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7 MARCH 2024

# AUTOSPORT

'The team  
is in danger of  
being torn apart'

JOS VERSTAPPEN

## Verstappen wins amid Horner scandal

Max leaves rivals floundering but  
off-track tension mounts at Red Bull



PLUS

Can Marquez retake his **MotoGP** crown?

**WEC** shock! Porsche dominates in Qatar

What to watch in **IndyCar** this season



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# Not what F1 needed but there could be better races to come

Well, for the neutral, that was pretty much the worst-case scenario. Formula 1 kicked off with a Red Bull 1-2 and victor Max Verstappen barely breaking sweat as he beat the field by over 20 seconds. You have to admire his and the team's abilities but, as a sporting contest, last weekend's Bahrain Grand Prix was distinctly lacking.

So, are there reasons to be cheerful about the season ahead? Jake Boxall-Legge (page 18) and Alex Kalinauckas (p15) run you through how circumstances helped Red Bull and why Ferrari, Mercedes and McLaren are better than they looked on Saturday. Things *could* be closer in Saudi Arabia this weekend...

Sadly, the off-track developments at Red Bull (p4) seemed to attract more attention. Christian Horner was cleared of any wrongdoing last Wednesday (28 February), only for an incredible sequence of events to keep the saga rolling on over subsequent days. For the good of the sport, we hope that the situation is concluded fairly and swiftly.

A change in the status quo *did* happen in Qatar. After dominating the World Endurance Championship in 2023, Toyota struggled in the season opener. Gary Watkins was there to see Porsche set the pace in both Hypercar (p34) and the new LMGT3 category (p40).

Ducati will be tough to beat in Qatar's MotoGP first round this weekend, but all eyes will be on Marc Marquez to see whether he can return to the top following his departure from Honda. Our season preview starts on p52, while we also pick out the key things to look out for in the upcoming IndyCar campaign from p46.



*Kevin Turner*

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# PIT + PADDOCK



Horner and Verstappen Sr aren't living in harmony

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## Tensions inside Red Bull mount after investigation clears Horner

### FORMULA 1

The battle at the top of Red Bull increasingly looks as though it will end with the Formula 1 team losing at least one of its highest-profile assets. At the end of an eight-week independent investigation called for by the energy drinks company, team principal and CEO Christian Horner has been cleared of any wrongdoing after a woman made allegations of inappropriate behaviour against him. But the storm is seemingly far from over. Only a day after that verdict, when the paddock might have switched focus back to the 2024 season



Wolff missed out on Verstappen once

kicking off in the Middle East, FIA, F1 team and FOM chiefs plus members of the media were emailed by anonymous accounts with files purportedly containing images and messages at the heart of the case.

It seems this is very much a concerted effort to take down Horner, who some at Red Bull believe gets too much credit for the team's successes, has too much power, and are unhappy about his behaviour. But rather than this playing out like some sort of political power grab, there isn't a candidate who has emerged out of the shadows and is making a play for the top job.

There's plenty of speculation that this is simply a personal takedown, with Max Verstappen's father Jos at the heart of the rumours. Verstappen Sr has batted away such accusations, saying: "That wouldn't make sense. Why would I do that when Max is doing so well here?" But the ex-Benetton driver has nevertheless called for Horner's head, and told the *Daily Mail*: "There is tension here while he remains in position. The team is in danger of being torn apart. It can't go on the way it is. It will explode. He is playing the victim, when he is the one causing the problems."

If the campaign against Horner is motivated by anything more than a personal matter, it could be a move to

bolster Verstappen Jr's negotiating position. He is contracted to Red Bull until the end of 2028. But now, as a three-time world champion, he can demand a far higher salary and more marketing rights than when he originally put pen to paper in early 2022. It is suggested that a number of top staffers at the team, such as Verstappen, have a 'Horner clause'. In other words, if he goes, so can they. Technical wizard Adrian Newey is said to have such a feature written into his deal as well. So, for example, should Red Bull's nascent powertrain operation appear to be falling behind as the new 2026 regulations roll into view, theoretically Verstappen might need a way to facilitate a move elsewhere.

A Mercedes switch is one option. Following Lewis Hamilton's shock decision to join Ferrari, the Three-Pointed Star needs a replacement to partner George Russell. Verstappen Sr met with Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff after the Bahrain Grand Prix, and it is understood that they had dinner together earlier in the weekend. The Austrian is keen to promote Mercedes junior Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who is contesting FIA F2 with Prema Racing this season – albeit the squad endured a shocking opening round in Bahrain. Keeping the Italian happy and promoting

Champ was weighing  
his words carefully



GALLOWAY

him swiftly into the top flight would prevent Wolff allowing another prestigious young talent to slip through his fingers, as happened in 2014 with Verstappen when Red Bull offered a much clearer route to F1.

"I'm in no hurry for us to take a decision on drivers," said Wolff. "I've been rushed in a hurry by Lewis. So, this time around I'm going to take it easy and evaluate the market... I think the driver will always choose the quickest car. That is fundamentally what it's all about. At the moment the Red Bull is the quickest car, so that will obviously be the priority."

As for Horner, he's confident about his future. When asked by Sky Sports whether he would still be at the helm for this weekend's Saudi Arabian GP, the Briton replied: "Yes, absolutely, I wouldn't be here otherwise. We are a very strong team. We have got tremendous support and we have got tremendous partners and great shareholders behind us as well. You don't achieve this kind of result by not being united."

There are rumours that more leaked files could still emerge, and that FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem has approached Verstappen Jr about publicly backing Horner to help the whole saga go away. The Dutchman was pushed over the Bahrain weekend to give his full support to Horner, and each time he gave carefully worded responses that fell short of explicitly doing just that.

MATT KEW & JONATHAN NOBLE

➔ P18 BAHRAIN GP

## Domenicali hints at rotation among European grands prix

### FORMULA 1

The Formula 1 calendar is poised for a shake-up from 2026 that could finally lead to rotation among race venues, series CEO Stefano Domenicali has hinted. Event promoters have agreed a series of contract extensions in recent months. With plenty of those new deals going to grands prix outside of Europe to keep them on the schedule into the 2030s, the idea of some European circuits swapping in and out has come back onto the agenda.

The current contracts for Zandvoort, Spa, Imola, Monza and Monaco expire after 2025. Meanwhile, Madrid has already been announced as the new home of the Spanish GP from 2026, but Barcelona is understood to still have a contract to hold a race that season. There's also been talk in recent years of the Dutch and Belgian events taking place on alternate years. Swapping some of these would create a berth for a return to South Korea, which is among the new race options that F1 has been exploring. Mercedes sponsor Petronas is also keen on reviving a trip to Malaysia.

When asked about 2026, Domenicali said: "That is a year where there will be a lot of grands prix, mainly in Europe, where we have different options that we can take. In 2026, you're going to see something interesting. We are discussing with other promoters in Europe to do something that will be announced soon." The Italian did insist that there is no desire for the calendar to stretch beyond the current 24 races: "I just want to confirm the fact that we

Turkish president  
wants F1 back...



MAUGER

believe 24 races is the right number. We are going to play in the right way. We have certain opportunities that we want to bring to the market in the next couple of years, starting from 2026."

Turkey is another country that could reprise its race, after FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem met Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the return of both F1 and the World Rally Championship to the country. The owners of the Istanbul Park circuit are pushing to secure a new contract. Ben Sulayem said: "Istanbul Park is a modern circuit, which is popular with drivers while the city of Istanbul is a thriving metropolis which would welcome a return of Formula 1 with open arms. President Erdogan also recognises the importance of the economic and cultural impact which world class motorsport – Formula 1 and WRC – brings to the country."

ADAM COOPER & KEMAL SENGUL

...but that may come at  
expense of Zandvoort et al



MAUGER

# FIA devises guidelines to raise standards

## DRIVING STANDARDS

The FIA has devised a set of universal Driving Standards Guidelines that apply to all categories of circuit racing and are based on existing practices from Formula 1. It says that this new code will soon provide “for the first time a globally consistent reference point to support not only drivers as they develop throughout their careers, but also the race officials and stewards”.

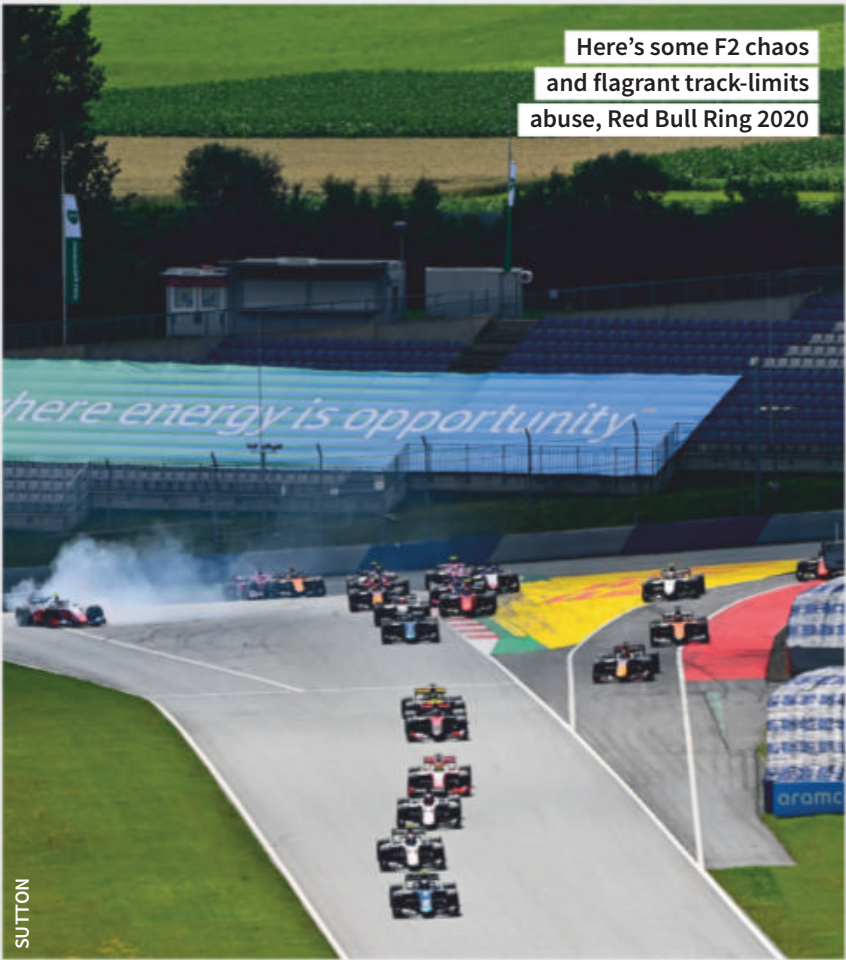
The DSG is poised to be rolled out in 2025 and follow consultation with the FIA Drivers’ Committee, which includes 2003 World Rally champion Petter Solberg, ex-F1 racers Karun Chandhok and Emanuele Pirro, and is chaired by former rally co-driver Ronan Morgan, the general manager of the Automobile and Touring Club of the United Arab Emirates.

The DSG will cover “a

number of key topics, from driving standards to defending and overtaking manoeuvres, track limits, yellow flags, driver advisors and safety car restart procedures. It will eventually also be used to assist with the training of young drivers applying for their first international licence. This project has been welcomed by some of the world’s top driving talents, with the need for as consistent and fair decision making as is possible within a framework that allows for close, exciting racing identified as the key objective.”

The FIA Drivers’ Committee also has a continual invite to all members of the current Grand Prix Drivers’ Association and is understood to have asked the current crop of F1 racers to give input into the DSG.

Aston Martin racer



Here’s some F2 chaos and flagrant track-limits abuse, Red Bull Ring 2020

Fernando Alonso is quoted by the FIA as saying: “Promoting driving standards across motorsport is vitally important. I’ve been in my fair share of on-track battles throughout my 23 years of racing in multiple categories of motorsports. Each battle

requires an understanding and respect between fiercely competitive racers. We need consistency in how drivers attack and defend on the race track, as well as how the rules are interpreted during all competitions.”

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

# Ben Sulayem linked with alleged race interference

## FORMULA 1

FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem is reportedly under investigation for allegedly trying to interfere with the result of the 2023 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. According to the BBC, a whistleblower has informed the governing body that Ben Sulayem attempted to get the race stewards to overturn a penalty that initially cost

Fernando Alonso third position.

The Aston Martin driver was punished after the race for not properly serving a five-second penalty, handed out for lining up incorrectly on the grid. A subsequent 10s reprimand, announced soon after the finish of the race in Jeddah, relegated Alonso to fourth. That was overturned several hours later.

The FIA stewards determined that

Alonso’s in-race penalty had not been served properly when video evidence appeared to show the rear jack briefly touching the back of the car as he waited for mechanics to begin a pitstop. But the team alleged ambiguity with the wording of the regulations, and that the jack touching the car did not constitute jumping the gun.

On Monday, the BBC reported that Ben Sulayem had called the FIA’s vice-president for sport for the Middle East and North Africa region, Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, to say he thought the penalty should be revoked. The BBC story states that the claim is included in a report by FIA compliance officer Paolo Basarri to the governing body’s ethics committee, which is expected to investigate and issue its own report later this year.

It is not clear what Al Khalifa could have done to influence the result, since he was not one of the stewards on duty that weekend. At the time, there was no suggestion of anything untoward with the change of heart by the stewards.



# Charter plan threatens Indy grid tradition

## INDIANAPOLIS 500

One of motorsport’s most revered traditions appears to be under threat, with the IndyCar Series aiming to have a charter system finalised before this May’s Indianapolis 500. If it comes to pass, it could mean that cars no longer need to be among the fastest 33 in qualifying in order to make the field for the flagship race.

Penske Entertainment president and CEO Mark Miles met with a small group of reporters last Thursday, saying: “Yesterday, we aired another kind of high-level starting point for the concept of charters that maybe will have more traction. And we’re going to work with a smaller group of team owners to get that developed. We’d like to see it fully developed and adopted before the 500 in coming weeks.”

When asked whether this would guarantee entries into the 500, Miles said: “I guess they’re related. We’ve been talking about it for a while. Let’s really lock up with the teams to figure out what’s



satisfactory. What would create value for them and for the series?

“In the proposal we put out yesterday, we said, ‘We want you to think about this without the assurance of charter members having automatic starting positions on the grid for the 500’. That’s what we aired, and of course, we immediately heard a lot of other team owners saying, ‘Woah, that’s really important’. So, it’s a key discussion point, for sure.”

Miles added that he would work together with series president Jay Frye to put together a smaller group of team owners

who would “intensively try to come up with something that ought to make sense for the series broadly, and the others. We just want to get it done.”

Roger Penske, owner of the IndyCar Series and Indianapolis Motor Speedway, was one of the team owners who boycotted the 1996 Indy 500 over the so-called ‘25-8 Rule’ introduced by the new Indy Racing League, locking in starting positions for regular IRL teams. Penske and his fellow CART World Series entrants instead competed in the rival US 500 at Michigan.

JOEY BARNES



# Airfreight ensures Imola race

## WEC

The entire World Endurance Championship grid is being flown back to Europe from Qatar to ensure that the next round at Imola goes ahead. A repeat of the shipping delays that forced the postponement of the Prologue test in the Middle East could have put the Italian race on 21 April in doubt.

The WEC organisation described airfreighting the cars and equipment as the “only viable solution which would guarantee the safety of the WEC’s freight, as well as everything arriving on time for Imola”. Its short statement

acknowledged that the change in logistics had a financial implication.

The teams will have to foot the bill. One competing in LMGT3 put the cost at over £250,000, and it is understood that it will be substantially more for the manufacturers competing in Hypercar.

The sea freight for Qatar, which included the majority of the LMGT3 field but only one Hypercar, left Rotterdam in mid-January on a chartered ship. The instability in the Red Sea, where Houthi rebels have attacked freighters, resulted in it docking in Jeddah and the cars being trucked across Saudi Arabia to Qatar.

GARY WATKINS

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## ‘Let them race’ – rulemakers explain new Hypercar rules

### WEC

The Automobile Club de l'Ouest and the FIA have vowed to “let the manufacturers race” under the World Endurance Championship’s new system of Balance of Performance in Hypercar introduced for 2024. The series organisers will set a window in which they want all nine manufacturers competing in the class to fall, and adjust the performance of the cars that lie above and below it.

But crucially, they did not reveal the size of that window when they offered an explanation of the new system ahead of last weekend’s Qatar 1812Km season-opener. They have hinted that it will be determined by the gaps they see between the cars fielded by each manufacturer.

“We have looked at last year and there are differences between two identical cars from the same manufacturer and it would not be reasonable to think that we can do better than that,” said ACO competition director Thierry Bouvet. “We have to unfocus a little bit on the BoP – the idea is to interfere as little as possible.”

He revealed that the tendency will be to peg back cars that are too quick more rapidly than it will give a helping hand to those that fall ‘below’ the window. That will help ensure

that manufacturers cannot play the system ahead of the Le Mans 24 Hours, which in 2024 will have a separate BoP to the rest of the series courtesy of the unique characteristics of the 8.47-mile Circuit de la Sarthe.

The system will be based on simulation and race data – “an awful lot of laps”, said Bouvet – but a key difference from last year will be that the BoP can in theory change every race. There will be no timeline laid down of when revisions can be made.

A new BoP table will be published for every race, but this doesn’t mean that the balance has changed from the previous event. Circuit characteristics will be taken into account in the same way as the second half of 2023, when the post-Le Mans BoP was published with separate sets of figures for each of the remaining races.

A new feature called ‘power gain’ could be introduced as early as round two at Imola next month. This will adjust the maximum power figure above 210km/h (130mph) to try to match the acceleration and straightline speeds of each car.

“It is giving us another tool to adjust the cars, and as a consequence you can have less difference in weight,” said Bouvet.

GARY WATKINS

➔ P34 QATAR ACTION

## Cadillac says no to customers

### WEC

Cadillac has ruled out supplying its V-Series.R to customers in either the World Endurance Championship or the IMSA SportsCar Championship in the immediate future. And there is no word yet on whether its WEC squad could expand beyond the current one car.

“It doesn’t make sense to go down that path at this point,” said Laura Wontrop Klauser, sportscar programme manager at Cadillac parent company General Motors. “Customer cars are not happening as of now, but you never use the word ‘definitely’ in this sport.”

The concentration on its factory squads represents a departure from Cadillac’s previous strategy with its DPi-V.R Daytona Prototype international of 2017-22. Customer cars were raced in IMSA by the Spirit of Daytona/Flis Motorsports, JDC-Miller and Juncos squads. To the question as to why it had changed its philosophy, Klauser replied: “Different car, different programme.”

No decision has been made on whether factory team Chip Ganassi Racing could expand to two cars in the WEC next year. “We will figure out 2025 when it makes sense, but we are not there yet,” said Klauser.

BMW, meanwhile, has yet to say whether it will follow Porsche’s line and produce customer versions of its M Hybrid V8 LMDh in the future or remain focused on its factory programmes with WRT and Rahal in WEC and IMSA respectively.

“We have quite some requests from teams that could be interested,” said BMW M Motorsport boss Andreas Roos. “I don’t want to say it is not happening, but I also don’t want to say, ‘Yes we will go’. The question is about the support from the engineering side and spare parts so the team can really run on a high level.”

GARY WATKINS



# Proton steps in to run additional Mustang effort

## GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

Proton Competition has stepped in to ensure that Ford will be represented in GT World Challenge Europe this year with the Mustang GT3. The team, which is running the new car in both the World Endurance Championship and the IMSA Sportscar Championship, answered the call after the Italian Dinamic squad abruptly ended its relationship with the American manufacturer last month.

Proton will field a single car in the Pro Cup in the Endurance and Sprint Cup legs of the GTWCE this year. That's a reduction on the Ford representation planned by Dinamic, which had entered one car in Pro and one in the Bronze Cup.

Team boss Christian Ried explained that he had been happy to further increase Proton's workload this year when he received the call from Larry Holt, boss of the Multimatic Motorsports organisation masterminding the Mustang programme. "Larry phoned me and asked if something was possible after Dinamic stopped, and I said yes," said Ried. "It will be hard work because it is all happening quite late, but it



will be good to be back with Stephane [Ratel, GTWCE boss] for the first time since 2006."

The German team has yet to confirm whether the intended Dinamic line-up in the top class comprising factory drivers Christopher Mies, Frederic Vervisch and Dennis Olsen will be retained.

The entry lists for both legs of the GTWCE were announced last week, with 55 cars for the enduros and 38 in the sprints. Jules Gounon will go for a hat-trick of Endurance Cup titles with the GetSpeed team, sharing a Mercedes-AMG GT3 with fellow factory

drivers Luca Stolz and Fabian Schiller.

McLaren factory driver Tom Gamble will return to a series he last contested full-time in his first year of sportscars in 2019. He will share a Garage 59 McLaren 720S GT3 Evo in the sprints with Benjamin Goethe, with Dean Macdonald joining them for the enduros. Reigning Carrera Cup GB champion Adam Smalley will share the team's bronze class McLaren in the enduros with Miguel Ramos and Louis Prette, adding to his rookie British GT campaign.

**GARY WATKINS**

# FE clash means Peugeot hatches duo plan for Spa

## WEC

Peugeot is set to run just two drivers in at least one of its 9X8 Le Mans Hypercars at the Spa World Endurance Championship round in May, when Jean-Eric Vergne and Stoffel Vandoorne (both pictured) will be on Formula E duty for sister marque DS in Berlin. New test and reserve driver Malthe Jakobsen is a candidate to fill the vacant seat in one car, but otherwise the French manufacturer is not looking beyond its existing squad of pilots.

Jean-Marc Finot, who is motorsport boss for all the brands within the Stellantis group, has stressed that no decisions have been made on how Peugeot will shuffle its drivers for the Spa 6 Hours on 11 May. But he has insisted that bringing in someone from outside is not in the plan.

"We will be not be looking outside of the Peugeot family," he said, adding that there was no question of Vergne or Vandoorne racing for Peugeot at Spa. "For us it is very easy to make a decision: without drivers the DS cars cannot run."



Regarding Jakobsen, signed by Peugeot last year, he said: "We will see; we have time to decide. It could be two [drivers in each car], it is feasible."

Nico Muller will be racing a

9X8 at Spa. His Peugeot drive in the #93 car alongside Vergne and Mikkel Jensen takes precedence over his FE deal with the Abt Cupra squad.

**GARY WATKINS**

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## WRC drops hybrid for 2025

### WRC

The World Rally Championship will abandon hybrid-powered Rally1 cars from next season as part of the FIA's extensive plan for the future of top-level rallying. Following months of discussion, led by the FIA's working group, the concept for the series' future was approved at last week's World Motor Sport Council.

The move has been made to address spiralling costs and declining entries in the Rally1 class, which was introduced in 2022 but will now not see out the planned five-year homologation window.

The current Rally1 cars will continue, but will run without their control 100kW hybrid units, despite the FIA agreeing a deal with supplier Contract Dynamics until the end

of 2026. As well as the drop in performance from the removal of hybrid, the cars will undergo a reduction in aerodynamics and air restrictor to close the gap to Rally2 cars.

Cost has been a critical element of the Rally1 hybrid car, with the FIA, teams and competitors stating that the near-€1million price tag is too expensive.

While these 'toned-down' Rally1 cars will be eligible to compete in 2025 and 2026, they will overlap with the introduction of new Rally1 regulations in 2026 before being phased out for 2027. The new cars will be capped at €400,000 and based around the current Rally1 concept, but will feature a larger spaceframe chassis, with a common safety cell to reduce costs and allow not just manufacturers but also tuners to develop cars. The chassis will accommodate

bodywork based on cars in the B-class, C-class, compact, SUV and concept car segments, and will produce approximately 330bhp. It is hoped that this will entice new marques and teams to the top level, with the 2026 introduction allowing the current teams time to prepare for 2027.

The news has resulted in a mixed reaction from WRC teams. Hyundai, which had urged the FIA against radical changes before 2027, stated that it will need time to digest the new vision. M-Sport Ford has welcomed the direction and is supportive of moves to improve event formats, but concerns have been raised over the timeframes proposed to meet the targets. Toyota was yet to comment on the moves as Autosport went to press.

**TOM HOWARD**

## Hard hardly gone before it's back

### BTCC

There was a major surprise in the British Touring Car Championship this week when Team Hard boss Tony Gilham confirmed two cars for 2024.

The Kent squad, which ran a gargantuan six-car effort last year, appeared to have bitten the dust during the winter, and gave up its three TOCA TBL entrants' licences. But it will continue using the two

TBLs belonging to Aiden Moffat, as it has done in recent seasons.

No mention was made in the Hard announcement of which cars it will use, but take it as read that the plan is for a brace of its Cupra Leons to be dusted down, adding to the duo now being prepared by BTCC newcomer Restart Racing.

"I have made many mistakes over the years, some poor business decisions and



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

ultimately over-ambition has had a huge negative impact on us as a team," said a contrite Gilham. "We will do everything possible to rebuild our team, reputation and any damaged relationships that have happened as a result."

No drivers have yet been

announced, with the team saying that the first is already signed and that 'discussions continue with regard to the final seat'. Sources have suggested that two BTCC race-winning drivers are in contention for the squad.

**MARCUS SIMMONS**



J BLOXHAM/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Hugely popular Chamberlain  
and team earned first world  
Group C2 title in 1989 (inset)

## Hugh Chamberlain 1941-2024

### OBITUARY

Hugh Chamberlain's name will remain synonymous with sportscar racing in perpetuity. His plucky and sometimes ultra-successful efforts as an underfunded privateer made him a fan favourite, while his admirers also included the organiser of the Le Mans 24 Hours; the Automobile Club de l'Ouest understood a contribution to endurance racing across three decades.

Chamberlain, who has died aged 82, was in his pomp as a team owner in the days of Group C2 in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His little Chamberlain Engineering team from Buntingford, Hertfordshire took C2 honours in the 1989 World Sports Prototype Championship with Fermin Velez and Nick Adams driving a Spice-Cosworth SE89C, and repeated the trick in the 1992 Sportscar World Championship with Ferdinand de Lesseps and an SE89C. Both successes were achieved on meagre funds that belied the team's professionalism.

"Hugh was a master of making things happen on very little money," remembers long-time Chamberlain driver Adams. "Our car looked well sponsored in 1989, but years later I found out that it didn't add up to a lot of money. With Hugh every pound always went to the right place."

Chamberlain ended up as a sportscar racing folk hero by a circuitous route: he was born on a croft in Scotland and became a Metropolitan Police officer. He started racing while still a copper

aboard a Jaguar XK120, which was quickly replaced by a Cooper-Jaguar before a move into the Clubmans ranks with a Mallock U2 Mk6B. A self-taught engineer, his prowess rebuilding engines won him customers in the paddock.

Introducing future British Touring Car Championship title winner Will Hoy to car racing was a Chamberlain claim to fame from this time. Hoy raced Superkarts and, in a drunken chat, the pair of Royston Rugby Club members arranged a test of each other's machines. Legend has it that Hoy was quicker than Chamberlain on his second flying lap. He went on to title success in a Mallock run by his rugby pal.

Chamberlain Engineering moved into sportscar racing with an open-top Tiga powered by a reworked Hart Formula 1 turbo engine in Thundersports in 1985. Putting a roof on the car allowed a move to C2 the following year. After the world series' demise, Chamberlain ran a works GT programme for Lotus with the Esprit, then self-developed Jaguar XJ220s and the Chrysler Viper GTS-R through the 1990s and into the new century. Chamberlain then landed the deal to run the Lola-developed MG EX257 at Le Mans in 2001-02 before his departure from the team.

Chamberlain remained in demand with wannabe Le Mans entrants. He lent his name to the Chamberlain-Synergy squad, fulfilling a sporting director role, and continued to work at Le Mans up to 2008.

**GARY WATKINS**

### ALPINE RESTRUCTURES

The beleaguered Alpine Formula 1 team has undertaken a 'three-pillared' technical restructure, which principal Bruno Famin says is in part inspired by McLaren's similar revamp last year. The squad will now have three technical directors, with Joe Burnell (engineering), David Wheeler (aerodynamics) and Ciaran Pilbeam (performance) all reporting to Famin. The changes come in the wake of the resignations of technical director Matt Harman and aerodynamics head Dirk de Beer.

### STRONG INDY NXT FIELD

Indy NXT, the final rung on the ladder to IndyCar, kicks off in St Petersburg this weekend with a strong 20-car field. Among those from European racing to join the grid is multiple FIA F3 race victor Caio Collet, the Brazilian racing with HMD Motorsports. Josh Mason, who took his first steps in F2 last season, lines up with Abel Motorsports to make it three Brits in the field along with Andretti pair Louis Foster and Jamie Chadwick. Irishman Jonathan Browne steps up from USF Pro 2000 with HMD.

### AUSSIE WORLD TCR IS OFF

The Middle East crisis has led to the cancellation of the TCR World Tour's Australian rounds at Sydney Motorsport Park and Mount Panorama due to shipping logistics difficulties. The series, which kicks off at Vallelunga next month, has also shifted its Brazilian round from Goiania to Interlagos.

### LARSON WINS IN VEGAS

Kyle Larson kept up Chevrolet's 100% wins record in the NASCAR Cup season by dominating last Sunday's third round at Las Vegas. Larson (below) led 181 of 267 laps in his Hendrick Motorsports car, but the end of each stage came down to a tight battle with Tyler Reddick. After a brief fight with Ross Chastain on a restart with 27 laps to go, Larson retook the lead. Reddick moved into second but ran out of time to catch him. Reigning champion Ryan Blaney was third from Chastain.



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## F1 SAUDI ARABIAN GRAND PRIX PREVIEW

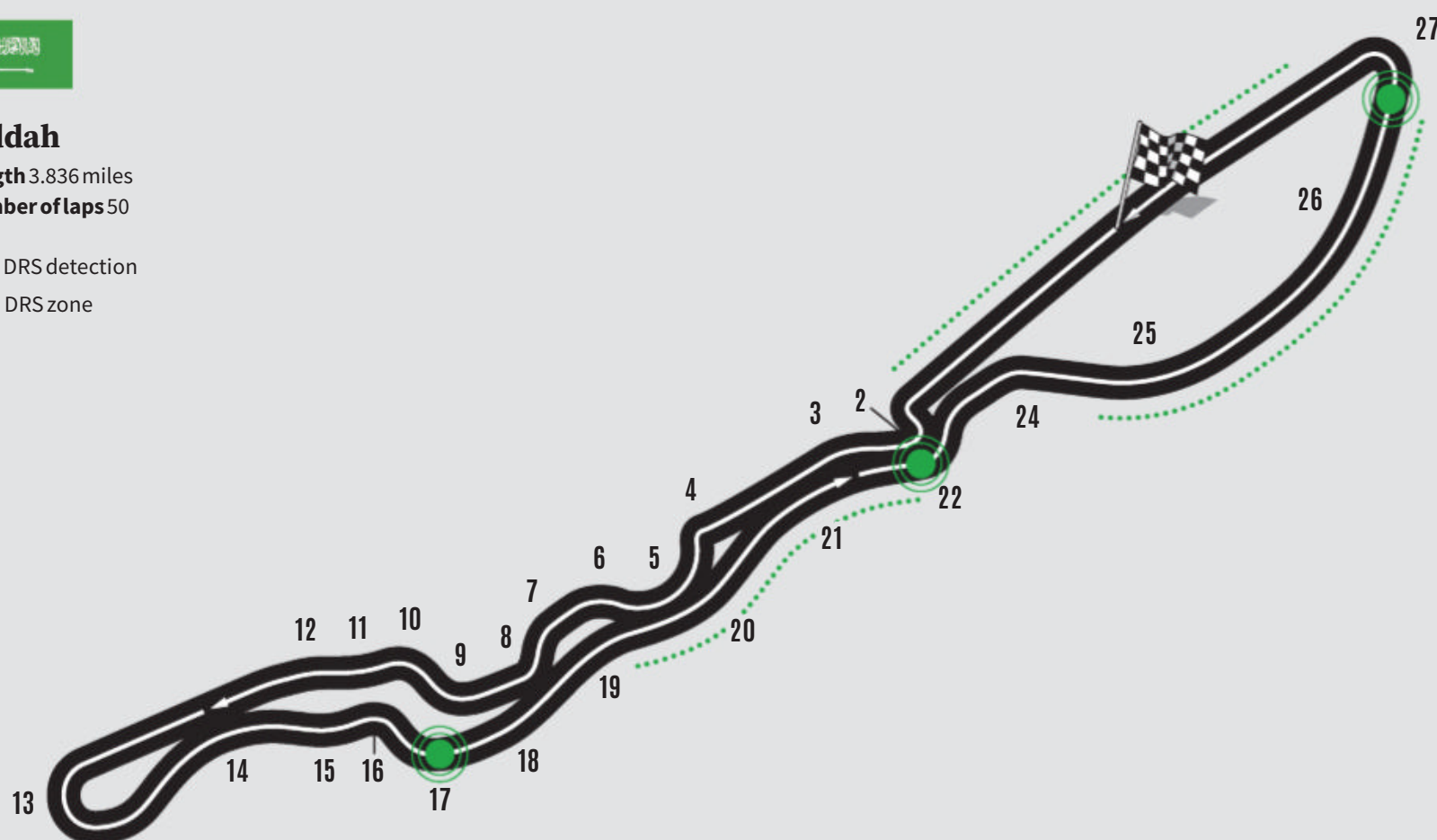


## Jeddah

Length 3.836 miles

Number of laps 50

- DRS detection  
 DRS zone



## UK START TIMES

Thursday 7 March

FP1 1330 FP2 1700

Friday 8 March

FP3 1330

QUALIFYING 1700

Saturday 9 March

RACE 1700

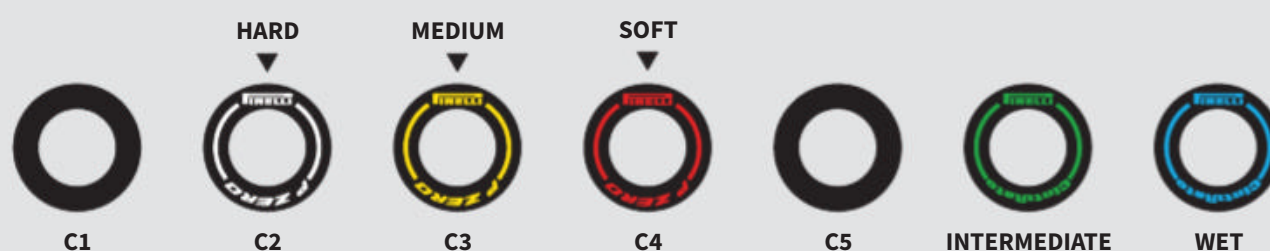
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## TYRE ALLOCATION



## CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

## Drivers

1	Verstappen	26
2	Perez	18
3	Sainz	15
4	Leclerc	12
5	Russell	10

## Constructors

1	Red Bull	44
2	Ferrari	27
3	Mercedes	16
4	McLaren	12
5	Aston Martin	3



## JEDDAH STATS

## Previous winners

2023	Sergio Perez	Red Bull
2022	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2021	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes



## 2023 POLE POSITION

Sergio Perez

1m28.265s

## POLE LAP RECORD

Lewis Hamilton

1m27.511s (2021)

## RACE LAP RECORD

Lewis Hamilton

1m30.734s (2021)



## Podiums

Max Verstappen	3
Sergio Perez	1
Lewis Hamilton	1
Charles Leclerc	1
Carlos Sainz	1
Fernando Alonso	1
Valtteri Bottas	1

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# What the Bahrain GP *didn't* tell us

*Following a disappointingly easy win for Red Bull, our Grand Prix Editor tries to find some reasons to be cheerful about the rest of F1 2024...*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

**I**t's the hope that gets you. Before last Saturday's Formula 1 season opener in Bahrain, there was the hope that someone, anyone, might be able to make a stab at challenging Red Bull's polesitting triple world champion Max Verstappen for victory.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, starting alongside, naturally had the best chance. And Leclerc had no constructors' championship considerations to enter his mind, as he had when he started alongside Verstappen on the front row for the final two events of 2023. But, following Verstappen's better launch, Leclerc's speculative look around the outside of the Red Bull at Bahrain's first corner was never going to cut it. Not even the new rule allowing DRS usage from lap two could save that race, the Ferrari's brake cooling problem already apparent to the Monegasque. Race over, already.

Verstappen simply took off to score his 55th F1 win and eighth in a row, with a commanding 22.5-second margin over the recovering Sergio Perez and 25.1s in hand over Ferrari's less hobbled challenger, Carlos Sainz. But there were elements of the snoozefest that mean F1 fans can keep faith in the 2024 campaign. For now, at least.

This is not to say that Red Bull is definitely beatable this weekend in Jeddah, or that it is not the overwhelming favourite to rack up another title double in 2024. But, for a start, Verstappen

occurred due to Ferrari going too aggressive on its brake cooling duct size. Logic suggests that Ferrari would have been closer had it not been suffering from that problem.

Last Saturday, there were additional problems that masked the true picture for the other typical runners in the group chasing Red Bull closest. Mercedes was losing "five or six tenths of a second" with its engine and brake cooling problems, plus the knock-on battery issues that effected both W15s, according to team boss Toto Wolff. Mercedes never got to show what it could do with this new, better basic car against Verstappen.

And then there's McLaren. Lando Norris explained that Bahrain is "a track we struggle with still, the fact we're so close to Mercedes is still a good sign for us that at some tracks we'll be able to be ahead". "I mean, they [Red Bull] weren't [on another planet]", Norris replied when that exact suggestion was put to him post-race. "Carlos was not far behind."

Much is made of Bahrain's abrasive track surface. One team insider explained to Autosport last week how this factor alone means that the track has therefore become very much a Red Bull happy hunting ground in the new ground-effect era (and it should really have won here in 2021, too). The surface simply flatters cars with better degradation tendencies. In Jeddah, where the F1 circus has now arrived, the surface is significantly less abrasive (Pirelli has it at 2/5 of its own ranking, with Bahrain 5/5). This should mean the rest don't have to back off quite so much and, while the same is of course true for Red Bull, it means the gradient stacked against its opposition is simply less steep.

Verstappen also revealed after the Bahrain race that the wind had "changed... the intensity of it", which "helped us out a bit more compared to the last two days". Had the conditions not swung to favour the RB20 – and by comparison, McLaren's MCL38 was left feeling "shockingly bad" in some corners, said Norris – the winning margin again might have been smaller.

Of course, the counter to all this is that, without any opposition (yet again), it cannot be known how hard Verstappen had to push in the session that mattered most in Bahrain this year. There is a sound argument that he could have been further ahead.

But the main takeaway from all this is, if any of Red Bull's main rivals can have a smooth run through a weekend, they might just be able to make a fight of it with F1's top team on a more regular basis this year. Because they clearly are in much better places this time around. Aston's year-on-year fall demonstrates it.

Another crushing win by Red Bull in Jeddah would go some way to dispelling this, of course. But it's all we've got right now. It really is the hope that gets you... ❄️

## “Not even the new rule allowing DRS usage from lap two could save that race”

himself says: “In general, other teams are closer. I just think that today everything just worked really well, and I don't expect that to happen every single grand prix in the near future.”

There is something to be said for Fred Vasseur's point that his Ferrari team “compensated 50% of the gap with Red Bull in the race, compared to one year ago” in Bahrain. After all, Sainz was 48.1s down in the same race in 2023, beaten by Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso to boot. Sainz's latest Bahrain gap was registered with an SF-24 that was also giving its driver major braking inconsistency issues. How much closer he or Leclerc could have been to Verstappen without that issue is academic now. From Sainz's “in testing you never put yourself in 10 laps consecutive behind four cars getting all the hot air and the brakes never cool down” comment, we can suggest that this situation

➔ **P18 BAHRAIN GP REPORT**



# The next F1 hopefuls in Japan

*With Super Formula re-established as a showcase for F1 talent-sporters, it presents a prime opportunity for young drivers to shine – in particular those switching from F2*

JAMIE KLEIN

**A**fter a tough few years amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Super Formula re-emerged as a viable stepping stone to Formula 1 last year thanks to the exploits of Liam Lawson. Although Lawson wasn't quite able to convince Red Bull to give him a race seat at the team now known as Visa Cash App RB, success in Japan helped put him firmly on the F1 radar even before his five stand-in appearances for Daniel Ricciardo at AlphaTauri last year.

This season, another high-profile *gaijin* with clear F1 aspirations is hoping to make a similar impact in Super Formula: reigning F2 champion Theo Pourchaire.

Pourchaire finds himself in a slightly different position to Lawson, however. For one thing, unlike the Kiwi, he comes to Japan with the F2 title under his belt, and as such his stock in F1 circles is arguably slightly higher than Lawson's was this time a year ago. On top of that, he won't have the luxury of driving for Super Formula's dominant team of recent times, Mugen, as Lawson did. Instead, he will be representing Team Impul as it aims to win a drivers' title for the first time since Joao Paulo de Oliveira back in 2010.

Pourchaire toyed with a Super Formula move for 2023, even entering discussions to succeed Sacha Fenestraz at Kondo Racing, but he and his Sauber Academy backers chose instead to stay in F2 for a third season. After winning last year's title, a fourth year wasn't an option for the Frenchman, who called a move to Japan "logical".

"I had two choices: I could stay as just a reserve driver in F1, which I am really happy to do, but it means almost all simulator work and almost no actual driving, maybe one or two practice sessions all year," said Pourchaire. "The other option was Super Formula."

"It's a bit difficult to just stay on the sidelines and wait for something that may never happen. Driving on the simulator is great, but I am super-happy that I can do what I love to do: drive super-fast cars around beautiful circuits, in a great team."

For fans of Japanese racing, Team Impul needs no introduction. But Kazuyoshi Hoshino's squad is no longer the dominant force it was in its noughties pomp. The Toyota-aligned team goes into 2024 with an all-new line-up, Pourchaire and 2016 Super Formula champion Yuji Kunimoto replacing now-McLaren F1 reserve Ryo Hirakawa and Yuhi Sekiguchi.

While Impul didn't make the best transition to the updated SF23 aero package last year, there is another reset of sorts this year with the ban on open damper development and the switch to common Ohlins material, potentially eliminating one of the team's weaknesses.

Pourchaire equally recognises that he has a role to play in

bringing Impul back to its former glory, bigger than the one he had during three seasons of F2 with ART Grand Prix. "The way the driver works with the team is different to F2," said Pourchaire. "I have more responsibility inside the team, even as a young driver, which I really like. It's not easy sometimes, but I have to make more decisions and help the team with the set-up."

Pourchaire won't be the only driver on the Super Formula grid with ambitions of making the step up to F1 as soon as 2025.

**"I have more responsibility inside the team, even as a young driver, which I really like"**

Taking over Lawson's seat at Team Mugen is Red Bull junior Ayumu Iwasa, who like Pourchaire is making the switch from F2.

However, with Lawson already firmly established at the head of the queue for any F1 vacancies with either of Red Bull's teams, Iwasa arguably faces an even tougher task than his old F2 rival Pourchaire to try to force his way into the grand prix paddock.

In any case, Iwasa will have to overcome his two-time champion team-mate Tomoki Nojiri, who is hungry to earn a third crown after a punctured lung forced him to miss a race and left him as the rank outsider against Lawson and Ritomo Miyata in last year's title fight.

With Miyata moving in the opposite direction to Pourchaire and Iwasa to race in F2 this year, his successor at TOM'S, Sho Tsuboi, goes into the new season among the favourites. Last month's pre-season test at Suzuka also suggests that Dandelion Racing's Tadasuke Makino is likely to be a serious contender at the head of the field.

With some pieces of the 2025 F1 driver market already falling into place, Pourchaire doesn't have time on his side to make an impact in Super Formula. But he isn't letting the pressure faze him. In fact, he seems sanguine about the possibility that F1 may not happen for him.

"On a personal level, I am a competitor and I want to win," said Pourchaire. "So even if I am not going to F1, I will enjoy every lap this season, give my best and try to win as many races as possible. I try not to think about [going to F1] much to be honest."

"F1 is a very complicated world. It's still my dream to race in F1 and become champion, but there is no guarantee I will become an F1 driver. So I'm focused now on Super Formula, just like last year I was focused on F2, doing my best and enjoying life here." ❄



# Aiming to win *and* inspire

*Former W Series star Jamie Chadwick had a trying time in her first season in the States, but she plans to step up in 2024 – in more ways than one*

SAM HALL

A

ndretti Global driver Jamie Chadwick is adamant that podium results are possible in her sophomore Indy NXT campaign, which gets under way this weekend in St Petersburg. Chadwick finished 12th in last year's drivers'

standings and was the fourth-best-placed rookie, recording a best finish of sixth in Portland towards the end of the campaign. After a slow start to the year, the three-time W Series champion established herself as a regular in the top 10, finishing five of the last eight races in the higher points-paying positions, albeit well behind team-mates Hunter McElrea (second), fellow Briton Louis Foster (fourth) and James Roe Jr (seventh).

"The thing that I like most about Indy NXT is that you know you're rewarded if you have success," says the 25-year-old. "It's quite clear that if you have a good year, there is an opportunity to progress into the big series [IndyCar]."

"I want to be on the podium, I want to be trying to win races. It's still a reasonable step from where we were last year. I just think that the progress we made throughout the year and with what I was able to learn, I'm confident that with the team that I'm in, that opportunity is there for me."

This season 12 rookies will join the series, including British former F2 driver Josh Mason. Of the returning drivers, six finished ahead of Chadwick in the 2023 rankings.

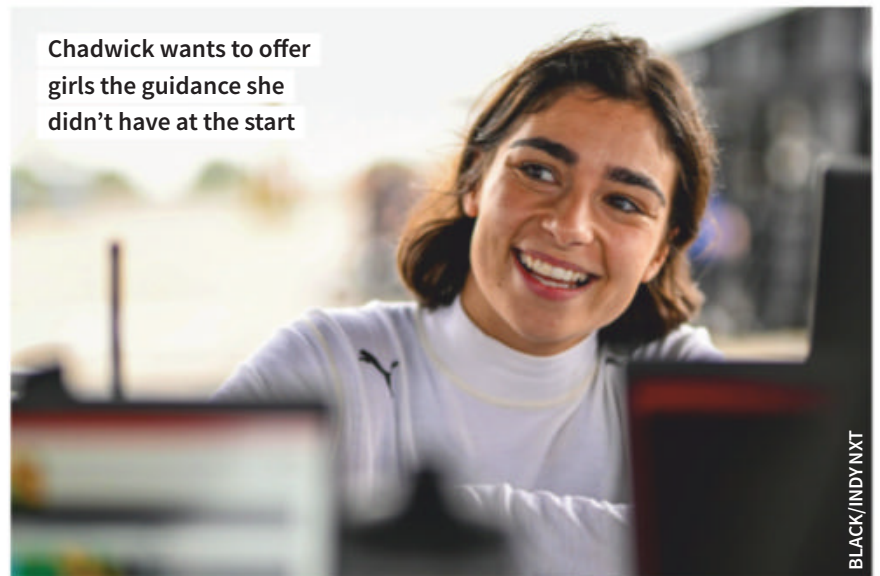
"Honestly, I think we're capable of being on the podium," adds Chadwick. "Pre-season testing, the pace that we had, there's a little bit of a step still to make to be committed to being constantly in the top five, but we're floating around it. The progress that we made last year definitely gives me the confidence that we can make the step again. And I think the way the series is with the different formats and the different kinds of racing, it really does allow the opportunity to get results. It's a season I'm really excited about."

Chadwick recently launched The Jamie Chadwick Series in partnership with karting chain Daytona Motorsport. As part of the initiative, girls aged eight and over will be able to enjoy a day of free karting at venues nationwide on International Women's Day (tomorrow, 8 March) before the championship officially begins. Chadwick will act as a mentor throughout the year, with the winner receiving financial support to climb to the next level of their career.

"When I look back to how I started in the sport, I really did fall into it by accident," explains Chadwick. "I started at this kind of arrive-and-drive set-up and I never thought that it was ever going to go beyond that. But I enjoyed it."

"I never really knew what possibilities there were in the sport beyond that. Even just going from arrive-and-drive karting to

Chadwick wants to offer girls the guidance she didn't have at the start



BLACK/INDY NXT

karting at a higher club level, without being from a racing family, we didn't really know how it worked.

"I like to think that there are a lot of female drivers who have the possibility to go to places like Daytona and experience karting for the first time, but don't know what possibilities there are, that could potentially have the talent and now have the opportunity to feed through to the next step."

For the younger generation of drivers, Chadwick is one of only a handful of female role models. While the increased visibility of the F1 Academy this season will add new names to those already in the public eye, it remains the case that the final season of the W Series in 2022 was the last concerted effort to promote female talent in open-wheel racing.

Further, Susie Wolff remains the most recent female driver to have taken part in an official F1 session – lapping during first practice at the British and German grands prix in 2014 – and Lella Lombardi was the last woman to start a grand prix, this final outing coming at the 1976 Austrian race.

It should be noted, however, that former W Series driver Jess Hawkins took to the track in modern F1 machinery in Hungary last year, drawing international attention. Hawkins will also serve as Aston Martin's head of racing for F1 Academy this year, expanding on her existing ambassadorial role.

When her Indy NXT schedule allows, as part of her role as a Williams Academy driver Chadwick will be on hand to offer guidance to Williams-backed F1 Academy driver Lia Block.

"I'm sure a lot of these girls that are going to the karting track aren't looking at Formula 1 and thinking, 'That's something I can do and will do', because there isn't anyone for them to aspire to be like at the current stage," says Chadwick. "I was out at the test in Jeddah and it's impressive to see what F1 Academy are doing." ❄

# RACE CENTRE

Verstappen  
kicked off the  
season with biggest  
winning margin ever  
seen in Bahrain



FORMULA 1

# VERSTAPPEN CRUSHES RIVALS' HOPES

*Dreams that Red Bull would have more opposition in 2024 proved to be just that as the reigning world champion surprised even himself by comfortably heading a 1-2*

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY RED BULL AND





“W

e’re expecting probably a half-second deficit,” George Russell mused, moments after putting his Mercedes in third place on the Bahrain Grand Prix grid. Asked to estimate the advantage Red Bull would have in the race, Russell reckoned that it would be slightly larger than the 0.3s per lap difference seen on

the timing boards between himself and Verstappen on Friday night.

Max Verstappen looked slightly surprised by Russell’s assertion. “Half a second?!” he exclaimed with feigned indignance. “I think that’s way too big. But if you say that now, then if it’s better tomorrow, then you can say, ‘Oh, it’s unbelievable, the car is unbelievable.’”

“Under-promise, over-deliver!” was Russell’s riposte, quietly hoping that Verstappen was right and Mercedes would find a stronger vein of performance in Saturday’s 57-lap race. Instead, he’d inadvertently predicted how utterly dominant Verstappen would prove to be in 2024’s season opener. The Red Bull driver often transcended that predicted half-a-second advantage in his rout of the rest of the field.

Hopes that Verstappen would face sterner tests with greater regularity had probably already been dashed after testing, where Red Bull’s RB20 looked largely unchallenged in the longer runs. Ferrari and Carlos Sainz had scrubbed up pretty well on the test’s second day in long-run trim, but there was nonetheless an expectation that the Red Bulls would turn up to the Grand Prix proper with a bit more in hand. The longer runs in FP2 also hinted towards an RB20 advantage – but the magnitude remained conspicuously veiled.

Before Red Bull could really show its hand, Verstappen had to ensure that he came up for air with the lead. He and fellow front-row starter Charles Leclerc enjoyed pretty much the same getaway,



Brake temperature splits led to Leclerc being plagued by lock-ups

although the Ferrari driver was granted the opportunity to tuck in behind and drink up a welcome slipstream before firing his shot. The Monegasque attempted to place his SF-24 around the outside into Turn 1, but couldn’t find the purchase through the corner to force his way into the inside line for Turn 2. Verstappen had preserved the lead, and now he needed to quickly extend it thanks to off-season tinkering to the rulebook.

It’s been a frequent feature of Verstappen’s leads that he has been able to build a one-second buffer before DRS can be activated at the start of the third lap, but the use of the overtaking aid has now been pushed forward to the start of lap two. Unsurprisingly, he was able to cope with that; Leclerc was 0.987s behind after the opening tour, and his weekend-long deficit to the Red Bull in the opening trio of corners nullified any faint glimpse of a DRS fightback.



Around-the-outside attempt by Leclerc firmly rebuffed by the world champion

ETHERINGTON

Leclerc was no longer in the picture at this juncture and his race took something of a downhill tumble: after being forcefully disposed of on lap three by Russell, who swept around the outside of the Ferrari into Turn 4 with a beautifully deft touch on the throttle, Leclerc started to experience myriad lock-ups as he suffered with brake temperature splits. The more he locked up, the worse it got and the more positions he lost, culminating in an almost 100C difference

## “LECLERC WAS NO LONGER IN THE PICTURE AND HIS RACE TOOK SOMETHING OF A DOWNHILL TUMBLE”

between his left and right front brakes.

Russell couldn't really pose an early challenge to Verstappen either. Progress stalled after the lofty Briton had moved past Leclerc, giving the reigning champion ample opportunity to start break-building out in front. It felt like a peak Ronnie O'Sullivan at play, seamlessly placing snooker balls atop the baize on his way to an effortless 147 score; Verstappen posted consistent 1m37.0s during his opening stint on soft tyres and, on the rare occasion he went slightly above that, he'd simply compensate on the next lap.

In the meantime, Russell had started to encounter issues that left him unable to at least keep tabs with Verstappen's pace. Temperature spikes within the powertrain had started to cause alarm, and the Mercedes was losing enough pace to Verstappen that Leclerc, Sergio Perez and Sainz were now firmly in his wheeltracks.

Russell's problems were still in their infancy, but a later continuation of those temperature issues – believed to be down to Mercedes being marginally too aggressive with its cooling package – forced him into a mid-race period spent lifting and coasting.

While Russell and Leclerc started to nurse their issues, their on-track countenance that of a slight limp, Perez and Sainz began to knock on the door. Leclerc's front locking at Turn 10 put him off the road and gave Perez plenty of ammunition to make his play for third into the next corner. It was pretty straightforward and almost appeared as if the seas had parted for the Mexican; Russell was next in his sights, and Leclerc was now in Sainz's clutches.

Russell and Leclerc pitted at the end of lap 11, ditching their soft tyres for the hard, but Leclerc was forced into defending against Sainz into the first corner of that lap. The Spaniard was aggressive and shoved his Ferrari down the inside of his team-mate's to claim another position. Perez brought his Red Bull in a lap later in reaction to the Russell and Leclerc stops, coming out between them on the sole set of hard tyres he had to play with.

It wasn't long before Russell came under pressure, since his initial laps on the hard tyre were somewhat abject compared to Perez's – skirting the high 1m36s and low 1m37s could not stand up to Perez posting a couple of 1m35s laps.

Resisting the urge to put a forceful move on Russell into the first corner of lap 14, Perez waited until the second DRS zone to loom in the Silver Arrow's mirrors ahead of a Turn 4 assault. A notably early turn-in put Russell rather wide for the exit, while Perez had taken a V-shape approach to the corner; he'd have to slow a bit more to swing his midnight blue machine to the inside for the exit, but had the traction to blitz past his rival. It looked easy, and Red Bull had crucially sealed first and second in its grasp – at least, after Sainz and Fernando Alonso had pitted. >>

Sainz wasn't messing about in first-stint move on Leclerc – then had to do it again



Verstappen was just shy of 30s clear of Perez at the end of lap 17, eventually making his own switch to the hard tyre. Now level-pegging on pitlane visits, the gap between them was about 6s, but this was only going to swell as Verstappen set some vastly impressive laps on the C1 compound and put Perez in the shade. In the first half of that stint, the three-time champion could be anywhere between 0.8s to one second per lap faster than his team-mate, suggesting a mastery of the RB20 despite limited time with his new steed. It's more of a chasm than a gap, and that's against a driver in the same car.

The thing about champions, when they're operating on such a stratospheric plane of performance as this, is that it rarely gets appreciated because they're more often than not driving the best car. But there's a clear delineation to make between winning in the fastest car, and leaving naught but utter devastation behind en route to victory. Verstappen was able to easily sit consistently in the low-to-mid 1m35s range during the bulk of his hard-tyre stint, while Perez dipped below the 1m36s mark twice at the start and then never again. That's the difference between good and great.

It only took a few laps for Verstappen – five, to be precise – to inflate his lead to 10s. Russell's post-qualifying prediction of half a second looked positively quaint against the nearly full-second per lap that Perez was shipping in those early laps on the hards. With little chance of returning the favour, the Guadalajara-born driver was instead focused on managing his stint to ensure that Sainz was not about to catch him and make a play for second.



## “WHEN CHAMPIONS ARE OPERATING ON SUCH A STRATOSPHERIC PLANE AS THIS, IT RARELY GETS APPRECIATED”

Having managed his tyres better than Leclerc had, Sainz had been left out for three extra laps, which put him back behind the team-mate he'd forcefully put a move on before the stops. He had to do it again, this time opening the 17th lap with a move seemingly emerging from the ether. In modern F1 parlance, it was a 'full send' moment that just about strayed away from divebomb territory. Close-run? It looked like it, and certainly would have conferred a few squeaky-bum moments on the Ferrari pitwall. But Sainz reckoned that he had everything under control.

“It never felt close inside the car,” Sainz contended. “Whenever I do an overtake on my team-mate I will always try and leave as much margin as possible, and I try and do it whenever I feel like I'm fully under control and I'm not putting any car at risk. And that's exactly what I did. It felt like a very good move. I was always keeping an eye on Charles and not making him also lose time or anything like that.”

Sainz reckoned that his moves were also testament to the improvements that Ferrari had made over the off-season. Last year's car was, when balanced upon a razor-sharp edge, a brilliant contender in qualifying, but the race-day performance was less prosperous owing to its heavy-handedness on tyres.

With greater confidence, Sainz started to put Perez under the microscope, although there was a forcefield-like 2s buffer between them that the Ferrari driver couldn't quite breach with enough regularity. On occasion, last year's Singapore winner could dip into that void, but Perez could respond and restore his advantage. Not that he could really do much about Verstappen.

Red Bull didn't really need another trick up its sleeve, and could have run the field ragged with just a conventional soft-hard-hard strategy. But, perhaps fearing more competition on race day, the team saved an extra set of softs from FP3 and pressed them into service for the final stint of the evening. They'd have to do over 20 laps on them, but the team was confident enough on its degradation that it could make the distance. Perez collected his red-walled tyres at the end of lap 36, Verstappen following suit a lap later, while the

## QUALIFYING



ETHERINGTON

The 0.228-second gap between Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc did not accurately reflect the closeness of 2024's opening qualifying bout, a tense encounter in which a handful of drivers could have realistically made an attempt for pole.

It was Leclerc who actually set the fastest time across the whole of qualifying, a 1m29.165s that he'd logged in Q2, but the Monegasque was unable to replicate that lap when it *really* mattered. Verstappen, on the other hand, was a slowburner throughout the weekend's practice sessions and built up to his qualifying lead bit by bit.

When it came to the Q3 showdown, the first efforts hinted at a continuing close battle; Leclerc, George Russell and Carlos Sainz were all within two tenths of Verstappen's initial 1m29.421s benchmark. Fernando Alonso, choosing to run only once in Q3, briefly plonked himself in third position.

As the circuit continued to drop in temperature, the drivers found more performance at their disposal and the times continued to fall. Russell tried to deliver on the qualifying pace that Mercedes had hinted at in FP2, but his endeavour was effectively undone in the opening sector through a slower exit from the final corner. The Briton managed to find improvements on his previous best and book his place into the top three, a result Mercedes had not expected after testing.

Verstappen had logged a purple first sector and ultimately improved by a quarter of a second to claim a 1m29.179s, which perhaps shattered Leclerc's hopes. The Ferrari driver had been up on Verstappen's previous time after the first two sectors and, given his SF-24's effectiveness in the final sector, might have uncovered a bit more time. The new arrears, however, were too great; Leclerc had shipped time against his own Q2 best in the opening corner, and started to lose more pace in the final sector as his tyres started to wear.

Those expecting a wild change in order compared to 2023 might feel a small shard of disappointment, as the Verstappen-Leclerc-Russell formation concluded last year's Abu Dhabi finale, but the fine margins were at least encouraging. "I think you never really knew who was going to be on pole heading into Q3, so I think that was very exciting to see," Verstappen mused afterwards.

Carlos Sainz had briefly looked like a pole contender in the early phases, but fell short in the final stage and had to be content with fourth. This put him ahead of Sergio Perez and Alonso's single Q3 lap, while McLaren locked out the fourth row. Lando Norris reckoned that a front-row start was possible with better execution, but the orange cars nonetheless stayed ahead of Lewis Hamilton's race-focused Mercedes and Nico Hulkenberg's Haas.

**"You never really knew who was going to be on pole heading into Q3, so that was very exciting to see"**



Russell's temperature issues were manifesting as Perez sized him up

ETHERINGTON

rest finished off with another set of hards.

This was always in Red Bull's gameplan, even before the weekend. Hints of a close field in FP2 on the longer runs did not sway the team, since it reckoned that testing had shown that the C3 rubber was more than capable of maintaining a superior level of pace.

"From my side, it was quite clear after testing and also practice that we needed to do what we did," Verstappen explained. "With the soft being a good tyre and the hard being... well, the hard. So never big question marks, to be honest."

"It was straightforward," Perez concurred. "I think the hard is just not performing as well as with the other teams. And we seem to be better looking after the soft. So it worked really well to be able to save a new soft."

It was in those opening laps with the soft that Verstappen plundered the fastest lap, a 1m32.608s (still nearly 1.2s shy of Pedro de la Rosa's 2005 record), but he immediately backed off on the following lap to ensure he could bring the tyres in more gently. Perez was arguably a bit more gung-ho by comparison and, although he was faster in the opening portion of the stint compared to Verstappen post-fastest lap, his times dropped off as his stablemate started to ratchet his up.

"I knew that it was just about managing," Perez said, "because [Sainz] obviously pushed us to stop early. It was going to be a very long stint, so we managed to progressively build a gap, keep that gap between us consistent and I think it worked well. But we had a few other issues [with engine braking] towards the end of the race that meant that our degradation was getting quite a lot worse."

Verstappen's lead dropped to 'only' 15s in that intervening period but, when Perez started to lose momentum, it was in the ascendancy once again. At the flag, 22.5s separated them: the biggest winning margin ever seen at the Bahrain circuit.

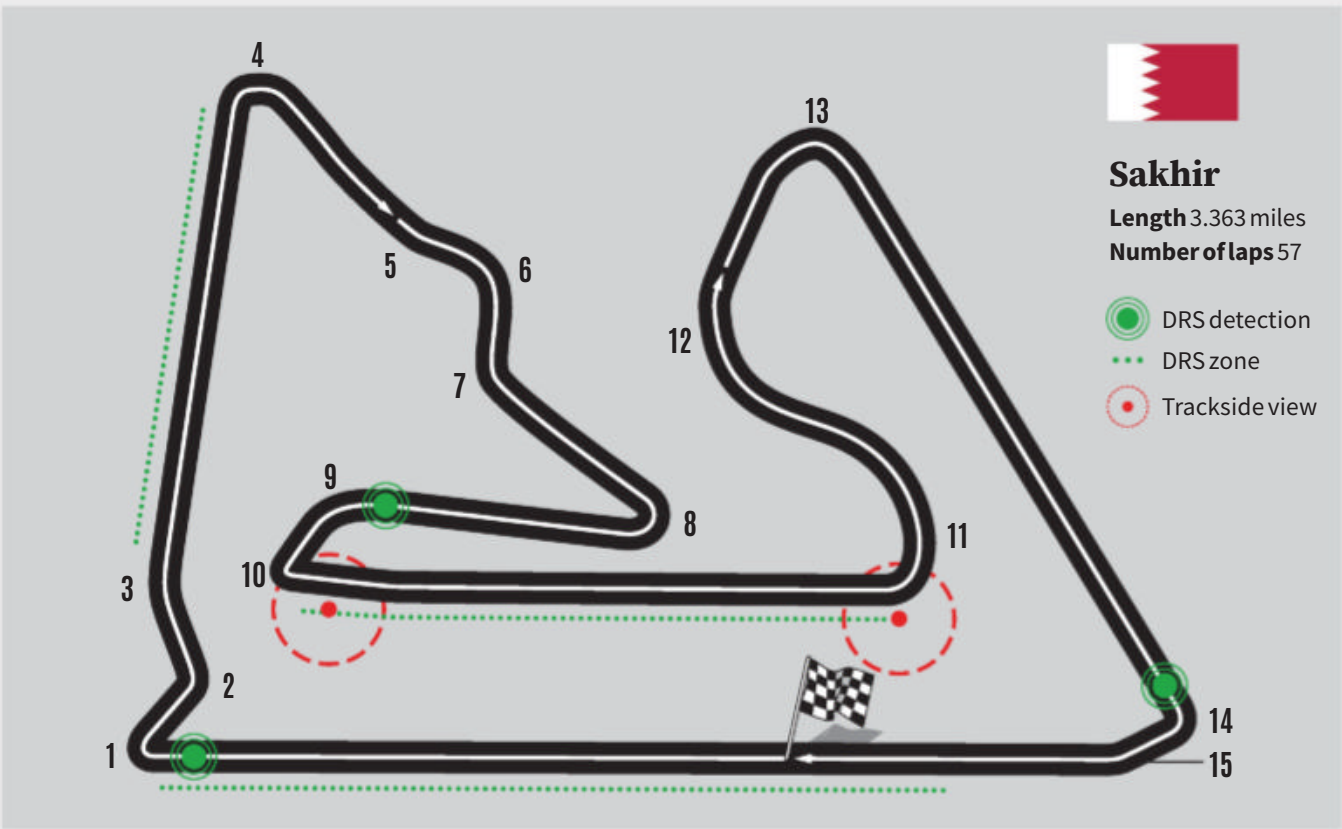
The level of Red Bull's dominance over the other teams even caught Verstappen by surprise, and his own suggestion that Russell's half-second prediction was too large appeared to be genuine. He reckoned that the wind had a part to play – it was less intense than Friday's >>



We’ve remembered to bring the sunscreen for this one; after all, it’s ‘scorchio’ outside for FP1, with nary a ‘nimbo cumulos’ in sight. Protected by the power of Factor 30, we begin our trackside musings for the year at Turn 11. After all, this writer had spent some time observing the cars during testing here, at least on occasions when the drain cover had not persistently refused to stay in its moorings.

You can tell who’s pushing straight out of the gate, depending on who brushes over the kerbs on the right-hand side the most before hooking the steering wheel left. Nico Hulkenberg is first on the scene, but he’s not going all-out as Haas spends the session focusing on its longer runs. Lando Norris, however, is going for it right away; the McLaren driver pulls marginally wide and lets the car settle under the downshifts, before cranking on the lock and giving the right-hand tyres some load to cope with.

We stay here for a while, watching the drivers tackle the outside kerb more given the removal of the drain cover since testing, before walking alongside the Bahrain drag strip



“Ocon’s Alpine lumbers through the corner, missing the apex as a result”

to park up at Turns 9 and 10. Immediately on our arrival, Hulkenberg locks his right-front tyre, but manages to get the car stopped and into the corner amid the suffusion of tyre smoke. You

get a sense of how good the cars are in the low-speed corners here. Max Verstappen sets the benchmark in his RB20, arcing the corner nicely with a consistent sweep into the Turn 10 apex as the steering lock increases. He straightens the car up long before it can consider washing out on the exit kerb, so he’s able to get his foot down.

Yuki Tsunoda also looks good here, with a sweet kiss on the apex as RB suggests early prowess at low speed, as does Ferrari’s Carlos Sainz. Esteban Ocon looks a little more at sea, his allegedly overweight Alpine lumbering through the corner and missing the apex as a result. His throttle pick-up is therefore slightly delayed. Both Saubers come through a little

later, and the neon green-lined cars seem to change direction nicely. Valtteri Bottas gets the cleaner exit; Zhou Guanyu buzzes the limiter on the way out of the corner and gets slightly bogged down.

Turns 1 to 3 aren’t far away, so we finish our viewing there. Norris looks ragged on medium tyres, with a lot of rear axle movement, but once he’s claimed the softs he looks more planted. Lance Stroll, however, does not. On one pass through, he gets an unwanted kerb strike in Turn 2 and has to correct, and on another he sustains a massive lock-up. There’s a lot of floor scraping around the field on the exit of T3, so it stands to reason that everyone’s running a lot lower this year...

**JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE**



Final stint on soft tyres had always been part of Red Bull's gameplan

breezy qualifying and almost acted like a half-turn of added front wing. He seemed completely at home, and the hopes that a more concerted challenge from the other teams on the grid diminished to the merest of embers after the first few corners.

"Of course, I don't know how [the other teams] approached their long runs, with fuel loads and whatever," Verstappen added. "But from our side, it was definitely not expected to be a half a second ahead, for sure not. It was probably a bit better than I thought today."

Going back to his victory in Japan last year, Verstappen has managed to chain eight wins together and looks good value to at least match the 10-race streak of victories from 2023's Miami-to-Monza stretch. With that superiority over Perez, challenges will likely have to emerge from elsewhere on the grid, so the onus is very much upon the likes of Ferrari, Mercedes et al to continue their progression.

Although Perez was well behind Verstappen in crossing the chequered flag, he could afford to be; Bahrain's rough surface is much less of a burden on Red Bull than it is on the other teams. Should Jeddah's smoother asphalt take some of the edge off the other cars' degradation levels, then Perez will have to step it up lest another challenger fill that 22s void.

Sainz's performance was also worthy of commendation. He had a series of great drives last year, albeit mainly from a defensive position in the races after the summer break, but he was greatly enthused by the fact that he could actually start fighting other drivers on track

## "I LOVE GOING RACING, AND I LOVE OVERTAKING, BEING AGGRESSIVE, ATTACKING"

now that Ferrari has made progress with the tyre concerns that previously plagued it.

"I remember last year, the last race where I was attacking was Austria," Sainz reflected. "And we're talking about 13, 14 races ago. And then the rest of the races last year, you just had to manage. You just had to look in the mirrors. You just had to control your pace. There were very little opportunities to go and overtake people."

"I love going racing, and I love overtaking, being aggressive, attacking. To come to the most rear-limited track of the season, the highest degradation, and do an overtaking, attacking race for me is a relief."

Remember Russell and Leclerc, both beleaguered in the first half of the race? While Leclerc's brake splits were somewhat debilitating, these could be slightly alleviated throughout the race and he appeared much more energised on the harder tyre. Russell, however, had to continue lifting and coasting with the engine turned down, which team principal Toto Wolff said cost him well over half a second per lap. The two converged on the 46th lap, and the shoe was on the other foot: this time, Russell ran off at Turn 10 and had to rejoin along the dusty run-off, giving Leclerc the impetus to slip past at Turn 11 and claim fourth – ultimately the Ferrari was 7.1s ahead by the flag.

Verstappen's massive margin at the end was the main takeaway, however. While this might be exacerbated by the peculiarities of the Bahrain circuit, it will offer little comfort to the rest of the field as they hold off clearing any additional space in their trophy cabinets. Most teams (save for perhaps Alpine) have made massive strides in their pursuit of honours – the problem is, Red Bull has seemingly matched their progress.

So, welcome to the new season, folks! It feels quite similar to the old one... 🍷



Yet more trophy cabinet space will need to be liberated in Milton Keynes

**NEXT  
F1 REPORT**

Saudi Arabian GP  
14 March issue

## WILLIAMS THWARTED BY CAR ISSUES

Williams's 2024 campaign got off to a tricky start, with its Bahrain testing reliability gremlins striking again.

Alex Albon had produced another decent qualifying performance to line up 13th, while team-mate Logan Sargeant ended up starting in 18th. Williams head of vehicle performance Dave Robson put part of this down to "a brake balance issue" aboard the American's car in Q1, something that occurred more visibly in the race.

"[The steering wheel] was just doing things on its own, without my asking," Sargeant explained of his Turn 4 off on lap 10, when his brake balance was suddenly shifted massively forwards. "We thought we fixed it [after qualifying], but obviously it came back. It didn't happen again once we changed the steering wheel [at Sargeant's first pitstop]."

Sargeant, who had been battling Kevin Magnussen and Daniel Ricciardo, was stranded for nearly a minute before getting going again, and ran adrift at the back of the field. He ended up finishing last, two laps down.

Albon initially ran in the pack chasing the final points places, but was soon hampered by the engine cooling problem that struck the works Mercedes pair, as was Sargeant. Albon was undercut by Ricciardo at the last pitstops and finished 15th. "If we had done more running in testing, we would have been able to avoid [the issues]," Albon concluded.



## McLaren shows gains as Norris beats Hamilton

McLaren came away from the season opener feeling it had gained "1.8 seconds" year on year in Bahrain qualifying, according to team boss Andrea Stella, with Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri then finishing the race either side of Lewis Hamilton behind the top five.

All three had to battle past Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin in the opening stint, having all underperformed in qualifying. This set them in the sixth, seventh and eighth places they would hold to the end, all having shed their starting soft tyres for hards on laps 12 (for Piastri and Hamilton) and 13 (Norris).

In the second stint, a gap grew between the McLaren pair, with Mercedes then able to undercut Hamilton ahead of Piastri with a lap 33 second pitstop for more hard tyres, while Norris came in from 6.3s ahead. It was close as Piastri exited the pits after pitting on the next lap,

but his plucky defence came unstuck with no "grip on those [cold] hards" exiting Turn 1, and Hamilton was able to power in front.

Hamilton was struggling with the same cooling issue that was so costly for George Russell ahead, although Hamilton's also involved overheating brakes. But Hamilton nevertheless took Norris's 4.5s initial final stint advantage down to 1.9s at the finish, where Piastri ended up 5.8s behind. Hamilton had also been dealing with a broken seat since before halfway.

"I don't feel downbeat – a super-average race," said Hamilton. "For a while my battery was dead, so down the straights I was just derating the whole way down the [main] straight. So, I lost a lot of ground to the McLarens. I was fixing that out for some laps, and that took a good 10 laps. And then after that was just really trying to get back on it, and catch up, as soon we got that fixed."

**“I’LL LET HIM COOL DOWN. WE KNOW WHAT HE IS LIKE. DURING THE MOMENT HE IS VERY... HE’S YUKI.”**

Daniel Ricciardo, after Yuki Tsunoda's somewhat negative reaction to RB's late-race team-orders request as the pair lapped in 13th and 14th.



# Hulkenberg and Stroll in middle of Turn 1 chaos

Several drivers had their races immediately compromised at the start when Lance Stroll's Aston Martin was turned around by the Haas of Nico Hulkenberg at the apex of Turn 1.

Hulkenberg had made a slow start and was overtaken by Stroll, who appeared to jink right just as the pack was braking for the tight right-hander.

Hulkenberg then somewhat clumsily knocked into Stroll's rear end, in the slow-speed chaos that followed, the German was struck in turn by Valtteri Bottas's Sauber. Several others, most notably Alpine's Pierre Gasly and RB's Daniel Ricciardo, had to take avoiding action.

"I had a good getaway, but got tagged

by Nico," said Stroll, who would go on to show strong pace on an attacking undercut-heavy two-stop strategy that meant he rose up the field to finish 10th.

Hulkenberg said he doesn't "know what happened" in the incident, in which he and Bottas picked up front wing damage and the Haas had its diffuser dented.



## Q&A

### FERNANDO ALONSO ASTON MARTIN DRIVER

#### What do you think of your race from starting sixth to finishing ninth?

It was exactly what we expected. Our simulations were saying that we were around P9 with not much fight in front of us. The top four teams are a little bit too much ahead and with a comfortable gap behind. And it was exactly like that. I had the McLarens 18 seconds ahead and the Sauber 28 seconds behind. So, we were in the middle of no one's race.

#### What was the main limitation?

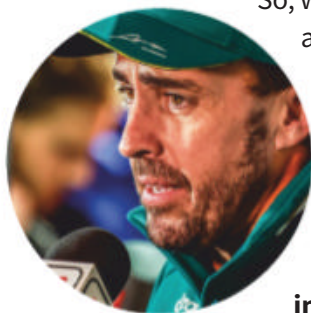
I think we are lacking pace for sure. I think my qualifying laps are something to study – why we were so fast. So, I think the race was normal. What was exceptional was yesterday's lap.

#### What was your race strategy, running long in each stint? Were you hoping for a safety car?

Yeah, exactly. We had no chance to fight with the guys in front. So, we were waiting many laps, just hoping for a safety car or

whatever. And once they overtook us, even with a safety car, we all have the same possibility to stop and we were not in an advantage anymore.

So, we decided to stop at that moment [lap 41 for Alonso's second service].



#### How do you explain the gap in terms of speed in qualifying and not having it in the race?

Yeah, I think yesterday the lap was exceptional.

#### What are Aston's chances for the next race in Jeddah?

It's going to be interesting, very different circuit characteristics. It's going to be the first comparison on a different track. I think the strength of the cars are very similar to last year. Ferrari second fastest, it was second fastest last year as well, just Leclerc's battery last year prevented a podium from them [in Bahrain]. And this year, they got the podium. So, in Saudi [in 2023] it was more Aston and Mercedes a little bit ahead of Ferrari, so let's see if, for us and for Mercedes, we are ready. But I expect Red Bull to keep dominating.

## Alpine off the pace and at the back

Alpine pair Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly qualified on the back row for the Bahrain GP and only beat two drivers who encountered major dramas in the race – Valtteri Bottas, who lost 52 seconds at his second pitstop with a threaded wheelnut, and Logan Sargeant (see far left).

After qualifying, Gasly had said "unfortunately, it doesn't come as a surprise to us that we are lacking performance", and he confirmed "there is some weight to be [lost], there's some performance to come on the chassis". But based on Alpine's awful showings in the two sessions that really mattered last weekend, it will require a lot to turn its season around.

At the start, both Ocon and Gasly launched past Sargeant, but Gasly's line behind the Turn 1 chaos meant his team-mate was able to get back ahead. From there, Gasly gradually shipped a few tenths here and there to drop back, before he completed a three-stopper with a final stint back on the soft tyres, on which he closed to within a second of his team-mate. Ocon ran the typical Bahrain soft-hard-hard two-stopper (for all bar Red Bull). Both were lapped.

"I don't think the car is too bad to drive," Ocon said afterwards. "The issue is that everyone made a step forward and we didn't really make a step forward enough."





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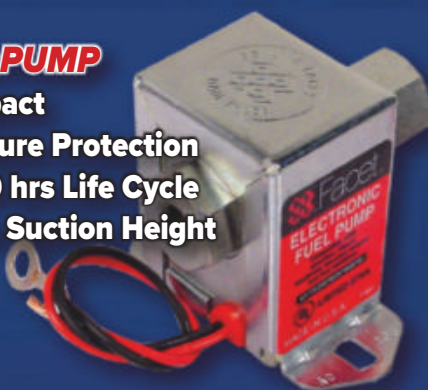


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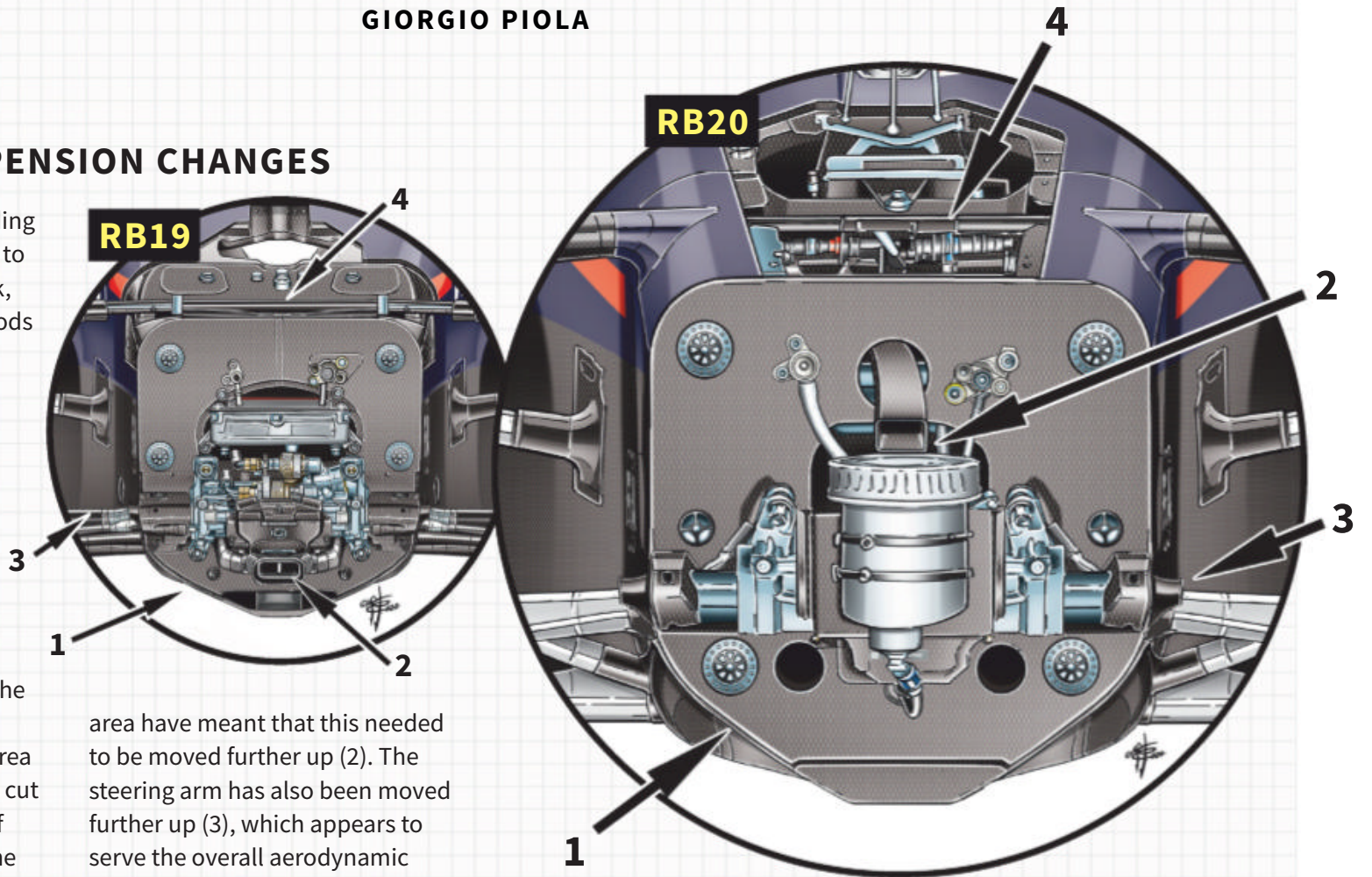
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# DRAWING BOARD

GIORGIO PIOLA

## RED BULL'S SUSPENSION CHANGES

Much of the intrigue surrounding the Red Bull RB20 has tended to hinge on the visible bodywork, particularly around the sidepods and engine cover, but it's important to note that these have been underpinned by the team's chassis changes over the off-season. Most of these can be seen from the bulkhead, with the suspension and associated components repositioned to package the front end more tightly. Along the underside, the keel (1) is more prominent because the cross-sectional area along the underside has been cut back to improve the quality of airflow passing underneath the car. The RB19's cockpit cooling duct was positioned along the bottom of the chassis to connect to the inlet on the nose, but the repositioning of the parts in this



area have meant that this needed to be moved further up (2). The steering arm has also been moved further up (3), which appears to serve the overall aerodynamic flow around the suspension arms rather than producing any distinct change in handling characteristics. Lastly, the rod linking the two upper wishbone arms (4) has been

shifted further back within the chassis to help minimise the effects of roll while the car is in yaw, which ensures that the

underbody aerodynamic performance does not drop while cornering.  
**JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE**

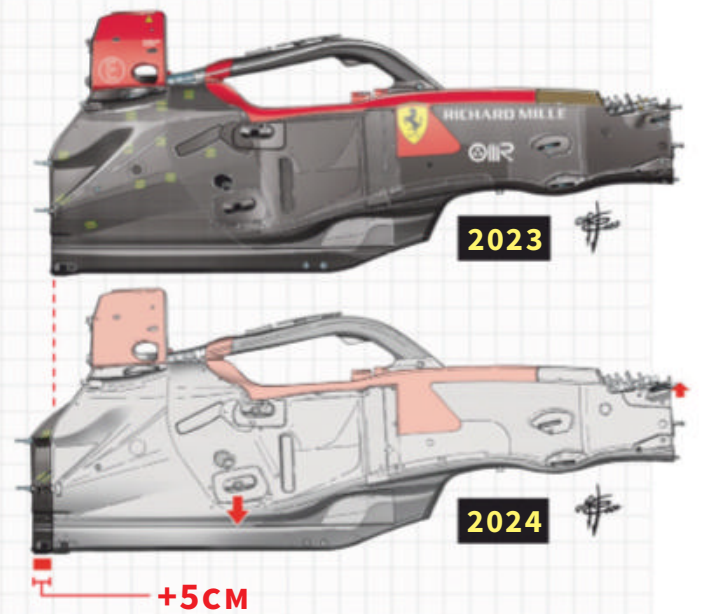
## NEW DIMENSIONS IN FERRARI CHASSIS

Having been restricted in the aerodynamic modifications it could make to its 2023 car by its existing internal infrastructure, Ferrari made a series of key changes to its chassis to hand it more freedom with its aero development and change its weight distribution. The lower side impact structure along the flank has freed up space in this region, making the more extensive

undercut possible. The impact structure now fits within the floor body, so the sidepod blister characteristic on last year's car is no longer needed.

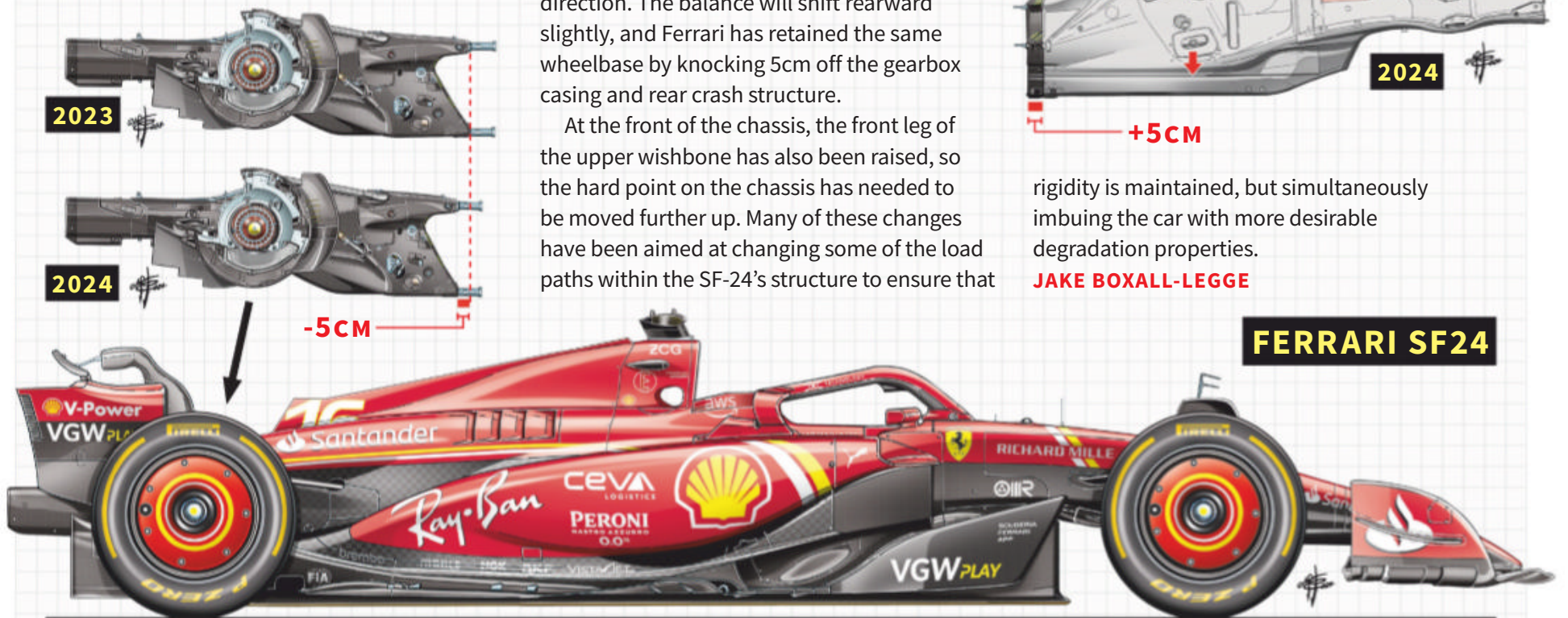
Furthermore, the rear of the monocoque has been extruded backwards by 5cm, which will shift the internal combustion engine and other powertrain components in the same direction. The balance will shift rearward slightly, and Ferrari has retained the same wheelbase by knocking 5cm off the gearbox casing and rear crash structure.

At the front of the chassis, the front leg of the upper wishbone has also been raised, so the hard point on the chassis has needed to be moved further up. Many of these changes have been aimed at changing some of the load paths within the SF-24's structure to ensure that



rigidity is maintained, but simultaneously imbuing the car with more desirable degradation properties.  
**JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE**

## FERRARI SF24



20 Gasly #10  
1m30.948s

19 Ocon #31  
1m30.793s

18 Sargeant #2  
1m30.770s

17 Zhou #24  
1m30.757s

16 Bottas #77  
1m30.756s

15 Magnussen #20  
1m30.529s

14 Ricciardo #3  
1m30.278s

13 Albon #23  
1m30.221s

12 Stroll #18  
1m30.200s

11 Tsunoda #22  
1m30.129s

FREE PRACTICE 1

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Ricciardo	1m32.869s
2	Norris	1m32.901s
3	Piastrri	1m33.113s
4	Tsunoda	1m33.183s
5	Alonso	1m33.193s
6	Verstappen	1m33.238s
7	Russell	1m33.251s
8	Leclerc	1m33.268s
9	Hamilton	1m33.302s
10	Bottas	1m33.354s
11	Sainz	1m33.385s
12	Perez	1m33.413s
13	Albon	1m33.583s
14	Stroll	1m33.868s
15	Zhou	1m33.923s
16	Sargeant	1m34.213s
17	Ocon	1m34.807s
18	Gasly	1m35.144s
19	Magnussen	1m37.477s
20	Hulkenberg	1m37.938s

FREE PRACTICE 2

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Hamilton	1m30.374s
2	Russell	1m30.580s
3	Alonso	1m30.660s
4	Sainz	1m30.769s
5	Piastrri	1m30.784s
6	Verstappen	1m30.851s
7	Hulkenberg	1m30.884s
8	Stroll	1m30.891s
9	Leclerc	1m31.113s
10	Perez	1m31.115s
11	Albon	1m31.333s
12	Ricciardo	1m31.516s
13	Sargeant	1m31.715s
14	Magnussen	1m31.764s
15	Tsunoda	1m31.881s
16	Gasly	1m31.951s
17	Bottas	1m32.001s
18	Ocon	1m32.027s
19	Zhou	1m32.048s
20	Norris	1m32.608s

FREE PRACTICE 3

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Sainz	1m30.824s
2	Alonso	1m30.965s
3	Verstappen	1m31.062s
4	Leclerc	1m31.094s
5	Norris	1m31.118s
6	Russell	1m31.190s
7	Piastrri	1m31.210s
8	Perez	1m31.248s
9	Hulkenberg	1m31.278s
10	Stroll	1m31.396s
11	Ricciardo	1m31.449s
12	Hamilton	1m31.452s
13	Tsunoda	1m31.631s
14	Magnussen	1m31.671s
15	Albon	1m31.965s
16	Zhou	1m32.000s
17	Bottas	1m32.096s
18	Ocon	1m32.124s
19	Sargeant	1m32.125s
20	Gasly	1m32.382s

WEATHER

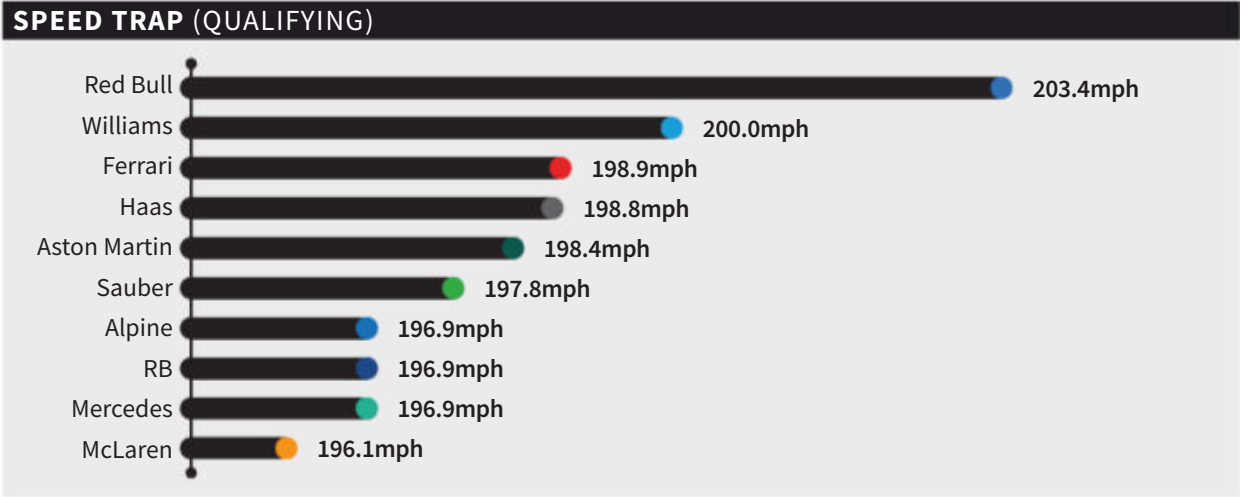
Clear, air 20-21C track 31-33C

WEATHER

Clear, air 17C track 21-22C

WEATHER

Clear, air 21-23C track 28-33C



QUALIFYING 1

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Sainz	1m29.909s
2	Stroll	1m29.965s
3	Verstappen	1m30.031s
4	Norris	1m30.143s
5	Alonso	1m30.179s
6	Perez	1m30.221s
7	Leclerc	1m30.243s
8	Russell	1m30.350s
9	Albon	1m30.397s
10	Hamilton	1m30.451s
11	Tsunoda	1m30.481s
12	Piastrri	1m30.531s
13	Ricciardo	1m30.562s
14	Hulkenberg	1m30.566s
15	Magnussen	1m30.646s
16	Bottas	1m30.756s
17	Zhou	1m30.757s
18	Sargeant	1m30.770s
19	Ocon	1m30.793s
20	Gasly	1m30.948s

QUALIFYING 2

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m29.165s
2	Verstappen	1m29.374s
3	Sainz	1m29.573s
4	Hamilton	1m29.718s
5	Alonso	1m29.801s
6	Hulkenberg	1m29.851s
7	Russell	1m29.922s
8	Perez	1m29.932s
9	Norris	1m29.941s
10	Piastrri	1m30.122s
11	Tsunoda	1m30.129s
12	Stroll	1m30.200s
13	Albon	1m30.221s
14	Ricciardo	1m30.278s
15	Magnussen	1m30.529s

QUALIFYING 3

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m29.179s
2	Leclerc	1m29.407s
3	Russell	1m29.485s
4	Sainz	1m29.507s
5	Perez	1m29.537s
6	Alonso	1m29.542s
7	Norris	1m29.614s
8	Piastrri	1m29.683s
9	Hamilton	1m29.710s
10	Hulkenberg	1m30.502s

WEATHER

Clear, air 18C track 21-22C

SEASON STATS

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1 Verstappen	26	1	1
2 Perez	18	2	5
3 Sainz	15	3	4
4 Leclerc	12	4	2
5 Russell	10	5	3
6 Norris	8	6	7
7 Hamilton	6	7	9
8 Piastrri	4	8	8
9 Alonso	2	9	6
10 Stroll	1	10	12
11 Zhou	0	11	17
12 Magnussen	0	12	15
13 Ricciardo	0	13	14
14 Tsunoda	0	14	11
15 Albon	0	15	13
16 Hulkenberg	0	16	10
17 Ocon	0	17	19
18 Gasly	0	18	20
19 Bottas	0	19	16
20 Sargeant	0	20	18

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

	PTS
1 Red Bull	44
2 Ferrari	27
3 Mercedes	16
4 McLaren	12
5 Aston Martin	3
6 Sauber	0
7 Haas	0
8 RB	0
9 Williams	0
10 Alpine	0

QUALIFYING BATTLE

Verstappen	1	0	Perez
Leclerc	1	0	Sainz
Hamilton	0	1	Russell
Gasly	0	1	Ocon
Norris	1	0	Piastrri
Alonso	1	0	Stroll
Magnussen	0	1	Hulkenberg
Ricciardo	0	1	Tsunoda
Sargeant	0	1	Albon

WINS

Verstappen	1
------------	---

FASTEST LAPS

Verstappen	1
------------	---

POLE POSITIONS

Verstappen	1
------------	---

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

NEXT RACE

9 March

Saudi Arabian Gp

Jeddah

SAM TODD / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

10 Hulkenberg #27  
1m30.502s

8 Piastri #81  
1m29.683s

6 Alonso #14  
1m29.542s

4 Sainz #55  
1m29.507s

2 Leclerc #16  
1m29.407s

9 Hamilton #44  
1m29.710s

7 Norris #4  
1m29.614s

5 Perez #11  
1m29.537s

3 Russell #63  
1m29.485s

1 Verstappen #1  
1m29.179s

RESULTS ROUND 1/24 (57 LAPS – 191.53 MILES)					
POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISH TIME	LED	TYRES
1	Max Verstappen (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	1h31m44.742s	57	Su,Hn,Sn
2	Sergio Perez (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	+22.457s		Su,Hn,Sn
3	Carlos Sainz (ESP)	Ferrari	+25.110s		Su,Hn,Hn
4	Charles Leclerc (MCO)	Ferrari	+39.669s		Su,Hn,Hn
5	George Russell (GBR)	Mercedes	+46.788s		Su,Hn,Hn
6	Lando Norris (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	+48.458s		Su,Hn,Hn
7	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	Mercedes	+50.324s		Su,Hn,Hn
8	Oscar Piastri (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	+56.082s		Su,Hn,Hn
9	Fernando Alonso (ESP)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+1m14.887s		Su,Hn,Hn
10	Lance Stroll (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+1m33.216s		Sn,Hn,Hn
11	Zhou Guanyu (CHN)	Sauber-Ferrari	-1lap/+6.759s		Sn,Hn,Hn
12	Kevin Magnussen (DNK)	Haas-Ferrari	-1lap/+8.316s		Sn,Hn,Hn
13	Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)	RB-Honda RBPT	-1lap/+8.958s		Su,Hn,Sn
14	Yuki Tsunoda (JPN)	RB-Honda RBPT	-1lap/+9.482s		Sn,Hn,Hn
15	Alexander Albon (THA)	Williams-Mercedes	-1lap/+11.886s		Sn,Hn,Hn
16	Nico Hulkenberg (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	-1lap/+17.632s		Sn,Hn,Hn,Su
17	Esteban Ocon (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	-1lap/+31.450s		Sn,Hn,Hn
18	Pierre Gasly (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	-1lap/+32.417s		Sn,Hn,Hn,Sn
19	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	Sauber-Ferrari	-1lap/+1m23.230s		Sn,Hn,Hn
20	Logan Sargeant (USA)	Williams-Mercedes	-2laps/+20.795s		Sn,Hn,Hn,Sn

WEATHER Clear, air 19C track 22-24C


WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 125.257mph FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED 130.726mph

FASTEST LAPS				
POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP	LAP
1	Verstappen	1m32.608s	-	39
2	Leclerc	1m34.090s	+1.482s	36
3	Alonso	1m34.199s	+1.591s	48
4	Perez	1m34.364s	+1.756s	40
5	Norris	1m34.476s	+1.868s	35
6	Sainz	1m34.507s	+1.899s	44
7	Hamilton	1m34.722s	+2.114s	39
8	Sargeant	1m34.735s	+2.127s	42
9	Gasly	1m34.805s	+2.197s	45
10	Hulkenberg	1m34.834s	+2.226s	46
11	Piastri	1m34.983s	+2.375s	39
12	Russell	1m35.065s	+2.457s	40
13	Ricciardo	1m35.163s	+2.555s	37
14	Zhou	1m35.458s	+2.850s	30
15	Magnussen	1m35.570s	+2.962s	34
16	Stroll	1m35.632s	+3.024s	30
17	Albon	1m35.723s	+3.115s	40
18	Tsunoda	1m35.833s	+3.225s	37
19	Bottas	1m36.202s	+3.594s	33
20	Ocon	1m36.226s	+3.618s	34

TYRES


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

HARD




C1

MEDIUM




C2


SOFT




C3




C4



C5



INTERMEDIATE



WET

STATS

114

Red Bull has now matched Williams's tally of world championship GP victories

33

Verstappen now has as many world championship F1 poles as Jim Clark and Alain Prost

3

This is the third time Red Bull has started an F1 season with a victory and the second time it has kicked off a new campaign with a 1-2

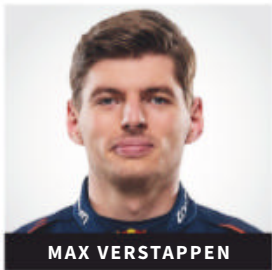
LAP CHART																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	Verstappen	Leclerc	Russell	Sainz	Perez	Alonso	Norris	Piastri	Hamilton	Hulkenberg	Tsunoda	Stroll	Albon	Ricciardo	Magnussen	Bottas	Zhou	Sargeant	Ocon	Gasly
G	1	16	63	55	11	14	4	81	44	27	22	18	23	3	20	77	24	2	31	10
1	1	16	63	11	55	14	4	81	44	22	23	20	24	3	2	31	10	77	18	27
2	1	16	63	11	55	14	4	81	44	22	23	20	24	2	3	31	10	77	18	27
3	1	63	16	11	55	4	14	81	44	22	23	20	24	2	3	31	10	77	18	27
4	1	63	16	11	55	4	14	81	44	22	23	20	24	2	3	31	10	77	18	27
5	1	63	16	11	55	4	81	14	44	22	23	20	24	2	3	31	10	18	77	27
6	1	63	16	11	55	4	81	14	44	22	23	20	24	2	3	31	10	18	77	27
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8	1	63	11	16	55	4	81	14	44	22	23	20	24	2	3	31	10	18	77	27
9	1	63	11	16	55	4	81	14	44	22	23	20	2	3	31	24	10	77	18	27
10	1	63	11	16	55	4	81	44	14	22	23	20	3	10	77	31	24	18	27	2
11	1	11	55	63	4	16	81	44	14	22	23	20	3	10	77	24	18	31	27	2
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17	1	11	63	55	16	4	81	44	14	24	22	18	20	23	31	3	27	77	10	2
18	1	11	55	63	16	4	81	44	14	24	22	18	20	23	31	3	27	77	10	2
19	1	11	55	63	16	4	81	44	14	24	22	18	20	23	31	3	27	77	10	2
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39	1	11	55	63	16	4	44	14	81	18	24	20	22	27	3	23	31	10	77	2
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42	1	11	55	63	16	4	44	81	18	24	14	20	22	3	23	31	10	27	77	2
43	1	11	55	63	16	4	44	81	18	24	14	20	22	3	23	31	10	27	77	2
44	1	11	55	63	16	4	44	81	18	14	24	20	22	3	23	31	27	10	77	2
45	1	11	55	63	16	4	44	81	18	14	24	20	22	3	23	31	27	10	77	2
46	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	18	14	24	20	22	3	23	31	27	10	77	2
47	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	18	14	24	20	22	3	23	31	27	10	77	2
48	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	22	3	23	31	27	10	77	2
49	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	22	3	23	31	27	10	77	2
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52	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	3	22	23	27	31	10	77	2
53	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	3	22	23	27	31	10	77	2
54	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	3	22	23	27	31	10	77	2
55	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	3	22	23	27	31	10	77	2
56	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18	24	20	3	22	23	27	31	10	77	
57	1	11	55	16	63	4	44	81	14	18										

# BAHRAIN GP DRIVER RATINGS

*In a change from 2023, we're now including practice and qualifying performances in our scores as well as the race itself...*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

## RED BULL



MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started **1st** — Result **1st**

**10** Delighted with pole given Red Bull's struggles to find a set-up that worked with the Friday wind, which then turned around on race day, boosting the RB20. Nailed the start, stamping out Leclerc's faint hope by running wide out of Turn 1, then just disappeared.



SERGIO PEREZ

Started **5th** — Result **2nd**

**6** Another underwhelming qualifying performance. Made a good start to jump Sainz, then tracked and passed Leclerc. Smartly dived under Russell in their Turn 4 tussle. Was isolated behind Verstappen from there. Complained of engine braking issue late on.

## MERCEDES



LEWIS HAMILTON

Started **9th** — Result **7th**

**5** Mercedes felt Hamilton's qualifying was messy overall. In the race, he made neat overtakes when required and had strong late pace, even with all the lift-and-coast requirements and a broken seat, but admitted that his qualifying result hampered him most.



GEORGE RUSSELL

Started **3rd** — Result **5th**

**8** Can't score higher because of late Turn 10 off that allowed Leclerc, who was suffering a brake issue, to get back ahead. But was by then having to lift-and-coast at a cost of 0.5s per lap to keep temperatures down. Early battles impressed, as did his searing qualifying pace.

## FERRARI



CHARLES LECLERC

Started **2nd** — Result **4th**

**8** Got switched onto used soft tyres for first Q3 run, so lost his rhythm and blew pole shot. Did his best against Verstappen at Turn 1, then brake problem struck. Front brakes were over 100C apart and had to keep adjusting braking points. Coped superbly and pressured Russell into critical mistake.

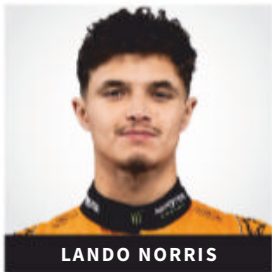


CARLOS SAINZ

Started **4th** — Result **3rd**

**8** Outqualified by Russell and jumped by Perez at start, their contact damaging his steering. Shot back up towards Leclerc and passed him boldly in first stint at Turn 1, then did it even more impressively early in second after being undercut. Got past Russell, then gamely chased Perez.

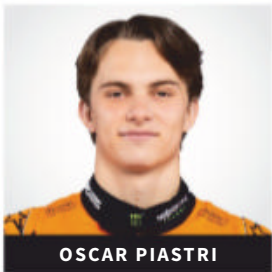
## McLAREN



LANDO NORRIS

Started **7th** — Result **6th**

**6** Made mistakes on Q3 runs, blowing potential third on grid. Critically, passed Alonso early on, then ran adrift of the Ferraris and Russell. Complained about balance – McLaren put this down to wind hurting the MCL38, which was set up with a bigger rear wing for more downforce.



OSCAR PIASTRI

Started **8th** — Result **8th**

**6** Struggled with balance through qualifying, but worked with engineers to end up happier. Was still adrift of Norris and behind Alonso too. Passed the Aston early in the race, then chased Norris before losing touch on hard tyres and getting undercut by Hamilton at second pitstop.

## ASTON MARTIN



FERNANDO ALONSO

Started **6th** — Result **9th**

**8** Delivered exactly what the Aston currently can in qualifying and the race. Was quickly overcome by the McLarens and Hamilton, but was on a long-running strategy in first and second stints in hope of a safety car. Used his late tyre-life offset to tear back ahead of Zhou and Stroll.



LANCE STROLL

Started **12th** - Result **10th**

**7** Poor qualifying performance – he blamed traffic on last Q2 lap – left him exposed in the pack at Turn 1, where he also cops some blame in Hulkenberg tangle. But he stuck at it, with strong pace around regular passes turning Aston's two undercuts into nice gains and rescuing a point.

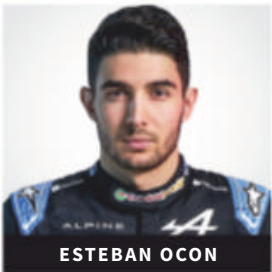
## ALPINE



PIERRE GASLY

Started **20th** - Result **18th**

**5** Qualifying defeat at hands of Ocon goes down to failure to nail tyre preparation at Q1 climax. In the race, good start was undone when avoiding Turn 1 mess and he gradually fell away from Ocon afterwards. Was only three-stopper (other than Hulkenberg and Sargeant) not to have a major in-race drama.



ESTEBAN OCON

Started **19th** - Result **17th**

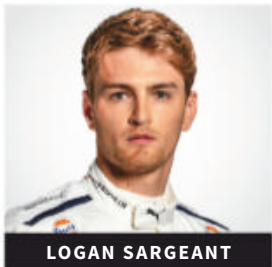
**6** Gets scored higher than Gasly for being lead Alpine driver in qualifying. In the race, was only able to stay ahead early on because Gasly got caught behind Turn 1 shenanigans. Held a small advantage that gradually grew until their strategies diverged late on.

Verstappen's domination  
earns full marks



GIVE YOUR  
DRIVER RATINGS  
[autosport.com/f1/  
driver-ratings](https://autosport.com/f1/driver-ratings)

WILLIAMS



LOGAN SARGEANT

Started **18th** Result **20th**

**5** Gets a reliability mitigation, mainly with Williams's steering wheel in both qualifying and race. In bizarre Turn 4 off, his steering wheel changed his brake balance wildly forwards and he went straight on, basically ending his race, and he was rhythmless in blue flags from there.



ALEX ALBON

Started **13th** Result **15th**

**6** Decent in qualifying, but might have been able to sneak past Stroll's Q2 underperformance if he'd hooked up his best lap at the death. Gained from Turn 1 shunt to run adrift of Tsunoda, but it was here where his pain began as the Williams overheated running in dirty air.

RB



DANIEL RICCIARDO

Started **14th** Result **13th**

**5** Underwhelming qualifying performance left him adrift of Tsunoda. Unlucky to be behind and on outside of Turn 1 chaos, which meant he didn't gain as much as he might have. Pace came alive on new soft tyres to the point he caught Tsunoda. Rued the place-swap not being enacted sooner.



YUKI TSUNODA

Started **11th** - Result **14th**

**5** No shame in being edged out in fight for Q3 and was excellent in shading Ricciardo. Got stuck in at the start and was running in 10th before being undone by others stopping earlier at both of his pitstops. Hurt RB's results potential by arguing with the team order to let Ricciardo past.

SAUBER



ZHOU GUANYU

Started **17th** - Result **11th**

**8** Did make an error at end of Q1, but it wasn't a major one. Showed strong pace on hard tyres while undercutting others before being overcome by Stroll early in final stint. Hung on impressively against Magnussen and the RBs, as they swarmed with late tyre-offset advantages.



VALTTERI BOTTAS

Started **16th** - Result **19th**

**6** Was among those signalling a car being better set up for the race after Q1 fall, but at least edged his team-mate. At back of Turn 1 tangle, struck Hulkenberg and broke front wing, which cost car performance. Race essentially ended with 52s pitstop when wheelnut got cross-threaded.

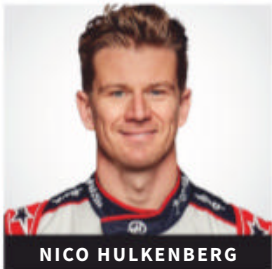
HAAS



KEVIN MAGNUSSEN

Started **15th** - Result **12th**

**7** Qualified well behind team-mate and felt no qualifying laps were clean. Opposite can be said of race as he kept out of trouble, then fended off Zhou before being undercut. Executed own second-stop undercut to get stuck in to Tsunoda, then held him off long enough before RB implosion behind.



NICO HULKENBERG

Started **10th** - Result **16th**

**6** Score would be lower but for qualifying heroics, as race was effectively ended in Turn 1 melee. Had a shocking getaway, then couldn't explain how he'd hit Stroll and broken his front wing, which suggests a misjudgement rather than being a victim of the Aston's late jink or Bottas's touch behind.

SCORING SYSTEM

Drivers are rated for their performance through the whole weekend, with the focus on qualifying and the race.

- 10** Exceptional performance, maximising the result or car performance and excelling, either through overturning a major obstacle or dominance over rivals.
- 9** Outstanding performance, but without quite reaching the heights required for a maximum score.
- 8** Very good performance with no major errors and a final result that, relative to circumstances, reflected the car's pace.
- 7** Good performance, perhaps one that's a little inconsistent in some aspects or without extracting the maximum

from the car but still yields a reasonable result.

- 6** Solid performance but without getting the most out of the car or nailing it when it really mattered.
- 5** Patchy performance, not necessarily off the pace but failing to string together the weekend well and coming away short of a good result.
- 4** Disappointing performance, failing to get close to the maximum of the car and/or making mistakes at key moments.
- 3** Poor performance, either through struggling to get the most out of the car or, through some massive error, falling short.
- 2** Very poor performance, with

mediocre pace and mistakes adding up to a wasted weekend.

- 1** Terrible. A performance with no redeeming features.
- 0** A rare case, but if a driver crashes on the way to the grid without car failure at play (think Verstappen at the 2020 Hungarian GP) and cannot take part in the race, they must get this score. The same for stalling at the lights and not getting going, although this in effect is a non-factor in modern F1.
- N/A** DNS due to car failure in the garage, on formation laps or on the grid. We reserve the right to use this in circumstances where a driver has been injured in a crash.

HYPERCAR

LMGT3

# Porsche makes perfect start despite late drama

*The German manufacturer's 963 was the machine to have as the 2024 campaign kicked off, while others endured heartbreak*

GARY WATKINS

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY JEP

motorsport  
IMAGES

Battle-scarred and as a result understeer-prone 963 was tough to drive towards the end of the race



**P**orsche dominated the Qatar 1812Km last Saturday on the way to a maiden win in the World Endurance Championship for the 963 and a first series victory for any LMDh prototype. Laurens Vanthoor, Kevin Estre and Andre Lotterer were never headed from late in the second hour of a race that hit its full distance four minutes short of the 10-hour cut-off. But it wasn't all plain sailing for the drivers of the #6 car. A late unscheduled pitstop after the car sustained body damage set doubts racing in Estre's mind.

When the Frenchman was instructed to pit with seven laps of the 335 to go, his reaction was "ahh, come on". A series of clashes with LMGT3 machinery over the final quarter of the race had damaged both the left sidepod and the floor, and he knew that anything but the briefest of repairs was going to rip victory from his and his team-mates' grasp. But Estre was told not to worry. All the Penske Porsche Motorsport crew had to do was affix a new adhesive race number to replace the one that had gone west with a chunk of the bodywork behind the wheel. The rules state that race numbers

"must remain visible in all circumstances".

Just 47 seconds were lost, pit-in to pit-out, which meant the #6 car emerged with a lead over Jean-Eric Vergne in the chasing Peugeot 9X8 that still stood at a shade under 40s. A first outright WEC victory for Porsche since its last with the 919 Hybrid LMP1 at Austin in September 2017 was now a formality.

"The car was pretty tough to drive," said Estre of the battle-scarred 963 at the end. "I was told the underfloor was smashed, that there was a hole in the bodywork, and it felt like it. I had a lot of understeer: on my own it was kind of OK, though with a bit of vibration, but when I was following another car I was definitely struggling. But the gap stayed pretty constant, so I was confident."

Had the pitstop that briefly caused Estre's concerns ended up costing him and his team-mates the victory, it would have been a travesty of the highest order. So too if the stewards had decreed that the 'leader lights' – the illuminations that show when a car is running in the top three – also had to be replaced. They had exited stage left with the portion of bodywork that carried them and the race number.



Vanthoor, Lotterer and Estre celebrate Porsche's breakthrough victory



## “I was told the underfloor was smashed, that there was a hole in the bodywork, and it felt like it”

The rule on that one is less clear cut.

Porsche had an advantage in the Middle East that it had exhibited from the beginning of the week and the delayed two-day pre-season Prologue test on the Losail International Circuit. The factory Porsche team and its customer Jota squad shared out the top spot in the four sessions of the Prologue on the Monday and Tuesday, and then Penske ended up quickest in two of the three practice periods. Matt Campbell then continued his dream start to 2024, which had encompassed victories in the Daytona 24 Hours and Bathurst 12 Hour, by taking pole. But come the race it was the sister Porsche, qualified only fifth by Estre after he reckoned he “hadn’t got the



Peugeot shone in Qatar, looking good for second until fuel issue struck

best out of the car”, that was in the ascendant. Jota boss Sam Hignett reckoned #6 was “in a class of its own – untouchable”.

Yet if Estre had the heebie-jeebies at the end of proceedings, so did Vanthoor at the beginning of a race that went the full distance of 1812km – and takes its name from the 18 December National »



Jota's innovative strategy  
boosted runners-up  
Nato, Stevens and Iltis

Day public holiday – thanks to just two caution periods; a pair of quickfire Full Course Yellows. Vanthoor lost a place at the start and was only fifth by the time of the first round of pitstops. He admitted to taking a conservative approach during the opening laps.

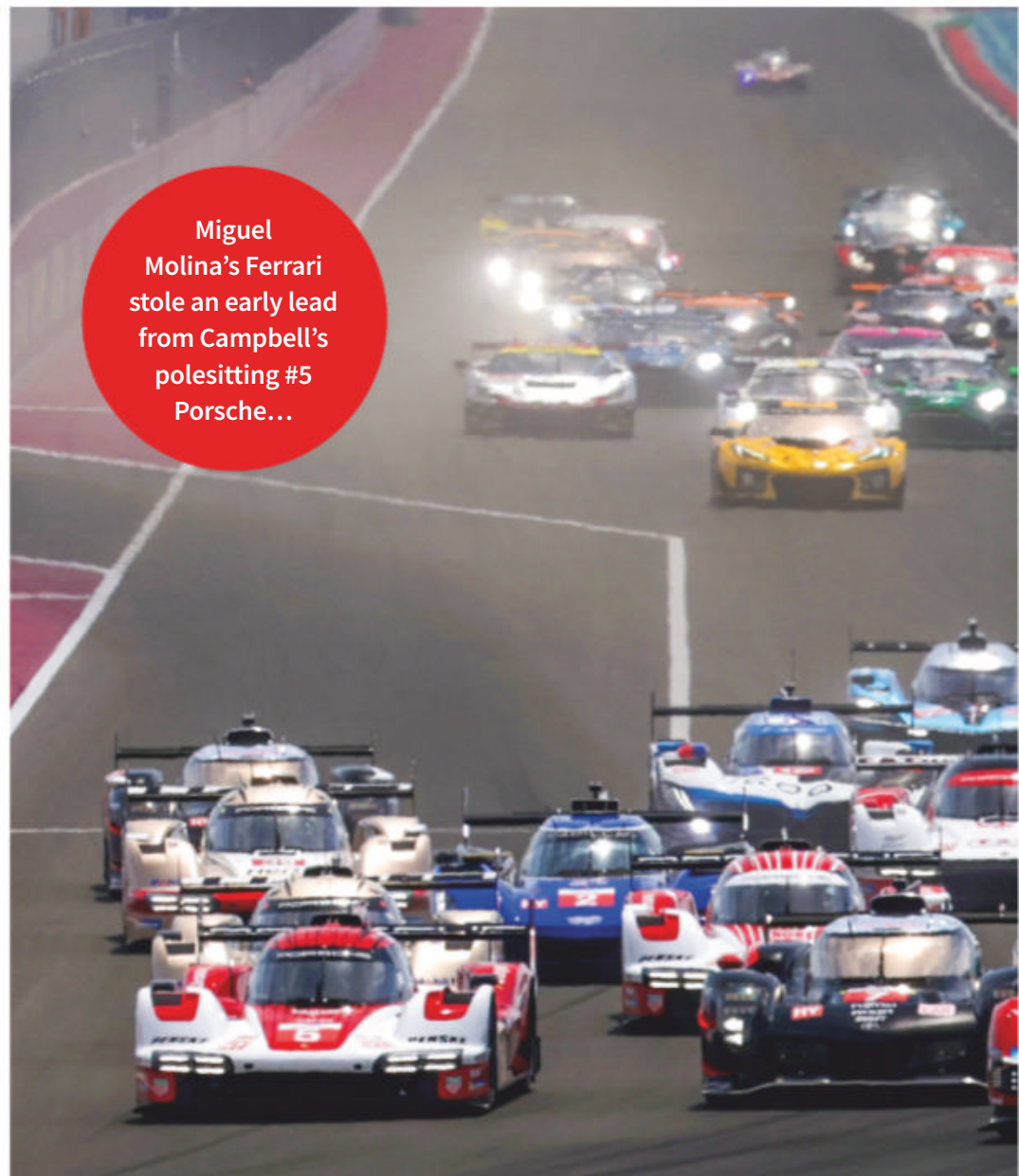
“I was a bit pissed off losing out at the start and a couple of times I had my nose between two cars,” said the Belgian. “But I thought, ‘This is a 10-hour race, try to be smart.’ We came back quite well and I was able to save some fuel in the process.”

So well did he come back, in fact, that when the second round of pitstops kicked off, Vanthoor was at the front of the field and a handful of seconds up on the second-placed Peugeot 9X8 Le Mans Hypercar with Nico Muller at the wheel.

Estre extended the lead to as much as 40s over his double stint before Vergne made some inroads when Lotterer took over the Porsche. Muller then came back at Vanthoor when the starting drivers returned. Peugeot gambled on using the medium Michelin tyre in the cooler temperatures after darkness had fallen, while Porsche stayed on the hard all race. It looked like an inspired tactic by a manufacturer that was best of the LMH pack ahead of Toyota and Ferrari on Saturday. The Swiss closed down the leader, reducing the deficit to as little as nine seconds. But on the second half of their double stints the Porsche pulled clear as the Peugeot's tyres went away. When Vanthoor got out to hand back to Estre, the lead was back up to over 40s and continued to grow. It was up to well over a minute before the drama of the closing stages.

The end-of-race excitement continued after it became apparent that Estre was home and dry. Vergne was looking good for second in the Peugeot he shared with Muller and Mikkel Jensen, despite having Callum Iltis in the best of the Jota Porsches little more than a second behind. Only, he suddenly slowed at the beginning of the penultimate lap and stopped just after the pits before resuming slowly.

The Peugeot had run out of fuel, but was able to complete a slow tour on front axle hybrid power to cross the line a lap behind in



Miguel  
Molina's Ferrari  
stole an early lead  
from Campbell's  
polesitting #5  
Porsche...

seventh. But because he had deployed electric power below the 150km/h (90mph) minimum allowed to the 9X8 under the Balance of Performance and then didn't make it into parc ferme, the car was struck from the results. It was a sad way for the original version of the 9X8 to bow out after its most competitive showing yet, or at least its best performance over a full race distance.

Exactly why it had run out of fuel wasn't understood by the team in the immediate aftermath. “We think it is something between the refuelling tower and the car,” said Peugeot Sport technical director Olivier Jansonnie. “We need to further investigate the problem.”

Peugeot's bad luck was Porsche's – and Jota's – good fortune. It promoted the #12 Jota car shared by Will Stevens, Iltis and Norman Nato to second and the #5 factory car of Campbell, Michael Christensen and Frederic Makowiecki to third to give the German manufacturer a clean sweep of the podium. Iltis crossed the line 33s in arrears of Estre; Campbell was a further second behind.

Jota opted for an innovative strategy on both the second-place car and the sister #38 963 shared by Jenson Button, Phil Hanson and Oliver Rasmussen. It triple-stinted the hard Michelin through the race, swapping drivers at each pitstop, with the exception of one



AF Corse's #83 499P flew  
the flag for Ferrari when  
works cars were delayed



## “I was a bit pissed off losing out at the start, but I thought, ‘This is a 10-hour race, try to be smart’”

double in the middle of proceedings.

“It was an idea we had before arriving, after testing here late last year, and we committed to the strategy early in the week,” explained Stevens. “There’s quite a big delta between having cold tyres and hot tyres, and if you over-push when they’re new, they can easily grain.”

Jota’s strategy was based on the principle that less time spent on cold rubber – no tyre warmers in the WEC these days, remember – would result in reduced time loss, as well as minimising the risk of graining. Its worth was validated by a finish ahead of the #5, which was handicapped by tyre issues. Or rather Christensen was.

Twice the Dane was forced to cut short a double stint on the hard tyre as the hard-used left-rear started to deteriorate at a rapid rate. The cause of an issue that hadn’t raised its head earlier in the week was unknown. Damage from the MotoGP-style kerbs, with a lip on their furthest edge, was one possibility, reckoned Penske.

The second Jota car wouldn’t have made it a Porsche 1-2-3-4 had it completed the race. It was running seventh – and would likely have ended up sixth – when the hybrid warning light came on 40 minutes before the chequered flag. It was the result of an electrical isolation problem of unconfirmed origins. A component failure or a fluid leak was suspected.

By the time Rasmussen brought the Porsche into the pits for what turned out to be its retirement, the Ganassi Cadillac V-Series.R and AF Corse’s satellite Ferrari 499P LMH were already ahead. The Caddy was always playing catch-up after Alex Lynn was tapped from behind at the first corner by Hanson and pushed into Paul di Resta in the #94 Peugeot. Damage was sustained to both ends of the American car, which forced a double bodywork change at its first pitstop. Half a minute was lost, but the strategy the team had planned from the beginning got the car up to the best of the rest once the #93 Peugeot >>

### ALPINE TOPS THE NEWCOMERS

Alpine notched up a notable achievement as first of the Hypercar newcomers home in Qatar, doubly so because it got one of its A424 LMDhs into the points. It was nip and tuck between the Renault brand and BMW for unofficial class honours, the deciding factor being some drastic fuel saving by Ferdinand Habsburg, Charles Milesi and Paul-Loup Chatin that ultimately yielded them eighth because they were able to complete the race on one pitstop fewer than their immediate rivals.

The #35 was one of only two cars in Hypercar to go through the race on nine stops. Unlike Cadillac, however, Alpine didn’t set out with that aim. “It was just that I saved a load of fuel over the first stint and we decided to carry on like that,” said Habsburg.

“It felt like the right thing to do and it paid off. We knew we didn’t have the pace of the guys at the front, so we just tried to save a lap every stint.”

Finishing was always top of Alpine’s priorities, and it achieved that with both cars, Mick Schumacher, Nicolas Lapierre and Matthieu Vaxiviere coming home 12th, six seconds behind the WRT BMW M Hybrid shared by Robin Frijns, Rene Rast and Sheldon van der Linde. The team’s #15 BMW driven by Dries Vanthoor, Raffaele

Marciello and Marco Wittmann ended up 15th. It was right with the sister car until late in the penultimate hour when it lost 10 minutes to a throttle problem.

WRT boss Vincent Vosse pointed out that the two cars had clean races – with just one penalty between them – and that the team had gathered a lot of data. But he took a veiled swipe at the Balance of Performance. “We did not have the tools to fight for a better position,” he said. “Of course, we will improve, maybe by two tenths, maybe by 2.1.”

**“We knew we didn’t have the pace of the guys at the front, so we just tried to save a lap every stint”**

That would make only a small indent into the one-second or so margin on race pace to the Porsche.

The solo Iron Lynx Lamborghini SC63 came home 14th and five laps down on the winning Porsche, but team principal Andrea Piccini was again taking positives from the car’s debut. That was despite the car being slightly further behind Porsche than BMW.

“We finished the race, that was important,” he said. “The pace wasn’t too bad and I think the team did a good job.”



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# MOTUL

Being first non-Porsche home considered a decent result for sole Cadillac



had faltered. Fuel-saving was the name of the game for the Cadillac Racing team, which got through the race on nine pitstops rather than 10 – or even 11 – of the cars around it.

“There was some pretty aggressive fuel-save out there,” said Lynn, who shared the car with Earl Bamber and Sebastien Bourdais. “That was the plan and it definitely worked for us.”

Lynn was under no illusions that Porsche was beatable on Saturday, even if the solo Cadillac had looked like a contender from the beginning of the week: it was the only non-Porsche to top a session. “To come home as best brand after them is a more than decent result after the early delay,” he said. “We had good pace, but not Porsche pace. Fourth was as good as it was going to get.”

Ferrari could say the same about the fifth place collected by its satellite Hypercar entry run by AF Corse and driven by factory contractees Yifei Ye and Robert Shwartzman along with Robert Kubica. The yellow 499P upheld the Italian manufacturer’s honour on a day when the two factory cars were delayed on the way to seventh (#50) and 13th (#51).

The #50 car lost time with two penalties, for pit-entry and refuelling infringements, while #51 lost four minutes in the second hour after its tail section flew off following the lightest of impacts with one of the United Autosports LMGT3 McLarens. It received a couple of penalties too, one for running the Proton Competition Porsche up against the pitwall as it passed the Ferrari on the way to the final point for 10th.

Toyota, meanwhile, wasn’t pleased with sixth and ninth for the #7 and #8 GR010 HYBRIDs that shared out half a dozen victories last year. Even though new Toyota race driver Nyck de Vries pulled

## “We had good pace, but not Porsche pace. Fourth was as good as it was going to get”

something out of the bag to qualify second, the Japanese manufacturer went into the race meeting with a damage-limitation plan. New Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe technical director David Floury reckoned he’d be happy with two cars in the points, though with mission accomplished he didn’t look that way on Saturday night.

Both of the winning manufacturers from 2023 struggled around the 3.37-mile Losail circuit. It was certainly no coincidence that their machinery was up there in the weight stakes under the Balance of Performance published ahead of the Prologue (see *Pit & Paddock*). Toyota was the heaviest car in the field at 1089kg, the Ferrari third heaviest on 1075kg. Or, to put it another way, they hit the scales respectively 41 and 27kg heavier than the Porsche.

Both manufacturers believed that the effect of the weight was greater in Qatar than on the tracks visited by the WEC last year. That was the result of both the layout of Losail and its all-new surface after a major overhaul of the facility.

Toyota suggested that it had reached a tipping point, that the extra 9kg gained since last year had hit the GR010 exponentially. Ferrari couldn’t use the same argument given that the 499P was racing at the same weight as at the end of 2023. But the graining effect of which Stevens talked undoubtedly hit the heavier cars hardest. The more weight, the more the car slides when the tyres are cold, the cause of graining. The way to avoid graining is to warm the tyres slowly with an inevitable time loss.

The characteristics of the Losail venue also played into Peugeot’s hands. It has never been able to make the 9X8 work across a range of circuits, which is why a Mk2 version will arrive at Imola next month. But work the original did in Qatar. The track surface helped, with an absence of bumps on the fine asphalt, as did the proliferation of fast to medium-speed corners and the lack of slow ones. Then there was a bit of help under the BoP: weight was down from 1041 to 1030kg with no change in power, the class maximum of 520kW (697bhp).

As good as the Peugeot was, it wasn’t close to the Porsche. The 963 was, said Vanthoor, “a joy to drive”. It certainly looked that way on the stopwatch. 🏆



Points were welcome, but no celebrations at Toyota over sixth and ninth (#8)

HYPERCAR

LMGT3

# And Porsche also wins new LMGT3 class

*Klaus Bachler, Joel Sturm and Alex Malykhin kept at bay a race-long Aston Martin challenge*

GARY WATKINS

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY JEP  **motorsport**  
**IMAGES**

**P**orsche enjoyed almost the perfect day in Qatar. It added victory in the new LMGT3 class by the Manthey PureRxcing entry to the clean sweep of the overall podium. Klaus Bachler, Joel Sturm and Aliaksandr Malykhin triumphed by just five seconds after nearly 10 hours of racing, but the truth was that the Lithuanian-flagged car was in the pound seats pretty much from the get-go. The car led 235 of the 299 laps the class leaders completed.

Belarusian Malykhin, who lives in Surrey and races under a UK licence, made the difference on Saturday. He is the mandatory bronze-rated driver in the line-up and was the fastest of the ams around the Losail circuit, and by a good half-second. Malykhin, who has joined the WEC from the GT World Challenge Europe, where he was Bronze Cup champion in both the overall classification and the Sprint Cup segment last year, laid down the foundations of the Porsche victory in the opening hours of the Qatar 1812Km.

The 36-year-old got the Manthey car into the lead inside seven laps ahead of Tom van Rompuy in the pole-winning TF Sport Chevrolet Corvette Z06 GT3.R, and went on to build up a lead of half a minute over the course of his opening double stint.

The race boiled down to a battle between the Porsche and the Heart of Racing Aston Martin Vantage GT3 driven by Alex Riberas, Daniel Mancinelli and Ian James. The two cars swapped the lead multiple times through the race courtesy of different strategies. The Prodrive/Aston Martin Racing HoR squad opted to push team boss James through the minimum driving time for a bronze of two hours and 55



minutes at the beginning of the race, and then leave it up to Mancinelli and Riberas. Malykhin, meanwhile, did a pair of double stints either side of one from Sturm, before Bachler got in the car for the first time nearly five hours into the race.

It was nip and tuck between the two cars, and the result might have gone the other way had not Riberas spun early in the seventh hour. The Spaniard tried to make amends for his misdemeanour in the closing stages, whittling down a 20s deficit over the final exchanges.

"To be honest I didn't want to be a hero at the start," said Malykhin, "but after a few laps I saw the Corvette in front of me struggling with the rear tyres." After passing the Corvette for the lead, he continued, "the next job was to keep my rear tyres fresh so I could keep pushing to the end of my stint".

Of his pace that has marked him out as the new Ben Keating – the star bronze in the field – Malykhin stressed the importance of a pair of team-mates with whom he has been driving since last year. "They have helped me become a better driver," he said.





Heart of Racing  
Aston and Manthey  
PureRxcing Porsche  
swapped the lead  
multiple times

## “I didn’t want to be a hero at the start, but after a few laps I saw the Corvette in front struggling”

D’Station Racing Aston driver Marco Sorensen showed the pace of the latest evo version of the Vantage, introduced for this season, in the closing stages. He overhauled Maxime Martin in the best of the WRT BMW M4 GT3s as the clock counted down to take the final spot on the podium.

The D’Station Aston co-driven by Erwan Bastard and Clement Mateu had run third and then second in the hands of the last-named before a delay in the pits dropped it down the order. The car was back into the top 10 by the five-hour mark, and continued its ascent before Bastard and Sorensen single-stinted through the second half of the race. Finally, the Dane pushed on through a final double stint in pursuit of the BMW that Martin shared with Valentino Rossi and Ahmad Al Harthy. He passed Martin with just over 20 laps to go, and was over 12s to the good by the chequered flag.

The Aston and the Porsche were among the fastest of the nine models of LMGT3 car racing on the debut of the new category, though not *the* fastest. That honour fell to the two Ferrari 296 GT3s fielded by AF Corse. Factory drivers Alessio Rovera and Davide Rigon were quickest on the averages, just ahead of Sorensen, though the bronze and silver-ranked drivers in the line-up weren’t quick enough for them to challenge for a podium.

The 296 that Rigon shared with Francesco Castellacci and Thomas Flohr ended up fifth in the class classification, a lap down on the BMW. Sixth went to WRT’s second LMGT3 entry driven by Augusto Farfus, Sean Gelael and Darren Leung.

The challenge from TF Sport quickly faded. Van Rompuy struggled on his Goodyear tyres in the opening stint and went backwards as the



Rossi’s BMW (shared with Al Harthy and Martin) was fourth

first round of stops approached. The car then encountered an issue with the electronic gearshift, after which the team decided to treat the rest of the race as an extended test. When damage to the wiring loom was spotted during a spring change, TF opted to park the car.

The second Porsche, entered under the Manthey EMA banner, ran second to the sister PureRxcing entry early in the race before losing 13 laps when the electronic throttle actuator had to be replaced. The car, shared by Richard Lietz, Morris Schuring and Yasser Shahin, ended up 15th at the finish.

The United Autosports McLaren team failed to get either of its 720S GT3 Evos to the finish cleanly. One car (#59) had to go into the garage for repairs, the other (#95) with a clutch issue. ❄

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RESULTS WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 1/8, LOSAIL (QAT), 2 MARCH (335 LAPS – 1127.638 MILES)					
POS	DRIVERS		TEAM / CAR	CLASS	TIME
1	Laurens <b>Vanthoor</b> (BEL) Kevin <b>Estre</b> (FRA) Andre <b>Lotterer</b> (DEU)		Porsche Penske Motorsport / Porsche 963	Hypercar	9h55m51.926s
2	Will <b>Stevens</b> (GBR) Callum <b>Ilott</b> (GBR) Norman <b>Nato</b> (FRA)		Jota / Porsche 963	Hypercar	+33.297s
3	Michael <b>Christensen</b> (DNK) Matt <b>Campbell</b> (AUS) Frederic <b>Makowiecki</b> (FRA)		Porsche Penske Motorsport / Porsche 963	Hypercar	+34.396s
4	Alex <b>Lynn</b> (GBR) Earl <b>Bamber</b> (NZL) Sebastien <b>Bourdais</b> (FRA)		Cadillac Racing (Ganassi) / Cadillac V-Series.R	Hypercar	-1 lap
5	Robert <b>Kubica</b> (POL) Robert <b>Shwartzman</b> (ISR) Yifei <b>Ye</b> (CHN)		AF Corse / Ferrari 499P	Hypercar	-1 lap
6	Mike <b>Conway</b> (GBR) Kamui <b>Kobayashi</b> (JPN) Nyck <b>de Vries</b> (NLD)		Toyota Gazoo Racing / Toyota GR010 HYBRID	Hypercar	-1 lap
7	Miguel <b>Molina</b> (ESP) Antonio <b>Fuoco</b> (ITA) Nicklas <b>Nielsen</b> (DNK)		Ferrari AF Corse / Ferrari 499P	Hypercar	-2 laps
8	Ferdinand <b>Habsburg</b> (AUT) Paul-Loup <b>Chatin</b> (FRA) Charles <b>Milesi</b> (FRA)		Alpine Endurance Team (Signatech) / Alpine A424	Hypercar	-2 laps
9	Sebastien <b>Buemi</b> (CHE) Brendon <b>Hartley</b> (NZL) Ryo <b>Hirakawa</b> (JPN)		Toyota Gazoo Racing / Toyota GR010 HYBRID	Hypercar	-2 laps
10	Neel <b>Jani</b> (CHE) Harry <b>Tincknell</b> (GBR) Julien <b>Andlauer</b> (FRA)		Proton Competition / Porsche 963	Hypercar	-2 laps
11	Rene <b>Rast</b> (DEU) Sheldon <b>van der Linde</b> (ZAF) Robin <b>Frijns</b> (NLD)		BMW M Team WRT / BMW M Hybrid V8	Hypercar	-3 laps
12	Nicolas <b>Lapierre</b> (FRA) Mick <b>Schumacher</b> (DEU) Matthieu <b>Vaxiviere</b> (FRA)		Alpine Endurance Team (Signatech) / Alpine A424	Hypercar	-3 laps
13	James <b>Calado</b> (GBR) Alessandro <b>Pier Guidi</b> (ITA) Antonio <b>Giovinazzi</b> (ITA)		Ferrari AF Corse / Ferrari 499P	Hypercar	-3 laps
14	Daniil <b>Kvyat</b> (RUS) Mirko <b>Bortolotti</b> (ITA) Edoardo <b>Mortara</b> (CHE)		Lamborghini Iron Lynx / Lamborghini SC63	Hypercar	-5 laps
15	Marco <b>Wittmann</b> (DEU) Dries <b>Vanthoor</b> (BEL) Raffaele <b>Marciello</b> (ITA)		BMW M Team WRT / BMW M Hybrid V8	Hypercar	-8 laps
16	Paul <b>di Resta</b> (GBR) Loïc <b>Duval</b> (FRA) Stoffel <b>Vandoorne</b> (BEL)		Peugeot TotalEnergies / Peugeot 9X8	Hypercar	-19 laps
17	Alex <b>Malykhin</b> (BLR) Joel <b>Sturm</b> (DEU) Klaus <b>Bachler</b> (AUT)		Manthey PureRxcing / Porsche 911 GT3-R	LMGT3	-36 laps
18	Ian <b>James</b> (GBR) Daniel <b>Mancinelli</b> (ITA) Alex <b>Riberas</b> (ESP)		Heart of Racing Team (Prodrive) / Aston Martin Vantage GT3	LMGT3	-36 laps
19	Clement <b>Mateu</b> (FRA) Erwan <b>Bastard</b> (FRA) Marco <b>Sorensen</b> (DNK)		D’Sation Racing (Prodrive) / Aston Martin Vantage GT3	LMGT3	-37 laps
20	Ahmad <b>Al Harthy</b> (OMN) Valentino <b>Rossi</b> (ITA) Maxime <b>Martin</b> (BEL)		Team WRT / BMW M4 GT3	LMGT3	-37 laps
21	Thomas <b>Flohr</b> (CHE) Francesco <b>Castellacci</b> (ITA) Davide <b>Rigon</b> (ITA)		Vista AF Corse / Ferrari 296 GT3	LMGT3	-38 laps
22	Darren <b>Leung</b> (GBR) Sean <b>Gelael</b> (IDN) Augusto <b>Farfus</b> (BRA)		Team WRT / BMW M4 GT3	LMGT3	-38 laps
23	Francois <b>Heriau</b> (FRA) Simon <b>Mann</b> (USA) Alessio <b>Rovera</b> (ITA)		Vista AF Corse / Ferrari 296 GT3	LMGT3	-38 laps
24	Sarah <b>Bovy</b> (BEL) Doriane <b>Pin</b> (FRA) Michelle <b>Gatting</b> (DNK)		Iron Dames (Iron Lynx) / Lamborghini Huracan GT3 EVO2	LMGT3	-40 laps
25	Giorgio <b>Roda</b> (ITA) Mikkel <b>Overgaard Pedersen</b> (DNK) Dennis <b>Olsen</b> (NOR)		Proton Competition / Ford Mustang GT3	LMGT3	-41 laps
26	Hiroshi <b>Koizumi</b> (JPN) Sebastien <b>Baud</b> (FRA) Daniel <b>Juncadella</b> (ESP)		TF Sport / Chevrolet Corvette Z06 GT3.R	LMGT3	-41 laps
27	Zacharie <b>Robichon</b> (CAN) Ryan <b>Hardwick</b> (USA) Ben <b>Barker</b> (GBR)		Proton Competition / Ford Mustang GT3	LMGT3	-42 laps
28	Claudio <b>Schiavoni</b> (ITA) Matteo <b>Cressoni</b> (ITA) Franck <b>Perera</b> (FRA)		Iron Lynx / Lamborghini Huracan GT3 EVO2	LMGT3	-44 laps
29	Josh <b>Caygill</b> (GBR) Nico <b>Pino</b> (CHL) Marino <b>Sato</b> (JPN)		United Autosports / McLaren 720S GT3 Evo	LMGT3	-51 laps
30	Nicolas <b>Costa</b> (BRA) James <b>Cottingham</b> (GBR) Gregoire <b>Saucy</b> (CHE)		United Autosports / McLaren 720S GT3 Evo	LMGT3	-51 laps
31	Yasser <b>Shahin</b> (AUS) Morris <b>Schuring</b> (NLD) Richard <b>Lietz</b> (AUT)		Manthey EMA / Porsche 911 GT3-R	LMGT3	-51 laps
32	Takeshi <b>Kimura</b> (JPN) Esteban <b>Masson</b> (FRA) Jose Maria <b>Lopez</b> (ARG)		AKKODIS ASP Team / Lexus RC F GT3	LMGT3	-62 laps
R	Phil <b>Hanson</b> (GBR) Jenson <b>Button</b> (GBR) Oliver <b>Rasmussen</b> (DNK)		Jota / Porsche 963	Hypercar	309 laps-hybrid/electrical
R	Arnold <b>Robin</b> (FRA) Timur <b>Boguslavskiy</b> (RUS) Kelvin <b>van der Linde</b> (ZAF)		AKKODIS ASP Team / Lexus RC F GT3	LMGT3	249 laps-engine
R	Tom <b>van Rompuy</b> (BEL) Rui <b>Andrade</b> (PRT) Charlie <b>Eastwood</b> (GBR)		TF Sport / Chevrolet Corvette Z06 GT3.R	LMGT3	177 laps-wiring loom/withdrawn
R	Jean-Karl <b>Vernay</b> (FRA) Antonio <b>Serravalle</b> (CAN) Carl <b>Bennett</b> (USA)		Isotta Fraschini / Isotta Fraschini Tipo 6 Competizione LMH	Hypercar	157 laps-suspension mounting
EX	Nico <b>Muller</b> (CHE) Mikkel <b>Jensen</b> (DNK) Jean-Eric <b>Vergne</b> (FRA)		Peugeot TotalEnergies / Peugeot 9X8	Hypercar	334 laps

In each car, first-named driver started the race. **Winners’ average speed** 113.546mph. **Fastest lap** Campbell 1m39.748s, 121.503mph. **LMGT3** Rovera 1m53.529s, 106.754mph.

QUALIFYING

**1 Campbell 1m39.347s; 2 de Vries**  
1m39.511s; **3 Ilott** 1m39.622s; **4 Fuoco**  
1m39.976s; **5 Estre** 1m39.981s; **6 Vergne**  
1m40.067s; **7 Lynn** 1m40.103s; **8 Giovinazzi**  
1m40.224s; **9 Button** 1m40.362s;  
**10 Vandoorne** 1m40.504s; **11 Hartley**  
1m40.586s; **12 Ye** 1m40.634s; **13 Andlauer**  
1m40.675s; **14 Lapierre** 1m40.682s;  
**15 Marciello** 1m40.702s; **16 S van der Linde**  
1m40.738s; **17 Chatin** 1m40.984s; **18 Kvyat**  
1m41.699s; **19 Vernay** 1m43.189s; **20 van Rompuy** 1m54.372s; **21 Malykhin** 1m55.179s;  
**22 Flohr** 1m55.182s; **23 Mateu** 1m55.184s;  
**24 James** 1m55.320s; **25 Bovy** 1m55.340s;

**26 Cottingham** 1m55.524s; **27 Caygill**  
1m55.836s; **28 Al Harthy** 1m56.028s;  
**29 Heriau** 1m56.596s; **30 Koizumi** 1m56.586s;  
**31 Roda** 1m56.650s; **32 Shahin** 1m56.650s;  
**33 Leung** 1m56.770s; **34 Robin** 1m57.117s;  
**35 Kimura** 1m57.920s; **36 Schiavoni** 1m59.792s;  
**37 Hardwick** notime.

CHAMPIONSHIP  
Hypercar drivers

**1 Lotterer/Estre/L Vanthoor 38; 2 Ilott/ Nato/Stevens 27; 3 Makowiecki/Campbell/ Christensen 24; 4 Lynn/Bamber/Bourdais**  
**18; 5 Kubica/Shwartzman/Ye 15;**  
**6 Kobayashi/Conway/de Vries 12.**



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

**Hypercar manufacturers**  
**1 Porsche 39; 2 Cadillac 23; 3 Toyota**  
**18; 4 Ferrari 15; 5 Alpine 12; 6 BMW 6;**  
**7 Lamborghini 0; 8 Peugeot 0;**  
**9 Isotta Fraschini 0.**

**LMGT3 drivers**  
**1 Malykhin/Sturm/Bachler 38; 2 Riberas/ Mancinelli/James 27; 3 Mateu/Bastard/Sorensen**  
**23; 4 Al Harthy/Martin/Rossi 18; 5 Rigon/ Castellacci/Flohr 15; 6 Farfus/Leung/Gelael 12.**

Maloney ensured that the Sauber livery spent a lot of time at the front in Bahrain

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY  
motorsport  
IMAGES

SUTTON

## F2's West Indian talent bowls a couple of fast ones

**FORMULA 2**  
**SAKHIR (BHR)**  
**1-2 MARCH**  
**ROUND 1/14**

Zane Maloney banished memories of a difficult 2023 Formula 2 campaign, which ended with his dropping off the Red Bull Junior programme, by joining an exclusive club of drivers to win two races on the same weekend in the series. The Rodin Motorsport driver, now a protege of Sauber, put in a pair of drives in Bahrain that showcased a wide range of skills.

After polewinner Kush Maini was disqualified from the session when his left undertray's front external strake was found to be below the required height on his Invicta Racing entry – this blamed on a heavy kerb strike – Maloney was promoted to third for the feature race grid. The negative was that this pushed the Barbadian back in the reversed-grid order to eighth.

Jak Crawford and Taylor Barnard started the sprint race from the front row, but

Barnard endured a woeful getaway and his PHM Racing car dropped to the fringes of the top 10 on the run to Turn 1, the Briton later forced to retire with a reliability issue.

Although DAMS driver Crawford was composed in the lead and went unchallenged during a safety car restart, Maloney had flown through the field and was on the American's gearbox by lap eight. Aware of the threat following the DRS zone on the run to Turn 4, Crawford covered the inside line, but Maloney had been wise to this and executed a textbook switchback, assuming the lead as the pair powered to the Turns 5-6-7 esses. Maloney eventually crossed the line with a five-second margin to Crawford, with Campos Racing's Pepe Marti rising from 11th on the grid to secure an unlikely podium.

Maini's qualifying exclusion elevated his Invicta team-mate Gabriel Bortoleto to feature race pole. But the McLaren F1 protege, who had finished the sprint in sixth, got a poor start, then tipped fellow front-row man Isack Hadjar (Campos Racing) into a spin at the first corner.

The helpless Hadjar (fourth in the sprint) was clobbered by Enzo Fittipaldi, forcing both out and triggering a safety car interlude. Bortoleto, who had a damaged front wing, was given a 10s penalty to serve at his pitstop.

Maloney, one of the few drivers to start on the soft tyre, had already leapt ahead of both front-row starters, and at the restart he streaked clear of the pack. On the same strategy were Marti, who got up to second, and Crawford, who rose to fourth before his day ended when his car failed to launch following his mandatory pitstop.

With the soft tyres holding on surprisingly well on the abrasive Bahrain surface, Maloney and Marti left it late to pit. They stopped just after Victor Martins – who appeared to be in a position to leap up the order thanks to a big undercut via an early stop to replace his hard Pirellis with softs – had pulled his ART-run car to the side of the track, causing another safety car.

Zak O'Sullivan had risen to second for the restart. The Briton, on his F2 debut with ART, had gone for the alternative choice of hard tyres for the sprint, but that didn't work and he had dropped to seventh. After also starting the feature on hards, and hanging on nicely in third, he was now on softs and looked to be in a prime spot to deny Maloney a double. But Maloney fired up his hard rubber and pulled away to win by 4.6s from Marti, while Paul Aron rose from 12th to finish third, to add to his fifth place in the sprint race. O'Sullivan only just held on to claim fourth from Bortoleto.

Prema pair Andrea Kimi Antonelli and Ollie Bearman had a disastrous weekend, Antonelli claiming the only point with 10th.

**SAM HALL**



Barbadian has raced into clear series lead

GALLOWAY

# Browning and Lindblad on top in Bahrain

**FORMULA 3**  
**SAKHIR (BHR)**  
**1-2 MARCH**  
**ROUND 1/10**

Luke Browning took an early lead in the Formula 3 championship standings after following up fellow Briton Arvid Lindblad's sprint race victory with success of his own in Saturday's Bahrain feature event.

After his success in last November's Macau Grand Prix, Williams F1 junior Browning entered the 2024 season as one of the favourites to top the order. And despite a rocky ride in Friday's sprint race, the Hitech driver stamped his authority on the feature event.

Browning's qualifying position of second for the feature race meant he lined up 11th for the sprint. It is not uncommon for the jeopardy of a midfield placing to catch out drivers quicker than those around them, and this was the case for the 22-year-old. He made up two positions early on, but found himself stuck in a DRS train and began to lose touch with the lead pack. Keen to get back in the mix, Browning pulled off an audacious Turn 4 outside move on Christian Mansell and Sami Meguetounif. But in the process, he completed the move *just* off the track, and was handed a 10-second penalty. Browning crossed the line in ninth, but dropped to 15th in the final results.

At the front, ART stablemates Laurens van Hoepen and Nikola Tsolov failed to play the team game to establish a gap and paid the price late on when Prema Racing's Red Bull Junior Lindblad, up from an early fifth, took the lead with three laps remaining.



Browning leads from Meguetounif, Tramnitz and Mansell in feature

While van Hoepen was able to hold on to finish second, Tsolov dropped behind Trident driver Leonardo Fornaroli on the penultimate tour.

Dino Beganovic had topped qualifying and therefore started the sprint from 12th. The Swedish Ferrari protege made contact with Santiago Ramos and was forced to pit at the end of the opening lap with a puncture. The feature race did nothing to improve the Prema driver's mood – Beganovic bogged down at the start and dropped to the back of the field before reaching the first braking zone.

But from here, Beganovic starred. Despite having to overtake half the field, he lost less than 0.1s to winner Browning from the end of lap one to the finish on his recovery to 13th. But it meant he departed Bahrain with just two points for pole.

This left Browning to head into the first corner unchallenged and allowed him to build an early lead, breaking free from the DRS threat. He then fell back into the chasing pack as quickly as he

had dropped them, and later revealed that this had all been part of the plan to conserve his tyres for a late push. There was mid-race concern when his engine began to sound rough, but it was nothing more than a problem with the heat shielding surrounding his exhaust.

From eighth on the grid, Mansell pulled off a succession of excellent overtaking moves, favouring the tight Turn 8, to rise to second ahead of Meguetounif on the fifth lap. The Australian held off the French Trident driver, who was then demoted by MP Motorsport's Tim Tramnitz with four laps to go. Ramos (Trident), Gabriele Mini (Prema), Fornaroli and Lindblad were next, all part of the lead DRS train for most of the race.

**SAM HALL**

## WEEKEND WINNERS

**FORMULA 2**  
**SAKHIR (BHR)**  
**Races 1 & 2** Zane Maloney  
Rodin Motorsport

**FORMULA 3**  
**SAKHIR (BHR)**  
**Race 1** Arvid Lindblad  
Prema Racing  
**Race 2** Luke Browning  
Hitech GP

**NASCAR CUP**  
**LAS VEGAS (USA)**  
Kyle Larson  
Hendrick Motorsports (Chevrolet Camaro)



For full results visit [motorsportstats.com](https://motorsportstats.com)



Lindblad (3) zaps Tramnitz on his rise up the order to sprint race victory

INDYCAR

# ANOTHER NEW START FOR GROSJEAN

*The post-F1 IndyCar career hasn't gone as planned to date. So how does the Frenchman rate his chances with series minnow Juncos Hollinger Racing?*

JOEY BARNES

**R**omain Grosjean has developed a knack of fast starts to the season during his short time in the IndyCar Series. Four of his five runner-up results have come before June, after all. The Swiss-born Frenchman is simmering any early expectations of winning with his new team, Juncos Hollinger Racing, but believes all the ingredients are there to progress and craft strong results.

Ex-Formula 1 veteran Grosjean made the switch over to JHR during the off season following a two-year stint with Andretti Autosport. Since becoming a full-time squad in the IndyCar Series in 2022, JHR has expanded from one to two cars, and steadily improved from breaking into the top 10 to scoring a brace of top-fives last year with Callum Ilott, who Grosjean has replaced in the Chevrolet-powered team's #77 car for 2024.

It also doesn't hurt that during the off-season, JHR was able add some papaya to its diet after forming a strategic alliance with Arrow McLaren. This concept has steadily become a trend in the series, with Meyer Shank Racing establishing a technical tie-up with Andretti Global, and AJ Foyt Racing following a similar relationship with Team Penske.





*“I’m realistic of where we are and what we need to do. But we’ll make sure we seize every opportunity”*

Even though everything appears to be trending in the right direction, Grosjean remains hesitant to declare the top step of the podium as an option when the season begins this weekend on the streets of St Petersburg. “Well, I think it may be early to speak about wins,” says the 37-year-old. “For sure we’re going to try to do everything we can, but we also have to be realistic that we are up and coming. The team has been doing really good for the past few years, but it’s still a three-year-old team. So, a lot to do, but I think everyone is very motivated and very aware of what we can achieve and what we cannot achieve. That’s good. We’re definitely going to try to be in the top 10 at first and then see if we can do top five and even more. But step by step, we know where we are, and we know where we want to go.”

Grosjean, who has three IndyCar poles to his credit, also acknowledges that one of the hurdles he needs to overcome is finishing at the Indianapolis 500 – he has crashed out early in both his appearances. “At least to try to see the chequered flag would be a good start,” he reckons.

JHR is Grosjean’s third team in a four-year span in IndyCar since he broke onto the scene with Dale Coyne Racing for a partial campaign in 2021. “Obviously, it’s always a challenge,” he admits. “There’s always things we need to adapt. But as I say, everyone is super-open-minded. I’m excited to see what we can do together. I’m realistic of where we are and what we need to do. But it’s IndyCar, and everything can happen on track. We’ll make sure that we seize every opportunity that we can.”

One of the biggest hurdles is the looming mid-season switch to the hybrid power unit coming some time after the Indy 500. To date only four teams – Andretti Global, Arrow McLaren, Chip Ganassi Racing and Team Penske – have been testing it. JHR is among the rest of the teams tentatively scheduled to get their first run with the hybrid in late March at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course. Needless to say, Grosjean is among those not bothered to see it delayed.

“For us, it was tricky,” he says. “It was an advantage for some that was pretty significant, and when we were doing the drivers’ meeting early in December, the guys were asking a question about the hybrid, and I had no idea what they were talking about. Definitely kind of happy that it’s been postponed. It’s also going to allow us to start with a known concept on the car and move from



MILLER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

there and see when the hybrid comes in, and hopefully by then we do have a lot more knowledge on it.”

Reflecting on his time with Andretti, which admittedly fell short of aspirations for victories or contending for the title, Grosjean is still able to take the positives from the experience. “Well, I think we tried, and we had a lot of belief that we could fight for the championship, and we did not achieve that,” he says. “I had an amazing time with some great characters over the last two years, made a lot of good friends. But right now, I’m more interested in focusing on 2024 and seeing what we can do with Juncos Hollinger Racing than moaning about the past. A lot of good times, a lot of good positions, podiums. It just didn’t play out our way. But the next chapter is the important one.”

**P48 WHAT TO WATCH IN INDYCAR**



INDYCAR

# WHAT TO WATCH IN INDYCAR

*Alex Palou guns for a third title, but Scott Dixon's going for a seventh...  
And there are plenty of other changes to get your American open-wheel teeth into*

JOEY BARNES

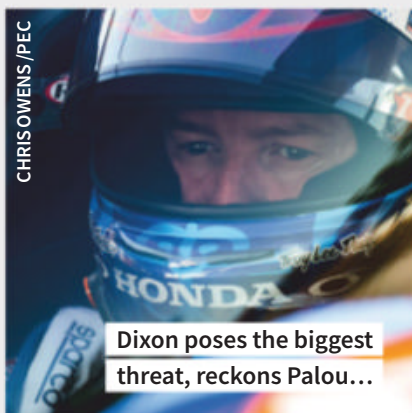


## PALOU VERSUS EVERYBODY

Alex Palou was in a class of his own in 2023, locking up the IndyCar title at the penultimate round – which last happened in Champ Car days in 2007 with Sebastien Bourdais – after putting together a historic run with Chip Ganassi Racing that featured an average finish of 3.7 courtesy of five wins, five further podiums and no finish worse than eighth in 17 races.

Now the Spaniard, who has hoisted the Astor Cup Trophy twice over the past three seasons, is hoping to replicate a different type of history by becoming the first driver to successfully defend his crown and go back to back since Dario Franchitti pulled off his wondrous hat-trick from 2009-11. With rivals lurking around every corner, though, it's obviously easier said than done.

It's impossible to ignore Team Penske, which as ever is firmly set to make a run with two-time champion and 2023 Indianapolis 500 winner Josef Newgarden, another two-time series title winner and Indy 500 victor in the form of Will Power, and last year's third-place points man Scott McLaughlin. Arrow McLaren's Pato O'Ward has been relentlessly chipping away in the 'best of the rest' category the past few years, and is poised for a breakthrough after



CHRISOWENS/PEC

Dixon poses the biggest threat, reckons Palou...

a winless 2023 that ended with a career-best seven podiums (second only to Palou).

After breaking out with two wins in his first year with the Andretti team in 2023, Kyle Kirkwood is among those who are poised to take another step forward. Colton Herta, Kirkwood's team-mate, will be hungry to bounce back after an underwhelming year with no wins and only one podium. Similarly, Andretti newcomer and 2022 Indy 500 winner Marcus Ericsson will be out to prove that Chip Ganassi Racing made a mistake by letting him walk.

Although Palou will have a watchful eye on everyone, his biggest threat is likely within his own Ganassi stable in six-time series champion Scott Dixon, who surged with

three wins in the final four races to finish runner-up in last year's title race.

"Even on the worst days [Dixon's] always there," says 26-year-old Palou. "It will be tough. I think he found something towards the end of the season as we saw with the results they got. Hopefully, he forgot about that stuff... Then outside [Ganassi], Newgarden. He's the same as Dixon, that even on the bad days he's able to get the maximum out of the car. I think he was a bit unlucky during last season, but he's always a threat."



JOESKIBINSKI/PEC

Already a double champion, Palou now wants back-to-back titles



CHRIS OWENS/PEC



...and has the momentum of last year's late surge in race-winning form

JOESKIBINSKI/PEC

## SHAKE-UP TO THE SCHEDULE

Thermal Club race is non-points TV special



CHRIS JONES/PEC

The schedule for the IndyCar Series has a dramatically different look compared to last year. There is a non-points made-for-television event later this month with the \$1Million Challenge at The Thermal Club, a facility near Palm Springs, California that hosted 2023 Spring Training on its 19-turn, three-mile layout. The Milwaukee Mile is back for the first time since 2015 and will be the penultimate round of the 17-race championship.

The 2024 season finale was originally supposed to take place on the streets of downtown Nashville. But the impact of construction surrounding the area due to the new stadium being built for the NFL's Tennessee Titans forced a switch to nearby Nashville

Superspeedway, a 1.33-mile concrete oval the series competed on from 2001-08. The last time that IndyCar finished the season on an oval was 2014 at Fontana.

Laguna Seca, which held the season finale for three of the past five years, has been moved to June. Additionally, the series will only run once around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course, in May, after dropping its summer date that was shared with NASCAR.

With these changes comes a cost, though, and one of the more significant is the loss of Texas Motor Speedway, which had been a pillar of the schedule since 1997. The combination of the Summer Olympics matched with NASCAR shifting its date created a conflict that led to TMS being dropped, but leaving the door open for a return in 2025.

**“A SIGNIFICANT LOSS IS TEXAS MOTOR SPEEDWAY, A PILLAR OF THE SCHEDULE SINCE 1997”**



Nashville oval replaces street race for finale

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

SEASON  
PREVIEW



Introducing hybrid tech mid-season “will be very interesting”, says Power...

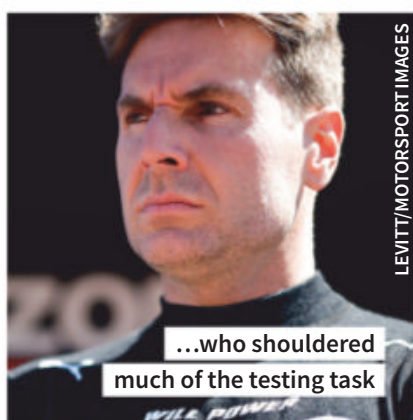
CHRIS JONES/PEC

## IMPACT FROM THE HYBRID DELAY

The introduction of a new hybrid power unit was going to deliver a number of factors to the 2024 championship, but now the drivers and teams of the IndyCar Series face unprecedented circumstances with it scheduled for a mid-season release some time after the Indianapolis 500 on 26 May.

The hybrid power unit, which is a collaboration between Chevrolet and Honda, is a system that is being added to the current 2.2-litre twin-turbocharged V6 engine. The system consists of a motor generator unit and energy storage system, which are both placed inside the bellhousing. While push-to-pass will still be available on road and street circuits with the hybrid, the strategy of automatic or manual deployment following regeneration of power, which has been tested on ovals and road courses, remains unknown.

Team Penske’s Will Power, who has been the workhorse of the testing effort, believes that having the new unit integrated in the midst of a season will have an impact on the title race.



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

...who shouldered much of the testing task

“It will be very interesting,” says the Australian. “There’s no question that it’s going to be a factor in the championship. Obviously, the weight distribution changes, the weight of the car goes up. You have this hybrid system that you have to use as efficiently as possible. So people will be learning through those races how to extract the most out of the system, which is a good thing. It’ll make for a very interesting championship.”

Through the end of February, only Arrow McLaren, Andretti Global, Chip Ganassi Racing and Team Penske have been part of the hybrid testing programme. They combined for 2656 miles logged in a recent two-day test in February, along with another 15,256 miles during the

final three months at multiple tracks last year.

The rest of the teams – AJ Foyt Racing, Dale Coyne Racing, Ed Carpenter Racing, Juncos Hollinger Racing, Meyer Shank Racing and Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing – are tentatively scheduled for their first taste of the new power unit on 28-29 March at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course.

## FRESH FACES IN NEW PLACES

There have been several off-season changes to the driver rosters up and down the grid. Marcus Ericsson was among the big names to move elsewhere, opting for a switch from Chip Ganassi Racing to an Andretti Global programme that has scaled down from four cars to three. In turn, Romain Grosjean parted ways from Andretti in favour of Juncos Hollinger Racing, replacing Callum Ilott.

Although CGR lost out on retaining Ericsson, the squad will run five cars



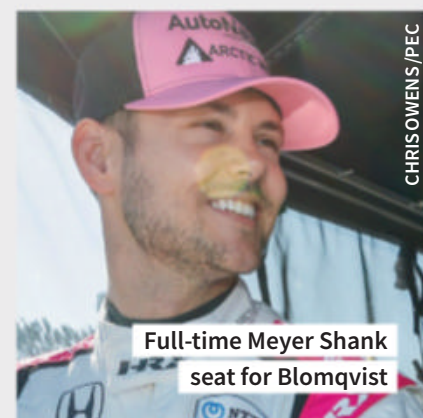
Ericsson has switched from Ganassi to Andretti

JOESKIBINSKI/PEC

full-time, including two rookies: 2022 Indy Lights champion Linus Lundqvist, and Kyffin Simpson. Meanwhile, Marcus Armstrong is elevated after a partial 2023 IndyCar campaign that ended with top rookie honours.

Speaking of rookies, Tom Blomqvist will compete full-time with Meyer Shank Racing. He will be alongside Felix Rosenqvist, who vacated his seat at Arrow McLaren at the end of 2023 that has now been filled by David Malukas following two years at Dale Coyne Racing. Malukas’s former team-mate, Sting Ray Robb, also left DCR, opting to spend his sophomore year with AJ Foyt Racing.

Christian Rasmussen, the 2023 Indy NXT champion, is set for a partial season with Ed Carpenter Racing, which includes a road and street course programme and a shot at the Indianapolis 500. And the legendary Fittipaldi name returns to the sport with Pietro – grandson of two-time Indy 500 winner and Indycar champion Emerson – driving Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing’s third entry.



CHRISOWENS/PEC

Full-time Meyer Shank seat for Blomqvist



Kyle Larson has been regarded by many, including several motorsports legends, as a generational talent. Combine that with opportunity, and history could potentially be rewritten when he makes his IndyCar debut at this year's Indianapolis 500. Even more than that, the California native is also participating in NASCAR's 600-mile Cup race at Charlotte Motor Speedway on the same day in what is known as 'The Double' on Memorial Day Weekend.

Larson, 31, has spent the past year getting up to speed with an IndyCar courtesy of Arrow McLaren, with which he will race a fourth entry in the 500 in partnership with his NASCAR team owner Rick Hendrick. He will become the fifth driver to attempt the feat, but first since Kurt Busch in 2014. John Andretti, Robby Gordon and Tony Stewart also made runs. Stewart's 2001 effort remains the most successful to date, finishing sixth in the Indy 500 and third at Charlotte, and he remains the only driver to complete all 1100 miles.

“I FEEL LIKE I’M A GRASSROOTS TYPE OF RACER, EVEN THOUGH I RACE ON SUNDAY IN THE CUP SERIES”

“I think everybody is really excited about it,” says 2021 Cup champion Larson. “It’s a rare thing. I think that brings a lot of eyes and stuff to what’s going on. I feel like I’m a grassroots type of racer. Even though I race on Sunday in the Cup Series, I still feel like I resonate with the local short track fans. That’s what gets people liking me.”

“I know I’ve got a lot of support on the fan side of things. I’m sure the whole NASCAR garage will be paying attention to how my couple weeks is going there. That’s all fun. Yeah, I look forward to it.”



INDYCAR ENTRY LIST

NO	DRIVER	TEAM	ENGINE
2	Josef Newgarden (USA)	Team Penske	Chevrolet
3	Scott McLaughlin (NZL)	Team Penske	Chevrolet
12	Will Power (AUS)	Team Penske	Chevrolet
4	Kyffin Simpson (CYM)	Chip Ganassi Racing	Honda
8	Linus Lundqvist (SWE)	Chip Ganassi Racing	Honda
9	Scott Dixon (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing	Honda
10	Alex Palou (ESP)	Chip Ganassi Racing	Honda
11	Marcus Armstrong (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing	Honda
5	Pato O’Ward (MEX)	Arrow McLaren	Chevrolet
6	David Malukas (USA)	Arrow McLaren	Chevrolet****
7	Alexander Rossi (USA)	Arrow McLaren	Chevrolet
17	Kyle Larson (USA)	McLaren-Hendrick	Chevrolet*
06	Helio Castroneves (BRA)	Meyer Shank Racing	Honda*
60	Felix Rosenqvist (SWE)	Meyer Shank Racing	Honda
66	Tom Blomqvist (GBR)	Meyer Shank Racing	Honda
14	Santino Ferrucci (USA)	AJ Foyt Racing	Chevrolet
41	Sting Ray Robb (USA)	AJ Foyt Racing	Chevrolet
15	Graham Rahal (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing	Honda
30	Pietro Fittipaldi (BRA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing	Honda
45	Christian Lundgaard (DNK)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing	Honda
75	Takuma Sato (JPN)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing	Honda*
18	Jack Harvey (GBR)	Dale Coyne Racing	Honda
51	Colin Braun (USA)	Dale Coyne Racing	Honda
20	Christian Rasmussen (DNK)	Ed Carpenter Racing	Chevrolet***
20	Ed Carpenter (USA)	Ed Carpenter Racing	Chevrolet**
21	Rinus VeeKay (NLD)	Ed Carpenter Racing	Chevrolet
23	Ryan Hunter-Reay (USA)	Dreyer & Reinbold Racing	Chevrolet*
24	Conor Daly (USA)	Dreyer & Reinbold Racing	Chevrolet*
26	Colton Herta (USA)	Andretti Global	Honda
27	Kyle Kirkwood (USA)	Andretti Global	Honda
28	Marcus Ericsson (SWE)	Andretti Global	Honda
98	Marco Andretti (USA)	Andretti Global	Honda*
50	RC Enerson (USA)	Abel Motorsports	Chevrolet*
77	Romain Grosjean (FRA)	Juncos Hollinger Racing	Chevrolet
78	Agustin Canapino (ARG)	Juncos Hollinger Racing	Chevrolet

- \* Indianapolis 500 only
- \*\* Ovals only
- \*\*\* Partial programme
- \*\*\*\* Expected to be replaced by Callum Ilott for St Petersburg due to injury

INDYCAR CALENDAR

RD	VENUE	DATE	RD	VENUE	DATE
1	St Petersburg	10 March	8	Laguna Seca	23 June
NC	The Thermal Club	24 March	9	Mid-Ohio	7 July
2	Long Beach	21 April	10	Iowa Speedway	13-14 July
3	Barber Motorsports Park	28 April	11	Toronto	21 July
4	Indianapolis GP	11 May	12	St Louis	17 August
5	Indianapolis 500	26 May	13	Portland	25 August
6	Detroit	2 June	14	Milwaukee	31 August-1 September
7	Road America	9 June	15	Nashville	15 September



MOTOGP

# AND HERE COMES MARQUEZ ON A DUCATI...

*It's a dream ticket, and a potential nightmare for his rivals, as the eight-time world champion prepares to race for the manufacturer that achieved a record win rate last year*

LEWIS DUNCAN

PHOTOGRAPHY GOLD AND GOOSE



**T**he greatest rider of his generation is now on machinery from the dominant manufacturer. Is Marc Marquez ready to banish his recent struggles for Honda and reclaim his crown?

As Orwell once wrote, 'there's time for everything except the things worth doing'. In Marquez's case, the thing worth doing is being competitive again on a MotoGP bike. And time is not something he has infinite amounts of.

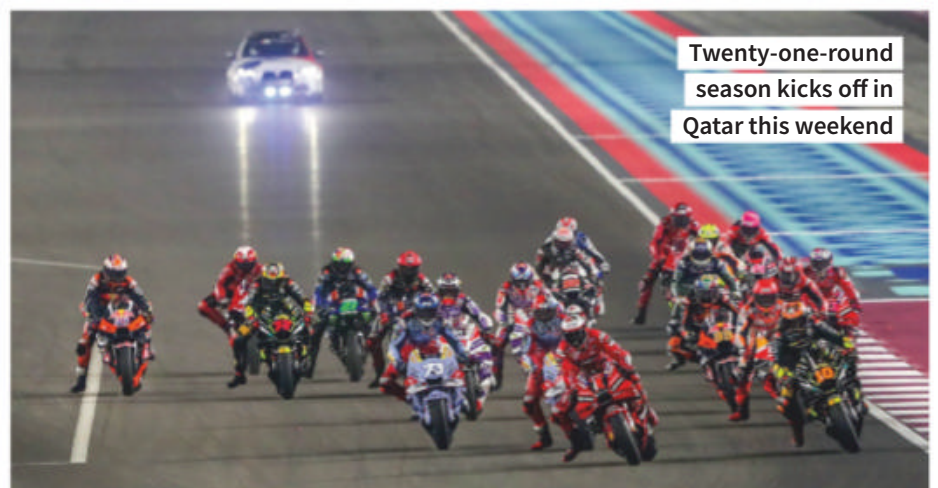
At 31 years old, Marquez is at least halfway through his MotoGP career, and for the past four seasons he has found himself facing myriad adversity. The badly broken arm in 2020 gave way to a season on the sidelines, and he was injury-plagued in 2021 and 2022, while his massive personal risk to go for a fourth major operation on his arm in 2022 was not matched in effort by Honda to give him a competitive bike last season.

Winless since 2021, when he was on a bike with which he very likely could have fought for the championship with a fully functioning right arm, Marquez came to a crossroads last year when the RC213V showed little form, and the initial 2024 prototype given to him at the post-race Misano test in September did nothing to improve confidence.

"I'm a winner and I'm a killer and I will try to do my best to try to fight at the top," said Marquez, whose move to Gresini Racing on a year-old satellite Ducati was necessary if he has any hope of stopping too much time passing him by.



Is it possible there's been some pre-season sandbagging by Marquez?



Twenty-one-round season kicks off in Qatar this weekend

And naturally, it's been the biggest talking point of the winter. His debut on the bike in the Valencia test turned heads, though the recent outings in Malaysia and Qatar brought some reality to the situation. Five days to unlearn 11 years of Honda tuition on a wildly different motorcycle has left Marquez coming into the 2024 campaign with his feet on the ground.

"It's always in racing we say the last three tenths are the most difficult ones," the eight-time world champion said at the end of the Qatar test. "So, it's there where I am now. I'm two, three tenths, even four sometimes, behind the top guys. And now I have to understand how to be closer."

On that final day of running in Qatar, Marquez had his first crash on the bike as he finally thrashed it. On single-lap pace, he was fourth overall, albeit 0.383 seconds off the best time. Long-run pace was solid in Malaysia, but hard to determine in Qatar based on available data. But even on average lap times from his short three-lap stint, he lagged some way behind.

"Still there are three, four, five riders faster than us, especially [Jorge] Martin, [Francesco] Bagnaia, [Enea] Bastianini are faster

***"It's always in racing we say the last three tenths are the most difficult ones. So, it's there where I am now"***

than us," was Marquez's summary at the end of testing.

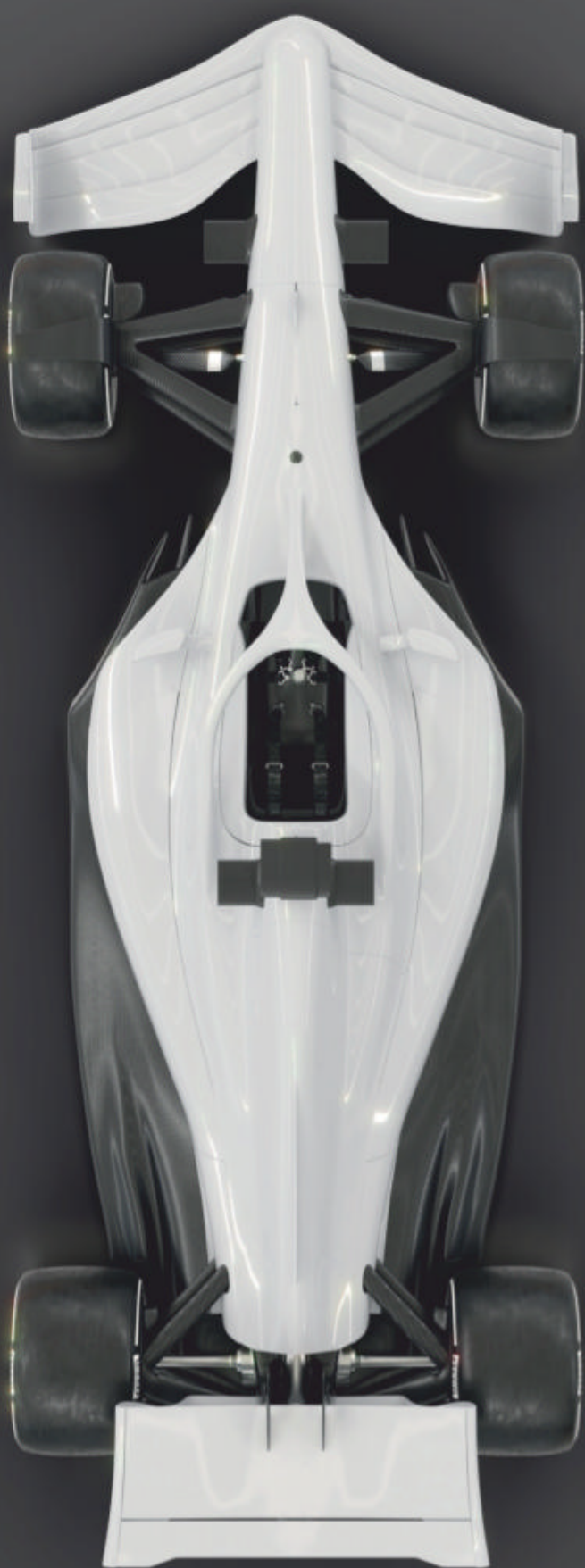
Marquez has always said – publicly at least – that his aim coming into 2024 is not solely the title. After the past few years, he just needs to know whether he can be competitive again. Few doubt he will be, 2023 runner-up Martin telling the media in Malaysia that he expects his fellow Spaniard to be fighting for victory straight away in Qatar. >>



Marquez has said that title aspirations aside, he just needs to know he can be competitive again

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Bagnaia is riding wave of confidence after topping last month's tests on "better in all areas" GP24...

Marquez has embarked on a campaign of hype-diffusion this winter, noting in the final test that he "will face a big frustration" at this stage if he aims for race wins from the start.

The beauty of testing, though, is that it's one big phoney war: few things are ever as they seem. And so, perhaps everything from Marquez over the winter has been one big lie. Maybe his lack of long runs in the Qatar test and apparent deficit was a deliberate ploy to hide his true potential on the GP23, which won the championship last year, to keep pressure fully off him – or, more frighteningly, show his rivals some mercy.

What does look certain, however, is that 2024 will be much like 2023 in that Ducati looks hard to topple. After winning a record 17 grands prix last year with six of its eight riders, and all three world titles, the Italian manufacturer is a powerhouse now.

While concessions have been brought in, targeted at pegging Ducati back, Gigi Dall'Igna appears to have crafted an altogether more potent weapon at his Bologna-based skunkworks. The GP24 topped both tests in February outright with reigning double world champion Bagnaia.

After obliterating lap records as he went, the Turin rider begins the season appearing more confident than ever: "The feeling right now is incredible. I think the 24 [bike] is better in all the areas, in every area, than the 23. It's a mix of all the good things from the 22 and the good things from the 23. So, right now at the



...while Espargaro reckons Aprilia has built its best RS-GP ever



moment it's working perfectly."

If you removed sprints from the equation last year, Bagnaia was world champion by a country mile. Martin, on identical factory Ducati machinery run by Pramac, kept things interesting with his sprint supremacy in the second half of the season, but

***"Ducati wants all of its riders to be competitive and it doesn't much care who takes the crown"***

key errors in grands prix ultimately kept him away from the title.

Martin will have learned from those mistakes for 2024. While he ended testing somewhat concerned about a tyre vibration issue that didn't seem to plague any other Ducati rider, the young Madrid ace will almost certainly be a contender from the off. And he needs to be. The Ducati stable is crowded with talent, and all of them will be looking at a step to the factory squad in 2025. Bagnaia is a shoo-in to stay put, meaning Bastianini's seat will be hotly contested by the Italian and riders such as Martin, VR46's Marco Bezzecchi – who was third in the championship last year – and Marquez.

A title win for Martin last year would have earned him an automatic promotion for 2024. As such, he now has to prove himself all over again. That won't be easy with the quality he will face, not least in a Bastianini who appears to have rediscovered his best form after a 2023 campaign largely plagued by injury and difficulties adapting to the GP23.

Bezzecchi's decision to stay at VR46 instead of taking a factory Ducati at Pramac was largely taken with the view that his next step should be to a works squad. The step the GP24 has seemingly taken over the GP23 suggests that those on VR46 and Gresini-run bikes may have a trickier time matching their factory counterparts.

But that doesn't mean civil war isn't likely. Martin has a point to prove; Bezzecchi doesn't like Marquez very much; Bastianini could pose the same problems for Bagnaia as he did in 2022; all of them are at risk of being shown up by Marquez on an older bike. But this is the way Ducati has engineered things: it wants all of its riders to be competitive, and it doesn't much care at the end of the day who takes the crown – so long as the bike model they are riding begins with 'GP'.

Ducati's European rivals appear to have taken a step. Aprilia >>

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SEASON

PREVIEW



Mir reckons Honda takes a step forward with every run on RC213V

*“The concessions system was revived in a bid to help the struggling Japanese manufacturers”*

has, in Aleix Espargaro’s words, delivered him its best RS-GP ever – albeit one that he thinks needs more mid-range torque to be a true title contender. Its radical aero concept drew eyes, and its speed was consistent throughout both tests. Espargaro seems in better shape on it than team-mate Maverick Vinales, who needs to step up in 2024 if he is to justify any more time on a prime factory ride on which he has continually underdelivered.

KTM delivered a fairly quiet pre-season with its RC16, but both Brad Binder and Jack Miller come into this year positive about the steps made on a bike that has been developed with the help of Red Bull Technologies in Milton Keynes.

Aprilia won two grands prix in 2023, and KTM was a factor on occasion, with Binder enjoying a couple of sprint wins. Both need to show marked improvement, not least given the benefits both will enjoy in terms of concessions over Ducati.

Can Marquez, on a year-old mount, deny Bagnaia a world championship hat-trick?



Making concessions count will be vital in Yamaha and Honda taking the steps forward they both need to get back to the front in MotoGP. The Japanese marques lumbered to the bottom of the constructors’ table in 2023. Honda scored one victory courtesy of Alex Rins – now at Yamaha – at Austin, but it was a result that proved to be an outlier in an otherwise miserable year. Yamaha registered its first winless campaign in 20 years, 2021 world champion Fabio Quartararo scoring a handful of podiums on his way to 10th in the riders’ standings.

The concessions system was revived in a bid to help the struggling Japanese manufacturers. As such, its factory riders will need to get used to a lot of testing this year.

Yamaha went on a recruitment drive over the winter in which it poached Dall’Igna’s right-hand man Max Bartolini from Ducati as technical director, while aerodynamicist Marco Nicotra was also

## MOTOGP’S NEXT SUPERSTAR?



Only one rookie steps up to MotoGP in 2024, and he may well be ‘the chosen one’. At 19, Pedro Acosta has brought with him the kind of hype that comes associated with a racer potentially carving themselves out as a generational talent.

Acosta made his grand prix debut in Moto3 in 2021, took his first win after starting from the pitlane, and claimed the title at the first time of asking. He was a race winner in his first year in Moto2 in 2022 and then scooped the crown last season.

Before his coronation, his move to MotoGP with KTM had already been assured. Since the Austrian marque finally found him a place at the GasGas-branded Tech3 squad, Acosta’s early development has been closely watched.

Impressive in testing on the RC16, he is tempering expectations. The Spaniard admits he still has “a long road” of adaptation to come. Marc Marquez believes he will be a

world champion sooner rather than later.

When Autosport sat down with Acosta in Liverpool at the FIM Awards last December, he noted how his entire racing life has been nothing but pressure – so now it’s a normal thing for him.

With a flair of the showman – and a deep-rooted love of road racing, in particular Michael Dunlop – Acosta for his age has a highly astute sense of what is needed from him as a representative (and ultimately a salesman) for MotoGP.

The bar for KTM rookies is high, thanks to Brad Binder’s victory heroics after just three races in 2020. Expecting a repeat is not fair on Acosta, and he notes that a strong debut in Qatar won’t be a “real” result given the last test took place there.

That feet-on-the-ground approach is a good sign. But there’s little doubt that Acosta will be on a MotoGP podium before long.



Rins brings Honda and Suzuki knowledge to Yamaha

snared. Continuing to work with Luca Marmorini (formerly of Ferrari and Toyota in Formula 1) on the engine side has yielded the much-requested increase in power.

But the grip issues Yamaha has suffered from on new soft tyres persists, with Quartararo calling it an unacceptable problem in testing. He is enthused by Bartolini’s way of working after such a short time, but Yamaha is not making the progress Quartararo needs to keep him around beyond 2024. In Rins, at least, Yamaha will benefit from knowledge of Suzuki and Honda machinery.

When Honda took its latest RC213V to the Valencia test for 2020 world champion Joan Mir and Marquez’s replacement Luca Marini, the bike had shed a whopping 8kg and genuinely seemed like a step forward.

As winter testing concluded, the atmosphere in the Honda camp was one of optimism – but Marini’s calls for patience signalled where Honda still is. And that is not very far forward from where it was. Traction remains the biggest issue, which is affecting the bike on acceleration and in braking. Mir noted in the Qatar test that he felt like Honda was getting closer with every run on the new bike, and that is encouraging at least.

Having freedom to test in-season and develop its engine means Honda isn’t facing the same misery as 2023, and its internal restructuring has been welcomed as “more efficient” by LCR boss Lucio Cecchinello – who brings Johann Zarco from Ducati to his team in place of Rins.

Marquez always said Honda would benefit from his leaving by being able to invest what it was paying him into the bike. That seems true enough for now as a long 21-round campaign approaches.

What will be telling, though, is how Honda responds if the rider who gave it so much and outperformed its difficult bike proves his decision to leave was correct. As testing drew to a close, there was little doubt he’s right... ❄

**NEXT WEEK**  
14 March issue  
Qatar GP  
Losail

MOTOGP ENTRY LIST

NO	RIDER	TEAM
1	Francesco Bagnaia	Ducati
23	Enea Bastianini	Ducati
5	Johann Zarco	LCR Honda
30	Takaaki Nakagami	LCR Honda
10	Luca Marini	Honda
36	Joan Mir	Honda
12	Maverick Vinales	Aprilia
41	Aleix Espargaro	Aprilia
20	Fabio Quartararo	Yamaha
42	Alex Rins	Yamaha
21	Franco Morbidelli	Pramac Ducati
89	Jorge Martin	Pramac Ducati
25	Raul Fernandez	Trackhouse Aprilia
88	Miguel Oliveira	Trackhouse Aprilia
31	Pedro Acosta	Tech3 KTM
37	Augusto Fernandez	Tech3 KTM
33	Brad Binder	KTM
43	Jack Miller	KTM
49	Fabio Di Giannantonio	VR46 Ducati
72	Marco Bezzecchi	VR46 Ducati
73	Alex Marquez	Gresini Ducati
93	Marc Marquez	Gresini Ducati

MOTOGP CALENDAR (SPRINTS AT ALL ROUNDS)

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	Losail (QAT)	10 March
2	Algarve (PRT)	24 March
3	Austin (USA)	14 April
4	Jerez (ESP)	28 April
5	Le Mans (FRA)	12 May
6	Barcelona (ESP)	26 May
7	Mugello (ITA)	2 June
8	Sokol (KAZ)	16 June
9	Assen (NLD)	30 June
10	Sachsenring (DEU)	7 July
11	Silverstone (GBR)	4 August
12	Red Bull Ring (AUT)	18 August
13	Motorland Aragon (ESP)	1 September
14	Misano (ITA)	8 September
15	Buddh (IND)	22 September
16	Mandalika (IDN)	29 September
17	Motegi (JPN)	6 October
18	Phillip Island (AUS)	20 October
19	Buriram (THA)	27 October
20	Sepang (MYS)	3 November
21	Valencia (ESP)	17 November

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Hawkins and Adam to race Astons in **British GT**

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# Adam joins up with Blackthorn for 2024

## BRITISH GT

Four-time British GT champion Jonny Adam will remain in the championship for another season after joining fledgling team Blackthorn to race the new Aston Martin Vantage GT3.

The 39-year-old Scot, who took BGT titles in 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 and jointly holds the record for the most overall wins in the series, will partner Giacomo Petrobelli for Blackthorn's first full-time campaign in the championship. The squad was founded in 2022 by Dan Jeal and David McDonald and has become an Aston Martin partner team.

"I've never worked with them before but I was out with them last week in Portimao and already it's a nice relationship," said Adam,

who raced with James Cottingham in a 2 Seas Mercedes-AMG last year, taking three wins and emerging as championship contenders.

"They seem like a good bunch of people and they have big aspirations to do a good job. I'm excited to come back. I've always enjoyed racing with new teams. This will be my fifth team in British GT and in the past I've always done a reasonably good job.

"I've known Giacomo for a good few years now. I've worked with him but I've never actually raced with him. He has done a little bit in the championship [two Silverstone outings in 2020 and 2021] but it's nice he's doing a full programme."

Italian Petrobelli is a former regular in the Blancpain Endurance Series, taking third in

the 2012 Pro-Am rankings in a Ferrari.

Blackthorn made its debut in British GT last season, participating in a one-off outing at the Silverstone three-hour event with Claude Bovet and McDonald.

The team will run a second Vantage for Silver-Am pairing Josh Rowledge and Matt Topham. Rowledge, the 2022 Ginetta Junior champion, made his British GT debut last season in a DTO Motorsport-run McLaren Artura GT4, in which he took four podiums. Topham, meanwhile, finished as runner-up in the GT4 class in 2022 alongside Darren Turner. He also made three GT3 appearances with Enduro Motorsport last term in both the older Vantage and McLaren 720S.

**STEFAN MACKLEY**

# Hawkins to make BGT debut with Beechdean

## BRITISH GT

Aston Martin Formula 1 ambassador Jess Hawkins will make her British GT debut this season when she partners two-time champion Andrew Howard at Beechdean.

The 29-year-old, who has been appointed Aston Martin's head of racing for F1 Academy, won a round of the TCR UK Championship in 2022 before

taking a W Series podium finish in Miami. The Briton also tested Aston Martin's AMR21 at the Hungaroring last year, when she became the first woman since 2018 to drive a modern F1 car.

Hawkins and Howard, whose British GT3 titles both came with Aston machinery in 2013 and 2015 with his Beechdean team, will share the new Vantage GT3.

"British GT is a series I've



FISHER/DREW GIBSON PHOTOGRAPHY

seen close-up while racing in other series in this paddock and it's made me want to get involved with GT racing on a regular basis," said Hawkins.

"To be able to do it with a

championship-winning team like Beechdean AMR and to be able to combine it with my Aston Martin F1 role means it's going to be a very busy season."



McKLEIN/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

## M-Sport offers Rally1 test for top Ford driver in Asphalt points

### RALLYING

World Rally squad M-Sport is offering a prize test in one of its top-tier Puma Rally1 machines to the highest-placed Ford driver in this year's Asphalt Rally standings, while it has also confirmed that it will run Max McRae and Garry Pearson in this season's British Rally Championship.

The Asphalt series has enjoyed strong competitor interest in recent seasons, and the Ford-aligned team is now offering the private Rally1 test at its Cockermouth facility alongside a systems check and shakedown for

the chosen driver's own Fiesta Rally2 machine.

"The popularity of asphalt rallying in the UK is developing at a fantastic pace, and the Asphalt Championship this year is made up of the best events the nation has to offer, each unique but very challenging," said M-Sport managing director Malcolm Wilson.

"With M-Sport being a UK-based company, the national championships are always close to my heart, and therefore it gives me a sense of satisfaction to offer one lucky winner the chance to experience the very top level of M-Sport WRC machinery."

Series coordinator Paul Morris added: "I cannot thank Malcolm Wilson and M-Sport enough for this brilliant prize. It's what rally dreams are made of!"

The opening round of the Asphalt campaign is later this month at the North West Stages, which is also the BRC curtain-raiser. After its current WRC driver Adrien Fourmaux blitzed limited opposition to land last year's crown, 2023 runner-up Pearson will join M-Sport's ranks, while McRae – grandson of BRC legend Jimmy – will also tackle four events alongside his European Rally commitments.

"I'm super-excited to

announce I'll be doing a BRC programme with M-Sport in their Fiesta Rally2!" said McRae. "I can't wait to gain some amazing experience in a Rally2 car and learn so much from working with this incredible team!"

M-Sport team principal Richard Millener added: "The pairing of Garry and Max, I feel, is a really strong one, and I look forward to seeing how they fair in the latest-spec Fiesta Rally2. It won't be an easy task as the entry to the championship is the strongest in years, partly due to the new event calendar, but also the recently announced TV coverage following each event."

## Dominant Anglesey win for Igoe as he makes it four in a row

### CIRCUIT RALLYING

Michael Igoe and Will Atkins scored their fourth Circuit Rally Championship win in a row at Anglesey last weekend.

By topping the times on five of the six stages of the Lee Holland Memorial Rally, the Citroen C3 Rally2 pair came home 48 seconds clear of reigning champions John Griffiths and Emma Morrison with their Ford Fiesta R5. Rob Hughes and Sion Cunliffe, also in a Fiesta R5, had been in second place

from the start, but a sheared front-wheel flange left them parked on the grass just yards from the finish of the final test.

A first-stage spin had left Griffiths playing catch-up but, by the end of stage three, he was back into fourth and challenging Paul Murro/Craig Simkiss (Fiesta R5). It was level pegging for third after the next stage, before Griffiths subsequently consolidated the position, which then became second following Hughes's retirement.

Murro held onto third despite late



PAUL LAWRENCE

Igoe was on flying form again in his C3

clutch problems, while the top six was completed by the Fiesta R5s of Gavin Edwards/Ifan Rowlands and Thomas Cooper/Paul Williams, plus Tony Robinson/Simon Coates (Skoda Fabia R5), after Hugh Hunter/Rob Fagg (Fiesta) lost fifth gear on stage four and retired.

**PETER SCHERER**

Kent was a podium  
finisher in Civic Cup



GARY HAWKINS

## TCR UK ace Kent to Civic Cup and will share Hyundai with his brother

### CIVIC CUP

Two-time TCR UK champion Lewis Kent will contest this year's Civic Cup, while also competing in the Britcar Trophy alongside younger brother Bradley in the family's TCR-spec Hyundai Veloster.

Kent spent 2023 largely on the sidelines but contested the Civic Cup's final two rounds in an EP3 prepared by Area Motorsport, achieving a podium at Brands Hatch. He will now take up a full-time drive with the multiple championship-winning squad as he seeks to "fall back in love with the sport".

"I've had a couple of years now where I've just been slowly falling out of love with it," said Kent. "I felt like in TCR I always had a target on my back and it took the enjoyment out of it. I really enjoyed driving the [Civic Cup] cars last year. They just want to rotate all the time and slide

everywhere, which for me is good fun."

Reigning champion Max Edmundson was also recently confirmed at Area. The pair complete an all-star line-up at Rob Baker's team alongside the previously announced Josh Files, Sam Kirkpatrick and Liam McGill. "Between the five drivers, I counted the other day, I think we've got 13 championships worldwide," said Kent.

Kent's family-run Essex & Kent Motorsport squad is looking to sell its two Hyundai TCR cars, which the brothers will showcase through the Britcar Trophy's revised class structure. TCR cars were previously eligible only for the sister British Endurance Championship, but the BEC class has been extended to allow various two-litre turbocharged touring cars, which will now also be eligible for Britcar Trophy's expanded T1 division.

MARK PAULSON

## Cowley swaps to Merc for GT4 defence

### BRITISH GT

Reigning British GT4 champion Matt Cowley is to defend his crown at the wheel of a Mercedes-AMG run by Paddock Motorsport.

The 26-year-old claimed the GT4 title last year alongside Erik Evans aboard a Ford Mustang operated by Academy Motorsport. But after four seasons with Academy, his move to Paddock comes as

part of a Pro-Am partnership with Ed McDermott.

"It's a big change for this season, switching teams, cars, and even classes, but I'm really looking forward to the challenge," said Cowley. "When the chance to join Ed and Paddock Motorsport came about, I had to take it."

Paddock will also run a McLaren 720S GT3 Evo for team co-founder Martin Plowman and Mark Smith,

with a second GT4 entry for a McLaren Artura due to be announced soon.

Meanwhile, reigning GT4 Pro-Am champions Chris Salkeld and Michael Johnston will graduate to the GT3 ranks. They will remain with Century Motorsport to race a BMW M4. "I am delighted that I get to spend another year with this brilliant team," said Johnston. "It was a no-brainer after the success of last year."

### MORE MINI ENTRIES

Mini Challenge drivers Lydia Walmsley and Marlo Cordell will continue in the championship for another campaign this year. Walmsley enjoyed her best season to date with her family-run squad in 2023, taking 10th in the points, while Cordell will remain with Jamsport after finishing 16th in the table. Cooper class frontrunner Harry Hickton also plans another year of Mini racing with Westbourne – he was 10th last year upon his graduation from Junior Saloons.

### PAT SPEER 1944-2024

We regret to report the death of popular Northern Ireland all-rounder Pdraig 'Pat' Speer at the end of last month. The Armagh motor trader and businessman rallied Imps (including the ex-Malcolm Patrick car) and raced a Lotus 61MX Formula Ford and Simca Rallye 1 in the 1970s, and subsequently the Lola T100 in which John Watson had been a regular winner in 1969. He is survived by wife Bernadette and sisters Delma, Anne, Paula (wife of racer Trevor Templeton) and Alma.

### RODIN'S NEW RECRUITS

Rodin Motorsport has taken on Arthur Rogeon and Jack Sherwood for its upcoming GB3 and British Formula 4 campaigns respectively. Frenchman Rogeon will contest a second season in GB3 after driving for Chris Dittmann Racing last term, taking a best result of second. Sherwood also moves to Rodin from CDR after taking part in one GB3 event and a full season of British F4, securing three podiums.

### TEMPLETON, HICKEY TO GB4

Two more drivers have signed up for the GB4 Championship this year, with Branden Templeton joining Fox Motorsport and Dan Hickey on board with Fortec Motorsports. Templeton, 17, will make his car racing debut this season after graduating from karting, while Hickey (below) will return to the series after the 21-year-old competed in last year's finale. It takes the number of confirmed 2024 GB4 drivers to eight.



# Masters to retain series but open to 2025 changes

## MASTERS HISTORIC RACING

New Masters Historic Racing boss Fred Fatien says 2024 will be a “transition” year where drivers will be consulted to determine whether any new series or changes will be introduced for the following season.

Fatien’s GP Extreme organisation, which operates a fleet of historic machinery and has run the Gulf Historic Dubai Grand Prix Revival event, merged with Masters at the end of last year amid a desire from MHR founder Ron Maydon to step back from day-to-day control. All of Masters’ existing series, which span Historic Formula 1 to tin-top and sportscar contests, will continue this year, but Fatien says tweaks could be made thereafter.

“This year is to understand what the driver wants and see what they feel needs improving and what they like,” said Fatien, who added that the opportunity to become involved in Masters was “good timing” since he was already evaluating plans to organise European and American events. “What we



GARY HAWKINS

have now is a good combo and after that we can see later on what other kind of cars they [Masters competitors] own. We will see if there’s a need for a new category and see if we can develop a new category for them.”

Fatien himself will compete in some of Masters’ events to better understand his customers’ feedback, including which circuits they would like to visit. “Our team will race to have a full view so we can be very close to the drivers and see what’s going on,” he said.

But one change Fatien does intend to make

is to introduce additional “lifestyle” elements to the events to provide entertainment for competitors and their whole family. “We want to bring more fun to the track,” he said. “I did a lot of races around the world and it’s always the same thing – we want to bring the family, not just the driver, to enjoy the weekend and we want to give more for them.”

Fatien also wants to bring some younger drivers into the Masters fold and added that its existing staff will continue in their roles.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

# Lauda to be celebrated at Members’ Meeting



MOTORSPORT IMAGES

## GOODWOOD

Next month’s Goodwood Members’ Meeting will pay tribute to triple Formula 1 champion Niki Lauda, with his 1985 McLaren, the final F1 car he raced, set to be among the machinery being demonstrated.

There are several

significant anniversaries being earmarked for the Austrian legend in 2024, including 50 years since his first grand prix victory, 40 years since his third title win, and it would also have been his 75th birthday.

In addition to the Members’ Meeting display on 13-14 April, Lauda will

be commemorated at July’s Festival of Speed, with some of his cars taking to the Goodwood hill.

“This year’s special moments will pay tribute to his outstanding racing career and celebrate his enduring legacy across the world of motorsport,” said the Duke of Richmond.

ANGELO R. DRIVE

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Pair will share TCR Cupra  
in Slicks Series this year

JEFF BLOXHAM



## Ex-BTCC driver Blencowe to make racing return alongside Norman

### CSCC SLICKS SERIES

Former British Touring Car Championship production class racer Alan Blencowe and experienced tin-top pedaller Claire Norman have teamed up to race the former's TCR Cupra in the Classic Sports Car Club's Slicks Series this season.

For Wiltshire scaffolding contractor Blencowe, who recently acquired the car in which Mark Havers contested 2022 TCR events with his T4 Motorsport team, the programme ends a long sabbatical.

"It's my first time on slicks in 16 years," said Blencowe, who debuted in the 750 Motor Club Stock Hatch championship with a Peugeot 205 GTI in 1999 and finished runner-up in the SEAT Cupra Cup in 2006.

"I've known Claire for a long time. I coached her for an hour at Thruxton when she was competing in the VW Cup in 2004. She has a lot of ability, but the Cupra is something new to us both."

After a shakedown over two very wet days at Llandow in Wales, Blencowe and Norman were finally able to get to grips with the car at last month's CSCC Donington trackday.

"I'd not driven on slicks before, or anything as powerful on track," said Norman, whose pace sharing father Charles Tippet's BMW 2002Ti in Swinging Sixties events in recent seasons has impressed. "It's quick and great fun. It's also getting on for 20 years since I raced front-wheel drive, a VW Golf in 2005, which is astonishing."

MARCUS PYE

## REIGNING CHAMP GIBSON AMONG LEGENDS ENTRANTS

### LEGENDS

Reigning Legends champion Will Gibson will defend his title this year and is among an initial batch of 19 drivers announced as competing in the category.

The series is celebrating its 30th anniversary season this year and has also joined the MotorSport Vision Racing stable, while points scored in its three-event British Touring Car-supporting Elite Cup contest will also now count towards the main championship.

Among the other established frontrunners who Gibson (below) will face are Robert Barrable and Jack Parker, who finished second and third in the Elite Cup table last year – Parker acting as a replacement for the injured multiple champion John Mickel.

Barrable's brother Peter is also set to continue, while 2011 champion Stephen Treherne plans a full campaign after making a series comeback last year. Race winners Luke Simmons and Nick Bridgeman are others included in the first instalment of confirmed drivers.

"We're all incredibly excited for the start of our landmark 30th anniversary season, and delighted to confirm the first batch of entries with close to two months still to go until the first rounds with BTCC at Donington Park," said championship owner Phil Cooper.

"Of course, it's fantastic to see our champion Will Gibson return to defend the title and he's going to have plenty of competition over what will again be a very busy season – there's a lot of strength in depth already confirmed."

## Meadows follows his brother to Porsche

### PORSCHE

Mini Challenge frontrunner Oliver Meadows is following in the footsteps of his elder brother Michael by moving into Porsche competition this year with a campaign in the Sprint Challenge GB.

The elder Meadows, who latterly fronts the Argenti F4 team, twice won the Carrera

Cup title, and his brother is heading down the sportscar route after finishing fourth in last season's Mini Challenge. He is due to drive a new RS version of the Cayman for leading squad Team Parker Racing.

"I'm drawn to the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB for its prestigious brand, competitive field, and technical excellence," he said. "Racing against some

of the best drivers in the country pushes me to continually improve, so it's a fantastic platform to test my abilities and see where I stand among my peers.

"I understand that transitioning from Minis to the Porsche will present a significant learning curve, but I'm confident in my ability to adapt quickly and effectively."



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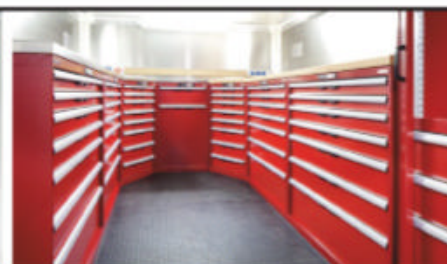
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**LISTA**



# Important progress being made

*Ahead of International Women's Day tomorrow, it's encouraging to see Motorsport UK's initiatives to increase female involvement in the sport starting to have an impact*

STEPHEN LICKORISH

**N**ot so long ago, having a female driver on a grid was considered something of a novelty. Now, with increasing numbers of women taking up the sport, it's becoming a little more commonplace. Whether as the result of all-female categories like W Series or F1 Academy, or a variety of grassroots initiatives, the idea of attracting more women into motorsport is in the spotlight now more than ever. And governing body Motorsport UK is determined to play a leading role in this.

Its CEO Hugh Chambers says the organisation has progressed a long way in the past five or six years since efforts to increase female participation began in earnest. "We're now into a far more exciting period, which is a maturing of those programmes," he explains. "What I mean by that is they no longer sit adjacent to the rest of the sport, they're in the sport. So, every discipline, every activity with marshals, getting more females involved in the sport is an integral part of everything that we do."

One example is the Girls on Track scheme, launched a decade ago by Susie Wolff as Dare to be Different. In its current guise, it's formed of two strands. First up is the education programme where events are held in schools to promote careers in STEM subjects (the areas of science, technology, engineering and maths that are so vital for many motorsport roles) to girls. Last year alone, nearly a thousand girls took part in such events.

**"For motorsport to stay relevant, 51% of the population needs to see it as a really good thing"**

The other key element of Girls on Track is the community of over 8000 members that can share experiences.

While Girls on Track revolves around getting more women involved in the motorsport industry in general, another scheme that Motorsport UK launched last year – in conjunction with F1 Academy – is more focused on the driving side. Discover Your Drive enables 8-12-year-old girls to experience motorsport in the form of indoor karting events held during school holidays – for example, 137 took part in such a gathering in February half-term. And indoor karting is a deliberate choice for this starting point as the barriers to entry are far less significant. "You don't have to have any of that knowledge or equipment to get started," says Jess Runicles, Motorsport UK's head of sustainability, who also oversees diversity and inclusion. "From those days, the

instructors and coaches at Team Sport identify those that show promise and they're invited into what we call Race Academies – they'll have five sessions in female-only environments where they learn things like racing lines and overtaking, and then they'll be integrated back with the boys to race alongside them in further Race Academies. And then the aim is to diversify the applicants of the British Indoor Karting Championship. Last year, we managed to get one DYD girl into the final and we have a bigger ambition this year."

These efforts are already having a tangible impact, with female participants in the BIKC up by a whopping 265% last year. And it is not just about karting, with the British Women Racing Drivers Club also trying to make hillclimbing less daunting for prospective female drivers by holding a series of women-only events where people can use their road car and learn the basics. Sure enough, it's in the more grassroots disciplines where there has been a noticeable upturn in female involvement. The percentage of RS Clubman licence holders – covering the likes of autosolos, sprints and trials – that are women has gone from 10% to 16% in the past couple of years. However, the fact that female drivers continue to account for just 5% of paid licences (giving a figure of 10% across all licence types), demonstrates how much more work there is to do.

But some might think that, as laudable as Motorsport UK's objectives are, does it really matter how many women are involved? Yet Chambers insists it is vital to the sport's future. "If motorsport is going to continue to be relevant and is going to be around in 50 years, we need to make sure that 51% of the population see it as a really good thing," he states. "And, if we're not connecting with the females in the community, it's easy for them to turn around and say, 'That's a boys' thing, men do that, it's nothing to do with us'."

Nevertheless, Motorsport UK remains some way off its target of having a competitor pool that mirrors British society. Chambers continues: "Could we ever get to 51% of our competitors being female? Who knows! Many certainly wouldn't have thought female football would've garnered the level of television viewers that they have done recently. So, never say never, but it is something that's going to take time.

"But everybody gets it now, this is an exciting period, we've got momentum, we've got mature programmes in Girls on Track, we've got new programmes like Discover Your Drive, we've got more women in British Formula 4 this year than there's ever been, and I think there's real good reason to be extremely optimistic."

After decades of female participation not even being a topic that was really considered, that is quite some progress already. ✨

# THE QUEST TO ENTER THE DRAGONS' DEN

*Autosport joins drivers looking to secure a scholarship for a fully funded season with Dragon Sport to find out what it takes*

STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT BOROWIK MEDIA

**T**he path to forging a career in motorsport is a difficult one for aspiring drivers, and even for those with bags of talent it can all count for nothing without the necessary budgets or the proper opportunities at the right time.

This is why scholarships, particularly on the national scene, can be such an important part of a young driver's career, and one that can offer a vital boost as they look to climb the ranks.

Championships such as Ginetta Junior and Junior Saloon Cars have established, well-respected scholarships that attract lots of hopefuls, but a relatively new venture that's hoping to become a mainstay was held for only the second time last month. The Dragon Sport Scholarship is the brainchild of Rhys Lloyd, the 2008 Welsh Sports and Saloon Car champion and a driver with years of experience in series such as TCR and the Creventic 24 Hour series. The 38-year-old Welshman won the Britcar Trophy last season, after creating the scholarship to find a driver to race alongside.

The inaugural prize went to Jack Meakin, who made the most of the opportunity (see panel, p74), and the same prize has been put forward for this season. As well as a fully funded drive alongside Lloyd in a Dragon Sport-run Renault Clio in the Britcar Trophy,

a test day in a TCR car plus an outing in the Spanish Endurance Series at Barcelona are also up for grabs.

"I think a lot of it is down to personal frustrations," Lloyd responds when asked why he's putting his own money into the scholarship. "I won the Welsh saloon championship and a few other things in 2008 and it was a very different situation to where I am now. I was hoping to make the step up into other series and I just felt like my racing came to a stop in 2009, pretty abruptly because of funding. I had a bit of a hiatus for seven or eight years, and I've still got a bit of a bad feeling about it and how there wasn't that chance to make the step up and do anything else, so it kind of stems from that. It's not the world's biggest prize, but obviously it's still a fair chunk and it's giving something back."

Autosport was given the opportunity to take part in the scholarship at Blyton Park to find out what went into the process of finding the 2024 winner. One thing immediately apparent at sign-on is that most hopefuls are there with their parents, while my ever-increasing number of grey hairs makes it clear that I'm towards the upper end of the age limit of 30 (and actually a bit above!).

"I would say if you averaged our age this year it would probably have been six or seven years younger than last year," says Lloyd.





Participants were put through their paces with fitness drills



Drivers got two on-track sessions aboard a Renault Clio alongside an instructor

*“There wasn’t that chance for me to make the step up, so the scholarship stems from that”*

“Last year I would have said we had, not older drivers, but probably late twenties, early thirties, whereas now, with what happened with Jack last year, it seems to be a bit more of a go-to scholarship, and endurance is more of a viable route I think.”

After a short briefing, the 32 participants are split into three groups to rotate around the different sessions, which include media/sim, fitness and on-track driving. The media session is headed by seasoned motorsport commentator Richard John Neil and Lloyd’s fiancée Carys Davies. “What do you know about the history of Dragon Sport?” asks Neil. As one more used to asking the questions, I’m momentarily caught out, eventually rambling about the team’s success in Britcar and how it’s providing drivers with a pivotal step up. The rest of the discussion centres on my racing plans for the year and the general importance of such scholarship schemes, but

by the end of the questioning it’s clear that my interviewers are aware of my true purpose for taking part. Regardless, going through the same process as other applicants offers an insight into what they face and what the judges are looking for.

“Clearly anyone that wins the scholarship is representing Dragon Sport, so they need to be able to represent them well,” points out 2019 Renault UK Clio Cup runner-up Max Coates, scholarship organiser and one of the day’s driver coaches.

Moving across to the simulator, operated by SimDynamics, participants are given the chance to drive a Clio – the same car that’s being used on the day and for the upcoming season – around Brands Hatch. Two years of running on the iRacing software finally pays off. I’m setting respectable times among the candidates and certainly not out of my depth.

But it doesn’t last long as the fitness test proves to be the most challenging aspect. Headed by instructor Claire Johnson from The Naked Warrior, we’re put through our paces with squats, burpees, push-ups and sprint drills, which are followed by hand-eye coordination exercises with tennis balls. For this I’m paired with GB4 race winner Lucas Romanek, his presence here showing how appealing the opportunity offered by Lloyd and his >>



Young hopefuls, plus Autosport, line up at Blyton Park for the Dragon Sport Scholarship

WINNING THE  
DRAGON SPORT SCHOLARSHIP

“I was expecting the season to go well, but it went really well.” The winner of the inaugural Dragon Sport Scholarship, Jack Meakin, made the most of the opportunity last term as he and Rhys Lloyd claimed the overall Britcar Trophy.

Meakin had competed in several rounds of the championship in 2022, after only moving into car racing in 2021 with selected rounds of the Junior Saloon Car Championship. That lack of experience didn’t hinder him, either in his efforts to win the scholarship or in his season with Dragon Sport, in which he and Lloyd also came out on top of the competitive one-make class. “It surprised me that we were able to win overall because we were in the tightest class, so that’s really a testament to how the team as a whole performed over the season,” he says.

Being relatively new to endurance racing, the 19-year-old claims he learned plenty from Lloyd during their campaign, while in return Meakin was able to bring outright speed to their Renault Clio. “I would say he taught me a lot about the strategy side of endurance racing and just thinking about the bigger picture,” says Meakin. “I feel like I could bring some speed to the equation, and he can bring the experience and the mindset, which was nice. I learned loads racing with Rhys.”

Meakin’s focus this year is on gaining further experience in other championships, such as competing in the Citroen C1 24 Hours to gain knowledge of racing in the dark as well as outings abroad, possibly at the Nurburgring Nordschleife.

Those opportunities will be with Dragon Sport, the team keen to further develop the Motorsport UK Academy driver beyond 2023, with Meakin himself stating it’s “like one big family and everyone wants to help”.

“To have Rhys’s support now, that’s really the key,” adds Meakin. “With me winning the Dragon Sport Scholarship last year, I feel like I’ve got the long-term support of Rhys and that means a huge amount, to have someone in your corner and someone who is now a friend.”



Meakin won inaugural scholarship and went on to take Britcar Trophy title



Autosport's Mackley (right) takes feedback from Nevill after opening run in the wet

Dragon Sport team is to a range of drivers. We’re also scored on our hand-grip strength and put through a reaction test, which salvages some of my pride battered by comparison to the younger and healthier participants.

Coates points out that the fitness test is not merely about looking for the strongest applicants – although that’s an important factor, especially for the discipline of endurance racing, with prolonged periods spent in the cockpit and fast driver changes imperative. It’s also an indication of someone’s perseverance and determination to push on through to complete the exercises. It’s good to know that by the end I’m not the only person in my session to be suffering from wobbly legs and aches that, at least in my case, lasted for days!

After the lunch break it’s time for the main element of the day,

*“You’ve got to ensure that everybody has had a positive experience and learned something”*

the on-track driving, which in the system of scoring accounts for 60% (the remaining 40% is split between fitness and media). The first session is as much about learning which way the track goes as anything else, having never been to Blyton before and, as I start to build up confidence in the car, it’s a job to manage the wheelspin on the wet track while I accelerate up the gears and find the limit of the braking. With no ABS fitted to the Clios, drivers are warned that it will be easy to lock up, and that’s what happens approaching the fast left-hander of Bishops. Alongside me, driver coach Alex Nevill calls for me to lift off the brake, while my brain tells me the opposite before we harmlessly slide wide into the run-off area before rejoining.

After a few more laps we’re back in the assembly area, and Nevill runs through what I can improve on for my second run, notably looking ahead through a turn to the next approaching corner rather than what’s happening immediately in front of me.



Soon I'm back out with Coates on a slightly drier track and at a greatly increased pace. I find we're getting on the throttle much earlier, although the front-wheel-drive car is prone to understeering through the slow chicane on the infield.

Perhaps inevitably, I overstep the mark and spin through the quick left at Bunga Bunga before coming to a stop in the run-off. I'm certainly not the only driver to end up off the track during the day's running, with Coates suggesting "there's enough power there to get it wrong, and also it means they are naturally a harder car to drive [than a junior car], and some people adapt to that very quickly and others don't."

What becomes clear during the day is that although only one person can be given the top prize, all participants are treated as

individuals and given appropriate feedback – an important element when each has paid £500 to be there. "Anybody who has entered a scholarship has put a decent chunk of money down to come and do it, so you've got to ensure that everybody coming away from it has had a positive experience and learned something," adds Coates.

It's left to the judges to pick six drivers who will advance and, while three are clear in the scoring, placings from fourth down to 12th are covered by only a handful of points.

After one more run, six become three – Matt Hyde, Jack James and Harri Reynolds – with each due to do one final shootout with Lloyd alongside to decide the winner. But the fading light and strict 5pm curfew means Reynolds is unable to get out to do his final run, prompting an ad hoc decision by the judges that shows how much they value a fair and informed decision.


"It was a horrible feeling because I knew I could do a good job, and then to know that I couldn't show what I could do, it was frustrating," says Reynolds. "Then we were given the opportunity to go again at Brands Hatch and that picked up my spirits because I thought that would suit me more than just a shootout."

All three were taken to Brands for an extra day of running, Lloyd admitting it provided a much more extensive assessment of each driver than the initial final shootout would have done. "The second day definitely had a different feel and it was really good because we had a lot more time to evaluate more thoroughly," says Lloyd. "I would say everyone had three or four good runs. They had plenty of track time and it was really interesting."

After race and qualifying runs, Reynolds was declared the winner, while Hyde and James are set to have further track time with Dragon Sport during the season. After finishing second on the Mini Challenge scholarship just the week before, and cutting short his GB4 campaign due to a lack of funds in 2023, Reynolds will have the perfect platform to showcase his talents this term thanks to the Dragon Sport Scholarship.

"The scholarships give such a good opportunity for anyone to really show what they can do," says Reynolds. "To win it, obviously you've got to have some talent. It's really important, especially for me where budget is where we struggle a lot. But now I have a chance to be able to show it." ❄





Simulators are one of the main tools that Academy members use to aid their progress

# TOP OF THE CLASS

*Plenty of Motorsport UK Academy members enjoyed on-track success last year as its programmes help drivers build a career in the sport*

STEPHEN LICKORISH

**T**here can be no denying that 2023 was a very successful year for Motorsport UK Academy drivers. GB3 conqueror Callum Voisin, GB4 dominator Tom Mills, Radical Cup UK champion Theo Micouris, Mini Challenge Trophy title winner Tom Ovenden and European Rally class victor Jon Armstrong, alongside British Rallycross champions Patrick O'Donovan (Supercar) and Max Langmaid (Mini), are just some of the Academy members to achieve notable accolades last season. Add in the likes of Formula E champion Jake Dennis and British GT title winner Dan Harper who have graduated from its various programmes in recent years, and it's clear how many careers the Academy has played a part in.

But what exactly is the Academy and what does it do? "Motorsport UK Academy is a talent development pathway for young athletes that show potential to make it to the top levels of the sport," explains the governing body's head of competitor development Katie Baldwin. "Through our programmes, we give drivers an insight into what it takes to get to the top and the opportunity to learn, develop and thrive. Just being quick behind the wheel isn't enough these days and you have got to look at what you're doing away from the track, away from the car, to make sure when you're in the car you're going to realise your potential."

Currently, there are 103 drivers/co-drivers who are part of

the Academy across three key programmes. The first of these is its Enhanced Diploma in Sporting Excellence, which is run in conjunction with Loughborough College and gives aspiring drivers a formal qualification and greater understanding of the industry, which is incredibly useful should their career on track or on the stages fail to flourish. "We've seen over the years that drivers neglect their education in their pursuit to rise to the top," notes Baldwin.

The course covers a wide mix of topics ranging from performance/technical areas – such as race strategy and tyre management – to physical preparation, including guidance on fitness, nutrition and sleep. Psychology and managing emotions are also explored, along with a focus on giving drivers an understanding of what is needed to be able to network and market themselves successfully. "They have to have a business mindset in the sport," says Baldwin, who adds that a "holistic" approach is taken to ensure drivers are given a broad range of tools.

Another of the Academy programmes is Team UK Futures, which offers a greater focus on performance. "It includes workshops, online sessions and training camps for 15 to 24-year-olds – it's a slightly more individual approach," says Baldwin. And then Team UK itself takes this a stage further. Fifteen drivers have been selected for 2024, all of whom have demonstrated a clear potential to reach motorsport's summit. Each is assigned their own performance manager as they get tailored support to help them on that journey



Baldwin is encouraged by number of graduates who stay in the sport

MOTORSPORT UK



Range of experts help deliver the Academy's programmes

MOTORSPORT UK

*“It shows the strength of the talent pool we’ve got in the UK and we’re able to harness that potential”*

up the ranks. Further training camps are run for these drivers, and Baldwin describes that act of “bringing together elite level drivers pushing for the top levels of the sport” as “really inspiring”.

The effort that Baldwin and all the Academy coaches and partner organisations are putting in is clearly delivering results – not just on track, but also in ensuring that many Academy graduates remain within the motorsport world in a variety of roles. “I did a review of our pathway last year and we found it’s really positive in terms of drivers that came through the Academy in the last five years and are still actively competing,” explains Baldwin. “That is 77%, and 30% of them are competing at an elite level. Of those no longer competing, 65% had been retained in the motorsport industry. That shows we’re reaching industry with their knowledge, expertise and passion for the sport.”

But, ultimately, everyone’s goal is to reach the top of whichever discipline they contest, and having such an impressive cast list of champions further supports the Academy’s approach. “It’s encouraging to see the number of people that have come through and been successful, particularly last season,” concludes Baldwin. “It shows the strength and depth of the talent pool we’ve got in the UK and we’re able to harness that potential.” And having such successful drivers progress through the ranks ensures that the important work of the Academy is firmly in the spotlight as the next generation of motorsport stars hone their skills. ❧

## HOW THE ACADEMY HELPED MICOURIS MASTER RADICALS



Micouris was a race winner on his first Radical weekend

MICKWALKER

One of the many success stories from the Motorsport UK Academy last year was the way in which Theo Micouris made an instant impression upon switching from karts to cars. He not only won the SR1 class title in his rookie season against some strong opposition, but he also claimed the overall Radical Cup UK honours.

Micouris’s first connection with the Academy came in 2020, when he was selected to represent the UK in the CIK-FIA Karting Academy Trophy, and he subsequently joined the Futures scheme last season. He says the support and guidance he received played a significant part in his title-winning performances. “It’s taught me everything I need to know going forward in my career, both on and off track,” Micouris says. “It’s opened lots of doors to me and it’s helped me maximise every opportunity I’ve been given. That very first weekend, without their help and preparation, I would have been a lot less prepared and I probably wouldn’t have come away with a win straight away.”

He highlights the advice on sleep as being one of the areas that he had not considered before his involvement with the Academy. “Obviously, everyone knows it’s important for everything, but I didn’t realise how much difference it makes,” Micouris says.

He also believes that the opportunity to learn from fellow drivers contesting a huge mix of disciplines is another valuable experience the Academy offers. “One thing I never really thought about before is being able to work with other drivers so closely,” he explains. “In motorsport, you always want to beat your team-mate, [here] you’re learning together.” And that collaborative approach has clearly paid off for Micouris as he now seeks to move into European competition.



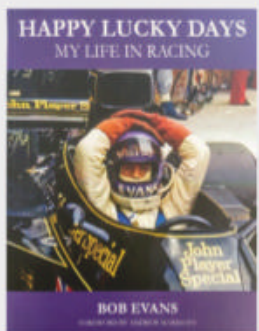
Micouris (centre) enjoys being able to learn from other drivers

MOTORSPORT UK

# FINISHING STRAIGHT



## A case of right place, wrong time; or right place, right era



### BOOK REVIEW **HAPPY LUCKY DAYS – MY LIFE IN RACING**

Bob Evans  
RRP £32

Ask anyone to name a British driver who represented BRM and

Lotus in Formula 1, and they're probably going to instantly come up with the name of Graham Hill. Another is Bob Evans, but it was very much a case of 'right place, wrong time' for a racer who ended up as a footnote in grand prix history.

Yet Evans, now 76, has a distinct advantage over many of those who enjoyed glory in different eras. His career spanned the late 1960s to the early 1980s – one of the most accessible, spontaneous and carefree times in motorsport history – and his enjoyment of and appreciation for his luck in playing his part oozes from every page, and is reflected in the title. So too does his thankfulness that he survived, for this was also one of the most dangerous of periods.

That Evans's book has seen the light of day is, like many aspects of his racing career, the result of a chance encounter. In this case it was his bumping into veteran journalist Andrew Marriott – a doyen of

the 1970s scene and friend to many of the drivers – in the BRDC Clubhouse at last year's British Grand Prix. Evans told him he'd been writing his memoirs, and Marriott put him in touch with authors Darren Banks and Kevin Guthrie, recent biographers of Stephen South, Gerry Birrell, Jim Crawford, Tom Pryce and Roger Williamson, and who have just established their own BHP Publishing concern.

Anyone who has spoken to Evans, as your reviewer did 25-odd years ago about his victorious path to the European Formula 5000 title of 1974, knows he is funny, articulate, and frequently drily acerbic in his observations. It's no surprise, therefore, that his softback collaboration with Guthrie and Banks is a genuine hoot and prompts more laugh-out-loud moments than you've got fingers to count them on.

BRM chief Louis Stanley, renowned for his grandiose self-importance, is cut no slack here, likewise his engine designer Aubrey Woods, who Evans describes as "odious, bumptious and appalling". That was Evans's lot in 1975, before his move to Lotus, whose Peter Warr is denounced as "the strutting, opinionated, Lotus team manager – the 'Jacob Rees Mogg of F1'".

While Evans is completely frank that he enjoyed an idyllic middle-class upbringing in Wimbledon, the youngest child of an oil

industry high flier, he was only in his late teens when the family was devastated by his father's death. As a result, you get the impression that his outlook on life and the sport was much influenced by his absolute devotion to his late wife Annie. They were a team, and it is clear on numerous occasions that what we might call her 'bullshit detector' was very finely tuned.

It's the tales of the early days, struggling with Annie through Formula Ford (in 1970 he won what would become known as the Champion of Brands series) and Formula 3, that are the real window onto a haphazard era. Their trips to continental Fford races are full of incident, starring an unreliable tow car, plus what Evans self-deprecatingly describes as his own blind optimism.

Evans could only make the move into F3 for 1971 thanks to a tip-off that there was a car called a Puma sitting unused in a London garage. It's thanks to this that he made the connection with Alan McKechnie, the man who took him (and Annie) under his wing and carried Evans through his F5000 success to the brink of F1. McKechnie wasn't going to allow his disability from polio to stand in the way of his determination to be a *bon viveur* who clearly had a heart of gold. As a result, the young Evanses upped sticks from swinging London to live in the rural Forest of Dean,



Evans, here at Montjuic, had a lot of time for the BRM crew, if not the team's top brass

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY  
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effectively in McKechnie's orchard for a while, and remained in the area for good.

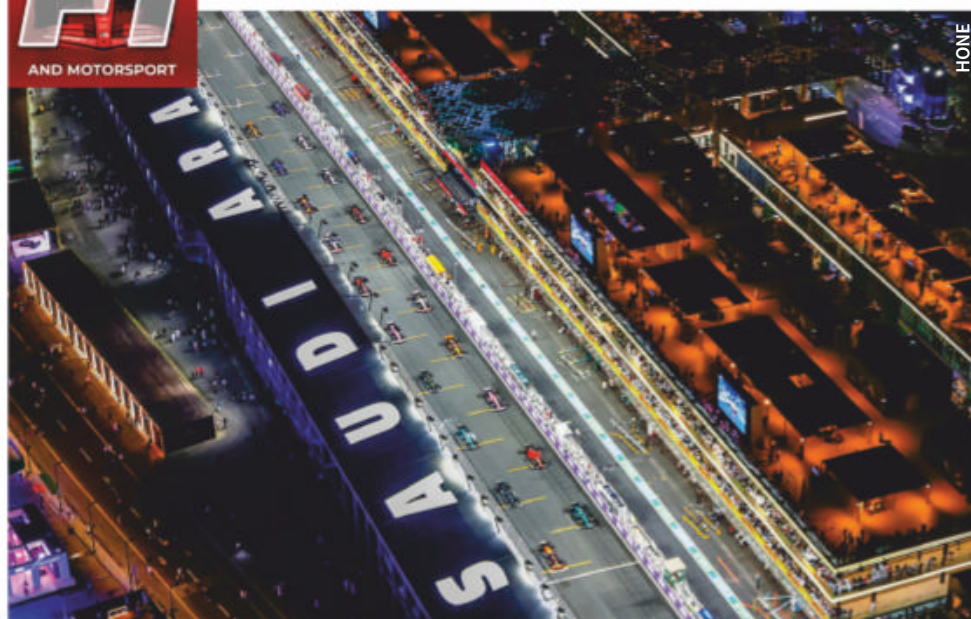
McKechnie, and Evans's mum, were instrumental in getting him the surgery he needed when he broke his neck rolling the Puma in a 1971 test at Castle Combe. That was after he'd been rushed to Chippenham hospital (where, coincidentally, your reviewer's wife was born two months later!). The ambulance crew got lost, and crashed on the way. Different times...

For a glimpse into an era when anything seemed possible – Evans, who started 10 world championship grands prix, was even an early pioneer of carbon fibre on his first race car, an Austin-Healey Sprite! – this is a fantastically enjoyable read.

MARCUS SIMMONS

## FINISHING STRAIGHT

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



### Saudi Arabian Grand Prix preview

Haydn Cobb and Jake Boxall-Legge join host Bryn Lucas to preview the Saudi Arabian GP. Also on the agenda is the ongoing situation surrounding Christian Horner at Red Bull, the potential return of the Turkish GP and that latest restructuring exercise at Alpine.



## WHAT'S ON

### INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

#### Saudi Arabian Grand Prix

**F1 World Championship**  
**Round 2/24**

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

**7-9 March**

**TV Live** Sky Sports F1,  
Fri 1610, Sat 1655

**TV Highlights** Sky Sports  
F1, Sat 2130, Channel 4,  
Sat 2130

#### Qatar Grand Prix

**MotoGP**

**Round 1/21**

Losail, Qatar

**8-10 March**

**TV Live** TNT Sports 2,  
Sat 1530, Sun 1615

**TV Highlights** ITV4,  
Mon 2000

#### IndyCar

**Round 1/15**

St Petersburg, USA

**10 March**

**TV Live** Sky Sports F1,  
Sun 1600

#### Indy NXT

**Round 1/12**

St Petersburg, USA

**10 March**

#### Formula 2

**Round 2/14**

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

**7-9 March**

**TV Live** Sky Sports F1,  
Fri 1505, Sat 1320

#### F1 Academy

**Round 1/7**

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

**7-9 March**

**TV Live** Sky Sports F1,  
Fri 1155, Sat 1200

#### NASCAR Cup

**Round 4/36**

Phoenix, USA

**10 March**

**TV Live** Viaplay 2,  
Sun 1930

#### NASCAR Xfinity

**Round 4/33**

Phoenix, USA

**9 March**

#### Super Formula

**Round 1/7**

Suzuka, Japan

**10 March**



MotoGP in Qatar

GOLD AND GOOSE

## FINISHING STRAIGHT



### FROM THE ARCHIVE

Tom Pryce presses on in characteristic style during the opening stages of the 1974 German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring. The Welsh Formula 1 rookie qualified

his Shadow DN3 11th on the grid, then put in an impressive performance to cross the line in sixth place, claiming his first world championship point. In Pryce's wake is the Williams FW02 (aka

Iso-Marlboro FW) of F2 star Jacques Laffite, making his grand prix debut *[at the Nordschleife, yikes! – ed]*. Twenty-first fastest in qualifying, the Frenchman completed two laps before his rear suspension broke.



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# Silverstone

Silverstone has featured many different guises down the years. But to Bertrand Gachot, who drove several of them while ascending the UK racing ladder, the British Grand Prix venue is no less appealing for it.

A winner at the circuit in British Formula 3 in 1987, F3000 polesitter in 1988 and points finisher in F1, Gachot's racing education featured Formula Ford slipstream-fests at Silverstone on his way to scooping back-to-back FF1600 and FF2000 titles in 1985-86.

"I always liked Silverstone, it's the heart of Formula 1," says the Dubai-based Belgian. "This is the track that shows the potential of an F1 car with those high-speed corners and it's just a very special place.

"Even today's version is interesting. It's very high-speed, a beautiful layout. When you see Copse Corner, then go up the hill and have the S [complex of Maggotts, Becketts and Chapel] leading onto the Hangar Straight, this is just amazing. You enter this with 300km/h, full power, don't lift and take a lot of gs. There you show what an F1 car can do."

The 1991 Le Mans 24 Hours winner raced at Silverstone five times in F3 in 1987, placing in the top four on each occasion. He saved his best for the British GP support, winning by 8.02 seconds in a crushing display with his West Surrey Ralt-Alfa. "Nobody could touch me," Gachot says. "I knew I would



win, this engine was just so good." Gachot was overhauled by Roberto Moreno after snaring pole for the 1988 International Trophy F3000 race. Although average speeds were reduced by the left-right Luffield chicane introduced for 1987, Gachot was taken aback unleashing the DFV-powered Reynard 88D around its fast sweepers for the first time in testing. "I thought to myself, 'Woah, what am I doing?' he says. "These cars are *fast*.' It was scary."

Gachot's best finish from four British GP starts was sixth for Jordan in 1991, the year Silverstone added the complex following the Bridge right-hander, reprofiled Stowe and revised Club approach. He starred in recovering from early contact to hold fifth until three laps to go. "That car was just amazing at Silverstone," he recalls.

**JAMES NEWBOLD**



IN NEXT  
WEEK'S ISSUE

# F1 heads to Jeddah

WHO WILL WIN IN  
SAUDI ARABIA?



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