

F1 2024 The challenges facing the Big Four

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Heavy hitters have questions to answer as F1 testing begins

The 2024 cast of Formula 1 machinery hits the track in Bahrain this week and there are plenty of storylines to follow.

Will Red Bull's decision to go radical (page 38) pay off, and how will the Christian Horner investigation impact the team? What is happening within Mercedes following Lewis Hamilton announcing his shock departure to Ferrari for 2025? Is Ferrari doing the right thing by sticking to its design concept? And can McLaren's planned developments give Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri the chance to win?

Alex Kalinauckas and Jake Boxall-Legge took a look at the new contenders and the challenges facing the top four teams from last season (p32) before heading off to Bahrain this week.

Elsewhere, Sam Hall speaks to rising star Victor Martins about the Alpine Academy member's upcoming F2 title challenge (p48), and he also hears from the young British drivers gunning for glory in F3.

The Daytona 500 and Rally Sweden were the big events last weekend. Charles Bradley reports on how William Byron escaped the usual carnage to score a landmark NASCAR victory for Hendrick Motorsports (p18), while Tom Howard was on hand to witness Esapekka Lappi end a long wait for his second World Rally Championship success as the Finn starred in the snow (p22).

- Look out for next week's 100-page special, previewing both the F1 and World Endurance Championships, and including testing analysis from Bahrain and the WEC Prologue in Qatar. Out on 29 February.



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PIT + PADDOCK



Horner all smiles with
Liberty CEO Maffei and
FIA president Ben Sulayem

F1 urges Red Bull to sort out its Horner

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 has made clear that it wants Red Bull to complete an investigation into allegations against team boss Christian Horner as soon as possible so that the uncertainty surrounding his position and any fallout does not hang over the opening stages of the 2024 season.

Horner is the subject of a probe launched by the wider Red Bull GmbH firm after unspecified accusations were made by a female employee. He has denied any wrongdoing and recently faced lengthy questioning from an independent barrister appointed by the energy drinks company. Despite the intense speculation over his future, Horner remained front and centre for the team's launch of its RB20 challenger

last Thursday in Milton Keynes (see p38). But F1 has since issued a statement asking for a timely conclusion as the curtain-raising Bahrain Grand Prix rolls into view.

"We have noted that Red Bull has instigated an independent investigation into internal allegations at Red Bull Racing," read the statement from Formula One Management. "We hope that the matter will be clarified at the earliest opportunity, after a fair and thorough process and we will not comment further at this time."

While F1 hopes that the situation is resolved quickly, it has no formal authority to force the matter, nor get involved in any action on the team or Horner should it be deemed necessary. That falls under the remit of the FIA, which could choose to intervene if there is evidence of any

wrongdoing that goes against standards it upholds. Soon after, the governing body noted: "In relation to the independent investigation currently being undertaken by Red Bull GmbH, the FIA reiterates that until such time as the investigation has concluded and the outcome is known, we will not be commenting further. The FIA remains committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity, fairness and inclusivity within the sport."

Similarly, Red Bull 2026 engine partner Ford, via its global head of performance motorsport Mark Rushbrook, told the Associated Press: "As a family company, and a company that holds itself to very high standards of behaviour and integrity, we do expect the same from our partners. It appears to us, and what we've been told, was that Red Bull is taking the situation very seriously. And of course, they're worried about their brand, as well."

At the factory launch, Red Bull did attempt to steer the media away from questioning any of its leading figures on the Horner situation amid fresh reports in the Dutch press. But Horner did briefly touch on the investigation, commenting: "Inevitably there has been a distraction, but the team are very together." Reigning three-time world champion Max Verstappen reckoned his relationship with Horner had not changed amid rumours of factions appearing in the team. "It's the



Nothing's changed,
says Verstappen

WILL CORNELIUS/REDBULL CONTENT POOL



SUTTON
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IMAGES

NO RETURNS FOR ROSBERG OR VETTEL

FORMULA 1

Spectacular comebacks for Formula 1 champions Nico Rosberg and Sebastian Vettel have been all but ruled out. Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said that he can be “bold” when replacing Ferrari-bound Lewis Hamilton for 2025, and many have taken this to mean a swift promotion for F2 rookie and Merc protege Andrea Kimi Antonelli.

But should the Italian not excel with Prema Racing, Mercedes might consider a stopgap. Vettel or Rosberg have been seen as plausible placeholders. But it looks as though both Germans



Rosberg showboats
after 2016 crown

DUNBAR/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

are out of the frame.

Speaking to German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Rosberg, inactive since the end of 2016, said: “I’m not planning a comeback. I would have to prepare intensively for a whole year, if only to train the synapses in my brain. A racing driver has to react super-fast at top speed and be precise. I’ve lost that after the long break. The muscles are also put under so much

strain, just to hold the steering wheel with all the centrifugal forces.”

Wolff remains in contact with Vettel. But speaking to *Auto Motor und Sport*, the Austrian noted: “He made the decision to not race anymore. We are talking on a regular basis. We’ve also talked yesterday, but it wasn’t about driving for us in the future.”

**JONATHAN NOBLE &
CHRISTIAN NIMMERVOLL**

investigation

same as always – I can tell you that,” he said. “I mean, I don’t know who likes to write these kinds of things.” Team-mate Sergio Perez implied that he hopes Horner keeps his job, saying: “We want the whole team to stay together because we’ve been so successful. It will be ideal just to keep the whole thing together and just focus on racing... We know that Christian is a key player in our organisation.”

Verstappen was at least given free rein when it came to assessing the news that Lewis Hamilton will leave Mercedes to join Ferrari for 2025. Despite their toxic 2021 grudge match for the title, Verstappen seemed to genuinely appreciate the move. After not ruling out a future Ferrari move of his own – “never say never” – he added: “At the end of the day, if someone wants to drive a Ferrari and especially someone like Lewis, having achieved so much, if that’s his dream and goal, and again, we don’t know the talks that they had right at Mercedes, at Ferrari, what has been promised, what they think is coming... so you can’t give an honest assessment from our side why you make that decision. But if he’s happy with that move, then he should go, I think it will look cool. And of course, I hope for them that it’s going to be success. But you don’t know at the moment.”

MATT KEW & JONATHAN NOBLE

P13 OPINION



Monchaux will
report to Tombazis

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Ex-Alfa boss gets Goss FIA gig

FORMULA 1

The FIA has recruited Jan Monchaux as its new single-seater technical director. The ex-Alfa Romeo Formula 1 team tech boss will report to the governing body’s established single-seater director Nikolas Tombazis, and effectively steps into the role held until the end of last year by recent RB (formerly AlphaTauri) signing Tim Goss.

French-born Monchaux, whose CV includes stints at the Toyota, Ferrari and Sauber squads, will play a key role in formulating the new 2026 F1 rules. His appointment follows the FIA’s loss of several

senior figures over the winter, including Goss and sporting director Steve Nielsen.

The turnover prompted some alarm from F1 figures. Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said: “It’s concerning to see so many good people leaving. Losing Steve Nielsen is a big blow... As a leader, it’s about the culture and environment you create for people to thrive. When people as competent as these leave an organisation, there is a vacuum. That’s clear. And you’ve got to ask yourself: why is it suddenly that so many people have decided to call it a day? What [the FIA] needs is stability.”

JONATHAN NOBLE

GM still working on Andretti bid for F1

FORMULA 1

Preparation for General Motors firm Cadillac to enter Formula 1 in partnership with Andretti Global continues “at pace”. The company remains confident that a slot on the grid can still be secured, despite the championship’s commercial rights holder recently snubbing the American bid.

In the first official comment from the automotive giant since FOM rejected the Andretti entry late last month – partly owing to doubts over its ability to be immediately competitive – GM vice-president of performance and motorsport Jim Campbell acknowledged that the team had requested a meeting with F1. This follows an IT glitch that meant an invitation sent in December to Andretti offering a chance to present its proposal ended up in an email spam folder.

“In terms of our application with Andretti, we feel great,” said Campbell. “The FIA studied it against other applicants, and then gave our application a vote of confidence and approval. So obviously the FOM made their statement, and we have asked for a follow-up meeting with FOM, and so we will work through that.”

“We do believe between Andretti and Cadillac that we have got the capability of fielding a competitive entry. We are not saying that it is easy, but we do between our two organisations have examples in our history where we have been successful in other motorsports categories, and that is true of Cadillac and Andretti. With that said, our joint teams are continuing to develop our car at pace. So, that is where we are at.”

Campbell played down the suggestion that GM had



Campbell wants a meeting with F1

BAKER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

felt insulted by the FOM statement that suggested that the project would not be competitive. “As I said, we believe in the application we submitted,” he continued. “And in that application, we articulated the abilities of

both Andretti as a race team, and Cadillac as a manufacturing and engineering entity. So, we feel confident in the application and are asking for a meeting with FOM.”

ADAM COOPER

Sato back at Rahal Letterman for Indy 500 attack

INDIANAPOLIS 500

Two-time Indianapolis 500 winner Takuma Sato will return to Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing for this year’s running of the race, reuniting with the team with which he took his second 500 victory in 2020.

After his last full-time IndyCar season in 2022, Sato contested an oval-only schedule with Chip Ganassi Racing last season, with

a best result of seventh in the 500. The 47-year-old now enters his third stint at RLLR: he drove for the team in 2012, when he nearly won at Indy, and again from 2018-21. Four of his six IndyCar career victories have come with the team.

“A heartfelt thank you to Bobby [Rahal], Mike [Lanigan] and David [Letterman] and the entire organisation for this incredible opportunity,” said Sato, who lines up

alongside Graham Rahal, Christian Lundgaard and Pietro Fittipaldi. “Gratitude overflows as I am driving the #75 entry with primary sponsorship from AMADA. Here’s to reconnecting with familiar faces and forging new alliances. I just can’t wait to get to work.”

Rahal Sr added: “Takuma’s spirit is something that motivates not only me and the entire team, but also his fans.”

Sato has also been appointed as an executive advisor of Honda’s motorsport division: Honda Racing Corporation. He has been backed by the Japanese giant throughout his career, and in recent years took on a formal role as ‘principal’ of the Honda Racing School, the talent factory whose graduates include Yuki Tsunoda, Naoki Yamamoto and Sato himself.

Another Indy 500 winner, 2014 victor Ryan Hunter-Reay, is also in the field for this year’s race on a 500-only deal, joining the Dreyer & Reinbold Racing and Cusick Motorsports effort alongside Conor Daly.

JOEY BARNES & ADAM COOPER



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Motorsport UK in WRC push for Scotland

WRC

World Rally Championship bosses have met with Motorsport UK officials to discuss the idea of reviving Rally GB in Scotland.

Motorsport UK CEO Hugh Chambers and chairman David Richards met with the WRC Promoter at last weekend's Rally Sweden, with Rally GB among the topics discussed. Great Britain was a mainstay of the WRC, hosting a round since the series' inaugural season in 1973, but has dropped off the calendar since 2019.

Should a bid led by Motorsport UK be successful, then 2026 would be the earliest conceivable target, according to the WRC.

"We met with David and Hugh Chambers and had some discussions," WRC event director Simon Larkin told Autosport.

"I would say it's at very, very initial stages from their side. We'll just continue to work with them. They've asked for some details from us and some proposals from us, and we'll do that in the next few weeks and give them some more data to go on."



Scottish Rally was prestige event back in the day. Here's Hannu Mikkola winning in 1978

Motorsport UK has long held a desire to resurrect the event, with Chambers telling Autosport last year that Rally GB's absence from the WRC is "unfinished business" for the organisation.

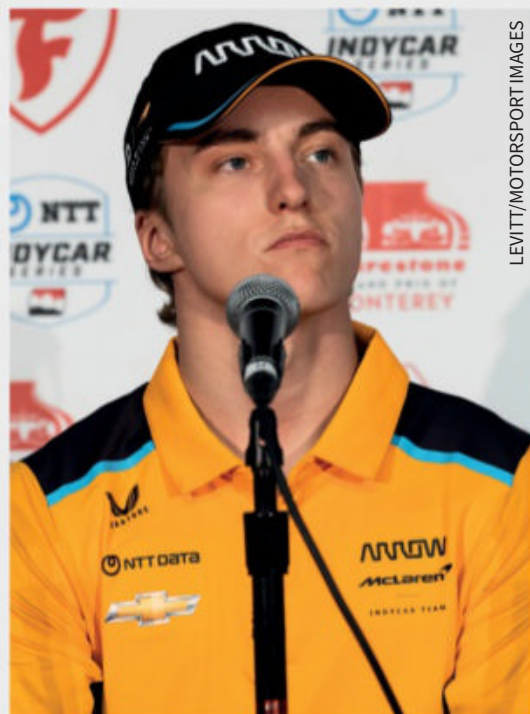
But a Rally GB bid could be complicated by a move from neighbouring Ireland, which is making significant progress with its plans to secure a three-year deal to host the WRC beginning next year.

Ireland's bid currently hinges on

securing €15million of funding from the government, with a decision expected to arrive next month. "If we do this Ireland deal, we need to consider whether we need a round in the UK as well," Larkin added. The United States, Paraguay and the Middle East are also vying to join the WRC calendar in the near future.

TOM HOWARD

➔ P22 RALLY SWEDEN DRAMA



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Ilott stands in for hurt Malukas

INDYCAR

World Endurance Championship newcomer Callum Ilott has been called up to test for the Arrow McLaren IndyCar team at Homestead this week in place of David Malukas, who has been sidelined with a wrist injury.

The surgery required after Malukas's (left) mountain-bike crash will leave him out of action for six weeks, leaving Arrow McLaren searching for a replacement for the St Petersburg season opener. Ilott parted company with Juncos Hollinger Racing at the end of last season, and has headed for the WEC to compete with the

Jota Porsche Hypercar squad.

At the Homestead hybrid test, Pato O'Ward was due to be in the car on Tuesday, with Ilott driving on Wednesday and Alexander Rossi on Thursday.

Ilott's WEC commitments do not clash with the St Pete event on March 8-10, but the preceding Sebring test is hemmed in tightly between this weekend's WEC Prologue test and the opening round, both of which take place in Qatar.

"I'm glad I'm able to help out the team, and it's a privilege to test with Arrow McLaren," said Ilott. "I'm thankful they're considering me for the opportunity."

JOEY BARNES

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Le Mans Hypercars: it's 23 for the 24 Hours

This is what they have to beat:
2023 winner Ferrari last week
unveiled tweaked livery for 499P

LE MANS 24 HOURS

The Hypercar field for the Le Mans 24 Hours has been boosted by four extra entries from Cadillac, Porsche and Lamborghini. The class at the World Endurance Championship blue riband in June will be made up of 23 cars, and two-time IndyCar champion Alex Palou will be among the drivers.

Cadillac will again – and as expected – bring over both its IMSA SportsCar Championship entries for the 24 Hours, it was confirmed when the full 62-car Le Mans grid was revealed on Monday. Action Express Racing, last year's GTP class

title-winning team, has had the automatic entry allocated by IMSA confirmed, while the Ganassi-run Cadillac Racing squad has had its entry for a second V-Series.R LMDh alongside its regular WEC car accepted.

Porsche Penske Motorsport will, like last year, enter a third 963 LMDh, while the Iron Lynx Lamborghini team's plan for its IMSA car to join its solo SC63 competing in the WEC has been confirmed. Proton Competition is at the head of the seven-car reserve list with its second Porsche.

Cadillac's #3 entry will be raced by IMSA regulars Sebastien Bourdais, Renger van der Zande and Scott Dixon. Pipo Derani and Jack Aitken have so far been confirmed

in the Action Express car.

The acceptance of the second Ganassi car means that neither Bourdais nor van der Zande will be available to drive alongside WEC regulars Earl Bamber and Alex Lynn. The team has drafted in Palou, who made his debut in the V-Series.R in the Daytona 24 Hours last month.

Mathieu Jaminet, who drove the third factory 963 last year, is the only driver so far confirmed in the additional Porsche entry, while the Lambo will be driven by Andrea Caldarelli and Matteo Cairoli, who will be the regulars in IMSA, and Romain Grosjean.

GARY WATKINS

ACO keeps its promise for LMP2 field

LE MANS 24 HOURS

The Automobile Club de l'Ouest promised that there would be a minimum of 15 LMP2 cars on the grid for the Le Mans 24 Hours when it confirmed that the category would be disappearing from the full World Endurance Championship schedule. It has remained true to its word – there are 16 LMP2s among the overall field of 62 confirmed this week,

of which six will contest the pro-am sub-class.

Among the 16 are five that owe their presence on the entry to successes in the European or Asian Le Mans Series. Algarve Pro Racing – reigning LMP2 champion in both those series – has had its two invites firmed up, while United Autosports, AF Corse and Cool Racing each have one.

The British Vector Sport squad, which raced in P2 in



the WEC in 2022 and 2023, has landed an entry for the car it will field in the ELMS this year.

The new LMGT3 class will expand from 18 full-season entries to 23 cars at Le Mans. Proton Competition with a third Ford Mustang GT3, and

Inception Racing with a McLaren 720S GT3 Evo, have won automatic entries, while Le Mans stalwarts JMW Motorsport and GR Racing have gained entries for the Ferrari 296 GT3s they will field this season in the ELMS.

GARY WATKINS



WEC One of the iconic Porsche liveries is returning to the track on Proton Competition's 963 LMDh in this year's World Endurance Championship. The car raced by Neel Jani, Harry Tincknell and Julien Andlauer is to contest the series in the the same FATurbo Express colours in which the factory Dauer 962 LM Porsche claimed overall honours at the 1994 Le Mans 24 Hours (right). French logistics company FAT International backed multiple Porsches in the 1980s and 1990s on both sides of the Atlantic. **Photographs by Siegerdesigns and Motorsport Images**

MUSTANG DOUBT AFTER LATE SPLIT WITH DINAMIC

GT WORLD CHALLENGE

Ford looks unlikely to be represented in the GT World Challenge Europe this year with its new Mustang GT3, after the Italian Dinamic Motorsport squad announced that it has split with the American manufacturer.

A team that had been due to run a line-up comprising Ford factory drivers in one of its two entries announced the end of its new partnership last week. It stated that it has "abruptly ended for reasons that we prefer not go into". Ford confirmed the split, also without elaborating.

Dinamic promised to "come back stronger" and "will do so soon". Whether that means a return to Porsche ranks, with which it has been a race winner in the Endurance Cup leg of the GTWCE, remains unclear.

The Dinamic Pro class Mustang had been due to be driven by Christopher Mies and Frederic Vervisch in both the Endurance and Sprint Cups, with Dennis Olsen joining them for the long GTWCE races. Ben Barker, who has also joined Ford's factory roster for 2024, was to have been the pro driver in a Bronze Cup entry.

GARY WATKINS



GALSTAD/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Slater pulls off mega fightback

FORMULA 4

A thrilling fightback rescued the Formula 4 UAE title for Freddie Slater in last weekend's Dubai Autodrome finale.

The 15-year-old Brit trailed local hero Keanu Al Azhari in the points going into the event, and the outlook looked gloomy when he qualified his Prema-run Mumbai Falcons car down in 13th for race one, with the other main contender, team-mate Kean Nakamura-Berta, taking two poles.

While Alpine F1 protege Nakamura-Berta led throughout race one from Rashid Al Dhaheri, Slater battled his way up to fifth place, but had now slipped to third in the standings. Yas Heat Racing Academy prospect Al Azhari was still on top after claiming ninth position.

Slater fought again in race two, charging from eighth on the reversed grid up to fifth. He then snatched fourth from Al



Azhari, who was attempting to pass Deagen Fairclough, at the finish line. Red Bull Junior Enzo Deligny (R-ace GP) won, with Nakamura-Berta in ninth. But Al Azhari remained atop the points.

Slater qualified fourth for the finale, with Al Azhari down in 10th. When Prema man Al Dhaheri beat Nakamura-Berta at the start, that swung things the way of Slater, who ran third. If both passed Al Dhaheri, Nakamura-Berta would be champion on countback, but the Emirati clung on and Slater clinched the crown. Al Azhari's chances slipped away with a run to eighth.

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Maloney steals the thunder in pre-season Bahrain test...

FORMULA 2

New Sauber F1 junior Zane Maloney emerged quickest from last week's three-day official pre-season Formula 2 test at Bahrain's Sakhir circuit, after topping the only two dry days of running with Rodin Motorsport.

The 20-year-old from Barbados (below), who raced with the same team in his rookie F2 season last year, set the benchmark time on the second afternoon when the vast majority of the field fitted soft-compound Pirelli tyres for qualifying simulation runs. Maloney's effort put him 0.125 seconds clear of DAMS-run Aston Martin protege and fellow ex-Red Bull junior Jak Crawford, with Enzo Fittipaldi third in his Van Amersfoort Racing car. Times were slower on the following afternoon on Wednesday, when Maloney was fastest by 0.193s, again from Crawford.

The test was the first with the brand-new Dallara F2 2024 machine. "We came out the box quite strong,"

TOP 10 TIMES		
POS	DRIVER (TEAM)	TIME
1	Zane Maloney (Rodin)	1m41.501s
2	Jak Crawford (DAMS)	1m41.626s
3	Enzo Fittipaldi (VAR)	1m41.735s
4	Isack Hadjar (Campos)	1m41.921s
5	Kush Maini (Invicta)	1m41.982s
6	Gabriel Bortoleto (Invicta)	1m42.149s
7	Zak O'Sullivan (ART)	1m42.162s
8	Victor Martins (ART)	1m42.172s
9	Juan Manuel Correa (DAMS)	1m42.294s
10	Franco Colapinto (MP)	1m42.313s

said Maloney. "I was six tenths off the whole three days of testing last year, so I can only take this as a good sign. It's just testing of course but, even when you say that, no one is sandbagging that much. We might not be at the limit that we will be in qualifying, but we also aren't much under – it's impossible to be. I think this year, for the first part of it, it's going to be all about who can make the biggest steps with the car."

Reigning F3 champion Gabriel Bortoleto was the top rookie in sixth place with Invicta Racing. Of the expected title contenders, Victor Martins was eighth with ART, while Prema pair Andrea Kimi Antonelli and Ollie Bearman were 20th and 21st out of 22, although the team often ploughs its own furrow in testing away from headline times – Antonelli was one of only two drivers to set his best time on Wednesday. "For sure it was a track where we performed less in the past years," said Prema chief Rene Rosin. "But I will say we seem to have understood the cause of it and for us these three days were important."

With the hard Pirellis the other tyre choice, much of Wednesday was taken up with longer race simulation runs. Taking the averages of the first 10 laps of long runs from each driver into account, remarkably it was VAR's midfield F3 graduate Rafael Villagomez on top from MP Motorsport pair Franco Colapinto and Dennis Hauger, then Invicta duo Bortoleto and Kush Maini. Crawford, Martins, Isack Hadjar (Campos Racing) and Fittipaldi were also close.

[➔ P48 F2 PREVIEW](#)



...as Browning leads way in F3

FORMULA 3

Luke Browning began his second season of Formula 3 in fine style by topping last week's three-day test in Bahrain. As his 2019 British F4 rival Zane Maloney did in the F2 sessions, Browning went quickest on two of the three days of running.

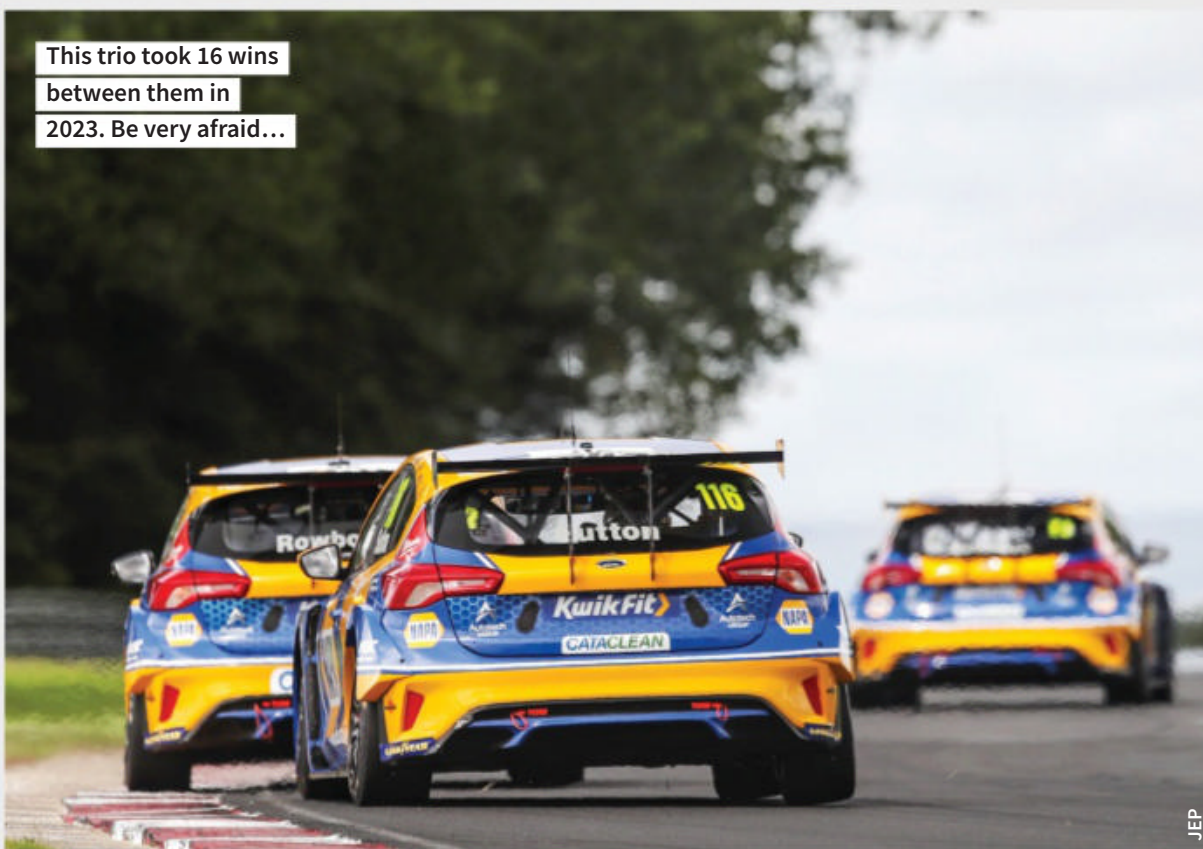
With only the hard Pirelli tyre available for the test and the opening race weekend on the Sakhir circuit, drivers were able to try qualifying simulations on all three days. The wet weather that affected F2 running on the opening day dried out during the afternoon F3 session, and that's when Van Amersfoort Racing rookie Noel Leon set his time that stood as second best of the week.

Williams F1 protege and 2022 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award winner Browning's Tuesday time with Hitech GP did not eclipse the Monday efforts of Leon or Campos Racing's Red Bull Junior Oliver Goethe, but he leapfrogged them both on Wednesday, when ART Grand Prix's Nikola Tsolov was second fastest.

"We are in the right place," said Browning (above). "I think we've got the right team around us and hopefully that will show why we are hopefully going to be title contenders this year."

TOP 10 TIMES		
POS	DRIVER (TEAM)	TIME
1	Luke Browning (Hitech)	1m46.566s
2	Noel Leon (VAR)	1m46.657s
3	Oliver Goethe (Campos)	1m46.672s
4	Nikola Tsolov (ART)	1m46.825s
5	Tim Tramnitz (MP)	1m46.828s
6	Max Esterson (Jenzer)	1m46.836s
7	Alex Dunne (MP)	1m46.885s
8	Santiago Ramos (Trident)	1m46.934s
9	Gabriele Mini (Prema)	1m46.942s
10	Leonardo Fornaroli (Trident)	1m46.953s

This trio took 16 wins
between them in
2023. Be very afraid...



No backing off for Alliance/Sutton

BTCC

Alliance Racing has not let up with development of its Ford Focus ST as it bids to retain its British Touring Car Championship titles in 2024.

The team carried Ash Sutton to his fourth crown last season, scored 16 race wins out of 30 and nine pole positions out of 10, and on Monday confirmed an unchanged driver line-up of Sutton, Dan Cammish, Dan Rowbottom and Sam Osborne for 2024 – the first season run out of its new premises in Northampton.

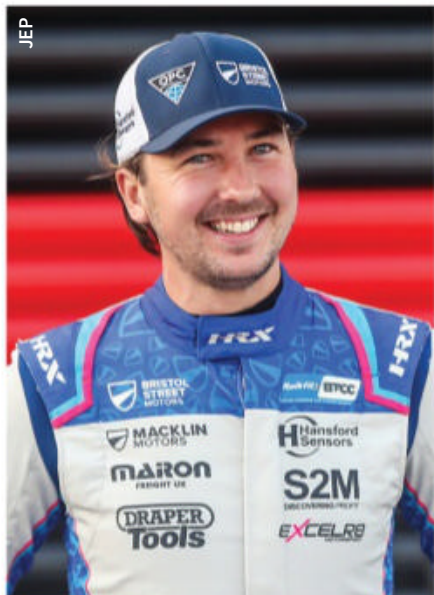
Key to Alliance's domination in 2023 was development to the Focus led by Sutton's long-time engineer Antonio Carrozza. "The approach this winter is similar to the last,"

said team manager Oly Collins. "We did a lot of work last year. That's less of a fear this year, but we haven't eased up and we've still got some weaknesses we've identified, and everyone's working hard behind the scenes to make it even faster. We've done work on aero, engine installation, weight distribution. Tony's led that again, and the details have been improved another few per cent – we haven't backed off."

A rule tweak that arose from a BTCC teams' meeting means Osborne remains eligible for the Jack Sears Trophy for non-overall podium finishers. He claimed a third place at Donington Park last April, but this came after Ronan Pearson lost that position to a ride-height infringement.

MARCUS SIMMONS

Ingram keeps his foot on the Excelr8or



BTCC

A few days before Alliance announced the retention of its four musketeers from 2023 for the coming British Touring Car Championship season, Excelr8 Motorsport had also come clean by declaring that 2022 title winner Tom Ingram and veteran Tom Chilton will stay.

Ingram had already been unable to avoid dropping heavy hints to that effect in the wake of the Hyundai squad officially extending its title

sponsorship deal with Bristol Street Motors, while strong 2023 rookie Ronan Pearson had already been confirmed.

Excelr8's communique also named Team Dynamics tech chief Barry Plowman as Chilton's engineer as part of its new tie-up with the Midlands operation, as predicted.

This week has come further news that Nick Halstead will once again fill the other seat at Excelr8, meaning an unchanged line-up here too.

MARCUS SIMMONS

VESTI IS MERCEDES RESERVE

Last year's Formula 2 runner-up Frederik Vesti, the forgotten man in the post-Lewis Hamilton/Ferrari 'who's going to Mercedes in 2025?' conjecture, has been given a role as F1 reserve by the Three-Pointed Star for this season. The Dane will share the role with Mick Schumacher.

NASHVILLE INTO COUNTRY

Nashville's 2024 IndyCar season finale on 15 September has been moved from the river-straddling street course to the 1.33-mile oval outside the city, due to construction work on a new stadium for the Tennessee Titans American football team. The oval was an IndyCar venue from 2001-08. Those who enjoy late-season Scott Dixon title charges will be pleased to know that he won the 2006, 2007 and 2008 races...

CAIROLI ADDS ELMS

New factory Lamborghini driver Matteo Cairoli will contest the European Le Mans Series in an ORECA-Gibson 07 LMP2 entered by Proton Competition in conjunction with Lambo LMDh partner Iron Lynx. Cairoli, who will race the Lambo SC63 in IMSA this year, will share with Jonas Ried, son of Proton boss Christian, and Maceo Capietto, who has competed in Formula Regional European for the past two years and whose father Guillaume is technical chief of Iron Lynx sister team Prema.

SUNINEN OUT OF SHADE

Teemu Suninen has become the latest driver from the World Rally Championship's top flight to join the bulging WRC2 field for this season. The Finn continues his association with Hyundai with a five-round programme aboard an i20 N Rally2 machine. He joins fellow Hyundai protege Emil Lindholm with French team CHL Sport Auto.

MCLAREN'S WEC LIVERY

The two McLaren 720S GT3 Evos run by United Autosports in the World Endurance Championship LMGT3 class will race in the same black and papaya orange colours as the MCL38 2024 Formula 1 car. The livery, says McLaren, "harks back" to the Le Mans-winning F1 GTR of 1995.



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Troubles overshadow launch

The Red Bull RB20 created quite a stir when it broke cover last week – but not as much as the investigation surrounding the team's boss

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

He looked rather small; Christian Horner, surrounded by reporters in a horseshoe of chairs and standing stragglers, a few feet from where the Red Bull RB20 had just been revealed. Horner's stature hadn't changed, of course, but there was something missing. The bravado was punctured; the immaculate image diminished. Perhaps irrevocably so.

To a certain extent this picture was inevitable. It was, after all, taking place within a live launch where Red Bull wasn't claiming an old car or an F1 show model was the real thing. Horner was exactly where he was supposed to be. Soon he was fielding questions on whether the RB20 and what Sergio Perez described as its "brave" design evolution were trolling Mercedes, given where such developments had first been seen so unsuccessfully. The basic floor on the launch car suggests Red Bull is, to a certain extent, playing with observers – and it's not alone in doing so.

But that topic had followed a briefing from Red Bull's communications chief that questions about the investigation into Horner's behaviour towards a female employee couldn't probe too far, that it remained a live legal situation and questions would be shut down if they delved too deeply. Horner was, however, free to answer questions on the mood within the Red Bull squad in light of the allegations. "Inevitably," began the muted reply, "there has been a distraction..."

"Horner insisted 'it's been very much business as normal' since the investigation surfaced"

The focus had been elsewhere for days. When Red Bull emailed launch attendees the day before, chiefly to explain where the event would later be streamed to the public, major outlets including the BBC and *The Guardian* ran stories on it being Horner's first public appearance since the news of the investigation first broke in Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*, to which Horner said, "I completely deny these claims". This is the stance he has maintained.

It was easy, therefore, to ponder how the situation would be addressed – what was Red Bull's message going to be? It was simply too important not to come up. Would an announcement be made to those gathered once they were first in the team's MK7 conference and event hall, surrounded by 14 of its previous F1 designs? Would a soft stage question be levelled at Horner

once the event got going? The press questions request turned out to be the first mention.

Before this, the launch had proceeded as had been planned for weeks. Since 2024 forms the 20th campaign in Red Bull's F1 history, it's clear that the team intends to celebrate. This initially took the form of marketing videos where Horner was front and centre. In the first, his typical character was back, suggesting it had been filmed before the investigation began. The second revealed that he'd attended the RB20's Silverstone shakedown two days before the launch. His stage appearance, where he was later joined by Red Bull's technical team leaders over the years – Adrian Newey and Pierre Wache – plus F1 Academy drivers Emely de Heus and Hamda Al Qubaisi, split the two videos. Horner looked visibly tired. But here was the first revelation of how he would act. And he did not command the room.

What followed was staggering. Red Bull's first full-time F1 driver David Coulthard and Horner reminisced about securing the team's first podium at the 2006 Monaco Grand Prix and the latter's famed 'naked' swimming pool celebration (he actually jumped in wearing a cape). Eyebrows from the journalists in the pen where they had been told to gather were raised to the point where they almost brushed the hall ceiling as Horner's quips about "doing it the Red Bull way" continued. Given the seriousness of the investigation, it was either tone deaf, utterly rebellious or a huge power move. Perhaps it was all at once.

Horner's presence at the launch demonstrates his intention to stick around. The Red Bull team wants the investigation dealt with before the 2024 season starts, but the decision-making goes above it to Red Bull GmbH's board and could take weeks more still. And Horner could yet be called upon to give further evidence to the independent lawyer who interviewed him two weeks ago, plus submit additional information directly to the board.

Horner insisted "it's been very much business as normal" in terms of his work since the news of the investigation surfaced, and that "the support has been fantastic". His appearance in the shakedown video filmed at a wet Silverstone suggests that things have carried on relatively normally. But overall, Horner was light on details of exactly what else he has been doing as his team's preparations for another campaign continue apace.

That these have been overshadowed is conspicuous. The implications for how this might ultimately impact lives should not be forgotten. Ending in the trivial, it's simply not how a team that in 2023 had the best season in F1 history would have wanted to start the next. And as every driver knows, when cars are involved, distraction can sometimes lead to disaster. 🏎️

➔ **P38 RED BULL RB20 TECH ANALYSIS**

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The rise of Rossi on four wheels?

The amount of car racing that the MotoGP legend intends to pack into this season indicates how seriously he's taking the business of honing his new craft

GARY WATKINS

Is Valentino Rossi getting serious about this four-wheel-racing lark? On the face of it, the answer has to be yes. The motorcycle legend will not just be racing in the World Endurance Championship with the WRT BMW squad in the new LMGT3 class this year. He's doubling up with the Belgian team in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup, and has thrown in a smattering of other races, too. Right now he's scheduled to do 16 in what will be only his third full season of car racing.

It should be expected that a competitor who won seven world titles in MotoGP and a couple more in its feeder categories wants to perform at the highest level in his second career, to be able to match the quickest drivers around him. He admits that doing more racing is part of a plan to achieve that, though he has also stressed that it was important for him to keep a foot in both camps. There's his love of the Spa 24 Hours, the centrepiece round of the GTWCE, to consider.

Racing at the Le Mans 24 Hours was one of the first topics of discussion when WRT boss Vincent Vosse first discussed with Rossi what they might do together. Ticking that box explains the WEC programme in one of the Belgian team's BMW M4 GT3s together with Maxime Martin and Ahmad Al Harthy. The plan for him to race in WEC was already in place when he piped up and said he wanted to do the GTWCE enduros as well.

But then he realised he wouldn't be racing at his home circuit of Misano, the track on which he scored his maiden GTWCE win last year. That's why the Italian fixture, part of the Sprint Cup leg of the series, was added to his schedule. And what about Brands Hatch, a venue he enjoyed immensely on his two outings in 2022 and 2023? That one was chucked in, too.

The sheer amount of racing Rossi will be doing in 2023 is significant for a driver who is still fresh to cars after calling time on his MotoGP career at the end of 2021. Seat time is everything in motor racing, nowhere more so than in the GT3 arena. The professional drivers whom he aspires to emulate almost live in the machinery in which they earn their crust.

Rossi is clearly still learning. He has to be so soon after making the swap to cars, notwithstanding the thousands of miles of testing he did in Ferrari Formula 1 cars in the 2000s, and that much was clear last year. He clearly made a step forward in 2023 over the course of a season in which he collected his first major trophies in the new discipline – a podium at Brands, a class win in the Road to Le Mans support race on the bill of the 24 Hours, and then the Misano victory.

That was also significant because the season involved a change

of machinery: when WRT jumped ship from long-time partner Audi to BMW for its GT3 campaigns after sealing a deal to represent the Munich marque in the Hypercar division of the WEC, Rossi had to adapt from the R8 with a normally aspirated V10 engine behind him to the M4 with a turbocharged straight-six at the front.

Adaptability is one of the core skills of a successful racing driver, particularly in endurance racing. What he learned when

“Seat time is everything in motor racing, nowhere more so than in the GT3 arena”

making the transition between the two cars will go into the Rossi information bank, something that is going to swell even further this year as he hops between championships and, crucially, different tyres. He'll be racing on Goodyears in the WEC and Pirellis in the GTWCE.

The WEC and GTWCE are two subtly different disciplines, not least when it comes to the black and round things at each corner. Double-stinting is part of the game in the former, not really in the latter. Ditto fuel saving. The GTWCE grid is made up only of GT3 cars, the WEC is multi-class, even if there will be only one type of prototype out on track with the LMGT3s on the disappearance of LMP2.

There were times when Rossi was pretty much on the pace of the pros in 2023, others when he fell short. Jumping between championships will not be easy, but in the long run it should help him on his quest to become regarded as one of them.

But Rossi, now 45, will have to be careful that he doesn't take too much of a step forward, at least if he wants to keep racing in the WEC with a pro as one of his team-mates. The Italian has been downgraded from gold to silver ranking under the FIA's system of driver categorisation for 2024, which smoothed his way into the WEC and has created what, on paper at least, looks like one of the strongest line-ups in the class.

If he is 'too' quick, he would almost certainly be upgraded. That may or may not prejudice a continuation in the WEC. But if he is bang on the pace, why couldn't he fill the slot in an LMGT3 line-up reserved for a platinum or gold-rated pilot? He is a BMW factory driver, after all! 🏁

NEXT WEEK **WEC 2024 PREVIEW**



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YOUR SAY

It has been one of the favourite events at Oulton thanks to BARC personnel who have made it a friendly series both for the competitors and spectators

MICHAEL COOKSON

High praise from the commentary box

One of the first events at which I commentated at Oulton Park was the first ever BARC Sports/Saloons Championship. Little did I realise that it would be going some 40 years later (National Focus, 8 February).

It has been one of the favourite events at Oulton thanks to BARC personnel who have made it a friendly series both for the competitors and spectators, introducing the 'joker' points system and various competitions for spectators.

I know I speak on behalf of my fellow commentators in thanking John Leck, Duncan Aukland and others for the presentation of the folder containing biographies of the drivers. The annual Dave Simpson trophy is eagerly fought over and his wife Margaret, who presented it, is regularly Chief Marshal at many events at Oulton.

The series has had several sponsors over the years – for the past 16 years this has been the CNC Heads company of competitor Ric Wood who regularly competes in a variety of exotic cars. If you haven't been to a BARC meeting with a round of the CNC Heads

Sports/Saloon Championship, you don't know what you're missing.

Michael Cookson
Audlem, Cheshire

Vesti deserves a chance in F1

Marcus Simmons's column (Opinion, 8 February) reminded me that although I have read much speculation on Lewis Hamilton's replacement, I have seen no mention of Frederik Vesti. As part of the Mercedes Junior team he has been brought to the cusp of F1 and without a few unfortunate events could easily have been 2023 F2 champion.

Admittedly we don't know what Toto Wolff is thinking but I guess he probably would not want a rookie in the team – even though Andrea Kimi Antonelli keeps being mentioned! So perhaps use the tried and tested Williams route (with Valtteri Bottas and George Russell). Put Alex Albon in the Merc and send Vesti along to Didcot?

Alan Clarke
By email



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RACE CENTRE

DAYTONA 500

Byron finds a way where wolves fear to prey

William Byron helped trigger a 23-car wreck before winning the biggest race of his young NASCAR career on a significant anniversary for team owner Rick Hendrick

CHARLES BRADLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES

William Byron had never finished in the top 10 of the Daytona 500 before Monday's belated race. But 40 years to the day since his team owner Rick Hendrick's squad entered its first NASCAR race at Daytona, he headed to Victory Lane after a wild 200 laps that boasted 41 lead changes.

Twenty-six hours later than originally planned due to rain, the 40-car entry was led to the green flag on Monday afternoon by polewinner Joey Logano, who had given his legendary team owner Roger Penske his first-ever Daytona 500 pole (see panel, p21).

As with so many rain-delayed races, it didn't take long for the first wreck to happen, as ambition outweighed patience. Coming to the end of lap five, Brad Keselowski wasn't lined up straight when he pushed John Hunter Nemechek off Turn 4. A sideways Nemechek clipped Harrison Burton, who connected firmly with Carson Hocevar. Locked together and out of control, Burton and Hocevar careered through the soaked infield grass, rejoining the track in the tri-oval at high speed. Burton collected Kaz Grala, Ryan Preece and Austin Dillon, while seven-time Cup champion Jimmie Johnson couldn't avoid slamming into Hocevar.

After most of the field pitted to top up fuel under caution, and with eyes on the first stage break when points were awarded at lap 65, the race restarted with the Toyota of Christopher Bell leading reigning Cup champion Ryan Blaney's Ford, both having gambled on not pitting. They subsequently towed around a pack that was delighted to save fuel in their wake, some drivers using as little as half throttle at times in the powerful draft. In response, the leaders slowed their pace too, so the next 30 laps resembled a leisurely stage of the Tour de France bicycle race.

Blaney and Bell then realised they had nothing to gain in this scenario, and put the hammer down, which encouraged a race to break out once more. The other aspect in play was manufacturer and team allegiance, and the three Penske Fords of Logano, Blaney and Austin Cindric moved to the front and then pitted early, with 25 laps until the first stage break. Blaney required a longer pitstop



“The next 30 laps resembled a leisurely stage of the Tour de France bicycle race”

to fill his tank and was hugely miffed that Logano and Cindric didn't wait for him, and with no drafting help he was lapped by the 50th tour.

The Chevrolets of Chase Elliott and Kyle Busch took over at the front until the Chevy armada pitted on lap 55. They quickly blew past the Toyotas, who had stopped a lap later, and the Camaro crew filled their boots with stage points at the break.

Elliott made a huge move at the start of the final lap of the first stage to grab the 10 points, ahead of Kyle Larson, Ross Chastain, Alex Bowman, Byron and Busch.



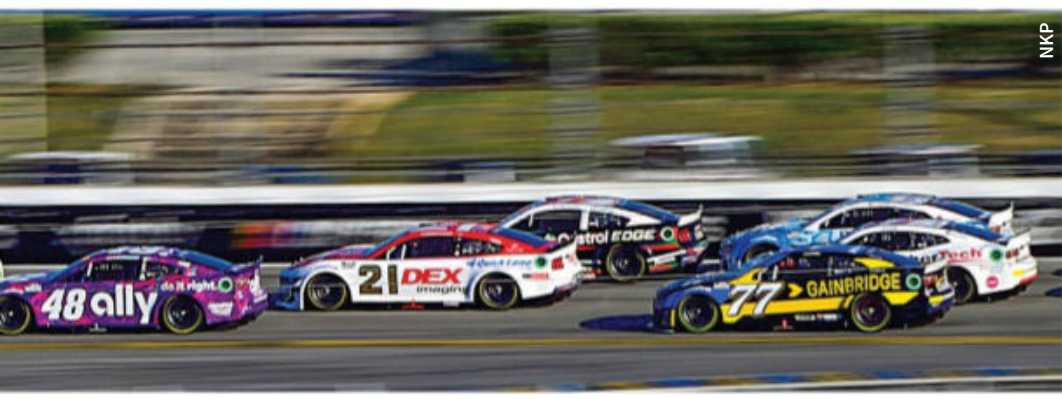


Byron scored a famous victory on a special day for his Hendrick team

HARRELSON/NKP

Stage 2 began with Larson leading the Ford of Josh Berry, who only took fuel at the stage break after fitting fresh tyres in the green-flag stops. Busch was relegated to the rear of the field when his tyre catcher fell over the pitwall trying to prevent a different penalty.

Logano made things happen almost immediately, charging to the front by creating a third lane on the outside as the pack felt racy on its new rubber. To show how powerful this lane's momentum was, Busch joined the party and rocketed from the back to fourth!



NKP

Todd Gilliland annoyed Logano by passing him at half distance, but he was worried about Toyotas ganging up behind him. As the sun set behind the Turn 1 grandstand on lap 110, superspeedway ace Bubba Wallace hit the front in his Toyota before Busch grabbed the top spot from him as everyone jostled for position for another round of green-flag pitstops.

Among the early stoppers, Berry was pushed into a spin on pitlane by Nemechek, while Wallace lost a heap of time exiting his pitbox. Blaney was now back in the hunt and pitted with the Chevys this time. As the cycle shook out, Larson led Elliott and Blaney, but the Fords lurched to the front again, with Cindric being pushed along by Blaney as Byron shoved Busch in the Chevy line inches away.

With the race to the end of the second stage approaching, the energy ramped up again and side-drafting became more intense with more points at stake. Blaney stayed true to his word about not working with his team-mates and hung Cindric out to dry into Turn 3, grabbing the stage victory from Cindric, who was lucky to finish second, Daniel Suarez, Busch, Tyler Reddick, Byron and Wallace. In the ensuing stops, Busch left the pits without his left-front wheel attached properly but escaped without a penalty. »

The Big One came late and removed several of the key players in dramatic NASCAR style



With the stages out of the way, 65 laps remained between the 36 remaining runners and their shot at glory. Wallace led Cindric and Blaney, with Logano repeating his top lane trick, but this time Chastain blocked him, and those in front also jumped to the top. That opened the door to an inside lane, and AJ Allmendinger (who was a lap down earlier) shot to the front as the race went truly three-wide, front to back, in spectacular fashion.

With 50 to go, the true 'go time' for any Daytona 500, Busch was out front but running neck and neck with Corey LaJoie. Moments later, Denny Hamlin surged between them to take control in his Toyota.

Busch brushed the wall at Turn 2 with 38 laps to go, mistiming a move to get in line and save some fuel before the final pitstop. Logano shot to the front with 34 to go, leading a Ford 1-2-3-4 from David Ragan, Keselowski and Chase Briscoe, as Hamlin fell to fifth.

The intensity ramped up once more with 25 laps to go – because the final pitstops occurred under green, stopping later would be crucial for track position. The Toyotas pitted first, a lap ahead of the Fords, and then the Chevys went a further tour.

With 18 to go, the Fords caught the Chevy pack and its leaders weaved in and out of them, with the Toyotas languishing. Leader Chastain was able to block out Logano, stalling his momentum, but then bailed to the inside line to search for more reliable help. Suarez then made a power move on the backstretch to lead with 15 to go, as the pushes intensified in the draft.

With 12 to go, the entire field was three-wide again, with

“He tried to fit a car where there wasn’t a car and just continued to push through until I wrecked”

Logano pushing Chastain out front.

But the inevitable happened with nine to go. Bowman pushed team-mate Byron into Keselowski, who turned hard right into Logano approaching Turn 3, triggering the 'Big One' that also took out Blaney, Gilliland, Suarez, Reddick, last year's winner Ricky Stenhouse and much of the chasing field. “It's speedway racing; it's a lot of fun until it sucks,” rued Logano. Bowman and Byron escaped scot-free as the red flag flew to clear up the big mess.

Leader Chastain, who just avoided being taken out, chose the outside lane for the final restart with four laps remaining, with Byron opting for the inside. The Hendrick powerhouse went into overdrive, with Elliott playing defence. First, he blocked Bell's charge through the middle – almost causing a wreck towards Turn 1 – before shooting to the outside lane to block Busch's charge moments later.

That left Byron out front being pushed by Cindric – although it was a matter of time over who would bail on who first – with Chastain taking the high line, being pushed hard by Bowman. As Byron quit on Cindric to go high coming to the white flag, LaJoie had huge momentum on the inside just as Cindric lost his draft.

Chastain dived down to fill the space to his inside. This could have been a winning move but, with Byron blocking the top half of the track, it coincided with LaJoie pushing Cindric into the tri-oval, which sent both Cindric and Chastain spinning into the infield grass. Cindric laid the blame squarely at LaJoie's door: “He tried to fit a car where there wasn't a car and just continued to push through my left-rear until I wrecked.”

The race stayed green as they took the white flag, which meant the yellow that followed moments later confirmed Byron as the winner, ahead of Bowman, Bell, LaJoie and Wallace.

“Hate what happened on the backstretch,” said Byron of his involvement in the huge race-stopping shunt. “Forty years to the day since [Hendrick] ran its first race. This is so frickin' cool.”

His victory means Hendrick Motorsports, which started life as All-Star Racing, ties with Petty Enterprises for the record of nine Daytona 500 wins.

“You couldn't write the script any better,” said Rick Hendrick. “When we started, we didn't think we belonged here and felt so out of place. To win 40 years to the day, and tie the record, is awesome.”



DUELS DELIVER DUAL THRILLERS

The traditional Thursday night Duel races to set the Daytona 500 field produced two all-action thrillers.

After Joey Logano and Michael McDowell locked in their front-row starts in Wednesday's qualifying, Logano scoring Roger Penske's first 500 pole, the pair of 60-lappers would result in two drivers being eliminated from the 500 starting grid.

Both races were won by Toyotas, but Duel 1 victor Tyler Reddick almost wrecked when he came to pitlane following a misunderstanding with Martin Truex, who clearly misread the Toyota pitstop playbook. Reddick later placed himself perfectly when Chase Elliott made his bid to win too soon on the final lap, which allowed Reddick to slingshot past Kyle Larson entering Turn 3 for victory.

The subplot here was Jimmie Johnson – the seven-time champion driving a Toyota in NASCAR competition for the first time ever – having to race his way in. He surged to the front early on but was back in the pack after the pitstop cycle when Ricky Stenhouse turned Daniel Hemric into the Turn 4 wall. Johnson's car was nerfed into a half-spin by Austin Dillon and he was forced to pit for new tyres, restarting behind his rival for the transfer spot, JJ Yeley.

In a wild finish, Johnson called upon all his experience and nerve to stay in the draft, while Yeley was forced to go three-wide off the last turn, Johnson just beating Yeley to the line. "I'm too old for this shit," Johnson remarked.

In Duel 2, Christopher Bell prevailed in his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota, but the talking point from this stanza was a brutal eight-car wreck that was sparked by William Byron blocking reigning Cup champion Ryan Blaney, and Brad Keselowski getting into the back of Kyle Busch in the tri-oval. Clipped by Busch, Byron hooked Blaney into a brutal head-on impact with the wall, triggering a melee behind as Blaney's Ford spun across the track and erupted in flames.

Another entertaining transfer spot battle ended with Kaz Grala just pipping BJ McLeod's unsponsored Chevrolet.



Bell (20) and Reddick
took the Duel victories

RESULTS ROUND 1/36, DAYTONA 500 (USA), 19 FEBRUARY (200 LAPS – 500 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM AND CAR	TIME	GRID
1	William Byron	Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet	3h10m52s	18
2	Alex Bowman	Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet	+0.006s	7
3	Christopher Bell	Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota	+1.390s	4
4	Corey LaJoie	Spire Motorsports Chevrolet	+2.511s	29
5	Darrell Wallace Jr	23XI Racing Toyota	+2.614s	24
6	AJ Allmendinger	Kaulig Racing Chevrolet	+2.615s	28
7	John Hunter Nemechek	Legacy Motor Club Toyota	+3.416s	10
8	Erik Jones	Legacy Motor Club Toyota	+4.478s	11
9	Noah Gragson	Stewart-Haas Racing Ford	+4.711s	38
10	Chase Briscoe	Stewart-Haas Racing Ford	+4.712s	20
11	Kyle Larson	Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet	+5.300s	17
12	Kyle Busch	Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet	+6.501s	34
13	Zane Smith	Spire Motorsports Chevrolet	+7.174s	14
14	Chase Elliott	Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet	+8.103s	5
15	Martin Truex Jr	Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota	+11.562s	27
16	Daniel Hemric	Kaulig Racing Chevrolet	+12.121s	37
17	Ty Gibbs	Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota	+12.435s	15
18	Chris Buescher	RFK Racing Ford	+25.745s	19
19	Denny Hamlin	Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota	+27.333s	8
20	David Ragan	RFK Racing Ford	+1m48.172s	40
21	Ross Chastain	Trackhouse Racing Chevrolet	199laps-accident	21
22	Austin Cindric	Team Penske Ford	199laps-accident	6
23	Ryan Preece	Stewart-Haas Racing Ford	199laps	25
24	Riley Herbst	Rick Ware Racing Ford	199laps	36
25	Josh Berry	Stewart-Haas Racing Ford	199laps	30
26	Justin Haley	Rick Ware Racing Ford	199laps	22
27	Anthony Alfredo	Beard Motorsports Chevrolet	198laps	39
28	Jimmie Johnson	Legacy Motor Club Toyota	196laps	23
29	Tyler Reddick	23XI Racing Toyota	192laps-accident	3
30	Ryan Blaney	Team Penske Ford	192laps-accident	32
31	Ricky Stenhouse Jr	JTG Daugherty Racing Chevrolet	192laps-accident	35
32	Joey Logano	Team Penske Ford	191laps-accident	1
33	Brad Keselowski	RFK Racing Ford	191laps-accident	16
34	Daniel Suarez	Trackhouse Racing Chevrolet	191laps-accident	13
35	Todd Gilliland	Front Row Motorsports Ford	191laps-accident	31
36	Michael McDowell	Front Row Motorsports Ford	176laps	2
37	Austin Dillon	Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet	146laps	33
38	Kaz Grala	Front Row Motorsports Ford	5laps-accident	26
39	Harrison Burton	Wood Brothers Racing Ford	5laps-accident	12
40	Carson Hocevar	Spire Motorsports Chevrolet	5laps-accident	9

Winner's average speed 157.178mph.

CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Byron 54; 2 Bowman 50; 3 Bell 44; 4 Elliott 42; 5 Wallace 39; 6 Nemechek 37; 7 Larson 37; 8 Busch 37; 9 Jones 35; 10 LaJoie 33.

“It feels
bloody good”
– Lappi starts his
partial WRC season
the best way
possible



WRC

Lappi flies high to end long wait

Long after his maiden WRC win back in 2017, the Finn was starting to doubt he'd repeat the feat. Then he came in from the cold in snowy Sweden

TOM HOWARD

PHOTOGRAPHY MCKLEIN AND RED BULL



REE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Six years, six months and 19 days is a long time in motorsport. For Esapekka Lappi, it would have felt like an eternity since he last stood on the top step of a World Rally Championship podium. Doubts that he would ever win again had begun to creep into his mind, but in Sweden last Sunday they were extinguished.

In the time since a fresh-faced Finn burst onto the WRC scene to claim a maiden victory on Rally Finland in 2017, Lappi has contested 60 rallies driving for Toyota, Citroen, M-Sport and Hyundai. There have been several opportunities to add to his win tally, but it took an attritional Rally Sweden for the stars to align for one of the service park's true characters.

"It feels bloody good, I don't know how to explain it," said an emotional Lappi as he and co-driver Janne Ferm stood on the podium. "At the end of last year for sure I felt it [a win] would not come anymore as I didn't even know if we were driving, so I was not really believing it anymore. But maybe that is the trick."

Tricks were indeed required to conquer Sweden's fast yet unforgiving snowbank-lined roads. This was a proper Rally Sweden, with heavy snow showers creating a challenge not witnessed for many years.

It was billed as reigning world champion Kalle Rovanpera's comeback as the Finn embarked on the first event of his part-time season for Toyota. The 2022 Rally Sweden winner was the overwhelming favourite given his skills on snow and a favourable starting position after sitting out last month's Monte Carlo Rally.

The event was also Lappi's first round of 2024 after he >>



Lappi and co-driver
Ferm celebrate return to
winning form with Hyundai

elected for a partial season this year at Hyundai. When Autosport suggested to Lappi that he and Rovannerpa would be the favourites given their road position, he wasn't convinced. "It could be Kalle and then the rest of us," he replied. "That is probably more obvious than me fighting with him, but I hope I can fight with him."

Lappi's words were somewhat prophetic as Rovannerpa raced into an early lead. After missing out on a podium last year, Toyota left no stone unturned in its preparations, and had entered Rovannerpa and team-mate Elfyn Evans into the Arctic Lapland Rally the week prior. On the face of things, the GR Yaris showed signs of improvement.

A somewhat relaxed and rejuvenated Rovannerpa had a clear aim: "Definitely, the plan is to push more for wins, and of course it doesn't mean that you will get more of them, but that is the goal."

It was a plan that Toyota boss Jari-Matti Latvala backed: "We want to win the event and if Elfyn is at the front with a difficult [starting] position then we want Kalle to go out there and really try to win. Of course, this is an event we really want to win as it is a bit like a home event for us and especially after Monte Carlo [won by Hyundai's Thierry Neuville]."

Friday began with a poignant reminder of a sorely missed WRC hero in Craig Breen, who lit up the rally last year on his way to second, driving for Hyundai in what was his last WRC outing before his death. The entire Hyundai team wore Breen beanie hats in honour of the much-loved Irishman, while rally organisers renamed the Brattby stage that kicked off Friday's action '42 Brattby' after Breen declared himself the 'Mayor of Brattby' following his record time driving the #42 i20 N 12 months ago.

Deep snow and fog made this stage a real challenge, frustrating championship leader Neuville. "Visibility was close to zero with the fog – everything looks the same," sighed the Belgian. "I think only the real Mayor of Brattby would have loved that stage, but I didn't."

Toyota's plan appeared to be working, with Rovannerpa opening up a 5.7-second lead after the first three stages, although he wasn't overly happy with his driving, labelling his effort as "horrible" in stage three. Team-mate Evans, meanwhile, was extremely fortunate not to find the snowbanks when his GR Yaris pirouetted 360 degrees at speed. The Welshman didn't flinch in the moment and just "tried to hold onto it".

This kind of fortune didn't continue into the next test, but it was the favourite Rovannerpa who hit trouble. He lost control of his GR Yaris, which fired deep into a snowbank, causing significant damage to the radiator. The victory chance was over. "We went wide on a quite simple place, a right-hand corner," related Rovannerpa. "I wasn't really expecting to have any moment there at that speed, so it caught me by surprise a bit. I think some guys in front had opened up a bit of a hole in the bank and it kicked us quite hard,



Part-timer Rovannerpa was caught out by the conditions

REE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

"It caught me by surprise a bit. We basically spun 360 degrees and broke the radiator"

and we basically just spun 360 degrees and broke the radiator."

Rovannerpa wasn't the only world champion caught out by the conditions – Ott Tanak, who had seemingly defied his advanced road position to sit third in his Hyundai, soon learned the peril of overstepping the use of the snowbanks. Last year's Sweden winner continued using EV power before coming to a halt on the road. "I hit the bank far too hard and we spun and damaged the cooling package," explained the Estonian.

Tanak's stricken i20 N almost caused another incident when Adrien Fourmaux was caught by surprise to see the car, but somehow the M-Sport Ford driver managed to avoid contact. "We had a big close call with Ott," said the Frenchman. "I didn't know he was ahead. We were lucky we are here without touching him so that is the main thing."

Fourmaux's M-Sport team-mate Gregoire Munster also suffered misfortune in the stage when one of his tyres delaminated. Sweden's harsh climate resulted in an unusual four-minute tyre change. "I have no idea how it happened as the tyre was new," puzzled Munster. "The battery on the wheelgun was dead because of the cold so we had to change the tyre by hand."



Evans leapfrogged

Fourmaux to take second

McKLEIN



This was just the start of an eventful Friday for the Belgian-Luxembourger who would later lose a rear side window that required an on-the-fly repair the A-Team would have been proud of, Munster fashioning a ‘window’ out of a team jacket. “You don’t want anything like the hybrid unit to get too wet, and also having water or fresh snow coming inside makes it very difficult for the windscreen to not to fog up,” he said. “We tried to make a window out of my jacket. We got some cable ties and some tape and a bit of everything.”

The retirements of Roivanpera and Tanak had handed the impressive Takamoto Katsuta an 11.4s lead for Toyota over Lappi. Evans was a further 1.9s back, ahead of Fourmaux, Neuville and top WRC2 runner Oliver Solberg.

If the challenge posed by Sweden’s icy roads wasn’t enough, it was turned up to 11 across the afternoon when heavy snow began to fall. This was bad news for the Rally1 runners, who faced the worst of the conditions. The timing screen was turned on its head. Incredibly, the second pass through #42 Brattby was won by WRC2 driver Georg Linnamae, the Estonian recording the first overall stage win for the new Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 car. Nine of the top 10 were Rally2 cars, with only Lappi representing the top class.

As road position becoming increasingly valuable, controversy struck when Neuville suddenly came to a halt before the start of stage six, with his Hyundai struggling to fire up. After working under the bonnet to revive the car, he checked into the stage four minutes late, incurring a 40s penalty. It also meant that he would no longer be tackling the stage first, and that disadvantage was handed to title rival Evans, who suspected foul play.

“I guess the spirit of competition has gone out of the window,” muttered Evans. “Let’s wait to cast judgement on that before we say something we regret.” He later added: “I’m not sure what’s been going on, but if that was intentional then they need a new strategist I think.”

Neuville refuted such suggestions, claiming that his i20 N was suffering from a fuel pressure problem and that Evans was aware of the issue. “We were forcing the fuel pump manually and there was nothing I could do,” countered Neuville. “To calm everybody down, if I wanted to do strategy I had 53 minutes before the stage so I could have stopped anywhere and worked on the car and not just before the time control.”

Neuville did benefit from the road order switch – he beat Evans on each of the day’s remaining stages, despite a couple of



scares with snowbanks and a broken bonnet pin that threatened to completely obstruct his vision.

At the front, Lappi coped the best in the blizzard, overhauling Katsuta on stage seven before ending the day with a 3.2s lead. But it was not easy work. “It’s not aquaplaning – it’s snowplaning,” quipped Lappi. “Even if you are safe you can still lose it.” Munster likened the lack of control to “being in a ball pool when you’re a child”.

But the star of the day was undoubtedly Solberg, who ended Friday leading the WRC2 class while sitting an amazing third overall in his Skoda, ahead of Rally1 drivers Fourmaux, Evans and Neuville. “Third place in a WRC2 car is incredible, and here on my home rally there is such a spectacular atmosphere,” grinned Solberg. “It’s a bit of a dream and I’m very happy.”

The effects of the heavy snow effectively distilled the battle for victory into a head-to-head between Lappi and Katsuta, who were more than a minute ahead of the rest of the field. With the carrot of a maiden WRC win dangling, coupled with much clearer conditions, the Japanese pushed, closing to 0.9s off Lappi. But on stage 10 (Sarsjöliden), Katsuta was punished in >>

the most brutal way for overstepping the mark, and was reduced to tears. “Obviously, I was trying hard and at one corner I came in with a bit too much speed and snapped the rear,” he said, distraught over his error. “Then we got stuck in the snowbank. It is hard to find the words.”

After inheriting a 1m31.6s lead, the odds on Lappi ending one of the longest victory droughts in WRC history seemed to be stacked in his favour. Cruise mode was engaged to lead the field home at the end of Saturday to pocket the 18 points under the new system – as long as he completed the event on Sunday.

Fourmaux confirmed his stunning pace by recording a fastest time on stage 11 (Bygdsiljum). He then survived a late

“I’m glad it’s over. When you are not in a fight you just want to see the finish line”

altercation with a snowbank in stage 15 to hold off a recovering Evans by 16.7s to sit second and claim 15 points. Evans took 13 points, with Neuville provisionally securing 10 after recovering to fourth, and Solberg slipping to a still impressive fifth overall.

Fourmaux’s head-turning performance didn’t go unnoticed by M-Sport boss Malcolm Wilson, who celebrated his birthday on the Saturday. “Before I came to this rally I certainly didn’t expect to be challenging for a podium and I didn’t think we would be near getting a fastest time,” nodded the Cumbrian. “He has given me the perfect birthday present. He’s definitely exceeded my expectations for the event.”

There was little Hyundai boss Cyril Abiteboul needed to say to his rally leader and, for the first time in 2394 days, the smiling Lappi was a WRC winner again after calmly navigating Sunday’s final three stages. He reached the finish with a margin of 29.6s ahead of Evans, Fourmaux, Neuville (who lost his tailgate over a jump in the final stage) and Solberg, who took a fine fifth.

“I’m glad it’s over,” enthused Lappi in what was a fitting victory for the Hyundai team, which celebrated by holding up a picture of last year’s Sweden star Breen on the podium. “When you are not in a fight you just want to see the finish line.

“I don’t think it makes up for all of the near-misses, but for sure last year in Sardinia I really thought I could have [a chance] and I wanted to fight for it, but that was not really the case. But



maybe this makes up for that.”

While Lappi cruised to a well-received victory, the new Super Sunday format delivered the action the WRC hoped it would. With the top seven drivers across Sunday’s stages claiming points, on top of those awarded for the Power Stage, Evans pushed and leapfrogged Fourmaux to claim second, leaving the M-Sport man to secure a thoroughly deserved maiden WRC podium in third.

Rovanpera, who rejoined the rally, played the ideal team game by backing off to help Evans finish on top of the Super Sunday classification. Evans would have taken a Sunday maximum of 12 points had he not clipped a snowbank in the Power Stage.

Interestingly, Evans, who is not an advocate of the new system, benefited by taking home the most points from Sweden with 24, while winner Lappi claimed 19. As a result, Evans trails Neuville by three points in the championship. Fourmaux has climbed to third ahead of part-timer Sebastien Ogier and Tanak, who salvaged six points by finishing fourth in the Super Sunday standings and the Power Stage.

A jubilant Fourmaux perhaps summed up Rally Sweden the best as both he and Lappi ended challenging barren runs in their respective careers. “It shows that if you never give up you can maybe get it one day,” smiled Fourmaux. “If you believe in a dream, you just have to follow it and ignore people saying you cannot achieve it.” ❄️



SOLBERG THE CLASS OF WRC2



Oliver Solberg kicked off his WRC2 campaign in style by claiming a dominant win on home soil in his Skoda, and a stunning fifth on the outright leaderboard.

The 22-year-old son of 2003 World Rally champion Petter Solberg was rarely threatened by his WRC2 rivals to claim a second consecutive class win in Sweden.

Solberg and co-driver Elliott Edmondson took the spoils by 1m19.7s from Finn Sami Pajari, with Estonian Georg Linnamae in third. Pajari and Linnamae recorded the first WRC2 podiums for the new Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 machine.

Solberg won 11 of the 18 stages to outline his dominance, and turned heads by running third in the overall standings at the end of Friday, which was plagued by heavy snow.

“The conditions were not easy – on Friday the snow was really deep in places, and then on Saturday we were having some gravel coming through and all the time you had to be thinking about the tyres and trying to protect them,” said Solberg.

“I think we showed good pace on the first day and it was really cool to finish third overall. That was a pretty amazing feeling for me, and to share that with the home fans and so many of my family, I was stoked for that. Saturday and Sunday was more about driving with the control. We had a lot to lose if we pushed too hard. We were sitting in fifth overall and with the good lead [in WRC2], so we didn’t want to take any big risks.”

Sweden was also the opening round of the Junior WRC Championship, which was also claimed by a Swede, Mille Johansson, on his WRC debut. The 18-year-old starred among the record 19-car field, taking the rally lead on stage six before going on to win by 48.9s. Romet Jurgenson, one of four FIA Rally Star drivers competing, finished second ahead of Irishman Eamonn Kelly.

RESULTS ROUND 2/13, RALLY SWEDEN, 15-18 FEBRUARY

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Esapekka Lappi (FIN) Janne Ferm (FIN)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20N Rally1	2h33m04.9s
2	Elfyn Evans (GBR) Scott Martin (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+29.6s
3	Adrien Fourmaux (FRA) Alexandre Coria (FRA)	M-Sport Ford World Rally Team / Ford Puma Rally1	+47.9s
4	Thierry Neuville (BEL) Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20N Rally1	+1m46.3s
5	Oliver Solberg (SWE) Elliott Edmondson (GBR)	Toksport WRT / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+5m04.2s
6	Sami Pajari (FIN) Enni Malkonen (FIN)	Printsport / Toyota GR Yaris Rally2	+6m23.9s
7	Georg Linnamae (EST) James Morgan (GBR)	RedGrey Team / Toyota GR Yaris Rally2	+6m26.4s
8	Roope Korhonen (FIN) Anssi Viihikka (FIN)	Rautio Motorsport / Toyota GR Yaris Rally2	+6m48.1s
9	Mikko Heikkila (FIN) Kristian Temonen (FIN)	TGS / Toyota GR Yaris Rally2	+7m25.7s
10	Lorenzo Bertelli (ITA) Simone Scattolin (ITA)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+7m37.7s

OTHERS

23	Gregoire Munster (LUX) Louis Louka (BEL)	M-Sport Ford World Rally Team / Ford Puma Rally1	+23m16.1s
39	Kalle Rovanpera (FIN) Jonne Halttunen (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+48m31.9s
41	Ott Tanak (EST) Martin Jarveoja (EST)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20N Rally1	+49m28.9s
45	Takamoto Katsuta (JPN) Aaron Johnston (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+59m04.5s

STAGE TIMES

STAGE	FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND
SS1 Umea Sprint 1 (3.21 miles)	Rovanpera 3m18.3s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +1.4s
SS2 #42 Brattby 1 (6.69 miles)	Rovanpera 6m12.7s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +4.9s
SS3 Norrby 1 (7.95 miles)	Lappi 5m47.1s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +5.7s
SS4 Floda 1 (17.55 miles)	Katsuta 12m40.6s	Katsuta	Lappi +11.4s
SS5 #42 Brattby 2 (6.69 miles)	Linnamae 6m50.6s	Katsuta	Lappi +5.3s
SS6 Norrby 2 (7.95 miles)	Lappi 6m11.8s	Katsuta	Lappi +0.3s
SS7 Floda 2 (17.55 miles)	Lappi 13m26.3s	Lappi	Katsuta +1.8s
SS8 Umea Sprint 2 (3.21 miles)	Lappi 3m27.3s	Lappi	Katsuta +3.2s
SS9 Vannas 1 (9.82 miles)	Tanak 9m00.5s	Lappi	Katsuta +0.9s
SS10 Sarsjoliden 1 (8.84 miles)	Rovanpera 6m36.1s	Lappi	Fourmaux +1m31.6s
SS11 Bygdsiljum 1 (17.58 miles)	Fourmaux 13m56.6s	Lappi	Fourmaux +1m24.3s
SS12 Vannas 2 (9.82 miles)	Evans 8m54.5s	Lappi	Fourmaux +1m17.1s
SS13 Sarsjoliden 2 (8.84 miles)	Neuville 6m40.6s	Lappi	Fourmaux +1m14.2s
SS14 Bygdsiljum 2 (17.58 miles)	Neuville 13m46.8s	Lappi	Fourmaux +1m02.0s
SS15 Umea 1 (6.26 miles)	Neuville 5m48.8s	Lappi	Fourmaux +1m06.3s
SS16 Vastervik 1 (15.84 miles)	Rovanpera 11m19.3s	Lappi	Evans +53.2s
SS17 Vastervik 2 (15.84 miles)	Evans 11m20.0s	Lappi	Evans +34.0s
SS18 Umea 2 (Wolf Power Stage) (6.26 miles)	Rovanpera 5m33.8s	Lappi	Evans +29.6s



NEXT REPORT
Safari Rally Kenya
4 April issue

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Neuville 48; **2** Evans 45;
3 Fourmaux 29;
4 Sebastien Ogier 24;
5 Tanak 21; **6** Lappi 19;
7 Katsuta 12; **8** Rovanpera 11; **9** Solberg 8; **10** Pajari 6.
WRC2 **1** Yohan Rossel 25;
2 Solberg 25; **3** Pajari 18.

MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT 87; **2** Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT 87;
3 M-Sport Ford World Rally Team 47.

It's a Porsche Panorama for the Manthey trio

**INTERCONTINENTAL GT CHALLENGE
MOUNT PANORAMA (AUS)
18 FEBRUARY
ROUND 1/4**

A lap around the clock at Mount Panorama can feature all manner of things and, in the 2024 edition of the Bathurst 12 Hour, all manner of things is just what the spectators witnessed.

In changeable conditions – the first half of the race was run in the dry, and most of the last half on a wet track – Porsche took its second win in the event when Manthey EMA Racing's 911 GT3-R sped to a narrow victory. It was an effort started by Laurens Vanthoor, finally a winner down under after seven attempts (and whose brother Dries won the 2018 event), anchored by a very impressive Bathurst rookie in Ayhancan Guven, and closed out in style by Matt Campbell, the Australian adding the Bathurst trophy to the Daytona 24 Hours hardware he won earlier this month.

On paper, the 'Grello' 992 dominated the race, leading 195 of the 275 laps (a record) and setting the fastest lap, a first for a Porsche in the event. But the drivers had to work especially hard, firstly to come back from not one but two pitlane drive-through penalties, and then Campbell had a comfortable 12-second lead erased by a final safety car, leaving him to rebuild a small but telling margin in the final 30 minutes of the race.

"To Larry [Vanthoor] and Ayhancan, they did a fantastic job," beamed

Campbell after the race, which featured 13 safety car periods (for a total of 28 laps). "We kept it off the walls... phenomenal. Second win, it's unreal."

Second place was a fine reward for the SunEnergy1 Mercedes-AMG team, which was shooting for a hat-trick of wins in the event. After team owner/driver Kenny Habul's Plan A to race a fresh car came to nought, the US-based Australian calmly retrieved his double race-winning car from a static display in the US and suited

up with Jules Gounon and Luca Stolz, their bid for a three-peat (and four in a row for Gounon) falling a mere 2.6s short of rewriting the history books.

If the top two looked in contention for most of the 12 hours, the battle for the final step of the podium was far from straightforward. It was only in the final minutes that Audi's Christopher Haase, who with co-drivers Kelvin van der Linde and Liam Talbot had been just inside the top 10 for most of the race, charged through from fifth to third in the Jamec Racing/MPC R8 LMS in a single move.

Close behind in that battle was the Phantom Global Racing Porsche, with Joel Eriksson, Jaxon Evans and Bastian Buus picking their way into fourth after starting from a lowly 18th on the grid.

Fifth place seemed less than the surviving WRT BMW seemed to deserve, the turbocharged car losing a slight edge during the warmer parts of the day. In his stints Valentino Rossi showed what great strides he has made in 12 months racing the M4 GT3, the MotoGP legend matching the lap times of the far more experienced four-wheeled racers around him, aided by co-drivers Maxime Martin



GRUPPEC PHOTOGRAPHY

Merc was salvaged from
museum and came
through for second in wet



GRUPPEC PHOTOGRAPHY



No time to
admire the New
South Wales
landscape for the
winning 911

and Raffaele Marciello.

Their team-mates were less fortunate, Charles Weerts clipping a slower GT4 car at The Cutting and launching the BMW onto (and nearly over) a concrete wall. Sheldon van der Linde had qualified the car on pole on Saturday, but he and co-driver Dries Vanthoor were out of the race after less than five hours.

In sixth place was the best of the local teams, Triple Eight's Supercars team-mates Broc Feeney and Will Brown joined by Mikael Grenier in a Mercedes-AMG.

Manthey EMA made it a double victory celebration when Alessio Picariello/Harry King/Yasser Shahin took the Pro-Am honours in their Porsche. In the class for silver drivers, the brand new Wall Racing Lamborghini Huracan of Tony D'Alberto/David Wall/Grant Denyer/Adrian Deitz took the win.

GT4 honours went to the Mercedes-AMG GT4 of Adam Christodoulou/Daniel Bilski/Mark Griffith, and the Invitational class was won by Adam Hargraves/Daniel Jilesen/Cedric Sbirrazzuoli in the MARC GT, which was rebuilt overnight after a major crash on Saturday.

PHIL BRANAGAN

Rosberg and Sainz pairs on top

EXTREME E
JEDDAH (SAU)
17-18 FEBRUARY
ROUND 1/5

Reigning champion Rosberg X Racing gained an early points lead after sharing the victory spoils with Sainz XE during Extreme E's season-opening double-header in Saudi Arabia.

RXR's formidable duo of Johan Kristoffersson and Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky won both of their qualifying heats in the desert dunes to comfortably progress to Saturday's grand final, where they were pushed hard by exciting new McLaren XE pairing Mattias Ekstrom and Cristina Gutierrez.

Ekstrom performed a switchback move exiting the first corner to grab an early lead before Kristoffersson wrestled the advantage away from his old World Rallycross rival. Ahlin-Kottulinsky

emerged from the Switch Zone in front after taking over from Kristoffersson but soon faced pressure from Gutierrez, who slammed into the back of the Swede's machine as the pair negotiated a jump. There was further contact as Gutierrez squeezed her way in front, but Ahlin-Kottulinsky immediately dived back up the inside before taking victory by just 0.167 seconds in one of Extreme E's closest finishes. Veloce Racing's Kevin Hansen and Molly Taylor came home third, while Fraser McConnell rolled on his Sainz debut.

Having narrowly missed out on the final, Andretti's long-standing double-act Timmy Hansen and Catie Munnings scored valuable points by taking a dominant triumph in the Redemption Race ahead of new American squad Legacy Motor Club, who paired off-road and stunt legend Travis Pastrana with teenager Gray Leadbetter.

Andretti made it to Sunday's final, for which RXR again proved unbeatable in the qualifying heats. McConnell used the inside line to take the lead, while Hansen won a three-way battle for second before closing in on McConnell, and Ahlin-Kottulinsky suffered a heavy landing and slipped to fourth. Munnings continued the Andretti charge following the driver change, but Laia Sanz resisted the pressure to take the win by 1.4s for Carlos Sainz Sr's team. Veloce was again third, with Kristoffersson a distant fourth for RXR.

McLaren failed to make the second final, but came from behind to win the Redemption Race. Pastrana led the opening leg before handing over to Leadbetter, who was hunted down and passed at the final corner by Gutierrez.

STEVE WHITFIELD

WEEKEND WINNERS

INTERCONTINENTAL GT CHALLENGE MOUNT PANORAMA (AUS)

Laurens Vanthoor/Matt Campbell/
Ayhancan Guven
Manthey EMA Racing (Porsche 911 GT3-R)

EXTREME E JEDDAH (SAU)

Race 1 Johan Kristoffersson/
Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky
Rosberg X Racing

Race 2 Fraser McConnell/Laia Sanz
Acciona Sainz



For full results visit motorsportstats.com

McConnell and Sanz
'dune' well for Sainz





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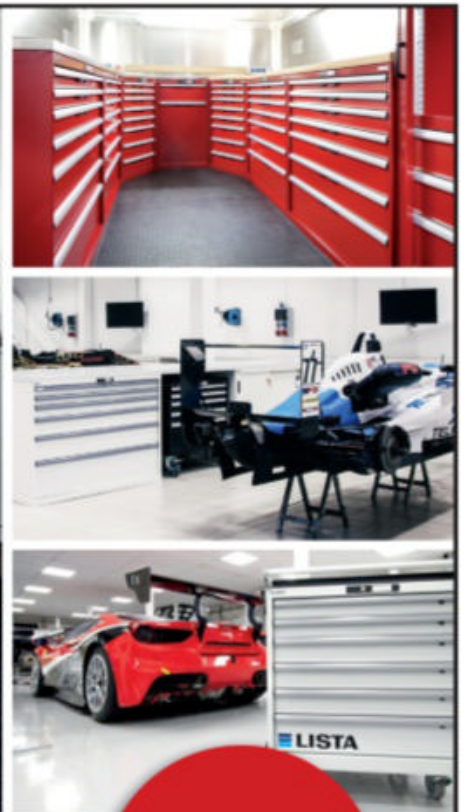
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LISTA

Taponen adds the Finishing touch for title

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST
DUBAI (ARE)
17-18 FEBRUARY
ROUND 5/5

There was never much doubt that 17-year-old Ferrari superstarlet Tuukka Taponen was going to be crowned champion at Dubai Autodrome. The maths were simple: a defeat of sole title rival Taylor Barnard in the first race would seal the deal. And when Barnard exceeded track limits on a qualifying lap otherwise good enough for the front row, and his next lap was sufficient only for 12th on the grid, Taponen's consummate pole position slashed the odds even further.

Sure enough, Taponen was untroubled through the 16 laps of racing on Saturday afternoon, and the Finn wrapped up the honours on this, his first step out of the Italian F4 scene. The R-ace GP squad clearly had the set-up nailed, because Taponen's team-mate Zachary David followed him home in second place ahead of Ugo Ugochukwu and Rafael Camara, this



pair from the Prema-run Mumbai Falcons Racing stable. Barnard did his best, but eighth was as far as he could progress.

That put Barnard third on the reversed grid for race two, and the PHM Racing-run Brit dropped to fifth early doors. But he moved back up to third following a couple of early safety cars, then brilliantly ambushed team-mate Tasanapol Inthraphuvasak and Mari Boya (Pinnacle Motorsport) as they battled for the lead to take victory. Boya finished second, but a penalty for not taking the Turn 2 escape road mandated for those straying into the run-off at Turn 1 relegated him to seventh in the results.

Taponen had clashed with Brando Badoer on his way to an eventual fifth place in that race, but was back on invincible form in the finale, and led from pole to the chequered flag. The PHM car of Badoer was left in second position, ahead of Sainteloc Racing youngster Theophile Nael and David. Barnard qualified fifth for this race, but what appeared to be a clutch problem at the start dropped him towards the rear of the 29-car field, and prompted a recovery drive to ninth position.

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Sceats wins GP, Bilinski champ

FORMULA REGIONAL OCEANIA
HIGHLANDS M'SPORT PARK (NZL)
17-18 FEBRUARY
ROUND 5/5

Strong late-season form in the Toyota Formula Regional Oceania series from Liam Sceats led to a home victory for the Kiwi in the series' blue-riband race, the New Zealand Grand Prix on the fabulous Highlands Motorsport Park circuit.

But the progress of Sceats's M2 Competition team-mate Roman Bilinski across all five rounds meant there was little doubt that the Anglo-Pole would be crowned TFRO champion, and third place in each of the first two races



wrapped it up in his favour before the cars even went to the grid for the GP.

Reigning FR Americas and Australian Carrera Cup champion Callum Hedge, runner-up last year in TFRO, completed a last-minute deal to join the field at Highlands with MTEC Motorsport. Hedge made it an all-Kiwi front row alongside poleman Sceats for the GP, and chased throughout, as he had done in Saturday's opening race. Sceats pulled away as the GP wore on, and Hedge found third-placed Michael Shin edging closer. Likewise, Shin was pursued by Jacob Abel, who somehow survived early contact with Shin and Gerrard Xie.

A qualifying shunt left Bilinski 12th on the grid. He soon stormed up to sixth, but found removing reversed-grid race winner Bryce Aron from fifth a tougher task. That was until Aron clipped the wall at the very last corner, Bilinski had nowhere to go, launched over the top of the American, and crash-landed in front of him as they took the chequered flag.

motorsport.tv
Relive this race at Motorsport.tv

WEEKEND WINNERS

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST
DUBAI (ARE)
Races 1 & 3 Tuukka Taponen
R-ace GP
Race 2 Taylor Barnard
PHM Racing

FORMULA REGIONAL OCEANIA
HIGHLANDS MOTORSPORT PARK (NZL)
Races 1 & 3 Liam Sceats
M2 Competition
Race 2 Bryce Aron
M2 Competition



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THE KEY QUESTIONS FACING F1'S BIG FOUR IN 2024

What are the greatest challenges facing Red Bull, McLaren, Ferrari and Mercedes as testing kicks off in Bahrain?

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

W

ith the Formula 1 car launch season now essentially crammed into just two weeks preceding the sole pre-season test, it can surely be said that in 2024 the best was saved until last.

For a start, it was the teams that occupied the top five positions in last year's constructors' championship that were the last to take their turns in the limelight. After all the depressing discussion over the naked carbon fibre displayed by Haas, Sauber, Williams and especially Alpine, the new colour schemes offered by Aston Martin, Ferrari, McLaren, Mercedes and Red Bull restored some faith for F1 fans in the midst of the ever-present balance – when it comes to car looks – of performance versus marketing. Even Mercedes, which had perfected a black livery in 2020, managed to add a splash of colour.

But while the car unveilings of those that chased Red Bull last season inevitably raised hopes of a 2024 title battle, given the time of year, it was the new look of Max Verstappen's latest challenger that capped things off. Finally, something different – except the RB20 appeared to have familiar features from elsewhere over the past two years in which Red Bull has dominated.

Now that their machines have broken cover, even with certain key design traits still inevitably disguised across the frontrunning squads, we could see the first challenges facing the expected contenders as testing was due to get under way this week.

We covered Aston Martin's AMR24 and the team's chances for this season extensively in last week's edition, so here we ask the key questions now facing Red Bull, McLaren, Ferrari and Mercedes.

Two major questions overhang Max's team

The first facing Red Bull has been hanging the longest: what impact will the investigation into team principal Christian Horner's behaviour towards a female employee have upon F1's current crushingly dominant team?

Horner faced the public at the RB20's launch last Thursday.

“THESE ARE THE FIRST STEPS BEFORE A SWITCH TO ANOTHER ‘ZEROPOD’ UPDATE COMING FOR RED BULL”

He cut a diminished figure, but is clearly determined to fight on as he seeks to save his career. Horner, around restrictions placed on questions to him and in his answers given the ongoing legal matter, admitted the situation had a been a “distraction”.

How long it lasts now becomes a key point for Red Bull. At the time of writing, Horner was expected to attend this week's Bahrain test in his usual capacity, having insisted at the launch of the RB20 that it had been “business as normal” in the two weeks since the story of the investigation first broke in the Dutch press. Yet rumours of rifts within Red Bull continue aplenty, which adds to risk for the team overall. After all, anyone familiar with the various sagas at the top of the UK's current Conservative government can see how quickly unstable leadership can erode a previously strong position. Red Bull will surely want to avert this course.

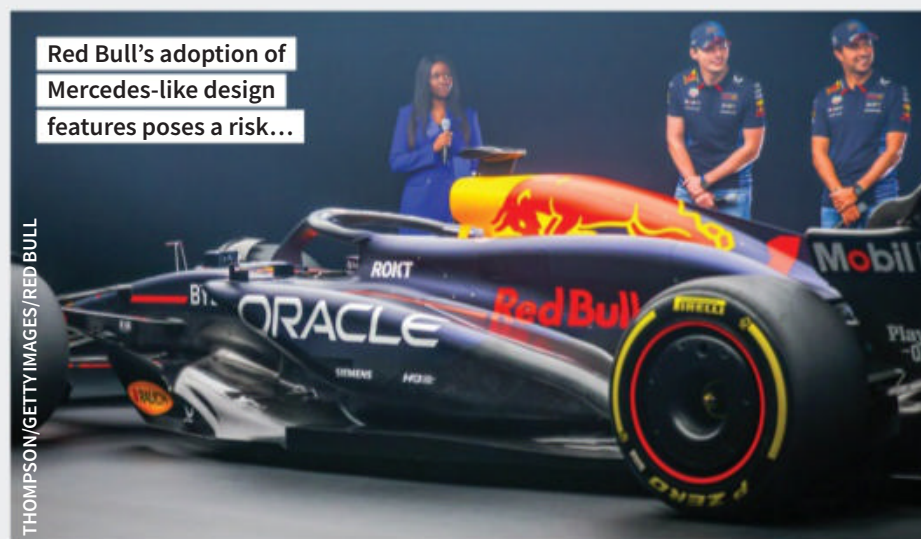
The longer the situation rattles on, with Horner shorn of authority in reputational stakes at least, let alone in any other leadership sphere, Verstappen and Sergio Perez will face even more questions. And, unlike at its own launch event, Red Bull can't control how and when these come up.

“It's the same as always, I can tell you that,” Verstappen says of his relationship with Horner, before going on to rebuff reports of a rift between the pair in his typically no-nonsense style. “I mean, I don't know who likes to write these kinds of things. But to me and Christian it's like always.”



Horner admits that investigation has been a “distraction”

ROSE/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL



“We just want to go racing, we are a race team,” Perez says. “And we want the whole team to stay together, you know, because we’ve been so successful. It will be ideal just to keep the whole thing together and just focus on racing.”

On track, the question concerns the surprise Mercedes-style aerodynamic design features seen on the launch version of the RB20. Most pertinently, this means the high engine cover cooling gulleys and vertical sidepod radiator exits, with Autosport also understanding that these are just the first steps before a switch to another ‘zeropod’ update coming for Red Bull at round four in Japan. That race will follow the expected hotter events in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Australia, with Red Bull having apparently taken advantage of the allowances within F1’s Aerodynamic Testing Restrictions that focus on cooling to unleash its own ‘zeropod’ path.

The key here is recalling Mercedes’ recalcitrant W13 and W14 designs of the past two years, with the Brackley squad abandoning that feature early in 2023 to finally adopt Red Bull’s downwash

sidepod style. Mercedes couldn’t ever get the ‘zeropod’ concept to work at ideal ride heights, despite the design offering more potential peak downforce in wind-tunnel simulations when running close to the ground.

The risk to Red Bull is that it encounters similar problems when the RB20 is finally unleashed for performance running. “It’s a difficult one because at its simplest level, if you’re not careful, you end up giving away downforce to reduce bouncing,” Red Bull F1 design legend and chief technical officer Adrian Newey told Autosport on this subject last year. “Then you’re trying walk that tightrope with downforce versus driveability, effectively.”

The Red Bull ‘zeropod’ surprise has inevitably raised interest levels given what happened at Mercedes in 2022 and 2023. But, ominously for the team’s rivals, Newey said at the RB20’s launch that the car had “behaved as it should”, which suggests Red Bull avoided the shakedown disasters worth recalling from 2022 and this concept’s first sighting. >>



Can McLaren continue closing the gap to the front?

In the final 14 rounds of the 2023 campaign, McLaren scored 285 points – the second highest total behind Red Bull, and one more than Ferrari. The team was regularly the closest challenger for victories once July’s Austrian Grand Prix upgrade had worked so well, although it wasn’t in a position to capitalise when Red Bull dropped the ball in Singapore, and Ferrari rebounded ahead in the final rounds of 2023.

But, having pushed Red Bull hard on so many occasions last year, and

with the team finally feeling the benefit of building a new in-house wind tunnel, simulator and composites-making facility, expectations of another step forward are naturally raised for McLaren.

It did launch season differently this year. It stole Haas’s thunder by revealing its livery on an old model halfway through January, where it welcomed the media into its McLaren Technology Centre headquarters. This was followed by a low-key revealing of the real MCL38, although the renders released showed considerable attempts at obscurification. This, again, raises hopes that McLaren is holding back on showing its hand because it doesn’t want its rivals to copy a key design idea.

What the team did reveal was a car with further changes to its front suspension arrangement, sidepod inlet tweaks and a rear wing altered to improve aerodynamic efficiency – an area in which McLaren was lacking last year against Red Bull and Ferrari. The launch renders also showcased a relatively simple front wing.

McLaren’s 2023 track record – of highlighting an early pace deficit but promising major gains it then delivered upon – means much is expected of its initial 2024 design evolutions, but also what it still has to unleash. On this front, team principal Andrea Stella has indicated that the MCL38 will change rapidly across the early rounds. “[There were] a few projects that we had started, so that they had potential, but just we couldn’t finalise them in time to have it on the launch car,” he explains. “So, they will very likely become updates for the early part of the season.”

These still-to-come developments, Stella says, concern McLaren’s “three major objectives” to improve aero efficiency, mechanical grip and interaction with the tyres. And he’s quietly positive that his team has started making its desired progress on these. “I wouldn’t want to



give any proportion [of gains],” Stella explains. “But I would say that we’ve been able to improve in all these three areas. Even though at the start, we see that there’s potential for further improvements in each.”

This reflects McLaren’s positivity at its livery event, where it confirmed its theory that the late-2023 aero development had made last year’s MCL60 unpredictable for its drivers at the limit in qualifying. This contributed to Lando Norris’s series of late-season mistakes. Fixing this was one of the team’s winter priorities but, given Stella’s words on early 2024 upgrades, the suggestion is that it hasn’t yet been able to fully resolve the issue.

Norris did, however, say that he’s been “trying to improve” around the handling issue in McLaren’s simulator this off-season. He’s also been working on adjusting his approach on “mental things at the same time”, in an effort to cut out errors at critical times.

That all adds up to a lot of potential, but McLaren also heads into





Ferrari's new livery is easy on the eye, and the SF-24 is supposedly less of a handful to manage

2024 with Stella warning: "This year, we will see that adding lap time will start to have some diminishing return.

"For two years we have seen progress, especially aerodynamic development, being quite steep. But now, I would anticipate that, towards the end of the season, it will become harder for designers to be able to keep a very steep development rate."

Is "easier to drive" Ferrari missing a key Red Bull trick?

If there were points on offer for best livery (something that would solve the carbon fibre confusion amid an inevitable frustration of subjectivity), then Ferrari would have plenty heading its way in 2024.

The SF-24 will stand out resplendent in red, with its deliberate sharing of the same scarlet shade as Ferrari's 2023 Le Mans-winning 499P Hypercar. That car's success should have motorsport fans recalling what the Prancing Horse can achieve at the biggest events, but at the same time it's a reminder that the team's F1 title drought has now gone beyond the 15-year mark.

Ferrari has at least made considerable changes to the design concept with which it ended 2023, with technical director Enrico Cardile saying, "every area of the car has been redesigned". But in the same sentence he adds, "even if our starting point was the development direction we adopted last year".

At least the sheer number of design refinements stack up promisingly. The headline seven chassis aero changes are all aimed at putting Ferrari's own spin on the theory that Red Bull has proved to be the best in the first two seasons of the new ground-effect era. But it was another kind of 'spin' that went a long way towards undoing Ferrari's 2023 campaign. The SF-23 was too peaky and, in the case of Charles Leclerc, far too unpredictable when a driver already predisposed to seeking the ultimate end of tyre grip took the car's aero potential to the maximum in qualifying. The result was much spinning and crashing.



Leclerc and Sainz flank team boss Fred Vasseur

"THE SHEER NUMBER OF DESIGN REFINEMENTS STACK UP PROMISINGLY FOR FERRARI"

It was therefore very encouraging for Ferrari fans to hear Leclerc say, after sampling the SF-24 in the simulator and in a shakedown at the team's Fiorano test track last week, that "this year, the car feels healthier and in a better place".

"I want to push on the point that that doesn't mean anything on the competitiveness of the car, because if other teams have done a bigger step forward in terms of lap time gains, then it can be an easier car to drive, but if it's not fast enough, it won't be fast enough on track," he adds. "In terms of actual feeling of the very first laps, I would say I've had a better fitting this year than I did last year."

The SF-24 doesn't have something Red Bull has used brilliantly in its rise to its current dominant position: a pushrod rear >>

FERRARI



Ferrari has chosen to eschew pushrod rear suspension that's worked so well for Red Bull...



...although Cardile points to inboard innovation

FERRARI

suspension. Instead, Ferrari has persevered with the pullrod layout, although it has altered it notably for 2024 to increase the anti-squat effect under acceleration. This should

reduce that unpredictable oversteer on corner exit inertia transfer.

"We tested for a couple of years a pushrod suspension," Cardile explains. "We recorded good aero results moving towards this direction and when moving from pullrod to pushrod, [but] we didn't measure a big advantage to justify some compromise in terms of weight or compliance."

"The main differences compared to last year's car are on the rear, where the inboard suspension is differently located inside the gearbox. It is also a different concept which, for us at least, has been an innovation because it's a different way to manage the inboard suspension compared to what we did in the past."

Ferrari's changes should in theory boost Leclerc's preference for oversteer, but this in turn risks hampering Carlos Sainz, who has more of a penchant for understeer. With his Ferrari exit looming, Sainz goes into 2024 surely only wanting to succeed in his own right, which will be another theme of the team's season.

But given how Red Bull has been open in admitting its suspension arrangement has been a critical part of its strength, Ferrari for now is out on a limb in hoping its own approach pays off in 2024.

Why is Mercedes keeping so quiet?

It might seem odd to have left the team that finished as runner-up in 2023 to last in our considerations here, but it all comes down to one thing. This is that McLaren is not alone in doing launch season differently in 2024. Mercedes, in not taking any outside scrutiny from the press, has departed from its approach of previous years.

In 2022, Lewis Hamilton in particular came out with considerable fighting talk, eager to avenge the Abu Dhabi 2021 pain and boosted by what Mercedes had been telling him about the potential of F1's first 'zeropod' design. Those hopes were soon dashed, and Mercedes

seems to have been keen to avoid the situation it also faced in 2023, when Hamilton, George Russell and team boss Toto Wolff had to discuss the initially similarly shaped W14 that they already knew wasn't a world-beater either, around a tricky Silverstone shakedown.

Furthermore, in controlling the narrative tightly this time, Mercedes has avoided giving any more air time to Hamilton's impending move to Ferrari for 2025.

But what the team did release in a series of press release quotes and in-house-produced videos was nevertheless intriguing, alongside the first render images of its W15 challenger.

The new car, which has a delightful splash of silver added to the

MERCEDES



Splash of silver is a welcome highlight, while Hamilton should enjoy rearward shift of cockpit



No chance to quiz
Hamilton, Wolff or Russell

nose above the team's previous all-black colour scheme to celebrate 90 years since (arguably) the first Silver Arrows raced, also features a switch to the Red Bull-style pushrod rear suspension arrangement.

In abandoning the internal architecture of the 'zeropod' concept it had moved massively away from at the Monaco Grand Prix last year, Mercedes has also apparently been able to move its cockpit rearwards by 100mm. This is something Hamilton had long been desiring. The team has also spent time in the winter assessing its pitstop procedures and kit to find critical race time gains.

But the suspension change is the main takeaway, with Mercedes technical director James Allison explaining that there had been a "big focus" on "improving the previous car's unpredictable rear axle,

which the drivers often referred to as 'spiteful'".

Allison adds: "We have worked on that to try and create a car that is reassuring to the drivers. At the beginning of a corner when you're hard on the brakes and turning in, the rear needs to feel rock solid. And then as you get towards the apex, the car needs to feel progressively more nimble, and eager, to turn. We have been trying to build that into the car."

Allison also says Mercedes has "worked hard to create a less draggy car and to add performance in the corners". The drag-reducing push is understood to come from Mercedes refining its DRS system.

The most high-profile messaging of Mercedes' launch came from Hamilton's comments of claiming to "feel the most motivated and focused I've ever been" to end his Mercedes tenure with a successful sign-off, while at the same time admitting that the weeks since his Ferrari move was announced had been "emotional". "To finish on a high [with Mercedes would] be the greatest honour," he concludes.

"IT'S NATURALLY SENSIBLE FOR MERCEDES TO UNDER-PROMISE IN THE HOPE OF OVER-DELIVERING"

"To be able to help them get back to the top."

But beyond that, there was little else to detect in the team's distributed noise. Wolff was much quoted emphasising the "mountain to climb to get to the front of the field", while Russell's desire for the season to get going was obvious.

It's naturally sensible for Mercedes to under-promise in the hope of over-delivering given how the past two years have gone. But the big question is whether it can continue its constructors' championship climb after its 2022 slide from 2021 winner to third place.

That's especially so since now there's only one place left to go, and Red Bull has that wrapped up, apparently trying to hold on with plenty of seemingly Mercedes-inspired ideas. 🍀



P40 MERCEDES W15 TECH ANALYSIS

RED BULL RB20

Intriguingly, elements of the world champion squad's follow-up to last year's all-conquering machine appear to echo previous Mercedes designs

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



Trend-bucking elongated nosecone blends into the front-wing mainplane

SIDEPODS

Red Bull has bucked the trend it inspired, and has obfuscated the actual inlet configuration in its launch photography and car renders. It appears that the team has opted for vertical inlets, like the Mercedes W14's original spec, while the leading edge of the sidepods has been extended forward to assist with the flow around the undercut. These launch-spec sidepods feature a minimal channel at the rear end, but the team's deliberate veiling of the configuration here suggests that it may opt for a different direction at some point in the season. Bahrain testing will offer more clues.



ALL PICS: REDBULLCONTENTPOOL

FRONT END

Rather than follow the main trend of opting for a shorter nose, and hence a shorter crash structure at the front, Red Bull has elongated its nosecone and it now blends into the leading edge of the mainplane element. This is paired with a very generic front wing, suggesting that the team is being deliberately sparing with what it shows of its new car. Furthermore, the pullrod front suspension remains and the geometry looks similar to last season's, so this may also be subject to change.





Engine cover 'shoulders' are more elevated; front-wing details likely being held back



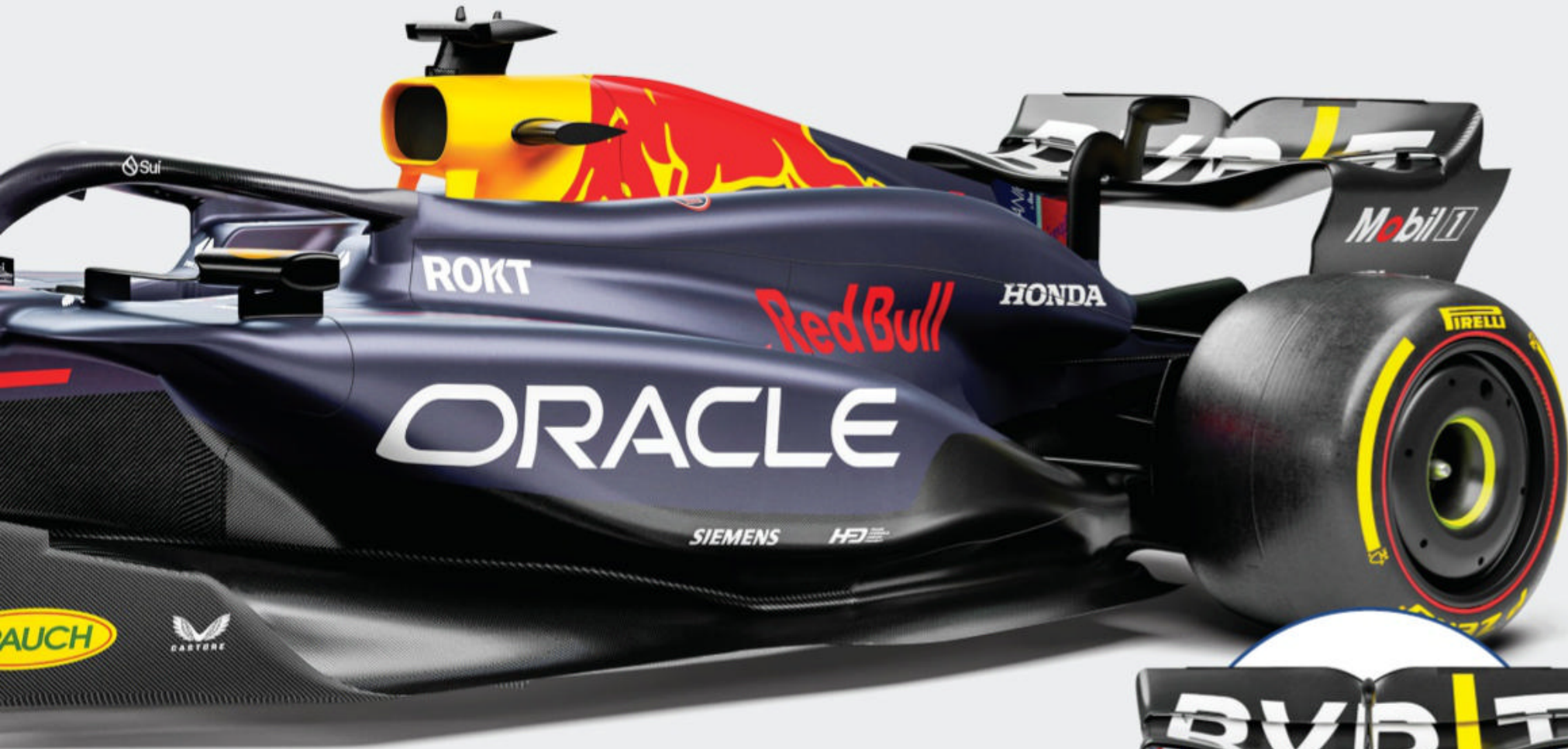
MERCEDES W14 ZEROPODS

BODYWORK

On the engine cover, the majority have opted for a flat horizontal surface around the flared bodywork, but Red Bull has channelled it slightly instead. Again, this suggests similarities to the Mercedes 2023 approach. The 'shoulders' around the engine cover, which blend into the halo mounting, are elevated more than its predecessor and are turned down at the exits to expel hot air towards the beam wing. There also appears to be a small outlet below this, suggesting that the team wishes to keep a trimmed boundary layer here as the airflow works its way around the rear suspension components.

IS THERE MORE TO COME?

"I'm quite happy I think with the direction that they chose," Max Verstappen explained at the RB20's launch. "I saw the drawings in Abu Dhabi, the last race. I was like, 'Wow, that's quite different in a way'. And they've not been conservative, let's say like that." But the suggestions are that the RB20 shown at the launch will be different to the real thing, and the team needed to innovate in order to retain its dominant advantage over the rest of the field. ZeroPods? Something more spectacular? The jury remains out.



FLOOR AND REAR WING

The edges of the floor have not been shown to retain some degree of secrecy, and other key details remain veiled at this stage. The RB20 also makes use of the prevailing rear wing trend that aims to reclaim the vortex-friendly format that the old ruleset provided, which it should be able to pair with its powerful DRS layout – in which it keeps the beam wing compact alongside a larger rear wing flap, which sheds more drag once opened on the straights.



MERCEDES W15

While common trends are visible on this year's challenger, it's evident that with key elements the German manufacturer still likes to go its own way

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

SUSPENSION

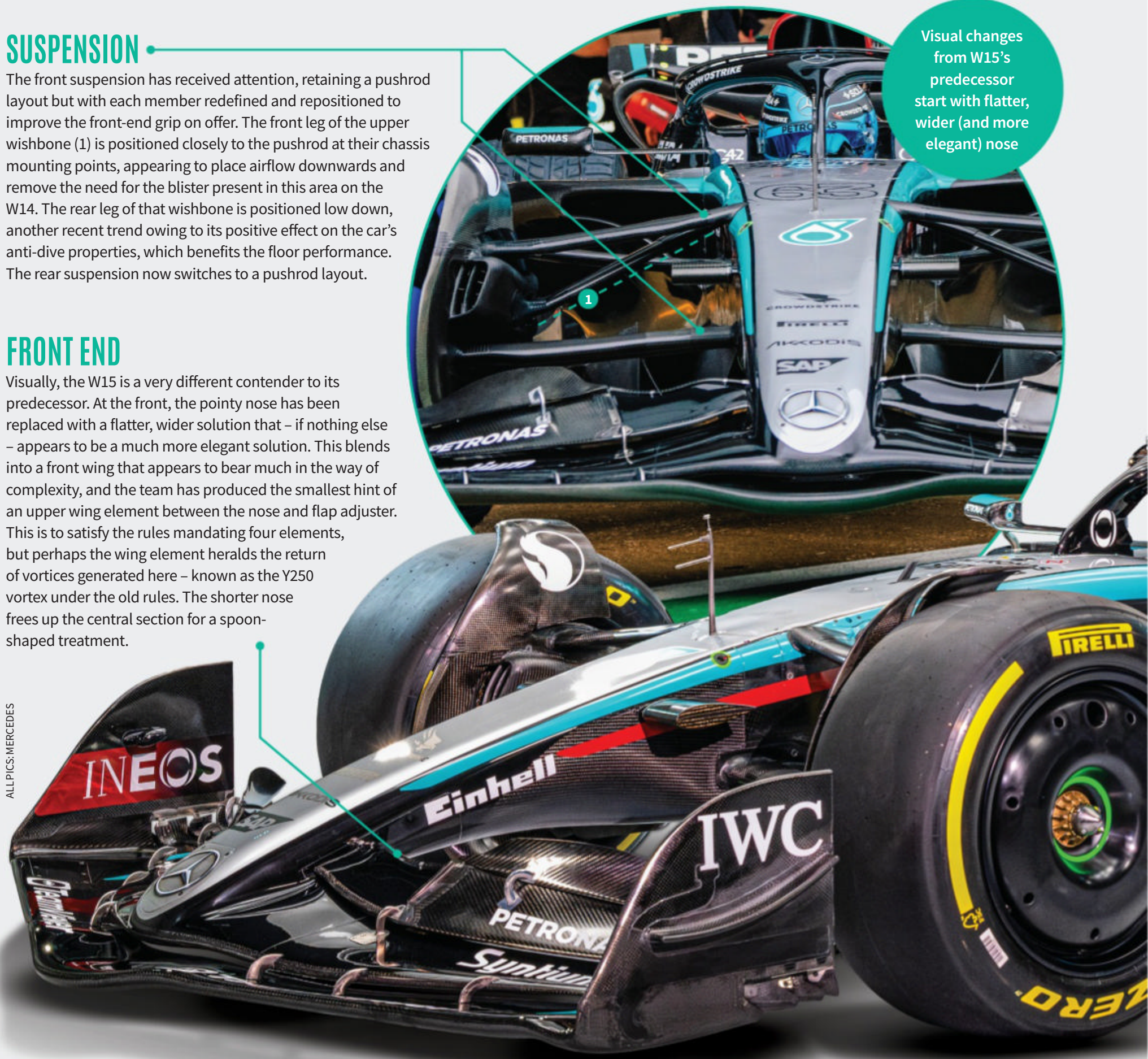
The front suspension has received attention, retaining a pushrod layout but with each member redefined and repositioned to improve the front-end grip on offer. The front leg of the upper wishbone (1) is positioned closely to the pushrod at their chassis mounting points, appearing to place airflow downwards and remove the need for the blister present in this area on the W14. The rear leg of that wishbone is positioned low down, another recent trend owing to its positive effect on the car's anti-dive properties, which benefits the floor performance. The rear suspension now switches to a pushrod layout.

FRONT END

Visually, the W15 is a very different contender to its predecessor. At the front, the pointy nose has been replaced with a flatter, wider solution that – if nothing else – appears to be a much more elegant solution. This blends into a front wing that appears to bear much in the way of complexity, and the team has produced the smallest hint of an upper wing element between the nose and flap adjuster. This is to satisfy the rules mandating four elements, but perhaps the wing element heralds the return of vortices generated here – known as the Y250 vortex under the old rules. The shorter nose frees up the central section for a spoon-shaped treatment.

Visual changes from W15's predecessor start with flatter, wider (and more elegant) nose

ALL PICS: MERCEDES





CHASSIS

“A big focus has been on improving the previous car’s unpredictable rear axle,” explained technical director James Allison. “We have worked hard to ensure that both axles, but particularly the rear axle, retain better control of the tyre than on the W14.” It also appears that the cockpit is positioned slightly further back – an area that should placate the Ferrari-bound Lewis Hamilton, who disliked the apparent feeling of driving the W15’s predecessor on its wheels.

Steps have been taken on the rear wing to address Red Bull DRS advantage

REAR WING

Further trends emerge, with the exposed tips on the upper element, but Mercedes has drawn the front corners forward to blend in the attachment points. The top corners of this upper flap square off, defining the placement of generated vortices. “There’s some been housekeeping on areas in which we had room for improvement, including the DRS effect,” Allison said, referencing an advantage Red Bull had linking its main rear wing body in a DRS activation phase to its beam wing.



SIDEPODS

Mercedes has pressed on with its decision to move to downwashing sidepods. The leading edge of the inlet, like others, has been extruded into a protruding lip; however, there’s a difference here compared to the prevailing trends. Mercedes has lowered the leading edge, which curves upwards into the inlet to capture airflow from perhaps lower down. This develops into a heavier undercut around the underside of the sidepods, which exposes much more of the upper floor surface. Although the upper sidepod surface has a slight channel, this is not as defined as the Aston Martin-style ‘waterslide’.



FERRARI SF-24

The Maranello team says that every area of the car has been redesigned, aiming to combine last year's formidable single-lap pace with improved consistency

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Two engine cover variants have already appeared on track at Fiorano

ENGINE COVER

The cooling outlet surrounding the exhaust tailpipe has been widened slightly to form the in-vogue cannon-like bodywork treatment around the engine cover. Gill-style cooling vents in the centre of these 'cannons' embellish the expulsion of excess heat from within the car. In its Fiorano testing, two engine cover variants were seen – a lower-slung option was trialled to further minimise the footprint of this area.

SIDEPODS

Restricted by the existing infrastructure in its downwash switch last year, Ferrari has been able to go all-in on that concept. It has started by moving the lowest side impact spar further down, incorporating it into the floor body to allow the team to open up the undercut below the inlet. Like many of the inlet geometries seen over previous launches, it features the protruding lower lip design first produced by Red Bull. A narrow vertical slot below this allows the aerodynamicists to keep the other inlets as small as possible to produce the requisite cooling. Ferrari has also produced a top surface channel to enhance the passage of airflow to the top of the floor. This builds into a tightly sculpted rear end.



ALL PICS: FERRARI

COCKPIT AERO

Aero devices positioned around the cockpit differ this season: for the first time since 2019, the team has opted for the removal of the horn-like flow conditioners situated either side of the air intake. But it still retains the triangular intake shape. At the halo attachment points either side of the cockpit, Ferrari has added some aero tools to perhaps condition and clean up the flow patterns around the cockpit. A small vane links the halo and the sidepod, with a smaller scoop embedded within it that funnels air behind the halo's rear mounting.

SUSPENSION

The team has persisted with the pushrod front suspension and pullrod rear elements – evidently, the packaging benefits of a pushrod rear were not enough to enact a switch. There are minor changes to the aerodynamic shrouding around the suspension elements at the front, with the placement of the rear wishbone legs low to assist with imbuing the right axial movement at the front.



Nose is wider, and last year's outwashing brackets appear to be surplus to requirements

FRONT END

"We wanted to create a completely new platform and, in fact, every area of the car has been redesigned," Ferrari technical director Enrico Cardile noted. A wider nose sets off the changes at the front, although Ferrari had already been able to implement a shorter crash structure last season. On the front wing mainplane, a spoon-shaped central section allows the opportunity to bring airflow under the nose to limit any stagnation. The front wing treatment differs to last season, and the outwashing brackets appear to have been removed; whether these will appear again is unknown, but it suggests that the team found them superfluous in its new development.



McLAREN AIMS TO CONTINUE ITS UPWARD CURVE

A lack of launch fanfare contrasts with a sense of confidence that the momentum built towards the end of last season sets the pattern for 2024

MATT KEW

McLaren is among the greatest sources of optimism in Formula 1 on the eve of the new season. The team transformed an initially underbaked MCL60 from backmarker into genuine Red Bull-worrier last term. That uptick convinced Lando Norris to pledge his allegiance with a new multi-year contract – just in the nick of time, what with Lewis Hamilton’s Mercedes seat coming onto the market mere days later. It’s also given rivals belief that they might only be a couple of well-executed upgrades away from surging up the order. As for the wider audience, there’s hope that, if McLaren’s 2024 creation hits the spot, Max Verstappen won’t have it all his own way to tee up a far more compelling campaign.

That said, it might not be a flying start for the MCL38, which was unveiled in muted fashion last week. Forget a big-budget do, McLaren was content with a press release before Norris and Oscar Piastri lapped a sodden Silverstone National Circuit.

Team principal Andrea Stella, so often true to his word, concedes: “There are a number of innovations on the car, but not all the areas we want to address have been completed for our launch-spec car. Those areas now become the focus of our in-season development, which is already in progress.”

McLaren reassures that it’s simply a touch behind schedule rather than this latest platform being unable to accommodate any late discoveries in the brand-new Woking wind tunnel. Even the details on the launch car remain somewhat shrouded in mystery, though. The images sent out feature different floors, so someone’s been busy with Photoshop to keep the rest of the grid guessing.

While McLaren developed greatly last year, the indication is that there’s still plenty of potential to be unlocked from the base MCL38 before it bangs its head on a performance ceiling. The team hasn’t peaked too soon. But for the third year of these ground effect rules, the major lap time gains have already come. Teams are now embarking down a path of diminishing returns as focus shifts to packaging, weight bias and centre of gravity.

Stella adds: “A lot of the performance is actually in the details and in the millimetre game... I would anticipate that towards the end of the season, it will become harder for designers to be able to keep a very steep development rate. We can be competitive if we are able to keep the development rate we have experienced over the last 12 months.”

This convergence – less than a second split the top 19 cars in Q1 at the 2023 season-closing Abu Dhabi GP – means teams will be severely punished when this capricious breed of machinery inevitably falls out



PICS: McLAREN

DUNBAR/MOTORSPORTIMAGES



Norris looked good for pole in Abu Dhabi until oversteer spike late in the lap



Ambiguity over details of launch-spec car no big surprise at this point

of its narrow operating window during an off-weekend.

An unintended consequence of McLaren's upgrades last term was the introduction of some tricky handling habits. Norris missed a plausible pole for the season finale when a spike of oversteer through the final slow-speed corners cost him 0.4 seconds to knock him to fifth. In 2024, a similar episode will likely hurt even more in a congested lead pack that should also house Red Bull, Mercedes, Ferrari and Aston Martin.

Stella's overhauled technical department, which now includes ex-Ferrari head of vehicle concept David Sanchez and former Red Bull chief engineering officer Rob Marshall, will focus on improving mechanical grip to finally fix McLaren chassis flaws that predate the ground effect shift.

For his own part, Norris says he's worked to address the occasional snaps that sneak in during the high-pressure moments. And the first impression from those slippery Silverstone laps is that McLaren has done similar with his new ride. He says of the MCL38: "The main thing is I jumped in and felt very comfortable straight away. No surprises or anything. I could push it to the limit on just those couple of little areas."

Despite the positivity that surrounds

McLaren, the expectation isn't for this team to suddenly dethrone Red Bull. It's to be a thorn in the side, to challenge for race wins most weekends rather than write off the first eight as with the underwhelming start to 2023. "My expectation is that Red Bull will keep enjoying some advantage [to begin with]," continues Stella. "[Having] said that, looking at ourselves, if – and I say if – we keep the development rate that we have had in 2023, that hopefully we will have onto the 2024 car, then I think we can be in a strong position."

Certainly, the Norris and Piastri driver line-up should make that doable. The duo proved especially well-matched in the second half of last season. That provides McLaren with an asset Red Bull doesn't have (unless Sergio Perez takes everyone by surprise, or Daniel Ricciardo is parachuted in). If one stumbles, the other can be there to pick up the fight. If they're both in the mix, the papaya pitwall will have the luxury of splitting strategies so Verstappen faces an extra obstacle on his way to the chequered flag.

Norris adds: "If you were to say, are [Red Bull] beatable? You're going to have to say yes. We were very close at certain times [last term]. And at certain times we did beat them! So, the question is, can we beat them over a season? I think that's going to be the challenging thing."

Stella says innovations will become evident during in-season development

"A LOT OF THE PERFORMANCE IS ACTUALLY IN THE DETAILS AND IN THE MILLIMETRE GAME"

McLAREN MCL38

In what Lando Norris dubs “a game of performance”, the Woking team’s 2024 car displays numerous design changes while simultaneously veiling significant enhancements

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

REAR WING

Differences are subtle in the rear wing, after McLaren made good progress here in 2023 to emulate the success of Red Bull’s DRS effect, but there are some of note: the corner at which the endplate meets the mainplane is sharper, perhaps to offer a more concentrated endplate effect and improve the rear-wing efficiency. Furthermore, like others, it has shown its car with the semi-separated wing tips that should enhance the strength of its performance further.



ENGINE COVER

The sidepod inlets remain small, but large enough to apparently shrink the air intake behind the driver’s head. Doing so allows for tighter packaging of the engine cover, reducing the effect of its wake on the rear wing. The cannon-like outlets at the rear of the bodywork look slightly larger, which allows the surfaces below to be more tightly packaged around the gearbox to improve the aero characteristics here.



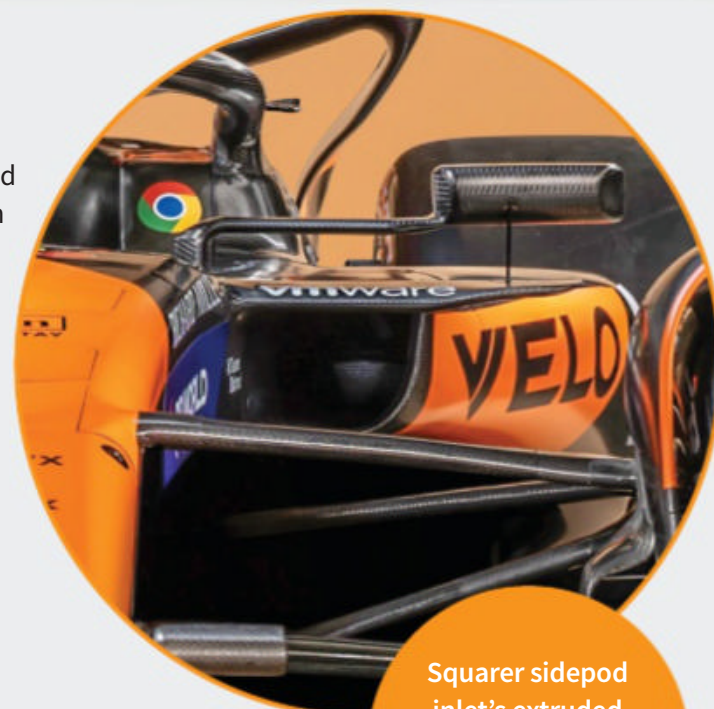


FLOOR

There are just as many questions as answers in the images McLaren has revealed at its launch. Its floor has remained suffused in mystery, with the images deliberately obfuscating the edge. The front wing also seems somewhat similar to last season's, and it would be odd to assume that it has made no progress over the winter on this front. When asked why McLaren had veiled certain parts of the car, Lando Norris stated: "Because we can! It's a game of performance, and why would you ever want to give away anything? So... you see what the car looks like. But you'll see in [Bahrain] the rest."

SIDEPODS

The sidepod shape is an evolution of last year's package, but with a more expansive undercut and continuation of its use of the slide-like channel in the upper surface. But it strays away from other teams in the development of its inlet, where the team appears to have extruded the upper lip rather than the lower one. A wing-like structure extends outboard, perhaps offering a chance to exert control over tyre wake or develop vortices that strengthen the flow over the sidepods. McLaren has also moved away from the wider, shorter inlets that it developed last year, instead producing a squarer aperture.



Squarer sidepod inlet's extruded upper lip contrasts with trend among other teams



ALL PICS: MCLAREN



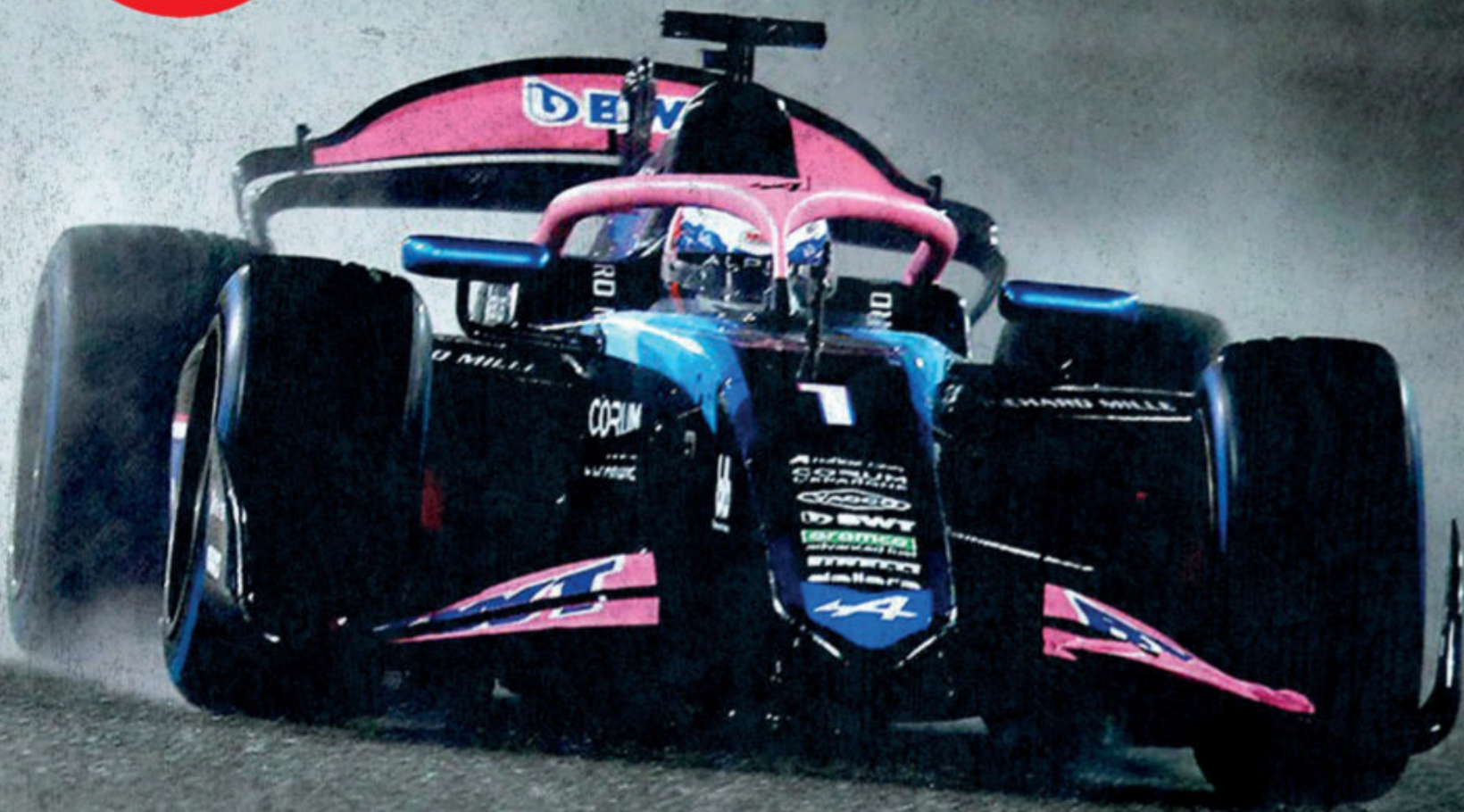
SUSPENSION

McLaren has continued with the pullrod front suspension layout, but with the rear leg of its upper wishbone positioned much lower as it chases the right kinematic properties to get the most out of the floor. Pushrod rear suspension remains in place, after the team switched to that in the development of last season's car. "We had three major objectives," said team principal Andrea Stella. "One was to improve aerodynamic efficiency. The second one was to improve mechanical grip. And the third one was to improve the interaction with the tyres."

SEASON
PREVIEW

Martins gets up to speed in the new-for-2024 F2 car in last week's Bahrain test

VICTOR MARTINS CV	
Age	22
2023	5th in Formula 2 (ART Grand Prix) 1 win
2022	1st in Formula 3 (ART) 2 wins
2021	5th in Formula 3 (MP Motorsport) 1 win
2020	1st in Formula Renault Eurocup (ART) 7 wins
2019	2nd in FR Eurocup (MP) 6 wins
2018	5th in FR Eurocup (R-ace GP) 2 wins
2017	2nd in French F4 4 wins





GALLOWAY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES; ANNIE SPRATT/UNSPLASH

The latest fine ART master?

Victor Martins was a standout F2 rookie with ART Grand Prix last season. Now the Alpine junior remains with the French team and is a title favourite for 2024

SAM HALL

One win. Nine podiums. Three poles. Top rookie. Victor Martins had a standout first season in Formula 2, but now the Alpine F1 junior faces the difficult second album, the campaign by which, whether they like it or not, so many drivers in the category are judged.

And the task couldn't be more difficult for the 22-year-old Frenchman, who will begin his championship mission next week in Bahrain, now spearheading the ART Grand Prix squad and battling to top one of the best driver line-ups we've seen in F2 for some time. That's despite Martins' former team-mate, reigning champion Theo Pourchaire, departing to compete in Super Formula, and the rest of the top four – Frederik Vesti, Jack Doohan and Ayumu Iwasa – also moving on.

Although it was Pourchaire who ultimately tasted success in 2023, Martins' single victory actually matched his countryman's haul, showcasing the fine margins by which the season can be decided. He relishes his status as the highest-placed driver from last term. "Honestly, it's not putting on any pressure," he professes. "It's just giving me confidence ahead of the second season in F2. Of course, it will be an important year for me, for Alpine, for the team and for the people who have been supporting me.

"But in the end, it's just to continue in the same way, to continue working like I did last year and just correct the few mistakes that I made and keep the same mindset, which worked quite well for

the overall season last year and it will work again this year. At least, I have the confidence that it will."

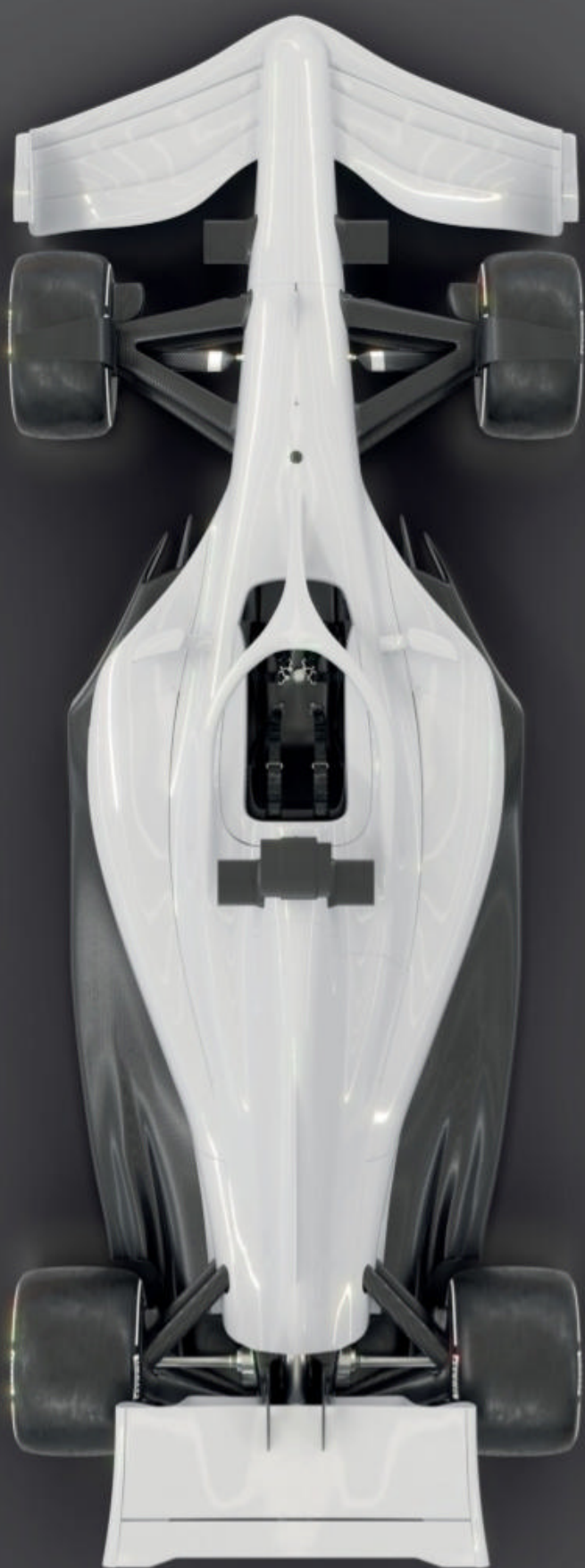
The mistakes to which Martins alludes mostly came during the early phases of his rookie season, with an opening-lap collision in the Bahrain feature race and an individual error while holding the net lead in Jeddah causing him to record two retirements from the opening four races. Asked how these errors can be removed, he replies: "I think it's just experience and knowing what happened, having analysed them a lot through the winter break and also during the season last year and accepting them to make a step forward. I know where they came from, so it's just a matter of putting it on track."

Although Martins was at fault on both those occasions, a slow pitstop in the Jeddah feature race had caused him to push harder than was necessary to ensure his position at the front, with team principal Sebastien Philippe conceding that the team must also do better. "For sure, last year, the speed was there," assesses Philippe. "If you look at the second half of the season, consistency was much better. We had too many mistakes last year on his car, coming from the team first and also from Victor, who I think was trying too much at some points. But we just have to fine-tune every area from last year to keep the same type of performance and just to be a bit more opportunistic in some situations. We lost so many points in the first half of last year.

"We are close to being able to deliver well but I would say »»



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Title success with
ART after dramatic
2022 F3 campaign...

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there will be some good contenders. It will be a big fight, I think. So just to make sure that we are consistent and to try as much as possible to avoid mistakes from both the team's side and the driver's side."

While some drivers burst onto the scene and are an immediate hit, others take more time to mature in a category and are successful over a period of time. Oddly, Martins finds himself in a peculiar middle ground. In Formula Renault Eurocup, he finished fifth in 2018 before progressing to runner-up in 2019 and, in 2020, he was crowned champion. Formula 3 was a similar story: fifth in his maiden year before championship success in 2022. Martins was fifth again in his rookie F2 season, and Philippe insists that a fast start to the new season will be crucial to any title ambitions, with a break of nearly two months following the flyaway races in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Australia.

"We all know that when you are starting the second season in F2, you are always under pressure because it's the moment when you need to deliver," adds Philippe. "Now, it's part of the game and he needs to cope with this pressure. I think, at the moment, he is quite relaxed, quite confident in what he is capable of doing. But the competition will be hard, so let's try to focus on learning this new car first and see how it goes."

Naturally, Martins has his eye on success in F2 being a springboard to F1. But even if he did become champion, this is far from a guarantee of progression. Since GP2 became renamed F2 in 2017, only three drivers have graduated the following year into F1, with two of these in the first two seasons – Charles Leclerc and George Russell. Since then, only Mick Schumacher has made the direct leap. Yes, Nyck de Vries made his ultimately failed move via Formula E, and Oscar Piastri is now proving that a year on the sidelines is not the end of the world, but any driver would rather be racing than not.

With this in mind, it's likely that the early start to F1's silly season could hinder those set to compete in F2 this term. A further roadblock for Martins is fellow Alpine Academy product Jack Doohan, who has already made clear his determination to convince team boss Bruno Famin that he is worthy of an F1 seat



Preview to 2024 title
fight? Bearman and
Martins battle in Jeddah



...was followed
by strong rookie
year in F2 in 2023

GRANT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

“In your second season in F2, you’re always under pressure because it’s the moment when you need to deliver”

should either Pierre Gasly or Esteban Ocon move on.

“For sure, you think about it,” concedes Martins. “But in the end, as I said, it’s about results and what you will do on the track. Alpine have been supporting me since almost the beginning of my career and it has all been done because of my results on the track. The confidence and the faith that they have shown in me, I just need to show results to show my potential and win. That’s it. Then I will get some opportunities. Of course, you see some movement in Formula 1, some people leaving and going to different teams, and it can open doors but it’s ultimately all about how I do in F2.”

While agreeing with the notion that success in junior categories is likely to create chances in F1, Hitech boss Oliver Oakes is not so sure that young talents should focus on the moves happening in the grand prix paddock. “I think it’s quite bad and good today, the whole social media and internet thing with the young drivers and all that type of stuff, because some of them will see something happen in F1 and it’s already in their head of, ‘Oh no, what’s going to happen in a year or two?’, when actually, the truth is that they need to perform,” reckons Oakes. “And if they perform in either F2 or F3, they will get opportunities.

“We’ve seen in F1 with the latest news that people didn’t see coming, nothing is set in stone. There are always contracts, there are always ways out, and I think over the years, even Red Bull, with some of the moves that they’ve made, it just shows that if you perform in F2 and F3, you get an opportunity. That’s fantastic.

“I know we all talk a lot about the road being blocked but actually, I look at it quite differently. I think that Piastri and »



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SEASON

PREVIEW



Miyata has to
prove himself in
European racing

Abundance of talent promises a season to remember

This season's Formula 2 grid is one of the most exciting for years, with proven race winners and potential championship contenders almost everywhere you look – even with the top four drivers from 2023 electing not to return.

Among the roster, there are two rookies who are likely to face more scrutiny than their peers – Andrea Kimi Antonelli and Ritomo Miyata. Italian Antonelli, the reigning Formula Regional European champion, has skipped Formula 3 as Mercedes looks to fast-track his career, and is already being touted as a possible contender to claim Lewis Hamilton's Formula 1 seat for 2025. Japanese Miyata, a long-time protégé of Toyota, enters with Rodin Motorsport as the reigning Super Formula title holder.

It's not hard to see why so many have been caught up in the hype surrounding 17-year-old Antonelli. Following a glittering career

in karting, he transitioned into cars in late 2021 and has since claimed five titles, mostly secured with Prema Racing, the team with which he will race in F2. With 34 race wins in two years across Italian and German F4, the FIA Motorsport Games F4 races, and FRegional Middle East and Europe, it's understandable why Mercedes felt Antonelli is capable of making the sizeable leap to race in F2. He even scored a victory on a one-off in a GT3 Mercedes

in Italian GT, aged 16...

Aged 24, Miyata is considerably more senior than most F2 rookies. His has been something of a meteoric rise by the standards of Japanese motorsport, where much more emphasis is placed on paying your dues while under the protection of manufacturer support. With Toyota patronage, he has won the F4 title (twice!) and Super Formula Lights. Then, in 2023, he conquered not only Super Formula but

“THERE ARE TWO ROOKIES WHO ARE LIKELY TO FACE MORE SCRUTINY THAN THEIR PEERS

also Super GT – the fifth driver to achieve this feat in the same season, but comfortably the youngest.

The real intrigue surrounding Miyata comes from the debate as to which championship between F2 and Super Formula is tougher to succeed in. A definitive answer is unlikely to emerge, but opinions are likely to be swayed by not only the progress of Miyata, but also that of reigning F2 champion Theo Pourchaire, who has moved in the opposite direction to compete in Japan.

It's not just Antonelli and Miyata who hold the intrigue, with all of the top five drivers from last year's F3 standings stepping up. Reigning champion Gabriel Bortoleto is now a McLaren F1 junior,

and the Brazilian has joined Invicta Racing (formerly Virtuosi). While Bortoleto showed great consistency in 2023, runner-up Zak O'Sullivan won the most races. The Williams protégé lines up alongside Victor Martins at ART Grand Prix. Paul Aron graduates with Hitech GP, Franco Colapinto (like O'Sullivan, the Argentinian is backed by Williams) is with MP Motorsport, while new Red Bull Junior recruit and Fernando Alonso-mentored Pepe Martí represents Campos Racing. Another F3 race winner from 2023, Taylor Barnard, is on the grid with PHM Racing.

Apart from Martins, those with F2 race-winning pedigree already are Ferrari starlet Ollie Bearman (Prema), Enzo Fittipaldi (Van Amersfoort Racing), Dennis Hauger (MP), Richard Verschoor (Trident) and new Aston Martin charge Jak Crawford (DAMS). This is a series not to be missed...



Antonelli is hope of
Prema – and Merc

Logan [Sargeant], the last two of the crop, and [Yuki] Tsunoda, they’re still there and they’ve all had opportunities. That just shows the strength of the junior categories.”

While Doohan will have his opportunity to prove his worth to Alpine across 10 days of private F1 testing, Martins could feature in FP1 sessions towards the end of the year, although he’s “not aware of any [plans] at the moment. Obviously, on my side, I would like to get some but honestly, I’m just really focused on Formula 2 and I know if I’m performing well, I will get some at the end of the season. That would be naturally given to me regarding the results. But for now, I don’t know and it’s not planned at all.”

F2 revealed its first new car since 2018 at last year’s Italian Grand Prix, with aerodynamics more akin to modern F1 cars, ground-effect technology and a striking rear wing not dissimilar to that used in Super Formula. Pre-season testing took place in Bahrain

“I have never had any problems working with team-mates. I’m always quite open-minded”

last week and was disrupted by wet weather on day one, adding a further restriction on running time.

“Obviously, the car has changed so it will be a matter of getting ready, getting a good understanding of the car, but that is what we have done in Bahrain,” says Martins. “It was only three days, which were in the end two days because of the rain, but I think we are ready for the first few rounds and then we will have some more [time] in Barcelona for testing.

“I don’t think it’s changed that much – at least, the feeling in the car. It’s just maybe only visible on the aero package but, in the end, the feeling is still the same because the tyres have not changed, so the contact with the ground is the same, the grip is the same. The compound is from Pirelli and the same tyre. Then the brakes are the same, the same engine – so it’s just the aero package which we need to understand how to work around and see how the car behaves. But in the end, it’s quite close. The feeling from the first laps was quite good and it felt like the pace was already good.”

Alongside getting to grips with the latest generation of car, however similar it may initially feel to the previous iteration, Martins will also have to adapt to his new role as team leader, with last year’s F3 runner-up Zak O’Sullivan in the sister car, although “on paper” Martins suggests that this role “doesn’t exist”.

“Obviously, I am a second-year driver and he is a rookie,” he says. “He is in the same position that I was with Theo last year but, in the end, I have never had any problems working with team-mates. I’m always quite open-minded. I also know that he can bring some good things to the team, some good feedback and also some good driving style. Sometimes you can think that you’ve done a good job but maybe someone else can do it differently and it is better, so you can learn from that.”

Regarding who could stand in his way for championship glory, Martins struggles to narrow down the list, perhaps adding further credence to the notion that the class of the 2024 grid is a step up on recent campaigns. “I don’t know. It’s not so clear,” he reflects. “Also, during testing, you never know who is doing what at the same time as you, so it’s quite difficult to actually compare. Also, because some teams are focusing more on qualifying runs, some teams are focusing more on race runs. And in the end, you cannot really compare and see who is the fastest so far. But I would say the guys from last year like [Ollie] Bearman, [Zane] Maloney and some others – [Kush] Maini will be quick with Virtuosi [now Invicta] and I think some of the rookies will be there also.” 🏆

F2 entry list

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Victor Martins (FRA)	ART Grand Prix
2	Zak O’Sullivan (GBR)	ART Grand Prix
3	Ollie Bearman (GBR)	Prema Racing
4	Andrea Kimi Antonelli (ITA)	Prema Racing
5	Zane Maloney (BAR)	Rodin Motorsport
6	Ritomo Miyata (JPN)	Rodin Motorsport
7	Jak Crawford (USA)	DAMS
8	Juan Manuel Correa (USA)	DAMS
9	Kush Maini (IND)	Invicta Racing
10	Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA)	Invicta Racing
11	Dennis Hauger (NOR)	MP Motorsport
12	Franco Colapinto (ARG)	MP Motorsport
14	Enzo Fittipaldi (BRA)	Van Amersfoort Racing
15	Rafael Villagomez (MEX)	Van Amersfoort Racing
16	Amaury Cordeel (BEL)	Hitech GP
17	Paul Aron (EST)	Hitech GP
20	Isack Hadjar (FRA)	Campos Racing
21	Pepe Marti (ESP)	Campos Racing
22	Richard Verschoor (NLD)	Trident
23	Roman Stanek (CZE)	Trident
24	Joshua Durksen (PRY)	PHM Racing
25	Taylor Barnard (GBR)	PHM Racing

F2 calendar

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	Sakhir (BHR)	1-2 March
2	Jeddah (SAU)	8-9 March
3	Melbourne (AUS)	23-24 March
4	Imola (ITA)	18-19 May
5	Monte Carlo (MCO)	25-26 May
6	Barcelona (ESP)	22-23 June
7	Red Bull Ring (AUT)	29-30 June
8	Silverstone (GBR)	6-7 July
9	Hungaroring (HUN)	20-21 July
10	Spa (BEL)	27-28 July
11	Monza (ITA)	31 August-1 September
12	Baku (AZE)	14-15 September
13	Losail (QAT)	30 November-1 December
14	Yas Marina (ARE)	7-8 December

Browning leads the Brits into F3 battle

Fresh off his stunning Macau GP success, Luke Browning has the spotlight upon him for the FIA F3 season. But he's just one of five Brits lining up on the grid in Bahrain

SAM HALL

Which nation has the most drivers who will line up on the Formula 3 grid for next week's opening round in Bahrain? It's the UK, with five set to battle it out among the 30-car field across the 10 events. Of this quintet, Luke Browning is the only one to have race experience in the series. Meanwhile, Arvid Lindblad, Cian Shields, Callum Voisin and Joseph Loake (who like Browning is an Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year winner) are all embarking on rookie campaigns. Time to take a look at their prospects...



MACAU GP



Luke Browning

All eyes are on Hitech GP's 22-year-old from Cheshire, who is tipped as a contender for the title. That's notwithstanding his rookie season of 2023 – just one podium finish and 15th in the points hardly sound like the ideal foundations from which to push on and top the order.

Instead, it's the post-season Macau Grand Prix from last November that has triggered the excitement around Williams F1 protege Browning. He was utterly sublime on the Far East streets, qualifying on pole, winning the qualifying race and then the main race. And although little can be read into the times from pre-season testing, it was the Briton who ended the three days in Bahrain last week at the top of the pile.

Talking about the deficit from his rookie year, Browning explains: "In terms of actual experience, these guys have had two to three years of Formula Regional, racing on these circuits. Last year, I hadn't been to a lot of the circuits that these guys had raced for years on.

"In terms of the actual experience of driving, you've got to think that last year I turned up with no testing. I've not really had any testing throughout my career and I've always been chucked in at the last minute, so this year has been one of the first years that I've been really well-prepared, and I think that shows in not only what we've done in Macau, but what we've done in testing.

"[I'm] the most well-prepared I can be. And with that comes the expectation of the championship. After winning Macau and the World Cup in this car, I think the team is going to be strong. It's certainly what I want to do. I'd love to win the championship with the team but ultimately, the championship is very difficult and it's early doors.

"I'm a different driver to what I was last year. I'm not turning up a week before I'm actually



Browning receives trophy for 2023 Macau GP victory...

driving, being told I'm going to drive. It's a bit different having four months to prepare, knowing that I'll be doing it. I'm feeling really good and I'm excited."

Aware of the pressure added by his Macau performance, Browning continues: "I've always had that in my career. I've never really had the money to do it the way I wanted to do it, nor to make the steps up that I wanted to take when I could. I've always had to prove myself to people to be able to move up, so it's natural to me. We've handled these situations well in the past, winning British F4 and GB3. I've been in these title discussions before where you've got to be smart and race a little bit differently. I think I'm ready for it – well, I know I'm ready for it and I'm really looking forward to the challenge."

Last season, Gabriel Bortoleto entered the final round needing just a single point to confirm himself as the champion. The previous year, Victor Martins came out on top but entered the final feature race of the year in a six-way battle

"I perform well under pressure – I always have done. It brings the best out in me"

for honours. So F3 is unpredictable...

"Obviously, Prema have been very strong in the past," muses Browning. "How many championships they've won, they've been formidable. I don't doubt that Prema will be there, I don't doubt that last year's drivers' champion team – Trident – will be there.

"Ultimately, F3 is so tight. The champion last year won two races. When Piastri won it [in 2020] he didn't have a pole position. It's not necessarily one person that you're battling with, it could be – like the Victor Martins year – five or six people for the championship going into Monza. You just don't know how it's going to work out.

"But my second-year experience should help a lot. It really was a massive learning year last year, not only with the tracks but in terms of it being a completely different driving style compared with what I was used to in the UK. It's going to be good. I perform well under pressure – I always have done. If you look at the Autosport Award, when the pressure is on and you've just got to perform, usually it brings the best out in me."

Hitech chief Oliver Oakes adds: "Last year Luke had an interesting season where he showed quite a lot of promise in F3. He probably didn't quite put it together when it mattered – he wouldn't mind me saying – and then he almost made up for that in a good way in Macau. So he's now got to do it this year consistently, weekend after weekend."



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RACING



Ford
RACING

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PEUGEOT
SPORT

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EXTREME

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RACING



Ford
RACING

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Aurobay

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Tornado
GB08

Ford
RACING

Ford
RACING

570 Kg x 370 HP | V6 3.3 N/A

Ford
RACING

690 Kg x 650 HP | V8 5.4 N/A

Aurobay

570 Kg x 410 HP | 2.0 TCR



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DUTCHPHOTOAGENCY/RED BULL



Arvid Lindblad

Luke Browning labels those in the highly coveted Prema Racing seats as a primary threat for the title, and this is where 16-year-old Red Bull Junior Lindblad resides. But the Surrey lad is up against it – he’s entering only his second full season of car racing, and lines up alongside Dino Beganovic and Gabriele Mini, proteges of Ferrari and Alpine respectively and already

established as forces in F3.

Lindblad finished in the top three in all the major karting competitions that he entered as a new Red Bull recruit in 2021, before his 2022 campaign was set back when he was forced out for a few weeks by a broken thumb sustained in a shunt at Franciacorta. That also truncated his F4 testing programme, but he performed respectably in his late-season races with Van Amersfoort Racing once he’d passed his 15th birthday and became eligible for the step into the Italian series.

Last year he moved to Prema, via a campaign with Hitech in the F4 UAE series where he accumulated one win. Lindblad was a clear mid-season leader in the Italian championship

– with six victories in his first 12 races – before car problems stymied his progress and he dropped to third in the final rankings. He collected a further win on his way to fourth in the Euro 4 mini-series, and dominated the Macau GP F4 event.

“He has grown up with us after stepping from karting into Formula 4 and he had a great season with us last year,” says Prema team boss Rene Rosin. “So we decided together with Red Bull to put him in Formula 3. It will be a learning experience to jump from Formula 4 to Formula 3 – it’s quite important – but I’m sure that together with the two experienced team-mates that he has with Dino and Gabriele, he will have a great season there.”



Aston Martin Autosport
BRDC Award allowed Loake
to ensconce himself at Rodin

RODIN MOTORSPORT

JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Joseph Loake

It’s fair to say that the move to F3 for 2024 was not fully on 18-year-old Loake’s radar until very late last year, when he won the Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award. His position on the grid with Rodin Motorsport puts him up against 2022 winner Luke Browning, and 2023 finalists Arvid

Lindblad and Callum Voisin.

Whereas Browning has made clear his ambition for championship glory, Loake – who enters his fourth season in single-seaters after finishing third in GB3 last year – has less lofty targets for his maiden F3 campaign.

“I think with the situation that I’m in at the moment with the team [which was bottom of the teams’ table in 2023], it’s going to be quite tricky to be anywhere higher than the top 15,” he argues. “But if we get everything right and I put in a good job, I don’t see why we can’t be looking at that.

“I don’t know what to expect and I don’t

want to put any pressure on myself, especially for the first round. It’s tricky to say. Of course, I’ve had three days in the car and I’m going to be thrown straight into round one, so I think it’s going to be quite a challenge to be at the pace that I want to be.

“I learned a lot in Bahrain testing and hopefully I can put that to good use come qualifying. I think if I’m just there or thereabouts with my team-mates and I’m showing the potential that we could have for the rest of the year, I’ll be quite satisfied with that. After we know where we are, we’ll try to build on that and build momentum for the year.”

SEASON
PREVIEW



Reigning GB3 champ
Voisin gets ready for
action in testing

FORMULAMOTORSPORT LIMITED



Callum Voisin

One of two British drivers in the Rodin Motorsport line-up, Voisin is well known to the team. He has spent two seasons with the squad in GB3, culminating in championship success last year. Among those he beat was new team-mate Joseph Loake.

"First of all, we want to beat each other!"

quips the 17-year-old. "But it's important that we work well together. We will turn up in Bahrain and, wherever we are, we will have to deal with it and keep chipping away at it. I think we'll get some good results."

Voisin has pinpointed Monaco as the event he is most looking forward to: "Just looking at it from an F1 perspective, qualifying day there is going to be pretty special. Being so close to the walls, going through the tunnel.

"I actually used to live there when I was younger so it's almost like going home and being on the streets that I kind of grew up on. I'm really looking forward to it, it's the most prestigious race in all of motorsport."

FORMULAMOTORSPORT LIMITED



Cian Shields

The 18-year-old Scot raced on a fair few of the F3 circuits on his way to runner-up spot – with four wins – in last year's Euroformula Open series. But Shields, who joins Luke Browning in the Hitech GP line-up, is making a big jump in terms of competition from that thinly supported contest to the throng on the F1 support grid.

"It's quite hard to tell right now with the testing because people do a lot of different things,"

concedes Shields. "So the first time that you really know where you are is qualifying at the first round. The pace is the main thing. As long as we're up with the front guys, I'm going to be pretty happy. I can't really focus on results because, obviously, there's a lot more factors that come into it."

Of Browning, he adds: "He's good to learn from and, analysing the data and the videos after each session, he's probably one of the best people to be able to compare to because I'd definitely say he's one of the fastest on the grid this year."

"With Cian, it's slightly different," says Hitech boss Oliver Oakes. "He's going into his third ever season of car racing. The ladder, they seem to jump up quite quickly now. So from our side, it's a case of just building up to it as the year goes on."

WHO ELSE IS LINING UP ON THE



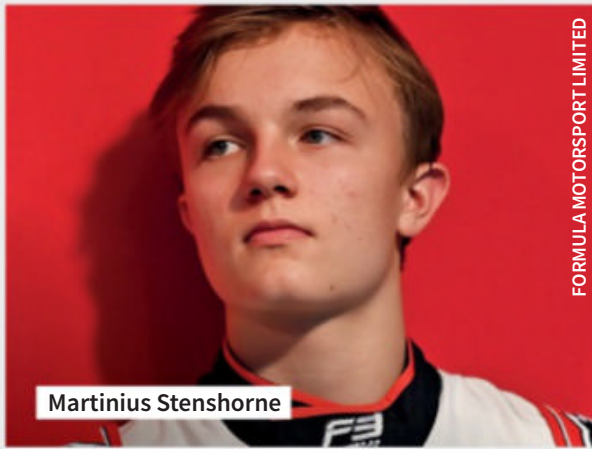
Dino Beganovic

FORMULAMOTORSPORT LIMITED



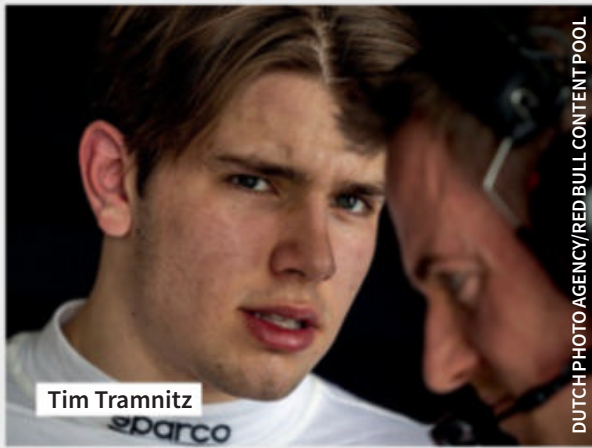
Gabriele Mini

MACAU GP



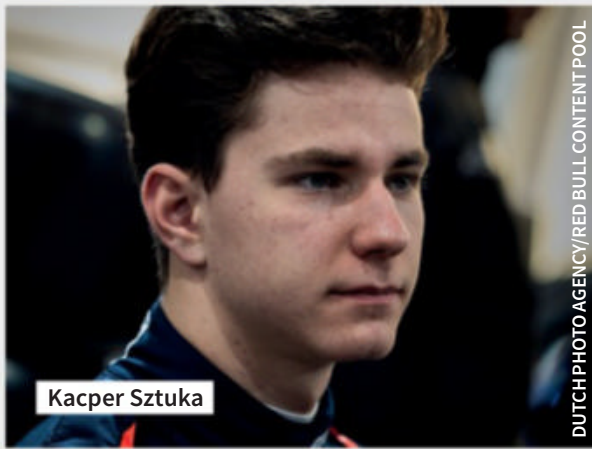
Martinus Stenshorne

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Tim Tramnitz

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Kacper Sztuka

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FORMULA 3 GRID

Beganovic gets going in Bahrain testing



FORMULA MOTORSPORT LIMITED

With last year’s top five in the final standings all graduating to Formula 2 (see panel, p53), **Dino Beganovic** and **Gabriele Mini** – sixth and seventh respectively in 2023 – are the highest-placed to remain on the F3 grid. And, what do you know, both of them are lining up with traditional F3 conqueror Prema Racing.

Swedish Ferrari junior Beganovic somehow didn’t pick up a race win with Prema in his rookie F3 season as the reigning Formula Regional European champion. Sicilian Alpine protege Mini was sublime on his way to victory in Monaco, and also won the sprint race clash at the Hungaroring, but was less consistent elsewhere with Hitech. He returns to the team with which he became the 2020 Italian F4 champion.

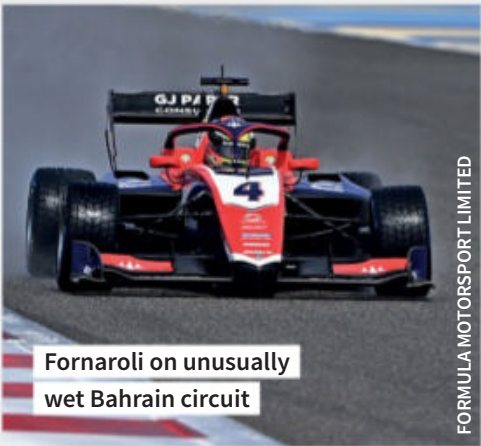
It was Trident, however, that fielded 2023 F3 champion Gabriel Bortoletto, although fellow Italian squad Prema scooped the teams’ crown. **Leonardo Fornaroli**, a three-time podium finisher and Silverstone polewinner as a rookie, is joined here by FRegional graduates **Sami Meguetounif** and **Santiago Ramos**, and the Italian knows he must challenge at the front more consistently this season.

Oliver Goethe is the only other race winner continuing into 2024. After ending the 2023 campaign in eighth spot, he has been newly recruited as a Red Bull Junior for his switch from Trident to Campos Racing, where he is partnered by fellow second-year drivers **Sebastian Montoya** and **Mari Boya**.

Apart from the British newcomers (see main article), there are some intriguing rookies in the line-up. Norwegian **Martinius Stenshorne** and German **Tim Tramnitz** were the closest opposition to F2 new boy **Andrea Kimi Antonelli** in last year’s FRegional European season, and join the F3 grid with Hitech GP and MP Motorsport respectively. Polish talent **Kacper Sztuka** beat **Arvid Lindblad** and the rest with astonishing late-season form to claim the Italian F4 crown – he and new MP team-mate Tramnitz have both been rewarded with selection to the Red Bull Junior programme. Completing a potent MP line-up is GB3 runner-up **Alex Dunne**, after the Irishman starred on his category debut in last November’s Macau GP.

Mexican **Noel Leon** didn’t have the deepest competition to beat in Euroformula Open last year, but was convincing on his way to the crown with seven race wins. He now steps up with Van Amersfoort Racing.

It all adds up to the usual mix of rookies and experienced heads in F3, which looks set to provide some entertaining action on grand prix weekends in 2024.



Fornaroli on unusually wet Bahrain circuit

FORMULA MOTORSPORT LIMITED

F3 entry list

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Dino Beganovic (SWE)	Prema Racing
2	Gabriele Mini (ITA)	Prema Racing
3	Arvid Lindblad (GBR)	Prema Racing
4	Leonardo Fornaroli (ITA)	Trident
5	Sami Meguetounif (FRA)	Trident
6	Santiago Ramos (MEX)	Trident
7	Tim Tramnitz (DEU)	MP Motorsport
8	Kacper Sztuka (POL)	MP Motorsport
9	Alex Dunne (IRL)	MP Motorsport
10	Oliver Goethe (DEU)	Campos Racing
11	Sebastian Montoya (COL)	Campos Racing
12	Mari Boya (ESP)	Campos Racing
14	Luke Browning (GBR)	Hitech GP
15	Martinius Stenshorne (NOR)	Hitech GP
16	Cian Shields (GBR)	Hitech GP
17	Charlie Wurz (AUT)	Jenzer Motorsport
18	Max Esterson (USA)	Jenzer Motorsport
19	Matias Zagazeta (PER)	Jenzer Motorsport
20	Noel Leon (MEX)	Van Amersfoort Racing
21	Sophia Floersch (DEU)	Van Amersfoort Racing
22	Tommy Smith (AUS)	Van Amersfoort Racing
23	Christian Mansell (AUS)	ART Grand Prix
24	Laurens van Hoepen (NLD)	ART Grand Prix
25	Nikola Tsolov (BGR)	ART Grand Prix
26	Tasanapol Inthraphuvasak (THA)	PHM Racing
27	Nikita Bedrin (RUS)	PHM Racing
28	Josh Dufek (CHE)	PHM Racing
29	Callum Voisin (GBR)	Rodin Motorsport
30	Piotr Wisnicki (POL)	Rodin Motorsport
31	Joseph Loake (GBR)	Rodin Motorsport

F3 calendar

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	Sakhir (BHR)	1-2 March
2	Melbourne (AUS)	23-24 March
3	Imola (ITA)	18-19 May
4	Monte Carlo (MCO)	25-26 May
5	Barcelona (ESP)	22-23 June
6	Red Bull Ring (AUT)	29-30 June
7	Silverstone (GBR)	6-7 July
8	Hungaroring (HUN)	20-21 July
9	Spa (BEL)	27-28 July
10	Monza (ITA)	31 August-1 September

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- Provide extensive communication with competitors throughout the year, including production and dissemination of post-race data and related information.
- On the ground at events it will include assisting with management of the extended event team, right down to ordering and setting up hospitality. That means literally rolling up your sleeves, getting stuck in, and being the one that makes sure that our team have got lunch.
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- Use tracking systems to record and prioritise the coding of new features & bug fixes.
- Work closely with the wider control engineering team, the FIA & common suppliers to build safety, reliability and legality into the code.
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- Have visibility of and represent the controls engineering team at test and race events as required.
- Build offline tools and models to assist with the tuning of performance functions.

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 - Monitor social media trends, adapting strategies to align with industry best practices and enhance audience engagement.
 - Engage actively with our community by responding to comments and messages promptly.
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 - Stay abreast of current events and relevant topics to produce timely and engaging content.
 - Coordinate social media advertising campaigns to drive website traffic and event participation.

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- Role requirements:**
- Manage and lead the creative team to inspire and create innovative campaigns. To organise and execute design projects to meet team objectives, under the guidance of the Head of Creative Design.
 - Key contact to support and manage the relationship with external agencies. Report to and support Head of Creative Design with day to day activities Mentoring / managing junior creatives and artworkers
 - Build and maintain robust and effective working relationships with key external suppliers and partners
 - To implement the standard to which all in-house design should adhere, in collaboration with the other designers in the Creative team
 - To research and plan design projects fully to ensure best quality solutions
 - To maintain and develop design of all assets and visual content to ensure the needs of the Williams Racing Group are satisfied, and to continue to push the boundaries
 - Take ownership of wider Partnerships, Commercial and Williams racing brand related projects

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Gotz, Keen and Loggie in 2 Seas **British GT** armada

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5 May - Curborough Speed Trials

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8 June - Harewood Hill Climb

30 June - Shelsley Walsh Hill Climb

21 July - Blyton Sprint

3 & 4 August - Vintage Prescott Hill Climb

7 & 8 September - Loton Park Hill Climbs

28 September - Prescott Long Course Hill Climb

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Esprit and Escort (inset) were just two of Sugden's many cars



Tony Sugden 1932-2024

OBITUARY

Tony Sugden, a legend of Britain's club racing scene, died peacefully in hospital last Saturday at the age of 91.

In a stellar four-wheeled career spanning 1965-2003, the Doncaster auto electrician won towards 220 races outright – mainly Special Saloons/GT events – plus dozens of class victories and several championships in cars fettled superbly by himself, family and friends.

Using Yorkshire nous, nobody stretched meagre finances further. Suggy's extraordinary determination and spirit made him the most formidable adversary, yet kindest to rivals needing help. "We're just humble people, privileged to race against some of the best, with budgets which really

didn't exist," he said.

With his devoted wife Rose – they married when Sugden was 21, but had no children – omnipresent as organiser/timer/record keeper/caterer, results were earned together.

Suggy competed initially on motorcycles, grass-tracking and scrambling a Triumph Twin in his teens. Following national service in the army, he road-raced nationwide in 1955, on a BSA Gold Star prepared with mechanic cousin Bert Morris. After contesting Manx GPs in 1958 and 1960, and raced wheel to wheel with Mike Hailwood at Cadwell Park in 1959, his final season on two wheels was 1962, on AJSs. With 30 plus wins and records to his name, a switch to cars followed.

Hillclimbs and sprints in Ford Cortina

GT and Sunbeam Alpines led to racing a Lotus Cortina, but Suggy became synonymous with an Escort built from a crashed shell. Over nine seasons, with twin-cam, BDE and BDX power, they won 47 races, 25 in Brook Hire colours, Peter Brook having sponsored its rebuild following a hefty Oulton Park shunt.

With the BDX in Alan Minshaw's ex-Tony Hazlewood DAF V8, rebadged as a Volvo 66, a Thruxton victory in 1978 flattered to deceive. After selling the Escort shell to Jim Price, Suggy bounced back with Price's Chevron B23, rebodied as a Skoda coupe, winning 29 races over two seasons. The ex-Jim Evans Lotus Esprit proved trying, with various turbo engines, and an open body, before the John Leek chassis was reconfigured with a 3.4-litre Ford GAA V6 for clubbies and Thundersports.

A Skoda body made it into a winner in 1988, but the chassis's successor, with two-litre Cosworth YB turbo (Sierra RS500) power was a stunner. Sugden was 1997 British Automobile Racing Club North West Sports/Saloons champion at 65 and kept winning until he retired in 2003.

Following Rose's passing, BRDC member Suggy drove the Classic Sports Car Club's safety car until his mid-eighties. He remained close to nephew Gary, to whom he was a lifelong hero, and was immensely proud of Gary's son Ryan, whose motor engineering career he inspired.

MARCUS PYE

Sugden was reunited with his old DAF in recent years



DTM king Gotz and Keen with Loggie at 2 Seas

BRITISH GT

The 2 Seas Motorsport squad will field a two-car Mercedes-AMG GT3 attack in this year's British GT Championship, with 2021 DTM title winner Maximilian Gotz and three-time BGT runner-up Phil Keen joining Kevin Tse and 2022 champion Ian Loggie respectively.

Loggie remains with the British-Bahrani operation after taking one win alongside Jules Gounon on his way to fifth in the standings last season. Due to Gounon's international commitments, Keen (below) – who jointly holds the record for British GT overall race wins with 19 – returns full-time to the series after filling in for the Frenchman alongside



Loggie at Portimao in 2023.

“It will be good to have a proper crack at it with Ian and see how we get on,” said 40-year-old Keen. “Ian has progressed a lot. Even since the last round [in 2023] he’s made some improvements and he’s out in the car a lot. He’s doing a lot of different driving and I think we stand a good chance at the championship but, as always, it won’t be easy.”

With James Cottingham, runner-up in British GT last season, moving on from 2 Seas to the World Endurance Championship with United Autosports, space has opened up for Tse to join the team. The Macanese finished second in the Silver-Am standings last season in a Sky

Tempesta McLaren 720S and now forms a Pro-Am partnership with Gotz, who is a newcomer to British GT.

The 38-year-old German, a long-time Mercedes factory driver, won the Spa 24 Hours in 2013 and the Blancpain Sprint Cup crown the following year. He first linked up with 2 Seas in the Gulf 12 Hours at Yas Marina last December, finishing third.

“The British GT Championship has become one of the biggest domestic championships in recent years, and has seen some amazing racing, so I am really looking forward to being a part of it, joining up with Kevin, and seeing what we can do together,” said Gotz.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Gamble joins Radcliffe aboard Optimum GT3

BRITISH GT

McLaren factory driver Tom Gamble will race full-time in British GT this year when he teams up with Mark Radcliffe in an Optimum Motorsport-run McLaren 720S GT3.

Gamble, the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner, has made sporadic outings in British GT over the past few years, driving a Century Motorsport BMW M6 GT3 in two rounds in 2019, and a Paddock Motorsport McLaren Artura GT4 in the final event of

2023 at Donington Park.

The 22-year-old is better known on the international stage, with a 2020 European Le Mans Series LMP3 crown under his belt, and competed in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup with Optimum last season, his first year on McLaren's roster of works drivers.

“I’m really excited to be paired with Mark for the 2024 British GT season and to be returning to some of my favourite circuits,” said Gamble. “I’m very thankful for the opportunity, we have a strong chance of



challenging for overall wins and for the championship which, ultimately, is our main goal. The car feels great, so we have the tools to get the job done.”

Radcliffe took three podiums as a BGT rookie with Optimum last season on his way to ninth in the standings.

Optimum will also run an Artura GT4 for Jack Brown and Zac Meakin this season. Brown remains with the team after coming close to the overall GT4 title and securing the Silver Cup with Charles Clark in 2023, when they scored two wins. Meakin moves across from Team Parker Racing.

Malin impressed last term in Carrera Cup as he took third in the standings



Malin switches to Zamparelli's Race Drive Porsche squad

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

Porsche Carrera Cup GB frontrunner Josh Malin has become the second recruit for Dino Zamparelli's new Race Drive squad in the series this year.

Malin won the 2020 Ginetta GT5 Challenge title before progressing to the Carrera Cup and taking seventh in the 2021 standings. He then replaced Gus Burton at Century Motorsport after the first two rounds last year and managed to climb to third in the points.

"Josh was on our radar because he was doing a good job last year with limited testing," said three-time Carrera Cup runner-up Zamparelli. "He was out of the car for nine months at Thruxton [when he returned in 2023] and finished on the

podium, and that was impressive. We wanted someone fast in the car because they can put it at the front and set the data for the rest of the team – and he was definitely on our shortlist."

Zamparelli is "excited" to see how Malin performs this year with more preparation under his belt. "With a bit of testing and a fair wind behind him, he can definitely challenge for the title," said Zamparelli.

Malin added: "It won't be easy, as this championship always sees a high level of racing, but I am confident I have a great team of people around me, and we are more than up for the challenge."

He joins Pro-Am contender Oliver White at Race Drive, and Zamparelli said the team could run a further two cars.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

BAXTER MOVES INTO GB4

Reigning Canadian F1600 champion Callum Baxter will contest the GB4 Championship this season in the UK with Graham Brunton Racing. The 17-year-old makes his slicks-and-wings debut with the Scottish team after a successful 2023, in which he also finished as runner-up in the Toyo Tires F1600 series and won on the fabled Trois-Rivieres street track.

F1 GRAND PRIX TESTING

Three of the Halusa Collection of classic grand prix cars were on track at Donington Park last week in preparation for the 2024 Monaco Historique. Lukas Halusa and Alex Ames drove the ex-Dan Gurney 1964 French Grand Prix-winning Brabham-Climax BT7, the ex-Jochen Mass McLaren M23 and the 1982 championship-winning ex-Keke Rosberg Williams FW08.

MINI ENTRIES GROW

The family-run Bitcoin Racing squad will join the Mini Challenge JCW grid this season running a single car for former Fiesta Junior and CityCar Cup competitor Chris Mackenzie. Meanwhile, Steven Chandler plans a full season of Cooper action in the Mini Challenge Trophy with his Chandler Motorsport team after making his debut in last year's finale.

ENID SMITH PASSES AWAY

Thruxton veterans will be saddened to learn of the death of Enid Smith, doyenne of the British Automobile Racing Club press office, last week. Smith, along with her late husband 'Mick', Thruxton's chief assembly area marshal, were the ever-helpful smiling faces of events in the 1970s and 1980s. She also became a key part of the media centre team for a decade when Lord March opened the modern Goodwood era in 1993.

Morris teams up with Parker for British GT4 assault

BRITISH GT

Seb Morris, the 2017 British GT3 champion, will return to the series this season with Team Parker Racing.

Morris, 28, will join the GT4 ranks aboard a Mercedes-AMG alongside Charles Dawson, and will bid to become only the second driver in the championship's history to win both overall class crowns.

The first was his former

team-mate Rick Parfitt Jr, who claimed the GT3 title alongside Morris in a Team Parker-run Bentley Continental in 2017.

"The first person to win both GT3 and GT4 was my former team-mate, so it would be funny to do it the other way around," said Morris (right). "However, to be honest, GT4 is just as hard, if not harder, than GT3 to win a race in. It's so incredibly competitive and we're going to be up against a lot of quick

Silvers and some very good, established Pro-Am pairings."

Dawson, meanwhile, returned to motorsport in 2022 following a long sabbatical. He made a handful of GT4 European Series appearances last year, as well as racing with Morris in the GT Cup, where they shared several podiums and a victory at Silverstone.

This success was after Dawson fractured his back in a crash at Monza in April.





Senna's only Silverstone F1 win came in 1988, but he starred there in the junior ranks

motorsport
IMAGES

Senna's life to be honoured at Silverstone

SILVERSTONE FESTIVAL

The largest-ever gathering of cars raced by Ayrton Senna is the target for the 2024 edition of the Silverstone Festival as the event commemorates 40 years since the Brazilian burst onto the Formula 1 scene and 30 years since his death.

The special Senna tribute has received the blessing of the three-time F1 champion's family and will be held at a venue where he achieved much success as he rose up the single-seater ranks. Although he was pipped by Rick Morris during his first Formula Ford 1600 race at Silverstone in 1981, Senna – then racing as Ayrton Senna da Silva – went on to triumph there in FF2000 the following year, and achieved six British F3 victories in Northamptonshire in

1983. Such was his dominance at the track that it was jokingly referred to as 'Silvastone' in some quarters. But Senna took just one F1 victory at Silverstone, which came in the rain-swept 1988 British Grand Prix.

"Ayrton always had a very strong connection with Silverstone," said his niece Bianca Senna, CEO of Senna Brands. "His history in motorsport includes memorable victories at this circuit, and he raced for British teams. We are excited to participate in the Festival this year, which is so special as we celebrate 30 years of Senna's legacy. It is definitely a tribute that will move fans worldwide."

Those who own Senna cars or memorabilia are encouraged to contact organisers of the 23-25 August event to

form part of the tribute.

"There could be no better circuit to celebrate the outstanding achievements of Ayrton Senna than Silverstone," added event director Nick Wigley. "Ayrton won 10 times from his 20 starts at Silverstone and we will honour that extraordinary success with the biggest and best collection of Senna cars ever displayed together. We are deeply privileged to have the full support of the Senna family, and will be working with them to ensure this very special celebration honours one of the sport's greatest stars in fitting and fantastic style."

Among the categories in action at this year's Festival is the F3 Classic Interseries, which features machinery from the era when Senna competed.

Karter Sutton picked as first Fiesta Junior scholar

FIESTA JUNIOR

The British Racing & Sports Car Club is already planning the second edition of its Fiesta Junior Scholarship after Daniella Sutton was named the inaugural winner last week.

Karting graduate Sutton impressed a panel of expert judges at Blyton Park and wins a funded season in the Fiesta category this year, a prize worth in excess of £65,000.

Over 50 drivers took part in the assessments, which featured a range of driving, fitness and media tests, including a presentation. Each applicant had four on-track sessions, with tin-top stars Matt Neal, Josh Cook, Aiden Moffat, Paul O'Neill and Jack Mitchell on hand to provide advice, each driver having a different coach for each run. The best six drivers from the first two



Sutton was awarded the prize after she impressed at Blyton

assessment days then progressed to the final.

Sutton will receive the use of a Pro Alloys Racing-prepared Mk7 Fiesta and have all championship registration,

entry fees and BRSCC membership paid for. She will also receive coaching from Cook, a simulator programme, and a range of consumable costs will be covered.

Reynolds wins Dragon Sport Britcar Trophy shootout at Brands

BRITCAR TROPHY

Ginetta Junior and GB4 graduate Harri Reynolds will compete in the Britcar Trophy this season alongside reigning champion Rhys Lloyd after winning the Dragon Sport scholarship.

The 17-year-old was one of 32 competitors to take part at Blyton Park earlier this month in the scholarship, which included sim/media sessions, a fitness test and two runs in the team's Renault Clio machines.

Reynolds progressed to the final shootout stage, but the track curfew was reached before he was able to complete his final run. Organisers took the decision to assess the Welshman and the other two finalists, Matt Hyde and Jack James, at Brands Hatch last week. Reynolds was announced as the winner after a day of running.

"It was a horrible feeling [not to do the final run at Blyton] because I knew I could do a good job," said

Reynolds. "But given the opportunity to go again at Brands picked up my spirits because I thought that would suit me more than just a shootout. I feel like my previous experience working with teams, looking over data, that helped with my progress."

Reynolds will partner Lloyd, who funded the scholarship for a second season after he and inaugural winner Jack Meakin combined to take the Britcar Trophy title last year.

STEFAN MACKLEY



ROBERT BOROWIK MEDIA

RACE RETRO CANCELLED

This weekend's Race Retro event has been cancelled due to extensive flooding in the area, with more rain forecasted. Organisers of the event, which was due to take place at Stoneleigh Park, announced on Monday that they would be calling off the gathering after consultation with the Warwickshire District Council Safety Advisory Group and Warwickshire Police.

BUMPER RALLY ENTRY

The East Riding Stages will commence this weekend for one of the biggest closed-road events in England, with more than 140 cars set to take part. David Henderson and Chris Lees will be the first crew away, having won for the past two years, but are yet to nominate their car for this year. Ten stages, including two runs on a super special at the start of Sunday's afternoon leg, will take place within walking distance of Beverley town centre.

OFF TO A WINNING START

Knockhill's season-opening Grant Construction Rally was dominated by Hugh Brunton and Terry Mallin in their Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo, as they got their Scottish Tarmac Rally Championship season off to a flyer. The pair piloted the ex-Andreas Mikkelsen machine to nine out of 10 stage wins, winning by a margin of over a minute to the second-placed Citroen C3 Rally2 of Peter Stewart and Kerrie MacGillivray.

MGA FUN FOR DANIELS

George Daniell impressed when the 16-year-old competed in one of his family's ex-works Dick Jacobs MGA twin-cams for the first time in last Saturday's Pomeroy Trophy at Silverstone. Daniell drove 1 MTW – raced in the 1958 RAC Tourist Trophy at Goodwood by Tommy Bridger and Alan Foster – alongside father Mark in 2 MTW (below). Mark's father Roger, who bought the cars in 1972 and 1967 respectively, hopes to join them on track in a third MGA, the ex-Dick Crosfield car, later this year.



STEVE JONES

Junior Saloons prize for Crewdson

JSCC

Will Crewdson has been named as this year's Junior Saloon Car Championship Scholarship winner and will receive a fully funded drive in the series this season worth more than £30,000.

The 17-year-old competed in three rounds of the Citroen Saxo-based championship in 2023 before last weekend's scholarship, which was held at Croft.

Competitors took part in pitstop, fitness and autotest challenges, alongside giving a media presentation and driving

assessment in front of a panel of judges.

Crewdson follows in the footsteps of previous winners including Will Fallon, Jack James, Chloe Grant, Harry Rice and Scott McIntyre.

"It's great to be able to give the trophy to a well-deserved winner in Will in what is set to be our 10th year," said Junior Saloons coordinator Dave Beecroft. "We're looking forward to working with this young man in 2024; a super scholarship winner!"

The opening rounds of the season are scheduled to take place across 31 March-1 April at Brands Hatch.

Hunt lands the VSCC Pomeroy Trophy honours

POMEROY TROPHY

Theodore Hunt proved his 1932/38 Frazer Nash TT Replica to be the Vintage Sports-Car Club's touring car of the year by winning the coveted Pomeroy Trophy at Silverstone on Saturday. His feat mirrored father Martin's in an FN Super Sports in 2015 and broke recent Japanese four-wheel-drive supremacy.

Simon Blakeney-Edwards was overhauled on track by wife Jo in their 1929 FN Super Sports tussle, but earned the Densham Trophy. Luke Roberts, perched on his 1906 Bianchi, wriggled it to Edwardian honours, while Alex Ames took Gordon Spice Trophy gold in Martin Halusa's BMW CSL racer.

Inaugurated in 1952 and run to a fiendishly complex formula devised by Laurence Pomeroy – using vehicle age, engine capacity, brake pedal to rear axle dimensions and luggage capacity – any car can win.

Wiggle-woggle (slalom), acceleration and braking tests, followed by a 40-minute high-speed trial (three to accommodate this year's 100-plus entry) on the Grand Prix



Frazer Nash pilot Hunt impressed in varied tests

circuit, embroiled cars spanning 115 years, the youngest from 2021.

Hunt cleaned the tests, then exceeded his 10-lap target by three in the first of the damp rolling-start trials. Lukas Halusa (Bugatti T35C) recovered from a moment to chase him in, while Tony Lees enjoyed a workout on his snaky 11.7-litre Vauxhall Viper.

Hunt Sr (FN Targa Florio), Nigel Gray (Lotus Elan), the evergreen Josh Sadler (Porsche Carrera RS), and FN Super Sports pedallers Mark Gold and Eddie Williams all excelled to land first class awards.

Denied the opportunity to wrestle

with four-time Pom winner Patrick Blakeney-Edwards in BMW 'Batmobiles' when electrical gremlins stopped the latter's slick-shod car, Ames – on wilting Avon wets – was hounded down by David Smitheram in his 2007 Chevrolet Corvette C6.

Smitheram's six-litre monster, nicknamed Clive, with 228,000 miles on its original engine and running road-legal Yokohama AD09 tyres, battled past cone penalty-hobbled Martin Short's rapid Toyota Yaris GR, gobbled up Jason Wright's Ford GT40 and finished in Ames's slipstream.

MARCUS PYE

F4 race winner Higgins moves to Rodin for 2024



BRITISH F4

British Formula 4 race winner James Higgins has moved to Rodin Motorsport for his second full campaign in the series.

The former Ginetta Junior driver tackled the final two events of the 2022 season with Fortec, before

finishing sixth in last year's standings with the team after taking two wins.

Rodin has entered five of the nine champions since the category became an FIA F4 series in 2015 – four of them under the team's former name of Carlin.

"Last year I think we showed glimpses of what

we can do, however, for one reason or another, things just didn't fall our way when it came to mounting a proper championship challenge," said Higgins.

"To join one of the best teams on the grid means there are no excuses; the goal is clear and that's to win the championship."

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Drivers have been pouring
into CSCC Donington grids



STEVE JONES

Entries for CSCC Donington opener filling fast with a month still to go

CSCC

The Classic Sports Car Club has enjoyed impressive interest for its season-opening race meeting at Donington Park with a month still to go before the event.

The entry for the 23-24 March fixture currently stands at a whopping 363 after the first two and a half weeks in which drivers could sign up.

"It's all gone a bit mad over the past week," said club director David Smitheram. "Half of the grids are already full and we are into reserves for some of them –

that is very encouraging.

"Most popular are the two Swinging Sixties races for which we have 87 entries in total, up from 67 at Donington last year. Classic K and Tin Tops have full 40-car grids."

A very promising sign is the Ramair BMW Championship, previously known as the Kumho series and a new addition to the CSCC portfolio this year, for which 24 competitors have subscribed for Donington, a 50% increase over 2023's largest field.

MARCUS PYE

GADD FACES NEW TYRE CHALLENGE FOR F1000 DEFENCE

F1000

Reigning F1000 champion Tom Gadd will defend his title this season, when new tyre rules are set to be introduced into the series.

The 26-year-old has spent the past three years in the 750 Motor Club single-seater category and, after just missing out on the title in 2022, Gadd claimed the crown with Team Sellars Racing last term.

"Going into this season, everyone starts from afresh again and I can imagine it's going to be just as competitive, if not more," said Gadd (below). "There were a couple of drivers who were knocking on the door last year who will be there from race one this year."

The championship is also set to switch to Hoosier tyres from previous supplier Avon, following the closure of the latter company's factory at the end of last year, and a new regulation is due to be introduced that will limit drivers to only one set of tyres from qualifying onwards over the weekend.

"The Hoosiers are completely different to the Avons we ran before," said Gadd. "No one has raced an F1000 on these tyres, and there's only been a very small amount of testing just to make sure they fit the cars."

"Going into this year, no one is going to know how to set the cars up. It's changed all the gearing because the tyres are slightly bigger so everyone is almost going to be starting from scratch, which should bring the field closer together."

STEFAN MACKLEY

P74 TSR'S SUCCESS



STEVE JONES

Kucharczyk among latest GB3 signings

GB3

GB3 podium finishers Tymek Kucharczyk and John Bennett are both moving to new teams for 2024, joining Hitech and JHR Developments respectively.

Polish racer Kucharczyk finished seventh in last year's table with Douglas Motorsport in his first campaign in the series, but now moves to the squad that fielded Luke Browning to the 2022 title. "The opportunity to race for such a prestigious team is a huge motivation for me," he

said. "I gained valuable experience last season and I hope it will help me fight for the championship title in 2024."

Former Ginetta racer Bennett, meanwhile, moves to a third different GB3 team. He was 10th in the points last season with Rodin Carlin and drove for Elite Motorsport in 2022, and has just completed a campaign in the Formula Regional Middle East series.

"JHR are a great team full of very talented individuals, as shown by their results across the board in 2023, and things

clicked instantly when I undertook my first test with them," said Bennett. "I can't wait to get the year under way and see what we can achieve together."

Elsewhere, Arden has also revealed two drivers for its line-up, with two-time race winner Noah Ping continuing for a second season after ending last year 12th in the table; he will be joined by Shawn Rashid, who was 25th for Douglas. These latest recruits mean 14 GB3 drivers have now been officially confirmed for 2024.

THE RISE OF A GRASSROOTS TITLE-WINNING TEAM

A 750MC clean-sweep last season for Team Sellars Racing is the culmination of almost a decade in motorsport

STEFAN MACKLEY



Title success in any championship is always a special achievement for a team, but to come out on top of three national series during the same season is an exceptional feat.

For Team Sellars Racing, the 2023 campaign could arguably not have gone any better. It claimed a hat-trick of crowns in the 750 Motor Club's Locost, Ma7da and F1000 championships, with Craig Land and Jonathan Lisseter completing back-to-back titles in the first two, while Tom Gadd came out on top of a fiercely competitive F1000 field. It was the culmination of nearly a decade of work, with TSR going from strength to strength to the point where it was responsible for running almost 20 cars full-time during the season.

"Although it's a really good achievement, I think once you've been in motorsport so long you become a little bit numb to it sometimes, you're just always focused on what we're going to do next year to beat it," reflects team boss Stuart Sellars. "I didn't come into 2023 with the expectation of winning three, but in 2022 we won the Ma7da and Locost championships and we came third

in F1000, so we nearly did all three that year. It's hard to replicate that year after year as well because obviously everyone else is trying to go faster, the same as we are."

TSR's success over several years in the Locost and Ma7da kit car championships is perhaps unsurprising given that's where the team began life, Sellars himself racing Locosts in 2015, when he finished fourth in the standings. That same season coincided with the creation of TSR as Sellars, then 21 years old, began to move away from competing, which he'd done since starting out in karting during childhood. A future in the industry was always likely since his dad, Chris, has been involved with motorsport for almost 40 years, beginning with oval racing as well as Legends.

After studying motorsport engineering at university prior to 2015, Sellars embarked on an apprenticeship that included spells working in the British Touring Car Championship and British GT, as well as being involved with the development of the Bentley Continental GT3. He also had spells working in McLaren's historic department and the Mini factory, all of which formed a solid foundation from which to build TSR. Sellars admits that he "tried to do as many

Land leads the Locost swarm on his way to a second title on the bounce



“I get just as excited about being a team manager trying to win races as I was in the driving seat”

different aspects of motorsport as I could get myself into”.

“I always say this to anyone standing near me when I’m watching a race: I’m more nervous watching my drivers than I ever was in a race car, which probably sounds quite weird to some people,” says the now 30-year-old. “I get just as excited about being a team manager and trying to win races from that side of things as I was in the driving seat. Don’t get me wrong, there’s times I would rather be out there, but you’ve got to earn a living somehow and I wouldn’t do it any other way than trying to be involved in motorsport.”

It didn’t take long for the team to taste championship success, with the first outright title coming in 2018 when Lee Emm took the Sport Specials Championship aboard a development Ma7da, which



Sellars (left) gained extensive motorsport experience before creating TSR

STEVE JONES

was the eventual foundation for the standalone series in 2021.

A second championship came just a year later when Gadd took the Locost crown, receiving partial support from TSR during his campaign. After dropping to sixth in the points in 2020, Gadd made the move into F1000 with TSR for 2021, one year after the championship joined the 750MC’s ranks. >>

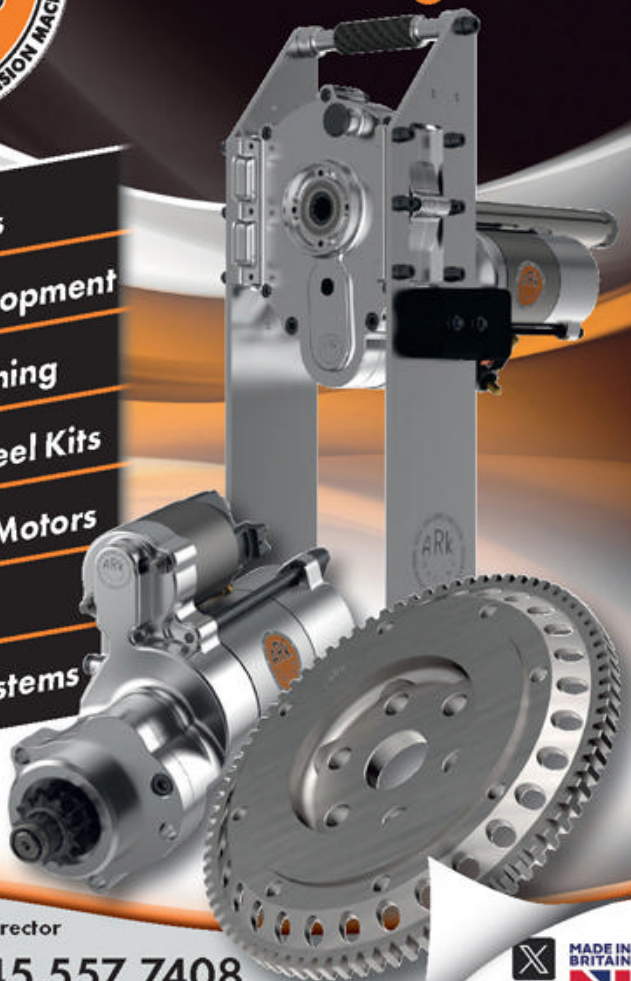
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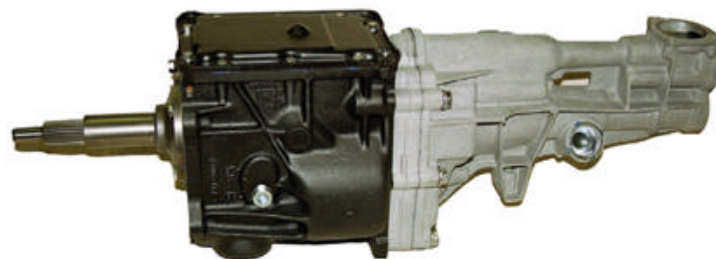
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“When we came into F1000, the first two years were very much learning years,” recalls Sellars. “You go through all the phases of trying to make the things reliable, then it’s trying to make the things fast once they’re reliable and hitting that consistency of making the car fast for an entire race. There’s a whole building process to it, and I think the modern generation of stuff can almost take that reliability factor away a little bit and that’s probably why we like to use the old stuff still. It makes it more of a challenge.”

While Gadd came close to the crown in 2022, reliability and

“I like being on the rolling road setting up carburettors – it’s more enjoyable than sitting at a laptop”

small errors cost him over the second half of the season before it all came together last term. The 26-year-old intends to defend his title this year with TSR, which he knows not only provides him with a car capable of fighting at the front but also in an environment where he can enjoy his racing.

“As we’ve spent time with them and got to know the people, I consider them all family now and it’s just a great atmosphere to be around,” enthuses Gadd. “Everyone gets on, everyone helps each other. Everyone in the Locost and Ma7da paddock knows him [Sellars], he’s sort of the go-to guy for everything to do with them. I think he wanted a bit of a challenge himself and we did too – it was just great we could work together to get that championship.”

With such success achieved in a relatively short space of time, Sellars is already looking ahead to other avenues of motorsport, including the historic side of racing such as Formula Junior. “I’ve done GTs and touring cars in the past, but I think I much prefer the single-seater route, so that’s the direction we’re going to go in,” he says. “With working on old Locosts, we’ve got a lot of knowledge and experience in doing that era of car. We’ve got experience in modern stuff as well, but it kind of excites me a little bit more when it comes to



Lissester came away with his second Ma7da crown

working on the cars – the older stuff is nice.

“We have our own rolling road, and I like being on the rolling road setting up carburettors – there’s much more enjoyment in that for me than there is sitting at a laptop doing mapping injections. It’s a little bit more raw.

“It’s a little bit of a dying art to a certain extent. The teams that are in it now are all really established, so it’s going to be quite interesting to get into.”

For the immediate future at least, focus has switched to the 2024 season, which gets under way in April with TSR set to run cars in F1000 and Ma7da. One significant change, though, will be that the team will not run any cars in Locost, Sellars admitting that “the workload last year was just crazy”.

Regardless, the team is likely to be a frontrunner once again. And, based on its growing trophy cabinet, there’s every chance that TSR will achieve success in other categories of motorsport in the future. “I suppose from the outside it looks a bit glamorous, but it really isn’t,” points out Sellars. “I think as a team owner and especially in club racing, we’re never going to earn a fortune, so it’s definitely for the passion of doing it.” ✎

OVERALL TITLES		
YEAR	CHAMPIONSHIP	DRIVER
2018	Sport Specials Championship	Lee Emm
2019	Locost Championship	Tom Gadd
2022-23	Locost Championship	Craig Land
2022-23	Ma7da Championship	Jonathan Lissester
2023	F1000	Tom Gadd



TSR and Gadd took their maiden F1000 title at third time of asking

FINISHING STRAIGHT

The return of a tried and tested formula



DOCUMENTARY DRIVE TO SURVIVE

Available on Netflix

It's now become a tradition: Netflix has launched a new season of *Drive to Survive* to coincide with winter testing

for the new Formula 1 season.

Providing behind-the-scenes access to one of the world's most restricted sports championships has done wonders for F1's booming popularity and expanded demographic, so the docuseries made by Box to Box Films has stuck to its guns for season six, half of which

we have had early access to.

Once again each of the 10 episodes is built around one of the main narratives from the season just gone. So with Red Bull winning all but one race in 2023, the makers have had to seek their thrills elsewhere and lean heavier on the off-track drama.

Maybe that's just as well, because *Drive to Survive* remains somewhat jarring when it comes to on-track storytelling. It lapses into the old vice of overlaying out-of-context soundbites and pitwall reactions onto action footage, which had seemed less prevalent in season five. Making it sound like race engineers get into their driver's ear on the frantic run down to Turn 1 at the start is a little nonsensical, but it's where

diehard F1 fans just need to take a deep breath and remember who this show is aimed at first and foremost.

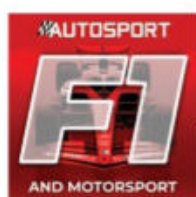
Instead, where *DTS* really shines for seasoned motorsports devotees – which you presumably are if you're reading this – is in showing us fresh fly-on-the-wall footage, and season six is no different. The third episode revolving around McLaren particularly stands out with some delicious snark, with Red Bull team boss Christian Horner eager to twist the knife as Zak Brown's team misfires, adding insult to injury by openly courting Lando Norris.

We get a nugget of inside baseball when McLaren's blue-chip sponsors worriedly ask Brown what's going on, following by a well-crafted segment of the team's mid-season resurgence as Norris takes second at home at Silverstone. While Brown does all the heavy lifting on camera, there's curiously barely a mention of Andrea Stella, the team boss who turned the ship around, but perhaps both like it better that way.

DTS has never shied away from fan service and it continues that trend in season six. Unlikely Netflix star Guenther Steiner is back to his charismatic self as Haas's struggles are well documented. Watching young, female F1 fans fawn over meeting the foul-mouthed Italian at his book signing feels both surreal and meta. Here, *Drive to Survive* has gone full circle, basking in the popularity it has created.



McLaren's mid-season resurgence gets its own well-crafted segment



autosport.com/podcast



Formula 1 pre-season testing

The F1 pre-season continues in earnest, with the teams and drivers finally making it to Bahrain for the three-day test. Following the car launches, the eyes of the world will be fixed upon which machines have evolved from their launch spec and which teams have got it right or wrong. Williams will also show its 2024 challenger for the first time, with Alex Abon and Logan Sargent looking to build upon last year's progress. But the biggest question is over reigning champion squad Red Bull. Has the team pushed the benchmark even higher with its RB20 apparently inspired by title rival Mercedes' W14 of 2023?



Each episode built around one of the season's main narratives

Given Steiner has since been replaced at Haas, it may have been his last hurrah on the show. But Netflix was handed a boost by its other fan favourite, Daniel Ricciardo, enjoying a year worthy of a script. He first gets an episode alongside struggling Nyck de Vries, and Box to Box Films deserves huge credit for being on the scene at the Australian's Silverstone test that convinced Red Bull to give him a second chance at AlphaTauri in the Dutchman's stead. We get access, in truncated form, to a series of events and meetings, including Ricciardo's first reaction to the news that he's back in the game. Ricciardo later returns for a second episode around his wrist fracture at Zandvoort, which brings Liam Lawson into the frame as his temporary replacement.

While juggernauts Ferrari and McLaren also play a big part in the second half of the



Now ex-Haas boss Steiner remains, unsurprisingly, great box office

series, which we haven't had access to yet, the award for best drama goes to Alpine's implosion. The long-time rivalry between Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly is the focus of the fifth episode, but its title *Civil War* would have been much more appropriate for the events around the departures of Laurent Rossi and Otmar Szafnauer, which spills into a second (as yet unseen) Alpine-dominated episode.

Netflix has largely stuck to its tried-and-tested formula so, if you weren't a fan before, this season won't change your opinion. But if you're just here for the behind-the-scenes popcorn fodder and can look past the odd embellishment, then enjoy the ride. All 10 episodes of *Drive to Survive* season six are available on Netflix from 23 February.

FILIP CLEEREN

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Formula 1 pre-season testing

Sakhir, Bahrain

21-23 February

TV Live Sky Sports F1 Wed 0650, 1155, Thu 0650, 1155, Fri 0650, 1155

NASCAR Cup

Round 2/36

Atlanta, USA

25 February

TV Live ViaPlay Sun 1930

NASCAR Xfinity

Round 2/33

Atlanta, USA

24 February

NASCAR Truck Series

Round 2/23

Atlanta, USA

24 February

Australian Supercars

Round 1/12

Mount Panorama, Australia

24-25 February

TV Live TNT Sports 3, Sat 0500, TNT Sports 4, Sun 0400



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Gerhard Berger picks his way back to the pitlane in his front-wingless Benetton-Renault B197 having come a cropper on lap nine of the unexpectedly wet (for some teams,

at least) and incident-packed 1997 Monaco Grand Prix. He wasn't happy after qualifying 17th, two seconds off the polesitting Williams-Renault FW19 of Heinz-Harald Frentzen, and his progress following his Mirabeau

off did little to make amends: Berger at least made the finish, one of just 10 of 22 starters to manage that, but was second to last, two laps adrift of the head-and-shoulders-above-the-rest Michael Schumacher's Ferrari F310B.



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Gianmaria Bruni has been a Porsche man since 2017, but it's the first chapter of his sportscar career, at Ferrari, that he looks back on to pick a favourite team-mate. In his four years of sharing a car with Toni Vilander, the pair had great success, and enjoyed numerous collaborations outside their season-long campaigns in FIA GT (2008-09) and the World Endurance Championship (2014-15).

That the pairing was a good match is evidenced by their 2008 FIA GT2 title and 2014 World Endurance Cup for GT Drivers, in addition to 2012 and 2014 Le Mans victories together – which could have been added to in 2011 and 2015 without electronic and gearbox gremlins respectively interfering while leading late on. It also helped that during that time, Bruni says, he and Vilander became “friends outside and inside the track”.

“We were always together and then separate and then together again, then separate,” reflects Bruni. “In this period, we grow up as drivers, as a person, together. We were having fun during races, and fighting each other when we were not in the same car, so it's something that will always stay in my mind. We were successful together but also when we were not, we always had fun. It's something that is not common.

“It was not in any doubt that he was



on the pitwall supporting me and I was on the pitwall and supporting him, so it was not any rivalry, it was just working for the results. It's not easy to find a fast driver, good team-mate, that is with you all the time, in a good result and then the bad results.”

Equally as effective in the F430 and the 458, Bruni singles out Vilander as one of the most impressive drivers in bad conditions he's ever encountered: “He was absolutely amazing, I never saw someone like him in the wet.”

The two were happy to change their roles depending on conditions and enjoyed complete confidence in each other. “It's simple things, but it makes a big difference because you trust 100% that it will work and you don't have to think about it,” he adds.

JAMES NEWBOLD



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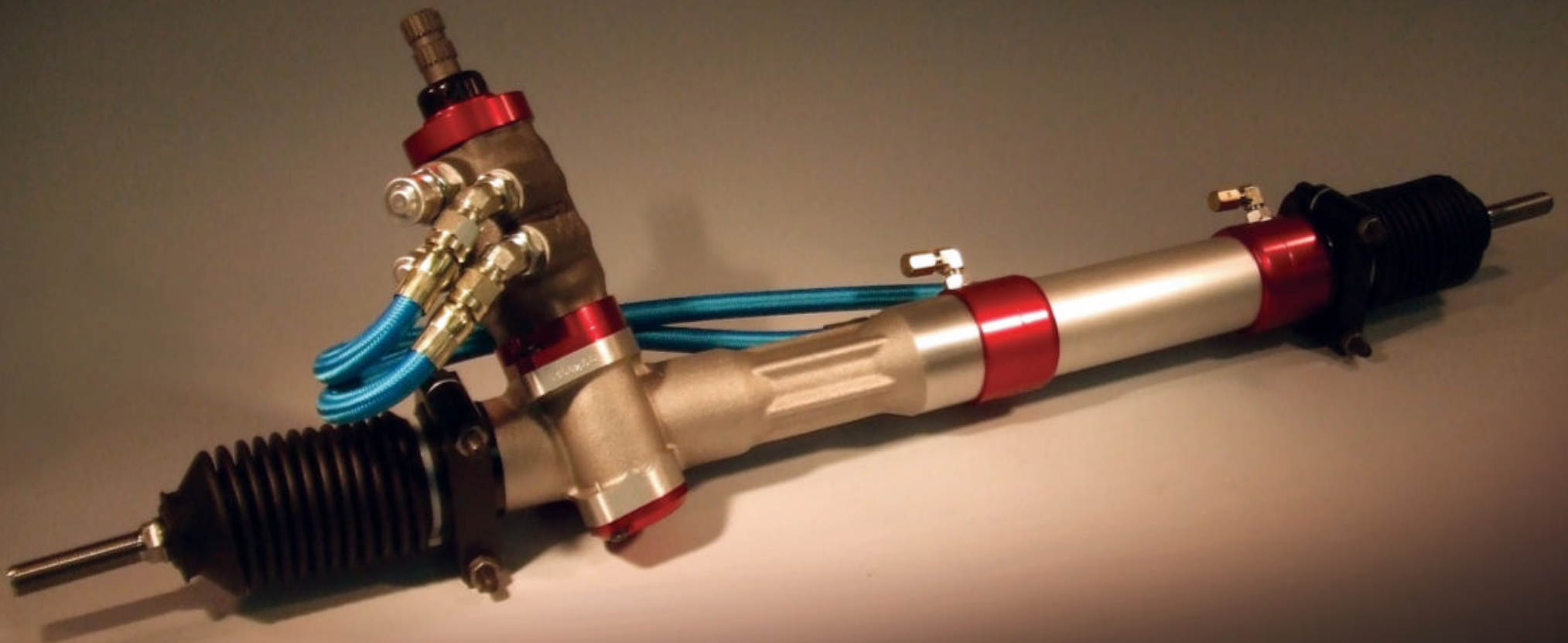
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