

F1 Ferrari ends Red Bull's run

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Sainz reminds everyone of his class at just the right moment

Carlos Sainz has had a ridiculous past couple of months. First, he found out that he had lost his Ferrari drive to Lewis Hamilton for 2025, then he missed the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix thanks to appendicitis, and now he has won on his first Formula 1 race back.

Sainz is the only non-Red Bull driver to have won a GP since November 2022. He's also proved to be a strong team-mate to Max Verstappen, Lando Norris and Charles Leclerc in his F1 career so far. It's *surely* only a matter of time before he finds employment in 2025. The Spaniard would be an asset to any team on the grid.

Aside from Sainz's personal story, the Ferrari success in Australia was a feel-good result for F1 after two dominant Verstappen drives. The reigning world champion was hamstrung from the start in Melbourne but, as Jake Boxall-Legge shows in our report (page 16), free practice form and the struggles of Sergio Perez suggest that there could have been a good Ferrari-Red Bull fight without the brake conflagration that took Verstappen out of the equation.

Even if Ferrari can maintain its challenge – which we'll dive into in greater depth in next week's issue – expect normal service to be resumed in Japan. The RB20 is likely to fly around Suzuka, a track on which Verstappen has been mighty in recent years.

The UK motorsport season is now really kicking into gear. We preview another competitive season in British GT (p48) and GB3 (p52), which begin at Oulton Park, and cover last weekend's club-racing action from p60 in our bumper National section.



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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Peugeot adds wing for bid to take flight

WEC

Peugeot has finally confirmed sportscar racing's worst-kept secret of the winter with the release of images of the updated version of its 9X8 Le Mans Hypercar – complete with a rear wing. The French manufacturer had revealed last November that it was overhauling the avant-garde concept of its World Endurance Championship contender, but it had tried to keep the world guessing on whether it would incorporate a conventional wing at the back for the first time.

The addition of a what is a low-slung wing follows a change of tyre dimensions for the revised car, which will come on stream at round two of this year's WEC at Imola on 21 April. A machine known simply as the 9X8 2024 runs 29cm wide

tyres at the front and 34cm rubber at the rear, as opposed to the 31cm all round of the original car that entered competition midway through the 2022 season.

The rear wing is a natural consequence of the change: the Peugeot Sport design team has pushed both the weight distribution and the aerodynamic loads rearward as part of the revised concept. "Everything is driven by the tyre dimensions, changing the weight distribution to be much more rearward than the previous version of the car and changing the aero balance," said technical director Olivier Janssonie. The car generates a larger proportion of its downforce from the upper body surfaces, rear wing included, than its predecessor, which relied more on its underfloor aerodynamics.

The latest Peugeot LMH – which was unveiled in a new livery, the third since

it started racing – retains the family look of its predecessor. But Janssonie revealed that his design team had "touched 90 to 95% of the surfaces of the car". The windscreen and the airscoop are among the few visible parts carried over.

"It was one of the challenges, one of the constraints we had was that we wanted to keep the overall look of the car," he explained. "It is interesting that you can achieve quite a substantially different aero concept with surfaces that are changed but all looking very similar."

The 9X8 2024 retains the monocoque and the crash structures of the mk1 version. That means it does not count as a new car, an option available to Peugeot in the LMH rulebook. Rather, it has taken advantage of the evo joker rules that allow a maximum five performance upgrades over the





➔ P14 OPINION

PEUGEOT

lifecycle of a car, though how many it played for the 2024 update has not been disclosed.

“Keeping the rear [crash structure] was actually a challenge with the new rear wing; obviously the rear end is quite different,” explained Janssonie. “That was important for us from a schedule standpoint.”

The rearward shift in weight distribution has also allowed Peugeot to revise the car’s 2.6-litre twin-turbo V6 and its seven-speed gearbox in the name of reliability.

Janssonie revealed that the decision to update the 9X8, which has finished no better than third since Peugeot’s return to top-flight sportscar racing, was taken last March after 2023 Sebring 1000 Miles WEC season-opener. It was followed by testing of the new tyres on a development hack in the summer before the first run for the 2024 car in December. “The main factor for the decision to change the car was to rely less on the Balance of Performance, which we cannot control,” he said. Peugeot wanted to “do something that is putting us much closer in terms of car concept to our competition, so we can be in the ballpark of performance regardless of what the BoP is doing”, he added.

The 9X8 2024 has so far completed 7-8000km since its maiden test at Paul Ricard. The target for the new car, said Janssonie, is to allow Peugeot to “fight for podiums and some wins on a regular basis”.

GARY WATKINS



GRUPPEC PHOTOGRAPHY/PORSCHE

Porsche test for Vettel raises Le Mans 24 Hours speculation

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Four-time Formula 1 world champion Sebastian Vettel got his first proper taste of a sports-prototype aboard one of the Porsche Penske Motorsport squad’s 963 LMDh racers this week. What is not clear, however, is whether the try-out at Motorland Aragon has put him in contention for one of the vacant seats in the additional third car that the team will field in the Le Mans 24 Hours World Endurance Championship round in June.

The test was organised at Vettel’s request, Porsche Motorsport boss Thomas Laudenbach revealed. It follows extensive negotiations last year between Vettel, who retired from F1 at the end of 2022, and the Jota customer Porsche team about joining its expanded Hypercar class assault this season.

“We’re delighted that Sebastian is interested in our Porsche 963,” said Laudenbach. “There was no question for us that we’d be thrilled to support his request for an opportunity to test and

provide him with extensive preparation and plenty of time to drive our hybrid prototype. There’s no doubt we’ll learn a lot from his valuable feedback.”

Vettel revealed an interest in sportscar racing ahead of the Motorland test, which started on Monday. “I’ve always followed other racing series and my curiosity for endurance events encouraged me to just give it a shot,” said the 36-year-old.

Vettel’s run in Spain as part of a 36-hour pre-Le Mans endurance simulation was preceded by some familiarisation laps at Porsche’s Weissach test facility in mid-March, as well what was described as “extensive time in the simulator”. But prior to the test he remained coy about what the next step might be: “This will be a new experience for me. We will then see what happens next in this respect – at the moment there are no further plans for the future.”

PPM has so far named only Mathieu Jaminet in the extra 963 it will field at Le Mans for the second year in a row. Team boss Jonathan Diuguid stated at the Qatar WEC opener that only the other three drivers from its IMSA SportsCar Championship squad – Nick Tandy, Felipe Nasr and Dane Cameron – were in contention for the remaining seats. Roger Penske, meanwhile, ruled out the prospect of Josef Newgarden, who was part of the winning line-up at the Daytona 24 Hours, joining the roster. “We don’t want to run a driving school,” he said.

GARY WATKINS



SBLOXHAM/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Susie Wolff files FIA complaint to courts

FORMULA 1

Susie Wolff has filed a criminal complaint against the FIA. This follows the governing body announcing in December that it was looking into allegations that confidential information had been passed to a Formula 1 team principal by a member of the staff of commercial rights holder Formula One Management. Although the FIA did not name who was involved, it was clearly aimed at the F1 Academy managing director and her husband, Mercedes motorsport boss Toto Wolff.

Supposedly, this came to light following a complaint from rival teams. But in a display of unity, the rest of the grid issued a coordinated denial and came out in fierce support of Wolff. The FIA promptly backed down but failed to issue a public apology in the

following months.

Wolff has confirmed that “I have personally filed a criminal complaint in the French courts on the 4 March in relation to the statements made about me by the FIA last December. There has still not been any transparency or accountability in relation to the conduct of the FIA and its personnel in this matter. I feel more than ever it is important to stand up, call out improper behaviour and make sure people are held to account. Whilst some may think silence absolves them from responsibility – it does not.”

It comes during a month where the FIA has had to investigate its own president Mohammed Ben Sulayem over claims that he interfered with officiating at the 2023 Saudi Arabian GP and the track certification for the Las Vegas GP, and for which he was recently



Wolffs (wolves?!) received support from F1 teams

cleared of any wrongdoing.

Lewis Hamilton slammed the lack of scrutiny at the top of motorsport. “Things that are happening behind closed doors; there is no transparency, there is clearly no accountability,” he said. “How can you trust the sport and what is happening here if you didn’t have that?”

“Hopefully, this stand that she’s taken now will create change, have a positive impact, and especially for women. We’re living in the time where the message is, ‘If you file a complaint, you’ll be fired’. That is a terrible narrative to be projecting to the world.”

MATT KEW

British peer slams F1 chief Domenicali’s “arrogance”

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 CEO Stefano Domenicali has been accused of “arrogance, lack of professionalism and non-engagement” by a member of the House of Lords for allegedly failing to respond to concerns over the championship racing in countries with poor human rights records. Liberal Democrat peer Lord Scriven called a

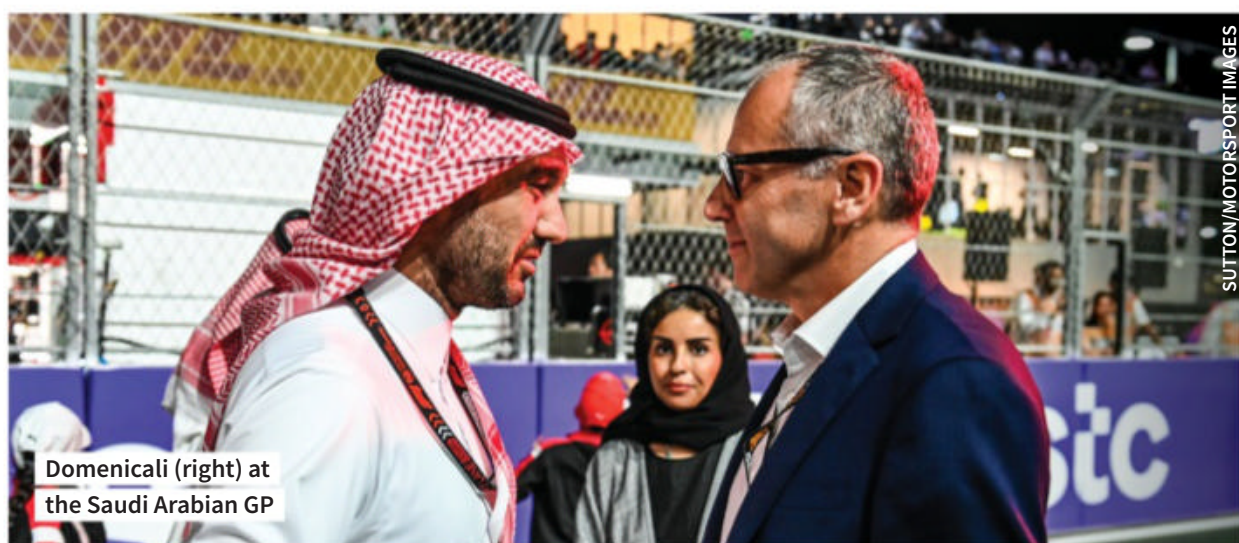
‘sportswashing’ debate in the chamber last week, a measure he thought necessary given Domenicali’s lack of communication.

Scriven claims he has contacted series chiefs, including on two occasions in the past month alone, but has had nothing in return since 2018. F1 disputes this, telling Autosport that they have replied within the past 12 months. Still, Scriven added that Domenicali’s “leadership of F1 is damaging

the reputation of his sport, as he refuses to engage with the issues around F1 and human rights. He thinks he can just receive the reported £574million from the Bahrain authorities up to 2036 that makes him and his organisation richer, while having nothing to do with the real issues that his sport is helping to cloak in Bahrain.”

In a statement supplied to Autosport, F1 commented: “For decades Formula 1 has worked hard to be a positive force everywhere it races, including economic, social, and cultural benefits. Sports like Formula 1 are uniquely positioned to cross borders and cultures to bring countries and communities together to share the passion and excitement of incredible competition and achievement. We take our responsibilities on rights very seriously and set high ethical standards for counterparties and those in our supply chain, which are enshrined in contracts, and we pay close attention to their adherence.”

MATT KEW



Domenicali (right) at the Saudi Arabian GP

Brown extends deal to helm McLaren team

FORMULA 1

McLaren Racing has re-signed CEO Zak Brown until 2030. The American joined as an executive director in 2016 before being handed the keys in 2018.

Under Brown's reign, McLaren has added IndyCar, Formula E and Extreme E programmes alongside its Formula 1 entry. "It is a privilege to work alongside the talented men and women across McLaren Racing's different race series," he said. "Together, we will continue to push the boundaries of motorsport and strive for the highest performance on and off the track."

But that's not the biggest bit of paperwork Woking execs have inked in recent days. The sovereign wealth fund of Bahrain has completed a full takeover of the wider McLaren Group, which owns a majority share in the grand prix team. Late last year, McLaren shareholders unanimously approved a full recapitalisation of the business, ostensibly to allow for a "simplified" and "streamlined" governance



Happy Brown greets Sainz after Australian Grand Prix victory

MAUGER
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process. That has been realised thanks to Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company, the Gulf state's sovereign wealth fund, taking full ownership of the share capital "following the conversion of all preference shares into ordinary shares".

Mumtalakat has been partnered with McLaren since purchasing a 30% stake from former chairman Ron Dennis and the late Mansour Ojeh in 2007. This takeover finally shores up McLaren's finances after delays to road car production, arranging a leaseback

deal on its HQ, seeking a loan from the Bahrain national bank, cutting 1000 jobs, and selling £185million worth of shares in its F1 team to an American investment firm.

McLaren Group executive chair Paul Walsh said: "This will further enable us to focus on delivering our long-term business plan, including investment in new products and technologies, whilst continuing to explore potential technical partnerships with industry partners."

MATT KEW



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Mazepin sanctions lifted by EU

FORMULA 1

Ex-Haas Formula 1 driver Nikita Mazepin has had sanctions against him lifted by the European Union's General Court. The body can no longer justify him remaining on a list of individuals subject to restrictive measures – including the freezing of funds and bans on entering the territory of EU member states – after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Mazepin's sanction was because of his relationship to his father Dmitry, whose Uralkali business had sponsored his racing activities. A General Court statement read: "The 'association'

criterion, applied in respect of Mr Nikita Mazepin, covers persons who are, generally speaking, linked by common interests... In the circumstances of the present case, the General Court holds that the Council did not discharge its burden of proof to establish such a link. The association between Mr Nikita Mazepin and his father is in no way established from an economic or capital perspective or by common interests linking them at the time when the maintaining acts were adopted."

Mazepin Jr has since returned to racing in the Asian Le Mans Series.

JONATHAN NOBLE

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BTCC

A new BMW engine has been developed for the marque's official team West Surrey Racing to use in this season's British Touring Car Championship.

BMW UK finally got round this week to confirming that quadruple champion Colin Turkington and 11-time race winner Adam Morgan will remain on board the 'works' cars for 2024, alongside the Laser Tools Racing with MB Motorsport entry for Jake Hill that was announced in December. They all complained in 2023 of the 330e M Sport's straightline speed, especially when running in traffic.

WSR chief Dick Bennetts said that the

team's long-time engine specialist Neil Brown Engineering has been working since September on developing an evolution of the B48 powerplant produced at BMW's Hams Hall plant in Warwickshire, in place of the old Austrian-supplied mills.

"It's the latest-model BMW road-car engine," said Bennetts. "We've shaken two cars down already at MIRA and they and the other two will all run on Wednesday [yesterday] at Snetterton. On bodywork, we've done a facelift to the latest-model BMW, we've done chassis work, we've got development dampers. A lot's gone on under the skin of the car."

"Everything looks really positive," enthused Turkington. "Having the new

engine is probably what excites me the most. Reflecting on last year, it's probably where we lacked the most of our overall performance on the straights. We've nudged the package forwards, but that will all be relative to the steps the others have taken."

There is still no taker for the fourth WSR entry to replace Carrera Cup GB-bound Stephen Jelley. Bennetts confirmed speculation that the highly rated but often underfunded Bobby Thompson is one of several in contention, but that the team could be forced into running one driver for the first half of the season, and another for the second. "It's not ideal," he said. "There's a very good car sitting there for someone."

MARCUS SIMMONS

Lancia poised for return

RALLYING

Lancia has offered a first hint that it is contemplating a rallying comeback with the relaunch of its HF brand.

The Italian manufacturer has been linked with a World Rally Championship return following reports in Italian media last year. The marque is the most successful in WRC history, winning 10 manufacturers' titles (1974-76, 1983, 1987-92).

Lancia is undergoing a revival under the Stellantis

Group, and in February it launched its new all-electric Ypsilon hatchback.

The HF (high fidelity) initials featured on the title-winning Fulvia, Stratos and Delta that ran under the HF Lancia Racing Team, founded by Cesare Fiorio in 1963. The relaunch was unveiled at the first screening of *Race for Glory*, a film about Lancia's fight with Audi for the 1983 WRC title. "Will we return to [rallying]? We are working on it," said Lancia CEO Luca Napolitano.



Autosport understands that should Lancia commit to a rally return, its most likely option would be in

Rally4, with Italian sources suggesting an immediate jump into Rally2 as unlikely.

TOM HOWARD



ELMS/LE MANS 24 HOURS The French IDEC Sport team has unveiled a livery for the ORECA-Gibson 07 it will field in the European Le Mans Series and at the Le Mans 24 Hours that celebrates Matra's sportscar successes half a century ago. The paintjob, which incorporates hints of the 1974 Le Mans-winning MS670C, follows a tie-up between IDEC and the owners of the Matra brand, electric-bike manufacturer Groupe Rebirth. What IDEC sporting boss Nicolas Minassian described as "a proper sponsorship deal" could be a lead-in to Matra re-entering the automotive sector. "We're exploring possible developments for the future," said Minassian.

LMP2 cars get power hike

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

The 22-strong flotilla of ORECA-Gibson 07 LMP2 cars will be unleashed in the European Le Mans Series this season. They will be back almost to the specification in which they raced before a series of moves to slow the class on the introduction of the Hypercar category to the World Endurance Championship in 2021.

The one-make, 4.2-litre normally aspirated Gibson V8 has been given back 40bhp for the coming season, which starts at Barcelona next month. That brings maximum power up to 580bhp, close to the 600 the unit pushed out in 2017-20. The missing 20bhp is the result of a 500rpm rev reduction that remains in place. At the same time, weight has been reduced from 950 to 930kg, the original class minimum. Fuel capacity has been increased from 69 litres to the old maximum of 75.



ORECA's 07 will be slowed, however, when P2 returns to the WEC for the Le Mans 24 Hours in June. The cars will run in the same spec as last year, which means 500bhp and 950kg.

"It's good that the cars will be able to stretch their legs – I've never known a driver who doesn't want more power," said Richard Dean, boss of ELMS stalwart United Autosports. "We're going back nearly to what we had before without any addition in running costs, so it has to be a good thing."

GARY WATKINS

RESTRUCTURE FOR PANIS RACING'S 2024 EFFORTS

ELMS/LE MANS 24 HOURS

Sportscar entrant Olivier Panis is switching partners for the 2024 European Le Mans Series. His squad has moved from Tech 1 to TDS Racing for a campaign that will include an attack on the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Panis Racing and Tech 1 are ending a tie-up that stretches back to 2017, when they entered the ELMS under the Panis Barthez Competition banner in deference to a partnership with former Manchester United and French international goalkeeper Fabien Barthez. Tech 1 has now stepped back due to constraints on budget, says the Abadie family that runs the operation.

A deal with Panis brings TDS back to the ELMS after a year's absence. It joined the series in 2011, winning two races, and went on to win the P2 title in 2012 and the GTC crown for GT3 machinery in 2015.

The Panis/TDS ORECA will be raced in ELMS by Ferrari development driver Arthur Leclerc, who will also be competing in Italian GT in his maiden season of sportscars, Alpine factory driver Charles Milesi (below) and Manuel Maldonado. The last-named, the mandatory silver-ranked pilot, stays with the team for a second season after a campaign that yielded four podiums.

GARY WATKINS



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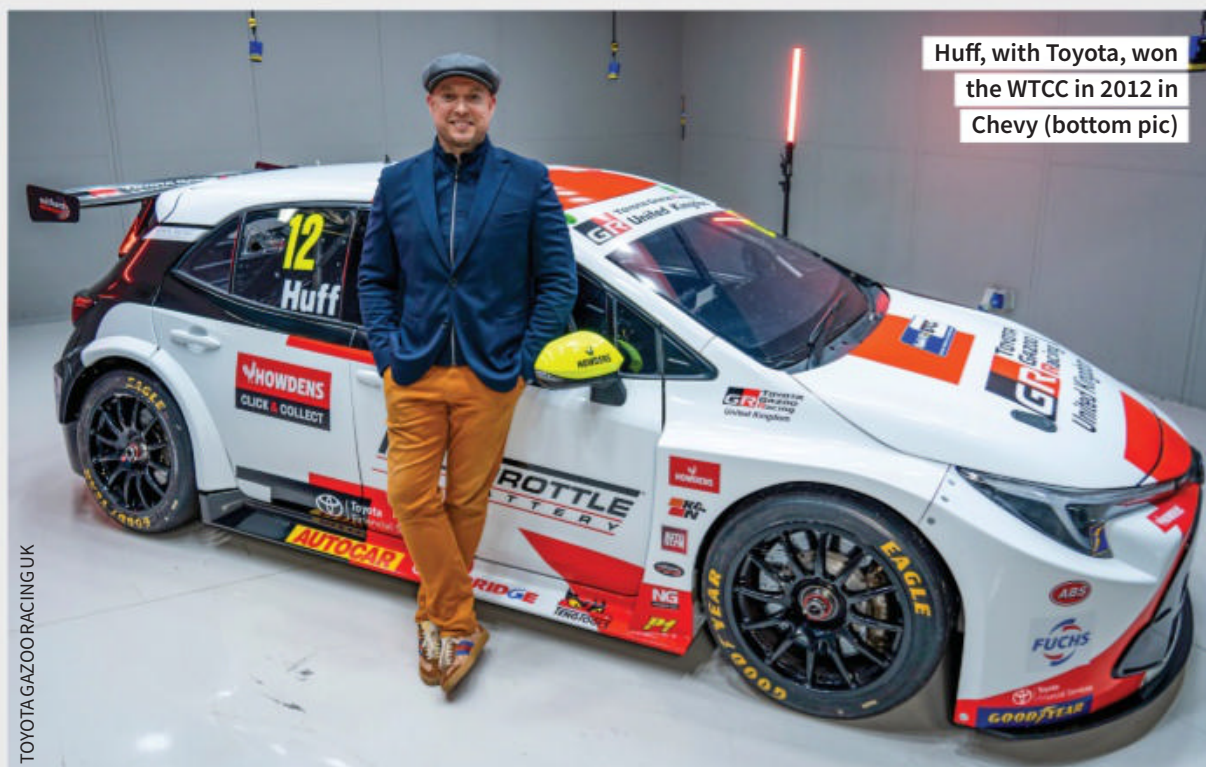
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Huff back in BTCC with Toyota

BTCC

One of the worst-kept secrets of the British Touring Car Championship off-season is finally out in the open: 2012 World Touring Car champion Rob Huff will contest his first full domestic campaign in 20 years with Toyota team Speedworks Motorsport.

It was announced today (Thursday) that 44-year-old Huff will partner Andrew Watson in the Toyota Gazoo Racing UK line-up, completing a four-strong entry of Corolla GR Sports from the Cheshire squad that also includes the LKQ pairing of Josh Cook and Aiden Moffat.

Since his rookie touring car season in the 2004 BTCC with SEAT, Huff has been ever-present at world level, his only break coming in 2020 when he competed in Sweden and won the Scandinavian title. In that period he has contested two rounds of the BTCC: in 2017 at Silverstone with a Power Maxed Racing Vauxhall; and last August at Knockhill with a Team Hard Cupra. His Scottish outing came shortly after Huff moved back to his native East Anglia from Dubai, and preceded a push to secure a BTCC deal for 2024.



"I'm absolutely thrilled to be back in the BTCC," said Huff. "It's where I was inspired by motorsport as a young lad and it was very much where I got my breakthrough at the beginning of my career. I've always kept an eye on BTCC obviously, just because I'm a huge fan of it and always have been."

Huff did the deal with Speedworks bosses Christian and Amy Dick following a wet test last autumn at Croft. "I only wanted to come back to the BTCC in a top team and a car that I feel I can achieve great things in," he said. "I spoke to pretty much everyone on the grid. I just got a very, very good feeling from Christian and Amy. What they do and the way they go about doing it aligns very much with my own positivity and motivation."

Huff, who begins his pre-season testing at Brands Hatch next week, explained that he had opportunities to continue in TCR World Tour, despite Audi – the marque he represented with Comtoy Racing in 2023 – pulling its customer sport programme. "I could run both championships – that has been spoken about – but I don't want to," he added. "There are no clashes so it is a programme that you could put together, but after 20 years travelling all over the world, visiting some amazing places, I'm very much ready to come home and focus on the British championship."

Christian Dick described Huff as "just as razor-sharp as he was when he started out more than two decades ago. When he tested the Corolla last year, he instantly felt at home and his wealth of experience of driving different cars will be hugely beneficial. We're tremendously excited."

MARCUS SIMMONS

DENNIS'S BMW GT ATTACK

Reigning Formula E champion Jake Dennis is to contest the full GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup schedule for the first time since 2019. Dennis, a race winner in the series with the R-Motorsport Aston Martin squad, will drive a Century Motorsport BMW M4 GT3 in the Bronze Cup class with IMSA racer Toby Sowery and Century's 2023 British GT title winner Darren Leung.

LAGUNA NOISE ABATES

A settlement has been reached between the Laguna Seca IndyCar/IMSA circuit and disgruntled locals who filed a lawsuit seeking a reduction in the California track's usage and noise levels. It means that the non-profit Friends of Laguna Seca will "conduct a previously planned sound impact assessment at the race track and carry out appropriate sound mitigation measures, all as part of being a good neighbour to the surrounding community".

ANGELA WEBB 1948-2024

Barely two months after the passing of her husband John, the longtime Brands Hatch supremo, Angela Webb died aged 75 in Spain last week, having recently been diagnosed with cancer. Very much half of the MDC powerhouse, she was credited with numerous circuit innovations.

IWASA'S FP1 DEBUT

Japanese talent Ayumu Iwasa will make his Formula 1 FP1 debut at Suzuka next week with RB, when he steps into the car due to be raced by Daniel Ricciardo. The Red Bull Junior (below), a race winner in F2, is competing in his domestic Super Formula series this season, and had his first taste of F1 with RB (AlphaTauri as it was then) in last November's Abu Dhabi young driver test.



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Top teams should try to sign Sainz

While Ferrari's already made its choice, other F1 frontrunners would be remiss not to put the winner of the Australian Grand Prix at the top of their driver shopping lists

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Carlos Sainz's performance in securing his third Formula 1 career win in Sunday's Australian Grand Prix was superb, made all the more remarkable given he'd got back into his Ferrari in Melbourne just 14 days after undergoing keyhole surgery in Jeddah to remove his appendix. The 29-year-old credited a strict "programming" of his time spent recovering in bed, including when he'd rise and go for walks, and what food was best given his situation. Twice a day he entered a hyperbaric chamber designed to boost oxygen intake and aid healing, and used an Indiba machine that specifically helps with wounds.

In the aftermath of Sainz inflicting Red Bull's second defeat in 26 races, he is, of course, still searching for new employment in 2025, given Ferrari's move to replace him with Lewis Hamilton for next year. Red Bull team boss Christian Horner was asked about the possibility of Sainz returning to the fold he left before the end of 2017. This was right after, unprompted, he'd referred to Sainz when answering a question about Yuki Tsunoda's career prospects: "You've had a very fast, unemployed driver win today's race, so the market is reasonably fluid with certain drivers. Based on a performance like that you couldn't rule any possibility out. So, I think you just want to take the time."

And it's not just where Sainz is concerned that the driver market is fluid. There's a sense that further big shocks are coming. And the

"Alonso's availability for 2025 does complicate matters for the various cases to sign Sainz"

changing landscape is perhaps best summed up by the also out-of-contract Fernando Alonso one moment being linked with a possible 2025 move to Mercedes, and then this week to Red Bull. There's also the question of what will happen to Max Verstappen in the context of the power struggle still playing out at the top of Red Bull, despite a quiet weekend on this front down under.

Sainz has shown during his relationships with Lando Norris at McLaren and Charles Leclerc at Ferrari that he could get on well enough with George Russell at Mercedes. And at Red Bull he's a clear upgrade on Sergio Perez, who after a fine start in Bahrain and Jeddah reverted to type in Australia.

Alonso's availability for 2025 does complicate matters for the various cases to sign Sainz. The double world champion is tenacious and can still provide top-drawer performances, such

as against Perez in Brazil last year. On the other hand, Alonso did show that he's fallible in his clever games when he messed up his legitimate tactic and put Russell off late in the race in Australia, picking up a penalty. But everything around Alonso is rumour for now. Horner's comments – again a possible tactic in the Red Bull management war, given the friction between the Sainz and Verstappen camps during their time as team-mates at Toro Rosso – are something more tangible.

There can be no denying that Sainz lacks Alonso's proven world champion status for his potential suitors. Yet, there's also the sense that he is underrated by many – so, where does that stem from? Because of his preference for understeer, which requires a sweet spot on balance to work best, he does tend to shine on front-limited courses. This narrows his opportunities to be clearly ahead of Leclerc, who is also up there on such layouts. Sainz tends to end up behind by narrow fractions on rear-limited circuits that provoke oversteer.

It also can't be forgotten that Ferrari chose Leclerc, not Sainz, in being offered a post-2024 contract. One was always going to be bumped for Hamilton once the seven-time world champion decided he was available. The racing and business cases are clear there. And there's Leclerc's wild and unpredictable style that forms his reputation as generally the current best in qualifying, which also boosts his popularity – because people like exciting drivers.

The more cerebral Sainz is also rather a victim of unfortunate circumstances. His altogether different pain in Australia two years ago, when his team-mate dominated from pole, might have been avoided had he not lost what was set to be a Leclerc-bothering time due to a red flag. Sainz was then undone by a Ferrari reliability issue and crashed out in the pack during the race. And he should have started second in Las Vegas last year but for his controversial penalty after striking a loose manhole cover.

Those were two of the most recent three occasions on which Ferrari genuinely undid Red Bull on race pace (the other was the 2022 Austrian GP). And how his story might have been different had he been able to match or even head Leclerc at those events...

Nevertheless, Sainz's career should still be blossoming. The suggestion that he's on Audi's driver line-up list for 2026 persist, given his history with team boss Andreas Seidl and his father's Dakar success with the marque. But Sauber has struggled so far in 2024, and it can be hard for a team to make serious strides forward even with greater investment. Sainz should definitely be aiming higher, to F1's established leading squads, for his next move.

And they should want to sign him, too. After all, there's little else he's got to prove... ❄

➔ P16 AUSTRALIAN GP REPORT



Peugeot's conventional switch

Circumstances beyond the manufacturer's control have led to the abandonment of its avant-garde 9X8 concept, but that doesn't mean it was wrong to take its original path

GARY WATKINS

It seemed somehow incongruous given what we knew was coming. The sight of a Peugeot heading the chase of the leader over a full race distance in the World Endurance Championship season-opener in Qatar earlier this month was a first, and also a bit strange. That was because it was the soon-to-be-replaced original version of the 9X8, a car that had previously only shown flashes of speed, posting the starring performance. But its pace in the desert proved exactly why the French manufacturer had no choice but to abandon the wingless concept of its first stab at a Le Mans Hypercar.

The avant-garde Peugeot worked around the Losail International Circuit in a way it never had before. The combination of a track layout with a high proliferation of medium to fast corners, and a surface that was both billiard-table smooth and what is described as low energy, made it a happy hunting ground for a car that had previously finished no better than third. The Mk1 9X8 would have bowed out with a career-high second position but for a few missing litres of fuel.

The problem for Peugeot is that not every circuit on the WEC trail is like Losail. The 9X8 was brought into the competitive fray with the help of the Balance of Performance, but the question remains whether it would have been able to accommodate an outlier in the WEC Hypercar field across a range of circuits. Uniquely, the old Pug ran equal-size front and rear tyres of 31cm width, rather than 29cm fronts and 34cm rears to which it has now switched to bring it in line with its rivals.

Peugeot's Olivier Janssonie believes that with the revised system in force this year, with a new methodology and a greater range of adjustment, it would have been possible. But on the other hand, he admits that in Qatar the 9X8 was in a "corner of adjustment" on BoP. There, he is essentially pointing out that the car was down at the minimum weight possible, 1030kg, and up at the maximum power permitted, 520kW or 697bhp.

Sticking with the original car was a risk that Peugeot couldn't take, Janssonie acknowledges. Switching to the wider rears and narrower fronts was the only way to "get rid of the trap" in which it found itself.

The new car, complete with a rear wing, will no doubt please the naysayers. There were many who proclaimed, "How long before we see a rear wing on the thing?" when the 9X8 was launched in June 2021. Others pointed to the salutary lessons of Peugeot's history in sportscar racing.

More than 30 years ago, the road car stylists got their mitts on the 905 3.5-litre Group C car. It was given the look of the Oxia concept, a machine conceived to lay down the styling trends for Peugeot across its forthcoming range. It lasted six races before a

massive aero programme changed its look – and its fortunes. The revised 905 went on to win the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1992 and 1993.

What we can't say is that Peugeot got it wrong this time, that it made the incorrect choices or that it was trying to be too clever by half with its unusual concept. The LMH rules were framed to allow the stylist input without compromising performance, which was not the case back in the days of the 905.

The problem was that the rules changed – on more than

“The new car, complete with a rear wing, will no doubt please the naysayers”

one occasion. Peugeot was a victim of the regulatory shifts that followed the announcement in January 2020 of the LMP2-based LMDh category that offered an alternative route into the WEC Hypercar class.

A reduction in minimum weight, down from 1100kg, in the spring of 2020 was the start of the problem. The LMH rules as they stood in November 2019, when Peugeot committed to a return to top-flight sportscar racing, mandated the 31/31 option for front-drive hybrids. Toyota's GR010 HYBRID was already in build in mid-2020 and, after its maiden season of competition in 2021, the Japanese manufacturer successfully argued for a switch to 29/34, claiming compromised weight distribution adversely affected tyre life.

Peugeot's problem was that when this happened it was just a couple of months away from the 9X8 shakedown. It was too late to change tack, even if it knew that the 29/34 route offered an advantage.

Things got worse for Peugeot. The manufacturers building cars to the LMDh rules demanding a rear hybrid system pushed through what might be termed a mitigation of the advantages offered by all-wheel drive. The speed at which electrical power could be deployed was taken out of the technical regulations and made part of the BoP so that it could go up and down. Peugeot's problem was that it never went as low as the original 120km/h (75mph) for which the 9X8 had been designed. So the BoP never gave the 9X8 the extra traction at the front it needed to compensate for that lack of rubber at the rear.

Big-picture circumstances beyond Peugeot's control essentially derailed the original 9X8. Convergence was its undoing and left it no choice but to go conventional. ❄

YOUR SAY

The idea of bleeding reserve drivers in non-championship F1 races makes sense, but with the current calendar, I'm wondering where these could be squeezed in

DOMINIC MALVERN

In praise of non-championship F1 races

I applaud Kevin Turner's idea of bleeding reserve drivers in non-championship F1 races (Pit + Paddock, 21 March); it makes complete sense. I fondly remember attending several Race of Champions events at Brands Hatch and an International Trophy at Silverstone back in the 1970s. But there were a lot fewer grands prix back then and with the current ramped-up calendar of 24 races (far too many in my humble opinion), I'm wondering where these races could be squeezed in.

I seem to remember Donington Park trying to organise a non-championship event, prior to their only world championship round in 1993, and having to abandon it due to lack of support. I suspect the current regime would not

support such events, which is a great pity.

Dominic Malvern
Llanrwst, North Wales

Did Alonso deserve a more severe penalty?

I find it hard to believe that Fernando Alonso was only given a 20-second penalty for his actions at the end of the Australian GP. He is the most experienced driver on the grid, so his explanation to the stewards that he had somehow 'misjudged' his approach to the corner is laughable. Where is the boundary between 'potentially dangerous driving' and actual dangerous driving?

John Hutchinson
By email



HANSEN/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Does anyone smell burning?
William Byron and his Hendrick Motorsports crew nonchalantly go about their victory celebrations at Austin. Race report, page 37

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RACE CENTRE



Sainz not alone in thinking that even without Verstappen's fiery exit, he had the pace to win

SAINZ'S REMARKABLE RETURN BREAKS RED BULL'S RUN

He doubted he'd be match fit after missing the previous round, but the Ferrari driver seized his opportunity to take a sensational victory in Melbourne

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport
IMAGES**



W

hen I was about to catch the flight to come to Australia, I was still in bed,” reflected Carlos Sainz of his recovery from the appendicitis that ruled him out of the preceding Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. “I could barely use my abdominal muscles to move. And I was like, ‘This is not going to happen.’ But I took the flight, and suddenly when I landed in Australia, the feeling was a lot better...”

A little over two weeks after going under the knife in Jeddah, Sainz was busy trying not to be too disappointed about missing out on pole position for

Ferrari at the Australian GP. A couple of minuscule mistakes, allied to a turnaround in Max Verstappen's pace after Red Bull had initially struggled for performance at the Albert Park venue, proved to be the difference between the two positions on the front row.

Sainz felt that he needed to be at 100% to beat Verstappen, even if Ferrari's long-run pace had proved favourable in Friday's FP2 session, and questioned whether he would be able to realistically shake off any lingering effects from his operation to dice against the championship leader. As it turned out, the Spaniard was spared that encounter.

Like all things tend to do in contemporary F1, proceedings in Australia began with Verstappen sauntering into the lead. Sainz attempted to probe for potential passing points into the first few corners, but this wasn't the Red Bull driver's first rodeo. They, for a short time at least, settled into the order in which they had begun.

There was the added problem of tyre graining to consider, since Pirelli was bold and had taken the three softest grades of rubber to Australia. As a measure to increase strategic variation and prevent the race from being a one-stopper, the softer tyres had offered much in the way of head-scratching throughout the weekend. The C5 soft, particularly the front tyre, tended to saturate under load and cause understeer; suggestions were that, were more sets of the medium C4 available, they might have served as a better qualifying tyre.

“I couldn't put Max under pressure into Turn 1,” Sainz reckoned, “and from there on it was kind of a very strategic first lap and a half where you are wanting to protect the tyre from opening up the graining.” Reducing lateral sliding was the key to this.

A change to F1's DRS ruleset has at least given Verstappen a little extra in his first-lap workload to consider, because it can now be activated at the end of the first lap. This has given him the added task of building a lead of a full second on that opening lap. Given the Red Bull's obvious strengths, he has largely made light work. Not this time, as Sainz crucially held onto the Dutchman's coat tails to sit on the cusp of getting his first dose of DRS – but there was more at >>



Sainz was “very strategic” in his initial pursuit of polesitter Verstappen

Reason for Verstappen’s loss of speed soon became evident



play in Verstappen’s court, which became apparent as soon as the second lap. On the run to Turn 3, Sainz and Verstappen were separated by the margin you would expect from a slipstream. The Spaniard was about half a tenth faster on the run to the corner, Verstappen reclaimed that back under braking, but the corner exit made the difference; the Red Bull shipped 0.6s to Sainz in just a few metres, uncharacteristically losing speed at the end of the straights. Verstappen’s right-rear brake caliper was stuck, and Sainz could smell blood.

“Basically stuck on from when the lights went off,” Verstappen explained of the caliper after his short-lived race. “The temperatures just kept on increasing until the point, of course, that it caught fire.” First, fleeting wisps of smoke emerged from his RB20; next, those wisps metamorphosed into great plumes, their intensity growing as Verstappen’s pace fell. At the time Sainz caught him with DRS along Lakeside Drive and successfully reeled off his play for the lead, Verstappen was about 16mph shy.

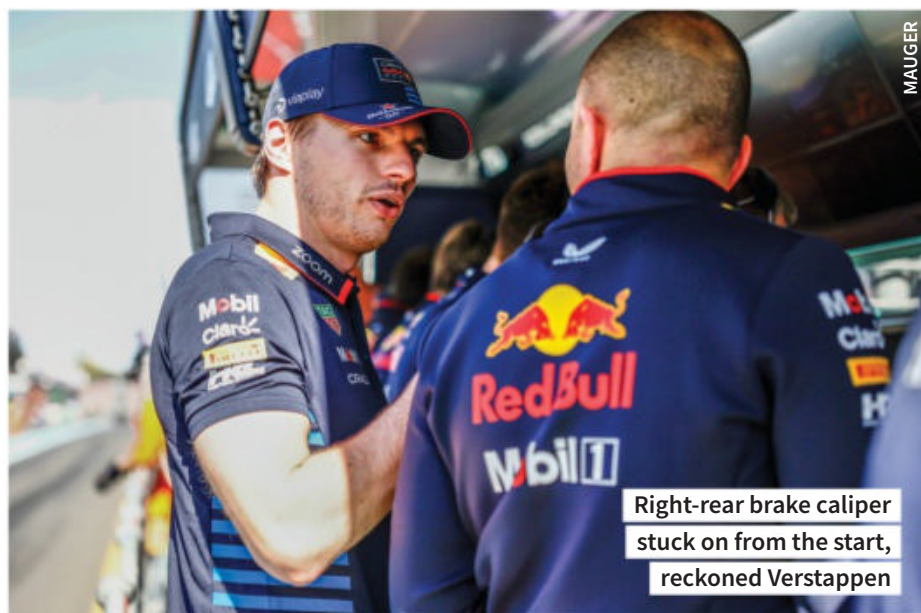
Although the Ferrari was now ahead, Verstappen attempted to cling on. With DRS, the top-end speed arrears were more or less reversed, suggesting that the catching brake wasn’t sapping too much in outright straightline speed. But data traces do show that, when Verstappen was turning right on the following lap, he was

shedding speed quite considerably. The exit of Turn 7 and the high-speed Turn 10 were both accompanied by a drop in velocity relative to Sainz, only alleviated when the steering wheel was turned anti-clockwise. It ultimately proved moot because the temperatures were rising, and shards of carbon eventually sprayed out of the wheel hub like an emptied buckshot.

The Australian crowd roared as it became apparent that Verstappen was out of the race. Nothing personal; the spectators simply wanted a different winner rather than another 10-victory streak from F1’s current pre-eminent force. Sainz now had the lead, with the pack of Lando Norris, Charles Leclerc and Oscar Piastri in pursuit.

“I was confident about the first half of the race that I was going to be OK, because it’s more or less the laps that I did on Friday,” Sainz reckoned. After all, Ferrari’s representative race pace in FP2 had looked pretty handy; Leclerc had been the faster of the two drivers over a stint on the medium tyres, factoring at the top of the average time order ahead of Norris’s McLaren. Aston Martin and Mercedes had been behind, so it had already been established that there was little threat. Red Bull only had a stint from Sergio Perez to count on after Verstappen’s delayed start to second practice cost him a chance of a long run on Friday. The Mexican’s 12-lap stint was behind that of Aston and Mercedes; different fuel loads might apply here, but it was evident that he was not really making inroads into the top four drivers in race trim.

Sainz may not have been in touch with Leclerc during FP2, but the Madrid-born driver had certainly had his Weetabix on Saturday



Right-rear brake caliper stuck on from the start, reckoned Verstappen



Sainz able to maintain decent lead over Leclerc until the closing laps

“THE TEMPERATURES JUST KEPT ON INCREASING UNTIL THE POINT, OF COURSE, THAT IT CAUGHT FIRE”

morning. The balance seemed to shift between the two; Sainz had a car that he could use to great effect in qualifying, while Leclerc appeared to be second-best – and the disparity in track position was another mitigating factor in the race.

If Leclerc was going to have a hope of beating Sainz, he'd have to get Norris out of the way first. The proliferation of higher-speed corners heightened McLaren's performance over the likes of Aston Martin and Mercedes, putting both Norris and home hero Piastri well into the mix. But Sainz dropped that trio with moderate ease, telling the team that he was intending to “open the gap and go long”. Leclerc, frustrated behind Norris, opted to pit at the end of the ninth lap and Piastri followed him, leaving the front two to go deeper into the race on their opening set of medium tyres.

When Norris stopped at the end of lap 14 for the hard tyre, this handed Leclerc and Piastri an undercut advantage and the Briton dropped to a net fourth place. Sainz kept going for another two laps before making his hard-tyre switch, coming back onto the field with a solid lead – albeit one nearly wiped out by a virtual safety car: Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes had given up the ghost at the end of that lap and crawled to a stop just after Turn 10.

Upon the lap 18 restart, Sainz's lead over Leclerc had briefly fallen to below a second, although this was restored thanks to the leader having more room to manoeuvre with his younger tyres. The gap between the two Ferraris therefore grew by about half a second per lap, and Leclerc admitted that he had not done a particularly stellar job of managing his first set of hard tyres. >>

QUALIFYING



“I think nowadays you need to be 100% to beat Max – and today I wasn't,” Carlos Sainz mused after qualifying, where he just missed out on pole to Max Verstappen despite headlining both Q1 and Q2 in the lead-up to the top 10 shootout. A mere two weeks after abdominal surgery to remove his appendix, Sainz admitted that lingering discomfort remained as he returned to the wheel of his Ferrari – but this hardly stopped him from impressing.

Red Bull, by contrast, had been on the back foot through much of the weekend. Issues with set-up had handed Verstappen too much in the way of understeer, sapping his times through the final sector. Sainz's performances in Q1 and Q2 had marked the Spaniard out as the favourite for pole in qualifying's final crescendo – but Verstappen is hardly one to concede defeat so soon.

Sainz opened his Q3 account with a 1m16.331s, a lap just over a tenth shy of his best in Q2. In contrast, Verstappen bagged a 1m16.048s on his first run, delivering a sucker-punch to Ferrari's hopes of a first pole of 2024. The Dutchman found even more time to secure the fastest lap, posting an impressive 1m15.915s. Sainz's final 1m16.185s was not enough to challenge him, but at least booked a front-row start. “I didn't really feel like I was fighting for pole,” Verstappen mused. “But then we made some little tickles on the car and that seemed to help me in Q3 to really push it to the limit.”

Sainz, who felt that missing most of Jeddah had cost vital track time with the SF-24, saw the sunny side and stated: “If you would have told me even five days ago, when I travelled here still recovering, that I could be on the grid and fighting for pole, I would have taken it.”

“We made some little tickles on the car and that seemed to help me really push it to the limit”

Sergio Perez had initially collected third, but was handed a three-place grid penalty for impeding Nico Hulkenberg in Q1. This promoted Lando Norris into third and Charles Leclerc, who had aborted his final lap after a snap at Turn 12, onto the second row. Home hero Oscar Piastri was also shuffled up to fifth to share the third row with the demoted Perez.

Mercedes made Q3 with only one driver; George Russell picked up seventh on the grid, ahead of Yuki Tsunoda and the two Aston Martins, while Lewis Hamilton was dumped out at the end of Q2 with his W15 proving particularly troublesome on a flying lap. He had been on the cusp of the elimination zone at the death of the session, and Tsunoda and Lance Stroll leapfrogged the seven-time champion to consign him to 11th, his worst Melbourne qualifying result since 2010. For his part, Stroll outqualified Fernando Alonso after the Spanish veteran went off at Turn 6 during his first flying lap.



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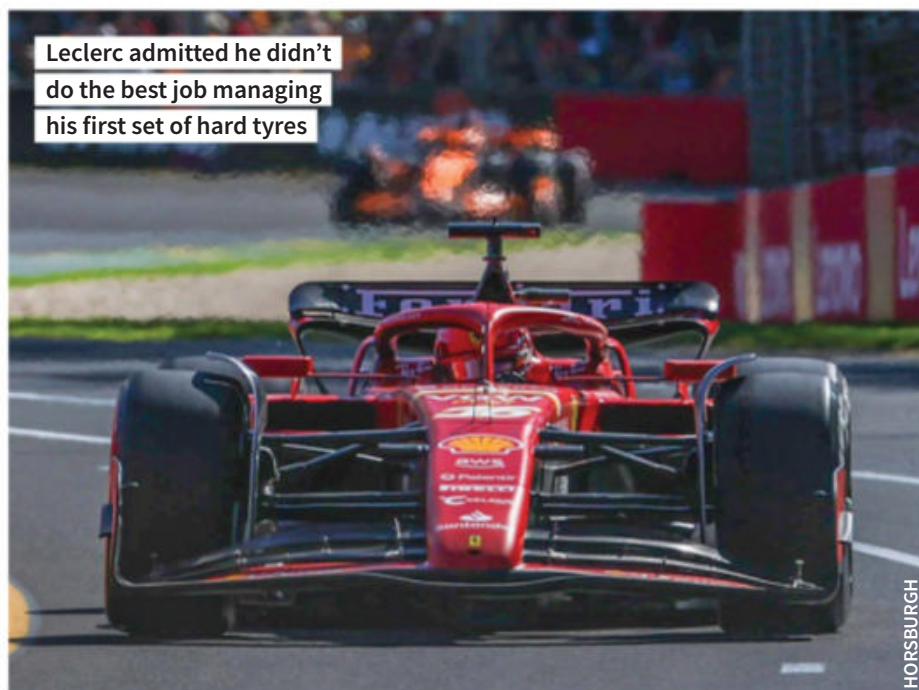


This left the Monegasque vulnerable to the advances of Norris. McLaren enacted a swap between its two drivers on lap 29 of 58 owing to Norris's greater pace, and Piastri agreed that it was the right call – even if it would deny him a home podium finish. Leclerc's heavy-handedness with the first set of hard tyres gave Norris the impetus to close to within two seconds of the Ferrari, and it was at this point where the parallel universes diverged.

"On the lap we were going to undercut, he boxed," Norris said of that fork in the road, when Leclerc stopped at the end of lap 34 for a second set of hards. "So you have to go off and do kind of a different strategy. We got close in the second stint; if I boxed, I think I would have undercut. But he boxed, so I missed that opportunity. You always think, what happens if we did it one lap earlier?"

This forced Norris into waiting until lap 40 for his final stop. Had he gone at the same time as Leclerc, he'd have lost track position anyway, so holding on for six more laps at least offered a tyre offset – even if it contributed little in the remaining third of the race as Leclerc rather cracked the code of keeping the hard tyres alive.

Sainz stopped on the following lap and returned to the circuit five seconds clear of Leclerc, a lead that he managed to keep relatively static until the final three laps. It was the race leader's tyres that started falling away, and this allowed Leclerc to shrink his teammate's advantage, taking over a second out of it by the end of the penultimate lap. Sainz will have been delighted to see the signs of a virtual safety car on that final tour of the circuit, when George Russell hit the Turn 6 wall when trying to pass and avoid a slow-



Leclerc admitted he didn't
do the best job managing
his first set of hard tyres



“LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER SOMETIMES, BUT IT CAN BE GOOD TO YOU. JUST LETTING IT SINK IN”

moving Fernando Alonso ahead of him. Race neutralised, Sainz had won his third grand prix – the second of those enshrined by Russell’s appearance in the wall.

“It’s the whole start to the year in general, how the year started with the news of the non-renewal [at Ferrari for 2025],” Sainz explained. “Then you get yourself fit. You get yourself ready for the start of the season, pushing flat out. And then you get to Bahrain. You do a good podium. You say, ‘OK, now the season is starting well and I can keep the momentum going.’ And suddenly, boom, you’re missing a race in Jeddah and the operation.

“Long days in bed, not knowing if I was going to be back in time. Obviously, a lot of unknowns. ‘Am I going to be back fit? Am I going to be back feeling still good with the car?’ And then suddenly you come back and win. So, yes, what I said on the radio – life is a rollercoaster sometimes, but it can be good to you sometimes. Just letting it sink in and enjoying the moment.

“Obviously, the second half of the race was a bit of an unknown. But yeah, once I got up in front and I had a gap, you can manage everything. You can manage yourself, you can manage the tyres, you have less pressure. You can choose your places where to push and not to push you know, and everything becomes a lot easier.”

But here’s the real poser: could Sainz have won the grand prix had Verstappen stayed in it? Assuming the Dutchman retained a healthy car, there’s more than just anecdotal evidence to suggest that he wouldn’t have necessarily had it all his own way versus his former Toro Rosso team-mate. And that goes back to practice.

Verstappen’s lack of a representative FP2 long run was due to the lingering impacts of an FP1 kerb strike that knocked some of his Red Bull parts loose, but he made up for it with an eight-lap stint during FP3. Averaging his laps on the medium tyres for that stint, he looked strong with 1m22.882s, versus Perez’s FP3 long run on the same compound that yielded an average of 1m23.287s.

That’s a four-tenth gap, one that has been of a similar magnitude throughout their partnership at the Red Bull squad, so we can use that to estimate where Verstappen might have stacked up in the FP2 session against the Ferraris. Assuming Perez’s average time of 1m23.808s from FP2, Verstappen would likely have managed >>

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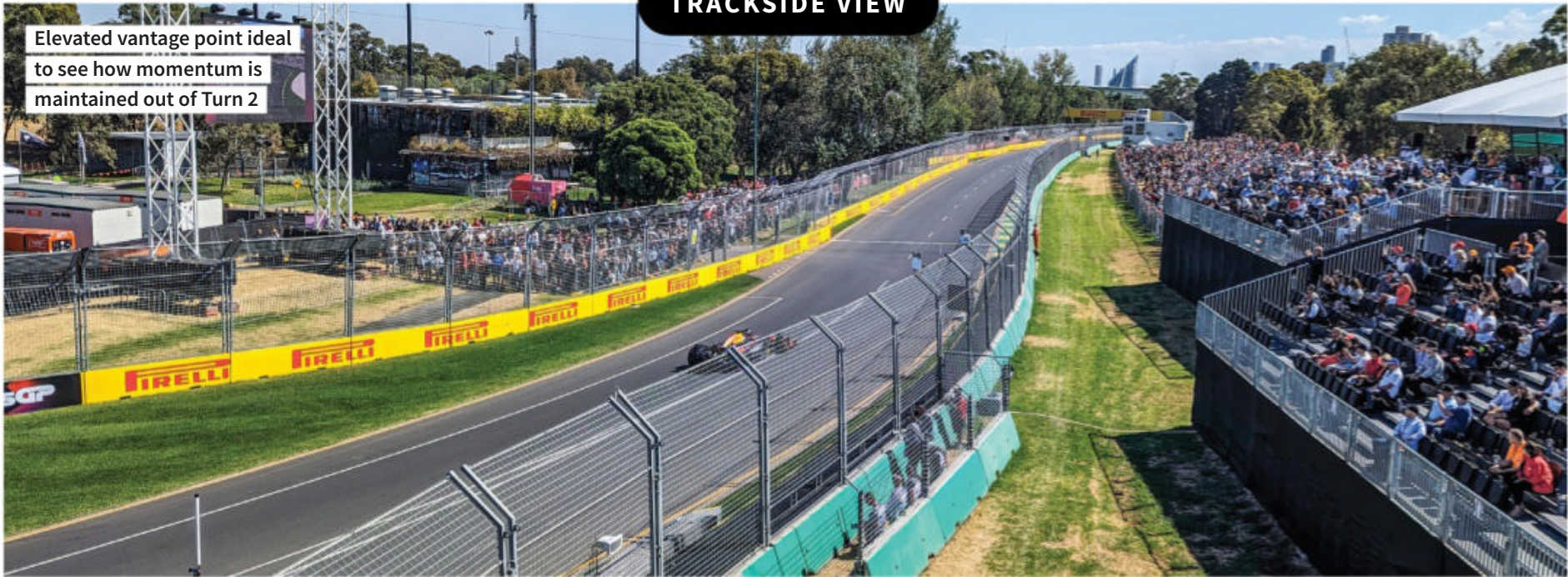
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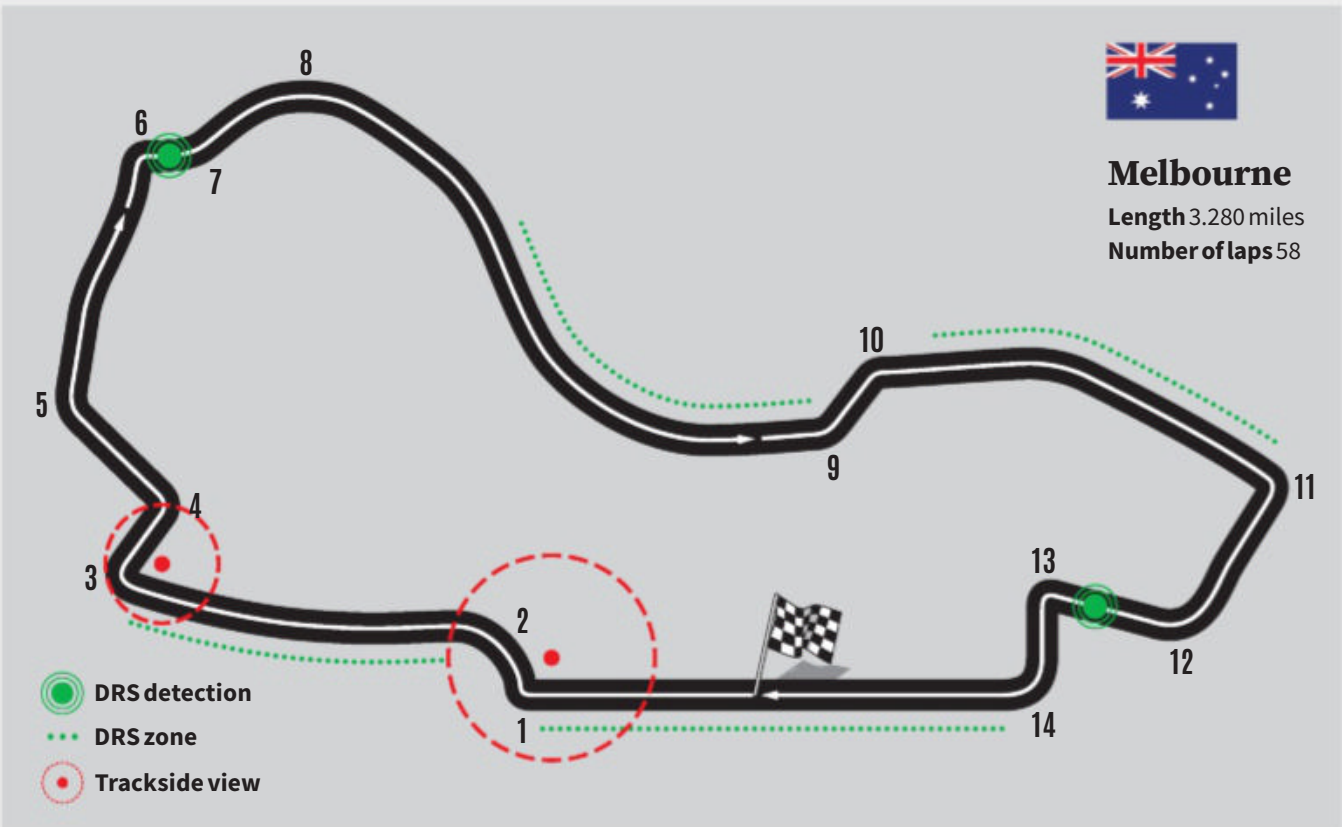
TRACKSIDE VIEW



We are camped out at Turn 1, keenly waiting for the thunder down under. The sound of Porsches and V8-powered Supercars have already torn through Albert Park in a motorsport jamboree, and the packed-out crowd is now anticipating the guttural snarls of turbo-hybrid V6s as the Formula 1 cars come to play. Autosport’s F1 Editor Matt Kew comes along for the ride one last time before he moves to pastures new, so we’re hoping the 20 drivers can provide adequate entertainment as a send-off.

There’s more camber in Turn 1 than you’d expect, and it’s up to the driver to carry enough speed through the right-hander and wind off the lock as they accelerate through Turn 2. It’s easy to spot the difference between a fast car and a slow one here, and it’s all in the dwell time at the first corner apex. Case in point: Charles Leclerc barely acknowledges its existence, barrelling through the kerb and firing his Ferrari at the next corner as he stomps on the loud pedal, the direction changes rapier-sharp. Esteban Ocon comparatively has a leisurely picnic in the park at Turn 1, shedding a lot more speed as his first quick lap is compromised as early as the first corner.

We make the vertigo-inducing climb up the photographers’ tower to watch from on high, noting the opening corner carry-through speeds and watching how the



“The difference between a fast car and a slow one here is all in the dwell time at the first corner apex”

drivers maintain the momentum on the run to the tight third turn – a noted accident hotspot in Melbourne’s 28-year history of hosting F1 races.

It’s apparent that buzzing the kerb slightly in the transit through Turn 2 is also worth some time, just as long as you don’t dip a wheel on the grass. Fernando Alonso needs a couple of bites on the steering



wheel when he comes through, missing the rotation, while Logan Sargeant is finding confidence; he shies away from the Turn 2 kerb on the previous run, but hits his marks on the next visit.

We take a walk to Turn 3, where an opening for cameras gives us a chance to watch the cars tackle the apex of the circuit’s tightest corner. Nico Hulkenberg is flexing his bravado here, turning in at great speed and managing to rotate the rear enough to get through cleanly.

It’s a slow corner and there’s not

much to report, at least until the screen directly behind us shows Alex Albon’s crash. We head back to Turn 2 during the red-flag stoppage, and get into place by the time the session resumes. Lewis Hamilton skips across the grass in his Mercedes, a mistake George Russell will repeat in the next session.

Albert Park is no walk in the park after all; grass and gravel offer tangible punishment, something other circuits would do well to heed.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



ALL PICS: BOXALL-LEGGE

Ferrari's joy lifted further by sense that the squad is properly in contention



SUTTON

a 1m23.400s, or probably a couple of tenths better after the intermediate practice session.

This puts the Red Bull a smidgen behind the Aston Martins, but the AMR24 is still lacking in consistency to deliver Alonso a long-awaited 33rd win. With Red Bull's Saturday progress, the green machines had dropped behind Red Bull, evinced in Perez's eventual dispatchment of Alonso after a fierce battle during the middle stages of the race.

The lap times that Perez was running were also in the range of half a second to a full second off throughout the final phase of the race against Piastri, although Red Bull boss Christian Horner contended that Perez had "picked up a tear-off underneath the floor and it's got lodged in an area that's caused significant load loss". Perhaps that accounts for some of it, but it's not unfair to say that the Guadalajara-born driver was not particularly on it during the Australia race. Regardless, improving each of Perez's laps by half a second up until the end-of-race VSC, to synthesise a hypothetical Verstappen result, puts him between Norris and Piastri. But would that have come to pass?

Although Verstappen was encumbered by the braking difficulty early on, Sainz seemed to have a feeling in his gut that the three-time champion was gettable without it. "I knew this weekend and this race, I could have the pace to challenge Max," the race winner revealed. "And I thought to myself, with how powerful the DRS is around here, if I get within the DRS range after lap one, we can put him a bit under pressure." Perez was more direct when asked whether Sainz would

"I KNEW THIS WEEKEND AND THIS RACE, I COULD HAVE THE PACE TO CHALLENGE MAX"

have beaten Verstappen in a 'normal' Albert Park encounter. "Absolutely", he replied, influenced by the level of pace of the Ferraris across the Australia weekend.

This speed allowed Leclerc to keep Norris at bay in that final phase; covering off the undercut ensured that Norris would have to do the deed for second on track. The gap never narrowed beyond the two-and-a-half second mark in that final stint, so Leclerc guaranteed Ferrari's first 1-2 finish since Bahrain 2022.

"It's been a long time since we have had the genuine pace to have Red Bull... I wouldn't say under control, because we don't know what the real pace of Max today was," Leclerc contended after the race. "But I will say that from FP1, we knew that pole position and the race win were possible because we had very good tyre degradation, very good pace, and that is a very encouraging sign."

Piastri secured a McLaren 3-4 after dropping away from Norris. Although the home crowd would have dearly loved to have seen its hero on the podium, his pace deficit to Norris justified their earlier swap. At least Piastri was not challenged from behind – once Perez had cleared Alonso, there might have been some expectant faces on the McLaren pitwall that the ex-Racing Point driver might be able to find an easy way through. Instead, Perez could not really erode Piastri's gap; the Australian worked on keeping it relatively static and ensured he would be the main beneficiary should any of the front three encounter misfortune.

It was a victory that came at the perfect time for Sainz. After losing his Ferrari drive for 2025 and then being ruled out of Jeddah, misfortune had started to build, and he needed a positive to cancel them out and put himself in the shop window for next season: "For sure, it does no harm. That is 100%. But yeah, I'm still without a job for next year. I guess this is going to help it!"

**NEXT
F1 REPORT**
Japanese Grand Prix
11 April issue



FERRARO

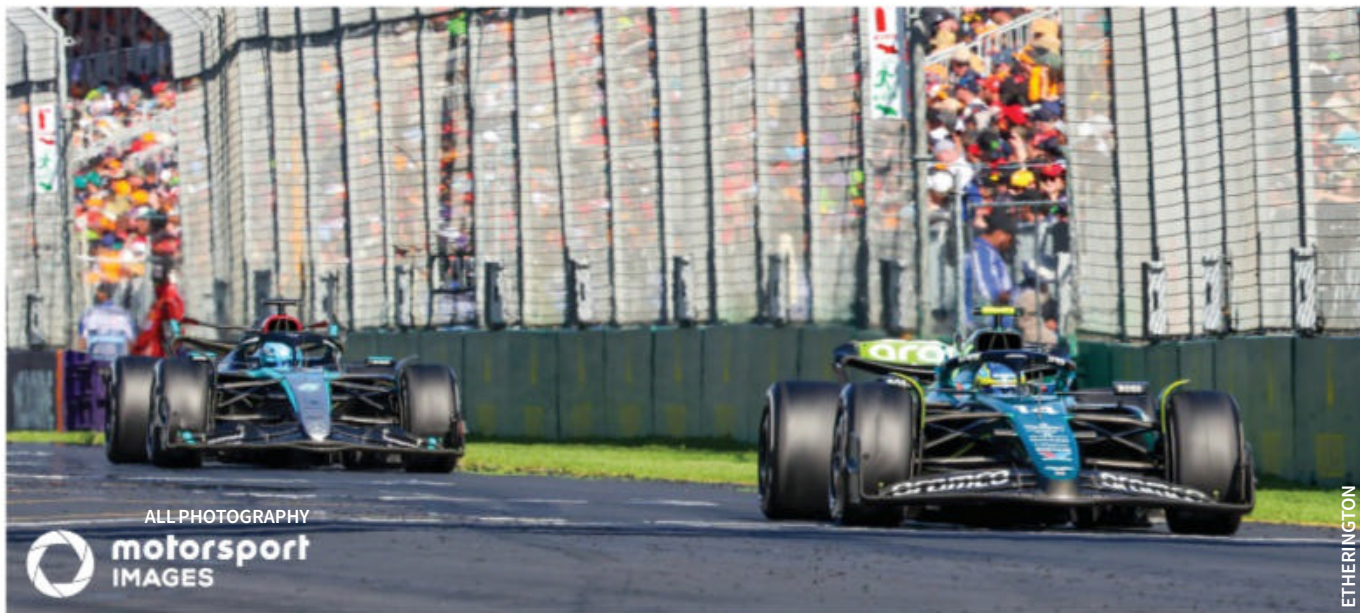
WILLIAMS DEFENDS PUTTING ALBON IN SARGEANT'S CAR

Williams justified its brutal decision to give Alex Albon Logan Sargeant's FW46 after the Anglo-Thai destroyed his in a costly Melbourne FP1 crash, because "the spread of our cars [in the Formula 1 midfield] at the moment is milliseconds".

That was the argument put forward by Williams team principal James Vowles, who also explained that "the midfield is so incredibly tight that a point or two or more may make the difference at the end of the season between being 10th or being sixth" as his reasoning for backing Albon over Sargeant. In their two and a bit seasons as team-mates, Albon has scored 27 points to Sargeant's one. Sargeant called it "the hardest moment I can remember in my career".

A lack of new parts meant that Williams could not build a spare chassis, and it made the call to put Albon in Sargeant's car after FP2. The problem is due to its late assembly of the initial FW46s following a major change of production process initiated by Vowles last year.

Albon ended up qualifying 12th and finishing 11th, his position boosted by faster rivals ahead retiring. He lost ground at the start, then was on an attacking undercut strategy for his two pitstops for hard tyres, but graining fronts and degrading rears compromised his pace.



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY
motorsport
IMAGES

ETHERINGTON

Alonso gets 20-second post-race penalty after late Russell crash

Fernando Alonso dropped from a sixth-place finish in the Australian Grand Prix to eighth after he was hit with a 20-second post-race penalty for contributing to George Russell's late accident.

The pair had been in each other's orbit for much of the race. Alonso had been a big gainer after starting his Aston Martin on the hard tyres and pitting under the virtual safety car activation following Lewis Hamilton's retirement. Alonso rejoined fifth – he had been running 10th before the VSC, when the frontrunners were yet to pit – and was then passed by Sergio Perez's Red Bull.

Russell chased, the Mercedes completing a very long middle stint on the hard tyres, while Alonso used the mediums. With a four-lap tyre offset for the final stint and with both on hard rubber, Russell closed from three seconds behind to reach DRS distance with six tours to run.

On the penultimate lap, Alonso lifted off around 100 metres earlier than usual for the fast Turn 6 right, where he'd had a

costly off in qualifying. Russell was caught out by losing downforce as he rapidly closed in on the Aston and lost control, spinning off into the gravel, hitting the wall and bouncing back into the track.

The stewards opted to penalise Alonso because, said their statement, "his plan was to slow earlier, he got it slightly wrong", which explains why GPS data has Alonso changing gear and even accelerating again before he braked fully for the corner. The stewards felt that Alonso "drove in a manner that was at very least 'potentially dangerous'" and therefore contravened Article 33.4 of F1's sporting rules. His penalty was essentially a converted drive-through since Alonso's action was considered "an aggravating circumstance, as opposed to a simple mistake".

Alonso later posted on social media that he was "a bit surprised by a penalty... regarding how we should approach the corners or how we should drive the race cars".



BAGNALL

32

Charles Leclerc has now finished on a Formula 1 world championship grand prix podium the same number of times as double world champion Jim Clark, Jacques Laffite, Jean Alesi and Daniel Ricciardo.



SUTTON

Q&A

YUKI TSUNODA
RB DRIVER

The weekend couldn't really have gone much better, all things considered...

Yeah. Very consistent throughout the week. The car felt good straight away from FP1. And we knew I just had to put it all together. In the end, the race wasn't easy. Actually, a couple of teams picked up the pace quite a lot but we were able to maximise performance, opportunities. So, I'm pretty happy, and the team did a fantastic job.

How important is it that you now have momentum?

Well, every race week, I'm just resetting myself – it's a new race week. At the same time each track we perform a little bit differently. But, actually, our car is pretty consistent. I think the good thing is that we are pretty consistent in terms of performance. We didn't have that last year, we were up and down. But for myself, yeah, I just keep improving. And try to fix



some things I want to fix. And I learn from previous races.

How pleased are you with your performances across three races so far?

Frustrating last two races and a couple of situations happened. But I think there was still a bit of opportunity that we could score points and we lost it. We just needed a clean race. And I think we achieved it today. We didn't have any mistakes.

How does 2024 feel compared to the last two years?

It's actually very impressive how our car is performing a lot differently compared to last year, like consistently a couple of corners we are using a higher gear compared to the last year's car. And we knew that last year, in the first half of the season especially, we struggled a lot. That thing is very impressive, how our team has done. You know, definitely without also [former team principal Franz Tost's] push [early in the 2023 campaign] we didn't achieve that. So, for sure, it's still a bit of Franz [influence].



MORE PITSTOP WOES FOR SAUBER - AND A FINE

The Sauber squad had another 2024 race ruined by disastrous pitstops, with Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu finishing 14th and 15th in Melbourne.

Bottas had made positive progress from his first Q1 escape of the year and was 11th when the first set of pitstops began. But his service hit 28 seconds due to Sauber's pit equipment again causing a cross-threaded wheelnut, and so the Finn dropped to the rear of the field.

The lengthy stop was down to modifications the team had made following long stops in Bahrain and Jeddah being "not robust enough", according to Sauber head of trackside engineering Xevi Pujolar. Later in the race, Bottas's normal-length second stop featured a wheelnut rolling into the fast lane in the pits, for which Sauber was fined €5000.

Zhou also suffered a long pitstop when battling Pierre Gasly's Alpine approaching the closing stages. This was due to a gear selection issue causing his car to stall.

Haas gets both cars into the points for first time since '22

Haas left Melbourne with its first double points finish since the 2022 Austrian Grand Prix, with Nico Hulkenberg leading home Kevin Magnussen for a 9-10 result.

It was the Dane who qualified ahead for a change, with Magnussen starting 14th and Hulkenberg 16th after he missed the Q1 cut for the first time this year. Magnussen jumped Alex Albon at the start and ran 12th before pitting with others on the conventional medium-hard-hard two-stopper. Hulkenberg held station early on, then climbed the order when he stayed out on his hard tyres. The German was then a big gainer with a VSC stop following Lewis Hamilton's retirement.

In the second stint, and with

Hulkenberg on younger medium tyres, Haas enacted a swap after he'd emerged behind and then caught Magnussen. Hulkenberg then rejoined just ahead of Albon following his second stop for more hards, after which Magnussen, who'd already had his second service for the same compound, caught and battled past the Williams driver.

After this, Pierre Gasly's Alpine pitted and the Haas pair ran in 10th and 11th, before each was boosted a spot by George Russell's late crash.

"We expected to have better race pace," said Haas team principal Ayao Komatsu. "But to be able to get double points is better than expected. It just goes to show that you need to be there."





Peter Collins

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Other Races This Season:

***15 June
Cadwell Park***

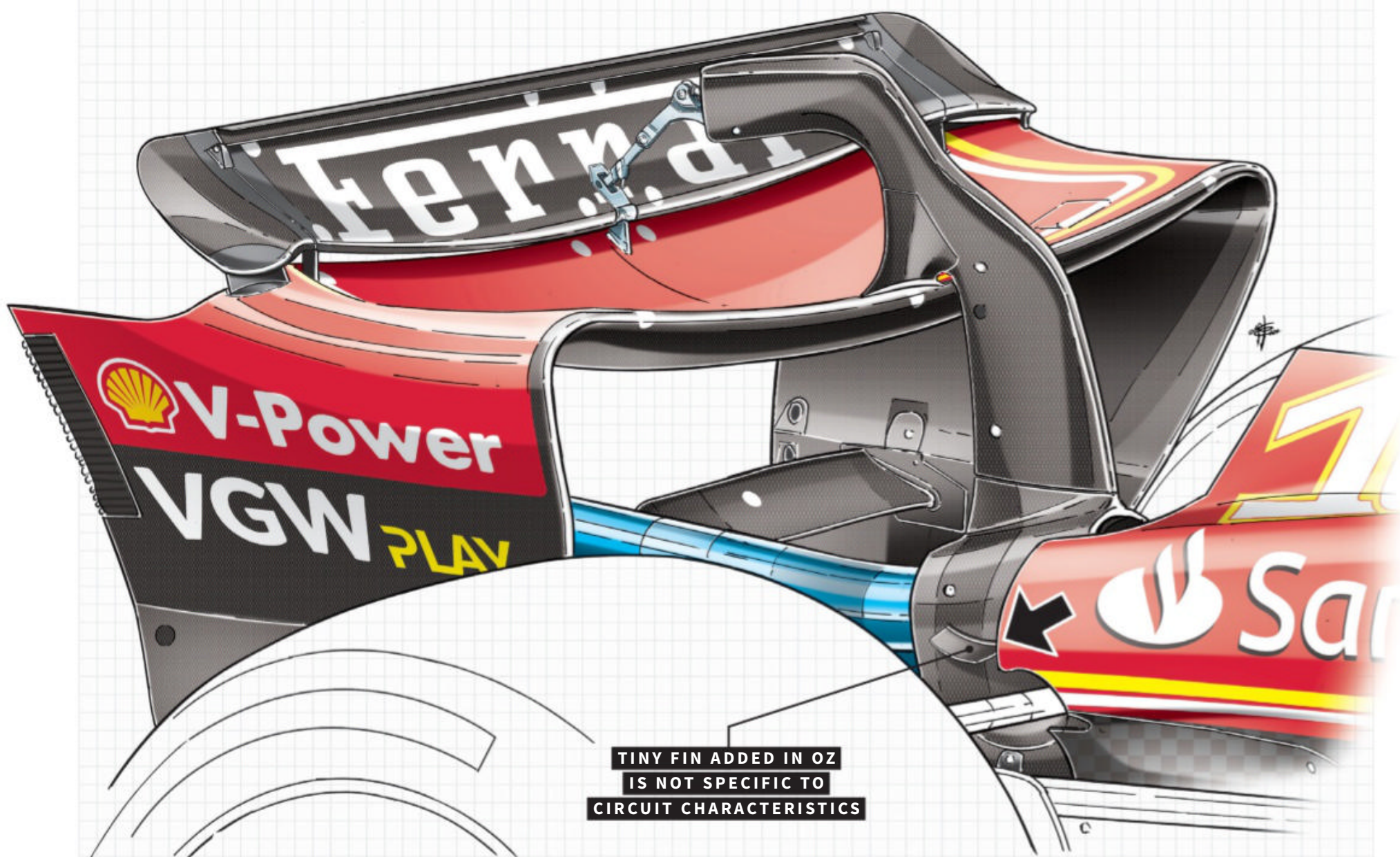
***7 July
Donington SeeRed***

***31 August
Mallory Park***



DRAWING BOARD

GIORGIO PIOLA



FERRARI MAKES TWEAK BEFORE BIGGER UPGRADES ARRIVE

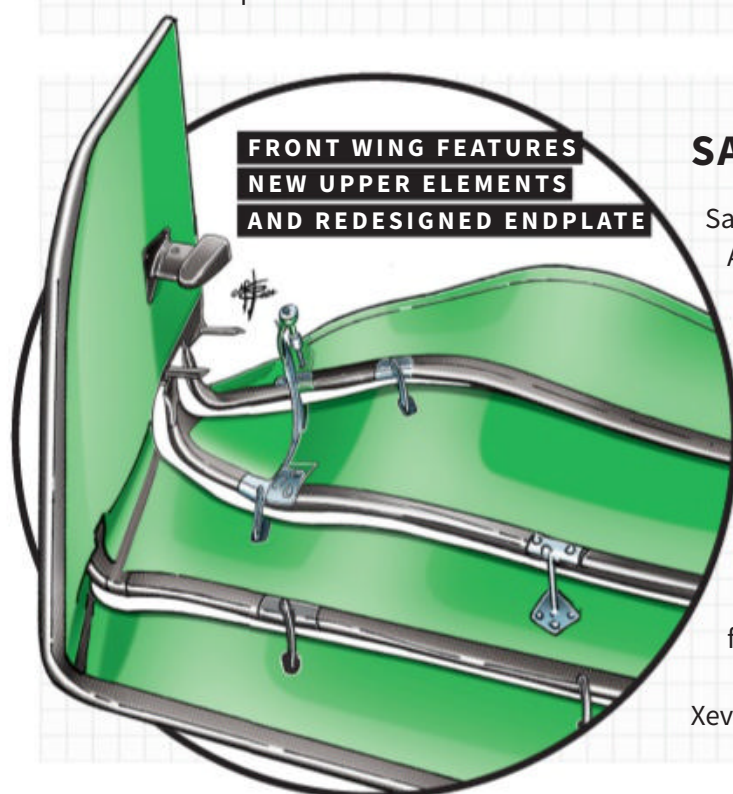
There were few upgrades for the Australian Grand Prix across the grid, with most teams instead waiting for the Suzuka round next month and then the start of the European season to debut new developments.

Ferrari kept it small with a tiny fin attached to the rear-wing mounting pylon, affixed to the stem that wraps around the exhaust. This offers

a little more conditioning over the air expelled from the aperture at the rear of the car, and Ferrari's pre-race technical notes stated that this was "not specific to the Albert Park circuit layout aerodynamic efficiency requirements", and "the addition of pylon winglets is a minor update and offers a small increase of local aerodynamic load".

Of the top five teams, only Ferrari and Aston Martin declared an upgrade for the Melbourne weekend, with a revised front wing on the AMR24. This had a "revised twist" on the top element that "changes the loading distribution across the span of the front wing for improved car performance".

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



SAUBER IMPROVES ITS FRONT WING

Sauber had a revised front wing for Australia, which featured a new pair of upper elements and a redesigned endplate. Relative to the old wing, a few minor details have been applied: the attachments between the endplate and those upper elements have changed, and small winglets appear above them, both with a notable downwashing characteristic. The position of the flap adjuster had also been moved from the third element to the top piece.

According to trackside engineering director Xevi Pujolar, the new wing offers "better aero

performance, more efficiency, better balance at higher speed [corners]", but the team encountered an issue when Zhou Guanyu's wing fell apart during qualifying during an innocuous use of kerb. This forced the Chinese driver to try the old specification, giving the team an opportunity to perform back-to-back observations over the race.

"The front wing worked well in the race," Pujolar added. "We can see that actually the front wing is working and for the next race, we'll have more parts, more performance. I think we're going on the right direction."

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



19 Zhou #24
1m18.188s



18 Ricciardo #3
1m18.085s



17 Gasly #10
1m17.982s



16 Hulkenberg #27
1m17.976s



15 Ocon #31
1m17.697s



14 Magnussen #20
1m17.427s



13 Bottas #77
1m17.340s



12 Albon #23
1m17.167s



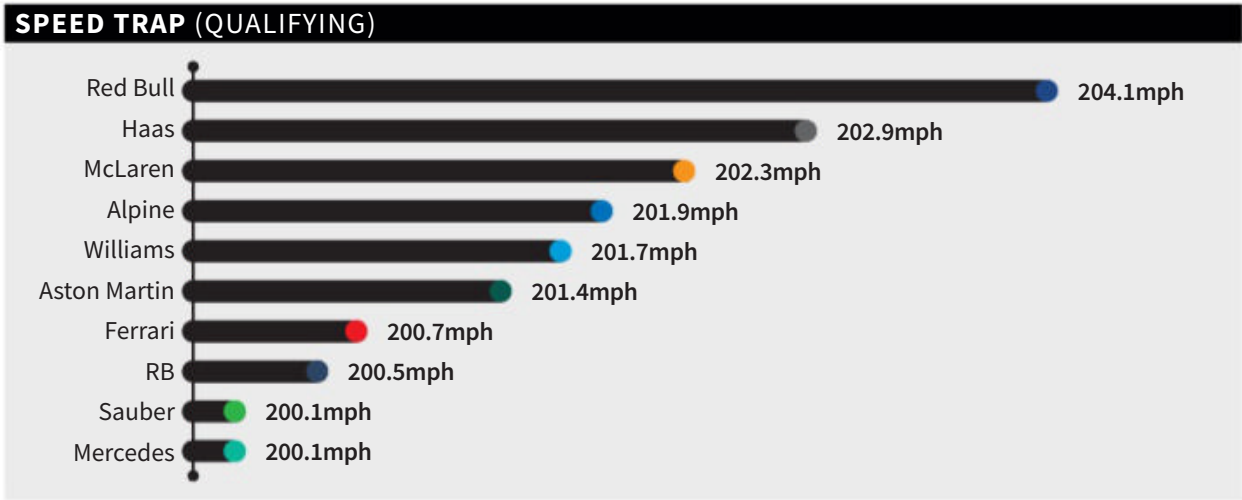
11 Hamilton #44
1m16.960s

FREE PRACTICE 1			FREE PRACTICE 2			FREE PRACTICE 3		
POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Norris	1m18.564s	1	Leclerc	1m17.277s	1	Leclerc	1m16.714s
2	Verstappen	1m18.582s	2	Verstappen	1m17.658s	2	Verstappen	1m16.734s
3	Russell	1m18.597s	3	Sainz	1m17.707s	3	Sainz	1m16.791s
4	Leclerc	1m18.599s	4	Stroll	1m17.822s	4	Hamilton	1m16.806s
5	Tsunoda	1m18.621s	5	Alonso	1m17.912s	5	Russell	1m16.886s
6	Perez	1m18.642s	6	Russell	1m17.951s	6	Alonso	1m16.997s
7	Stroll	1m18.667s	7	Piastri	1m18.077s	7	Perez	1m17.014s
8	Sainz	1m18.686s	8	Perez	1m18.090s	8	Piastri	1m17.087s
9	Hamilton	1m18.771s	9	Norris	1m18.155s	9	Stroll	1m17.341s
10	Piastri	1m18.918s	10	Tsunoda	1m18.188s	10	Norris	1m17.490s
11	Ricciardo	1m19.274s	11	Zhou	1m18.421s	11	Tsunoda	1m17.673s
12	Albon	1m19.443s	12	Ricciardo	1m18.534s	12	Bottas	1m17.752s
13	Magnussen	1m19.489s	13	Sargeant	1m18.578s	13	Albon	1m17.759s
14	Sargeant	1m19.519s	14	Bottas	1m18.585s	14	Zhou	1m17.876s
15	Ocon	1m19.561s	15	Gasly	1m18.691s	15	Ocon	1m17.920s
16	Hulkenberg	1m19.604s	16	Hulkenberg	1m18.702s	16	Hulkenberg	1m17.941s
17	Gasly	1m19.622s	17	Ocon	1m18.705s	17	Magnussen	1m17.961s
18	Alonso	1m19.716s	18	Hamilton	1m18.834s	18	Ricciardo	1m17.963s
19	Zhou	1m19.989s	19	Magnussen	1m19.275s	19	Gasly	1m18.390s
20	Bottas	1m20.014s	20	Albon	notime	20	Sargeant	notime

WEATHER Sunny, air 20-21C track 37-39C

WEATHER Sunny, air 21C track 36-39C

WEATHER Overcast, air 18-19C track 28-31C



QUALIFYING 1			QUALIFYING 2			QUALIFYING 3		
POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Sainz	1m16.731s	1	Sainz	1m16.189s	1	Verstappen	1m15.915s
2	Perez	1m16.805s	2	Leclerc	1m16.304s	2	Sainz	1m16.185s
3	Verstappen	1m16.819s	3	Verstappen	1m16.387s	3	Perez	1m16.274s
4	Leclerc	1m16.984s	4	Piastri	1m16.601s	4	Norris	1m16.315s
5	Alonso	1m16.991s	5	Perez	1m16.631s	5	Leclerc	1m16.435s
6	Russell	1m17.062s	6	Alonso	1m16.710s	6	Piastri	1m16.572s
7	Albon	1m17.130s	7	Norris	1m16.750s	7	Russell	1m16.724s
8	Tsunoda	1m17.356s	8	Stroll	1m16.780s	8	Tsunoda	1m16.788s
9	Piastri	1m17.369s	9	Tsunoda	1m16.791s	9	Stroll	1m17.072s
10	Stroll	1m17.376s	10	Russell	1m16.901s	10	Alonso	1m17.552s
11	Norris	1m17.430s	11	Hamilton	1m16.960s			
12	Hamilton	1m17.499s	12	Albon	1m17.167s			
13	Bottas	1m17.543s	13	Bottas	1m17.340s			
14	Ocon	1m17.617s	14	Magnussen	1m17.427s			
15	Magnussen	1m17.709s	15	Ocon	1m17.697s			
16	Hulkenberg	1m17.976s						
17	Gasly	1m17.982s						
18	Ricciardo	1m18.085s						
19	Zhou	1m18.188s						
20	Sargeant	notime						

WEATHER Overcast, air 19-20C track 34-36C

NEXT RACE
7 April
Japanese GP
Suzuka

SEASON STATS			
DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1 Verstappen	51	1	1
2 Leclerc	47	2	2
3 Perez	46	2	3
4 Sainz	40	1	2
5 Piastri	28	4	5
6 Norris	27	3	4
7 Russell	18	5	3
8 Alonso	16	5	4
9 Stroll	9	6	9
10 Hamilton	8	7	8
11 Tsunoda	6	7	8
12 Bearman	6	7	11
13 Hulkenberg	3	9	10
14 Magnussen	1	10	13
15 Albon	0	11	12
16 Zhou	0	11	17
17 Ricciardo	0	12	14
18 Ocon	0	13	15
19 Gasly	0	13	17
20 Bottas	0	14	13
21 Sargeant	0	14	18

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP		PTS
1 Red Bull		97
2 Ferrari		93
3 McLaren		55
4 Mercedes		26
5 Aston Martin		25
6 RB		6
7 Haas		4
8 Williams		0
9 Sauber		0
10 Alpine		0


QUALIFYING BATTLE			
Verstappen	3	0	Perez
Hamilton	0	3	Russell
Leclerc	1	1	Sainz
Leclerc	1	0	Bearman
Norris	2	1	Piastri
Alonso	2	1	Stroll
Gasly	0	3	Ocon
Sargeant	0	2	Albon
Ricciardo	0	3	Tsunoda
Zhou	0	3	Bottas
Magnussen	1	1	Hulkenberg

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

WINS	
Verstappen	2
Sainz	1

FASTEST LAPS	
Leclerc	2
Verstappen	1

POLE POSITIONS	
Verstappen	3



SAM TODD/REDBULLCONTENTPOOL

10 Alonso #14 1m17.552s			8 Tsunoda #22 1m16.788s			6 Perez #11 1m16.274s			4 Leclerc #16 1m16.435s			2 Sainz #55 1m16.185s		
9 Stroll #18 1m17.072s			7 Russell #63 1m16.724s			5 Piastri #81 1m16.572s			3 Norris #4 1m16.315s			1 Verstappen #1 1m15.915s		

RESULTS ROUND 3/24 (58 LAPS – 190.22 MILES)					
POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISHTIME	LED	TYRES
1	Carlos Sainz (ESP)	Ferrari	1h20m26.843s	57	Mn, Hn, Hn
2	Charles Leclerc (MCO)	Ferrari	+2.366s		Mn, Hn, Hn
3	Lando Norris (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	+5.904s		Mn, Hu, Hu
4	Oscar Piastri (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	+35.770s		Mn, Hu, Hu
5	Sergio Perez (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	+56.309s		Mn, Hn, Hn
6	Lance Stroll (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+1m33.222s		Mu, Hu, Hu
7	Yuki Tsunoda (JPN)	RB-Honda RBPT	+1m35.601s		Mn, Hn, Hn
8	Fernando Alonso (ESP)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+1m40.992s		Hu, Mu, Hu
9	Nico Hulkenberg (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	+1m44.553s		Hn, Mn, Hn
10	Kevin Magnussen (DNK)	Haas-Ferrari	-1 lap/+4.081s		Mn, Hn, Hn
11	Alexander Albon (THA)	Williams-Mercedes	-1 lap/+5.009s		Mn, Hn, Hn
12	Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)	RB-Honda RBPT	-1 lap/+11.508s		Sn, Hn, Hn
13	Pierre Gasly (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	-1 lap/+40.953s		Mn, Hn, Hn
14	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	Sauber-Ferrari	-1 lap/+42.326s		Mu, Hu, Hn
15	Zhou Guanyu (CHN)	Sauber-Ferrari	-1 lap/+44.293s		Sn, Hu, Hn
16	Esteban Ocon (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	-1 lap/+53.979s		Mn, Hn, Hn, Hu
17	George Russell (GBR)	Mercedes	56 laps-accident		Mn, Hn, Hn
R	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	Mercedes	15 laps-engine		Sn, Hn
R	Max Verstappen (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	3 laps-brakes	1	Mn
NS	Logan Sargeant (USA)	Williams-Mercedes			

WEATHER Sunny, air 21-23C track 40C

WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 141.869mph FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED 147.927mph.

FASTEST LAPS				
POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP	LAP
1	Leclerc	1m19.813s	-	56
2	Norris	1m19.915s	+0.102s	49
3	Sainz	1m20.031s	+0.218s	48
4	Piastri	1m20.199s	+0.386s	54
5	Russell	1m20.284s	+0.471s	53
6	Perez	1m20.388s	+0.575s	47
7	Alonso	1m20.493s	+0.680s	52
8	Stroll	1m20.930s	+1.117s	49
9	Magnussen	1m21.082s	+1.269s	44
10	Gasly	1m21.090s	+1.277s	51
11	Tsunoda	1m21.134s	+1.321s	46
12	Hulkenberg	1m21.145s	+1.332s	46
13	Ricciardo	1m21.239s	+1.426s	46
14	Zhou	1m21.327s	+1.514s	49
15	Ocon	1m21.354s	+1.541s	45
16	Bottas	1m21.422s	+1.609s	48
17	Albon	1m21.618s	+1.805s	46
18	Hamilton	1m22.444s	+2.631s	11
19	Verstappen	1m23.115s	+3.302s	3

RACE BRIEFING	
GRID PENALTIES	
PEREZ Three-place penalty for impeding Hulkenberg	
ZHOU Required to start from pitlane for front wing specification change under parc ferme conditions	
RACE PENALTIES	
GASLY Five-second penalty for crossing the pit exit line	
ALONSO Drive-through converted to 20s penalty, and three licence points, for “potentially dangerous” driving against Russell	

43

Verstappen finished 43 GPs between his 2022 and 2024 Melbourne retirements, winning 35

TYRES						
KEY: H - Hard M - Medium S - Soft I - Intermediate W - Wet n - New set u - Used set						
<div><div>HARD</div><div>MEDIUM</div><div>SOFT</div></div>						
<div><div>C1</div><div>C2</div><div>C3</div><div>C4</div><div>C5</div><div>INTERMEDIATE</div><div>WET</div></div>						

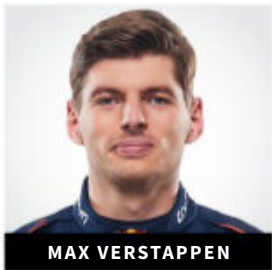
LAP CHART																			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	Verstappen	Sainz	Norris	Leclerc	Piastri	Perez	Russell	Tsunoda	Stroll	Alonso	Hamilton	Albon	Bottas	Magnussen	Ocon	Hulkenberg	Gasly	Ricciardo	Zhou
G	1	55	4	16	81	11	63	22	18	14	44	23	77	20	31	27	10	3	24
1	1	55	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	44	14	77	20	23	31	27	10	3	24
2	55	1	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	44	14	77	20	23	31	27	10	3	24
3	55	1	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	44	14	77	20	23	31	27	10	3	24
4	55	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	44	14	77	20	23	31	27	10	3	24	
5	55	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	44	14	77	20	23	31	27	10	24	3	
6	55	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	44	14	77	20	31	27	10	23	24	3	
7	55	4	16	81	63	11	18	22	14	77	31	27	10	44	20	23	3	24	
8	55	4	16	81	11	22	14	31	27	10	63	18	44	23	20	3	24	77	
9	55	4	11	14	16	81	27	10	22	63	18	44	31	23	20	3	24	77	
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AUSTRALIAN GP DRIVER RATINGS

A magnificent performance by the post-operative Sainz deserves nothing less than full marks, while Tsunoda also shines in ‘runner-up’ spot

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

RED BULL



MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started **1st** — Result **R**

7 FP1 off damaged his floor on a weekend where Red Bull needed track time, but turned things around very well. Regular tyre pressure changes and increased front wing aided his pole run, with late Q3 sector-three improvements key. That was his high point before brake issue wrecked his race.



SERGIO PEREZ

Started **6th** — Result **5th**

5 Given his team believes he lost 20 downforce points snaring a visor tearoff in his car’s underfloor, just as his comeback drive was gaining momentum, he’s mainly scored on qualifying. Impeded Hulkenberg early there so must pay, given he has mirrors as well as radio. Also there was a late Q3 Turn 1 mistake.

MERCEDES



LEWIS HAMILTON

Started **11th** — Result **R**

5 Only really scored on qualifying given how short his race was. Dumped out in Q2 when rising track temperatures and wind put W15 out of narrow balance sweetspot. Used his starting soft tyres to move past Alonso, and was happy with pace on the hards before engine failure.



GEORGE RUSSELL

Started **7th** — Result **17th**

6 Squeaked through to Q3, and then on first lap battled past Perez. Was repassed by Perez, had a very long middle stint, and then closed on Alonso towards the end. Has to cop some responsibility for his crash because he was caught out, as he noted.

FERRARI



CHARLES LECLERC

Started **4th** — Result **2nd**

8 “Aggressive” front wing adjustment for final Q3 lap backfired, and Norris qualified ahead. Undercut the McLaren while holding off Piastri, but pushed too much too early and grained first set of hard tyres. Rectified that well for third stint. Gets bonus point here for fastest lap, too.

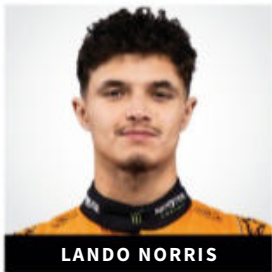


CARLOS SAINZ

Started **2nd** — Result **1st**

10 Ordinarily, Turns 9/10 moments and losses on final Q3 run would cost the maximum – but there was no guarantee that he was on for pole given Verstappen’s improvements, and overall performance was extraordinary given his post-appendectomy pain.

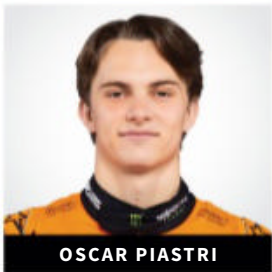
McLAREN



LANDO NORRIS

Started **3rd** — Result **3rd**

8 Headed Leclerc in qualifying. Chased Sainz before falling back in first stint, then was undercut when Ferrari covered Piastri’s first stop. Built tyre offset so was waved back past team-mate in middle stint, after which he couldn’t put pressure on second despite string of fast laps.



OSCAR PIASTR

Started **5th** — Result **4th**

7 Just misses an eight because he lost his rhythm in Q3 and Norris got ahead when it mattered. Mercedes snookered both McLaren’s into a risky strategy, which happened for Leclerc too, then pushed too much on first set of hard tyres and suffered graining. But got better in third stint.

ASTON MARTIN



FERNANDO ALONSO

Started **10th** — Result **8th**

3 Turn 6 defined poor overall weekend. An off there on first Q3 run damaged his floor and robbed him of confidence late in qualifying, which meant Stroll snaffled ahead. His mistake in braking early for Turn 6 on penultimate lap – a legitimate racecraft tactic – meant he copped a penalty.

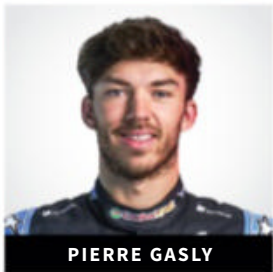


LANCE STROLL

Started **9th** — Result **6th**

6 Saved massive moment at Turn 9 on first Q3 run, and unhappy there on second effort, so qualified behind Tsunoda’s slower RB. Jumped him at Turn 1, then got chased by him for most of the race, only pulling away at the end. That Tsunoda was able to stay so close with an inferior car costs Stroll here.

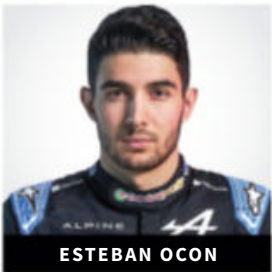
ALPINE



PIERRE GASLY

Started **17th** — Result **13th**

5 Downshift issue hampered final Q1 lap, but at least beat two quicker cars. Held station at start, then VSC pitstop would have been enough to jump Ocon even without team-mate’s misery. Penalised for crossing solid pit exit line – that’s poor given he was reprimanded for that in qualifying.



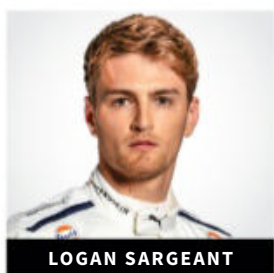
ESTEBAN OCON

Started **15th** — Result **16th**

7 Survived brush with wall on first Q1 run to escape that segment for first time in 2024. But race was undone when he pitted after seven laps of second stint for a tear-off to be removed from right-rear brake duct. Ran at the back with a stop to return to his hard tyres from that short earlier stint.



WILLIAMS



Started **N/A** — Result **N/A**

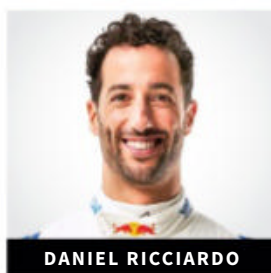
N/A Albon did qualify his car 12th, and there was little evidence to suggest that Sargeant might have replicated Williams's Melbourne high point. He ruined his only FP2 medium tyre run by spinning, which hurt Williams's data-gathering in that session before he got ousted. Obviously isn't marked here.



Started **12th** — Result **11th**

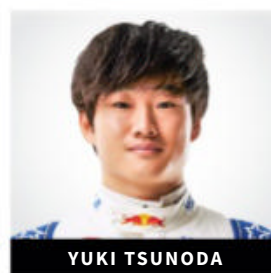
2 Might have been saved such a low score had he converted Williams's brutal call into points, but he didn't. FP1 error was an example of one he shouldn't ever be making and it ruined his team-mate's weekend. It also contributed to Williams lacking long-run data.

RB



Started **18th** — Result **12th**

4 Can't really score higher given Q1 error in pushing at Turn 4 meant losing lap to track limits. Out early while Tsunoda made Q3. Held station starting on soft tyres, gaining as issues for others occurred ahead. Showed flashes of pace at times, and passed Ocon in long third stint.



Started **8th** — Result **7th**

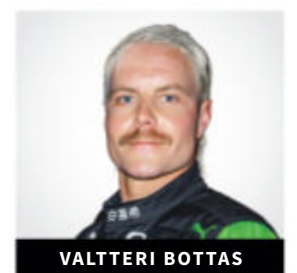
9 Impressed RB and Red Bull in making Q3 again, and this time backed it up with points. Got jumped by Stroll in outside attack at Turn 1, but was able to stay with faster Aston on tricky tyre-management drive without errors. Did lose touch with Stroll late on.

Sauber



Started **19th** — Result **15th**

6 Insisted that front-wing breaking run onto Turn 10 kerb late in Q1 wasn't a mistake. Going back to old wing meant pitlane start, then struggled in early DRS train. Was a chunk down on Haas pair before second pitstop phase, where gear selection issue led to a stall, ruining his race.



Started **13th** — Result **14th**

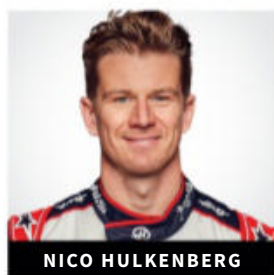
8 What he could show was rather good, making it through to Q2 for first time this season. Then at the start he launched past Albon and wasn't too far off Alonso when he first pitted – albeit out of DRS range. Sauber pit equipment failure led to cross-threaded wheelnut, 30s lost and his race wrecked.

HAAS



Started **14th** — Result **10th**

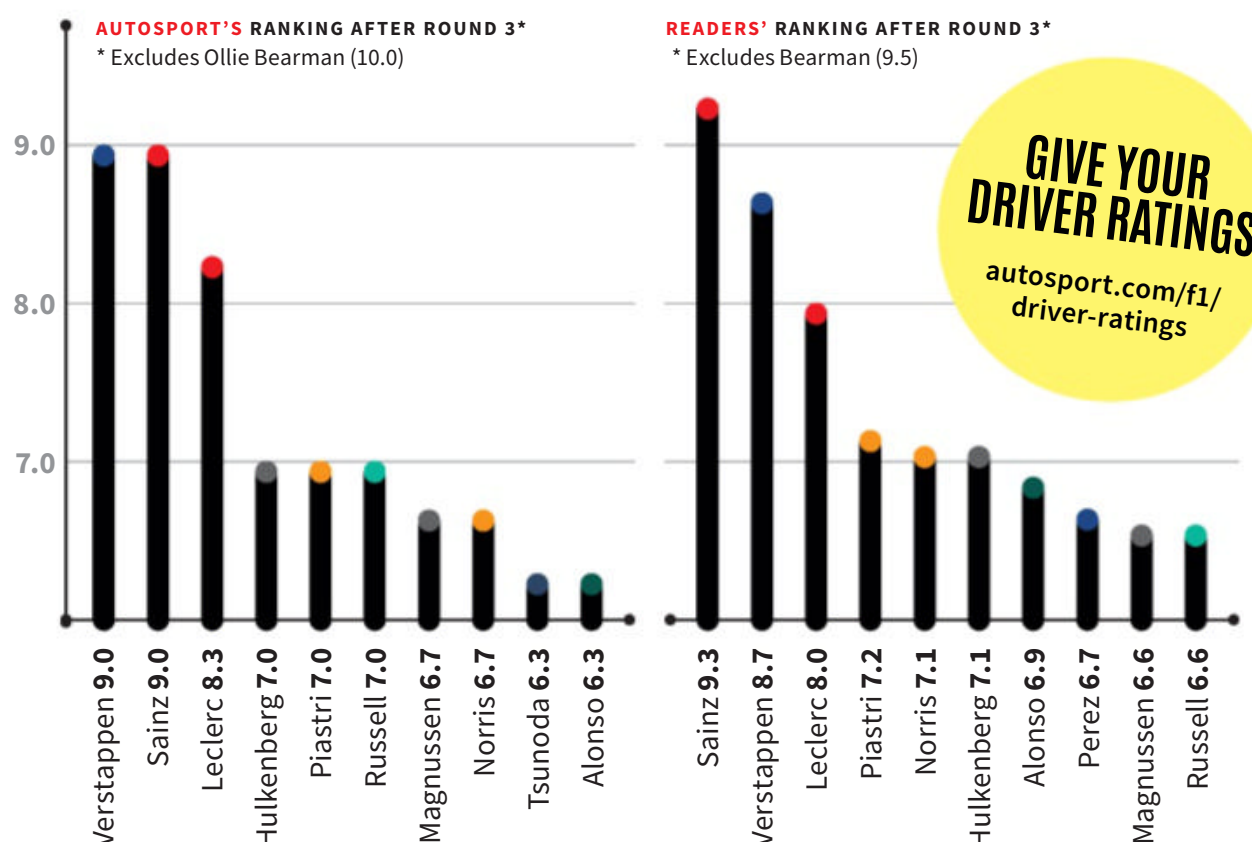
8 Progression to Q2 is difference between Haas scores, and he ended up with a favourable gap to Hulkenberg (before Magnussen was lapped) considering he didn't have VSC time gain after starting on medium tyres. Harried Albon and got ahead after some close calls.



Started **16th** — Result **9th**

7 Impeded by Perez on first Q1 lap, and getting caught out by change of wind direction at Turn 7 meant he lost time, dropped outside tyre temperature window and exited in Q1. Started on hard tyres and gained with VSC stop, meaning an offset to Magnussen, and so was waved by.

TOP 10 AVERAGE RATINGS



Palou dominates IndyCar's Thermal experiment

There wasn't as much action at the front as had been hoped for, but the concept of the non-points \$1 Million Challenge allowed the series to try out new ideas

JOEY BARNES

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES

Alex Palou was simply untouchable in what became a routine Sunday drive to the top step of the podium to win the inaugural \$1 Million Challenge at The Thermal Club last weekend. The reigning and two-time IndyCar Series champion controlled the field from pole and led every one of the 20 laps in the two-segment final of the non-points exhibition – the first in IndyCar since the 2008 race in Surfers Paradise – to claim victory with Chip Ganassi Racing by 5.8 seconds over Team Penske's Scott McLaughlin and take home \$500,000 prize money.



There were two heats and a final at the 3.067-mile, 17-turn road course just outside of Palm Springs, California, and Palou also led all 10 laps of his heat (the second) from pole to underline his domination of an event that had its dramas. "Right from the start, we had all the speed we needed," said the 26-year-old. "The race format was obviously different to our regular championship, so we weren't sure how saving tyres was going to play out in the final but, with no restarts at the end, everything was amazing."

When the dust settled on the day's action, which began at an unheard-of 0930, McLaughlin was left smiling after collecting \$350,000 for his runner-up result but also lamenting an inability to take full advantage of the single-file restart on lap 11 to begin the second half of the final.

"I better put some money up at the bar tonight," McLaughlin said. "We just didn't have quite enough for Alex. Once you get that clear air, it was good. I thought maybe that first restart would be OK, just to have a bit of a play around and see if we can get him, but ultimately I just settled for my pace to make sure we come home in a good spot. I was pumped with my first restart. That was a lot of fun. I got from fourth to second, and that really set up our race."

Meyer Shank Racing's Felix Rosenqvist finished third after





Runner-up McLaughlin
happy with prize pot and
'suck-it-and-see' format

GALSTAD

starting on pole and winning the opening heat to advance into the final, where he collected \$250,000 for taking the last step of the podium. After Chevrolet swept the top four spots at the season-opening Grand Prix of St Petersburg earlier in the month, it was Honda that flexed its muscles in the 'all-star' event, with five of the top six finishers powered by the Japanese manufacturer, and McLaughlin the sole interloper.

Beyond Palou putting together another ominous effort, the standout performance undoubtedly belonged to Colton Herta. After being forced to start the final from the rear of the 12-car grid thanks to taking emergency service after his heat race, the 23-year-old California native opted to run the opening 10 laps roughly 10s per lap off the pace in an effort to minimise the high tyre degradation. In the second half, he turned up the wick and charged through the field from ninth to finish just off the podium for Andretti Global, earning \$100,000 in the process.

"Starting deep in the field like we did, we knew the race was going to be a battle but saving tyres for the first half of the final seemed to work well for us," said Herta. "And to finish fourth in just a short race was pretty decent. It was a really fair fight with Marcus [Armstrong] for fourth. I felt like we gave each

"My first restart was a lot of fun. I got from fourth to second, and that really set up our race"

other plenty of racing room."

There were 39 passes over a combined 38 laps across the two heats and the final. The oddity in the lap count was due to an incident in the opening heat, which became a timed race of 20 minutes after the 10-lap run could not be reached.

On the opening lap of heat one, Rosenqvist led a stacked field to the green flag that quickly fell into chaos in a melee that ultimately put Romain Grosjean out of the event and damaged several cars. In the approach to Turn 1, Grosjean's Juncos Hollinger Racing machine was hit from behind by the nose of the Ganassi car of six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon. The Kiwi had brushed wheels with a fast-starting Herta, who made it three-wide on the inside line at the start.

The contact between Dixon and Grosjean sent the ex-Formula 1 >>



Polesitter Palou
won his heat then
dominated the
main event

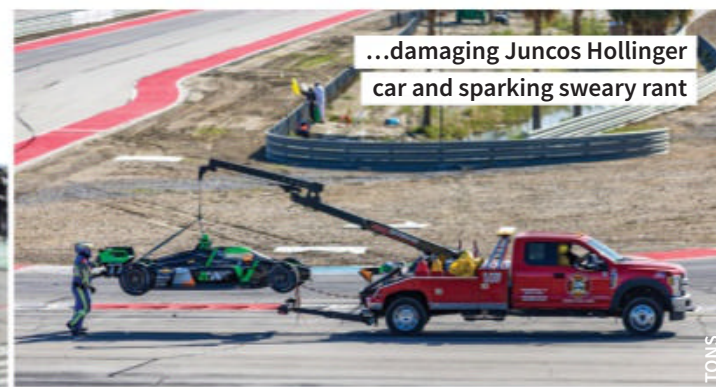
TONS



In first heat Grosjean was sent spinning off the circuit...



...after contact in the pack from Scott Dixon...



...damaging Juncos Hollinger car and sparking swears rant

racer into a wild spin, backwards, across the apex of the first corner, where he violently slammed into Rinus Veekey's Ed Carpenter Racing entry and Christian Lundgaard, putting a significant hole into the left sidepod of the Dane's Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing machine. Meanwhile, Penske's Will Power dropped to last place after taking avoiding action in the run-off area, meaning the two-time champion failed to make the final.

In the wake of the contact, Grosjean, left stranded across the track, shouted over the radio: "F***, who did that? Who the f*** could not brake?!" He was left so disgusted that even the walk back to the pitlane featured him getting into a brief shoving exchange with one of the IndyCar AMR Safety Team members. In the end, he was left shaking his head over the incident that left him – and the team – with a damaged race car and only \$23,500 to make up the difference.

"I got hit under braking, really, really badly at the back and then the car spun," said Grosjean. "Who is going to pay for the damage? We come here with no points on the line, we do nothing wrong, and the car is completely smashed." Shortly after, he saw a replay and responded: "What is that? It's not what I signed up to IndyCar for."

For his part, Dixon was handed a drive-through penalty that took away any chance of advancing out of the heat to the 12-car final. "There was a lot going on, that's for sure," said Dixon. "I think initially Herta and I got into it, and then Grosjean went to the left – I thought he was going all the way to the left, which was going to open up the middle – but then, all of a sudden, he started to fade back to the right. And everyone stopped so early, a lot earlier than I thought we were going to, especially with the

massive headwind that we had going on. Obviously, I don't want to collect anybody, and I apologise to anyone who was collected in that incident. It was all going on in a short space of time."

Overall, the made-for-TV event that featured limited fans in attendance – with most being among the wealthy club members of the circuit – was not full of action, but there was some solace in IndyCar's leadership trying something different to try to propel the sport forward. Rosenqvist applauded the effort and said that "it's learning by doing", sharing that the concept for the split final presented a challenge for the drivers when it came to tyre management. The Swede pointed to Herta as the standout with how his strategy added to the entertainment value.

As for areas that could be explored to improve the product, Rosenqvist said: "Obviously, you can tweak stuff like race length. Maybe you want to have all cars in the final. Things like that. IndyCar has been very open with this event. They told us, 'Hey, let's keep an open mind going into this.' I thought it was great. So much fun to be out there doing something different than we do every weekend. You learn new things. It's also a good test for what you can bring to the product going forward."

McLaughlin added that the non-points situation provided the opportunity for IndyCar to implement new ideas that could lead to change for the championship rounds. One of the more unusual elements that he enjoyed was the qualifying format, which was an eight-minute segment with only a certain amount of the push-to-pass boost that, with the high tyre degradation as a variable, put the onus into a driver's hands in more of a one-shot outing.

"The qualifying was cool with the push-to-pass," said the Supercars legend and Bathurst winner. "That's awesome from a standpoint of you have to nail the lap on that lap. I'm used to that from Supercars back in the day, shootouts. You had one lap to get it done. That's a really good opportunity – good and bad – for you to mix up the grid. You just have to nail it. This field is so tight that if you miss it by a tenth or two, you could find yourself 15th if it was a proper shootout."

"It's definitely something we could think about for the Fast Six qualifying format. I feel like we've done the same format for a long, long time. Don't get me wrong, it's great. But could we add something different to what we've done in the past to spice up the action? Send them out, give them a little bit of push to pass, see what happens. That would be pretty cool."

At a time when other series are trying different things, IndyCar should be applauded for the experiment, even if Palou helped prevent the action that everyone might have wanted happening at the front. 🌀



Herta's standout strategy added to the event's entertainment value

INDY NXT ACE SIEGEL SHINES ON INDYCAR DEBUT



The IndyCar Series record books won't show a non-points event as an official start for Nolan Siegel, but he certainly put together a memorable performance in the \$1 Million Challenge at The Thermal Club.

The 19-year-old Californian is in the midst of a full-time season in Indy NXT, the main feeder category for IndyCar, and leads the points after the opening round of 2024. Last weekend, he made his 'unofficial' debut in North America's premier open-wheel championship with Dale Coyne Racing, considered one of the smallest teams on the grid. And he progressed from 12th to seventh in his heat, falling just one spot shy of making the final after hounding Colton Herta, who ended up finishing fourth in the main event.

"It was good," said Siegel, the 2023 Indy NXT Rookie of the Year. "It was really promising. The pace seemed to be pretty good compared to the others. I had a few runs on Colton, but here, you have to get a run in the right place and there are so few opportunities to pass. I kept getting runs on him out of the carousel into the big high-speed section and there's just not a whole lot you can do. Overall, I kept it clean and I'm happy with the day."

Siegel will make his official IndyCar debut at the Grand Prix of Long Beach next month, followed by a chance to qualify for the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 in May, along with battling on the streets of Toronto in July.



RESULTS NON-CHAMPIONSHIP, THE THERMAL CLUB (USA) 20 LAPS – 61.340 MILES

POS	DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Alex Palou (ESP)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	39m30.2292s
2	Scott McLaughlin (NZL)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+5.7929s
3	Felix Rosenqvist (SWE)	Meyer Shank Racing / Dallara-Honda	+9.7587s
4	Colton Herta (USA)	Andretti Global with Curb-Agajanian / Dallara-Honda	+13.1126s
5	Marcus Armstrong (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+15.0938s
6	Linus Lundqvist (SWE)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+16.1064s
7	Alexander Rossi (USA)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	+16.5393s
8	Josef Newgarden (USA)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+17.6675s
9	Christian Lundgaard (DNK)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	+19.7073s
10	Agustin Canapino (ARG)	Juncos Hollinger Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	+20.4100s
11	Graham Rahal (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	11 laps-throttle
12	Pietro Fittipaldi (BRA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	disqualified

Winner's average speed 93.166mph. Fastest lap Palou 1m41.6145s, 108.658mph.

HEAT 1 8 LAPS – 24.536 MILES

POS	DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Felix Rosenqvist (SWE)	Meyer Shank Racing / Dallara-Honda	13m30.9622s
2	Scott McLaughlin (NZL)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+0.4971s
3	Josef Newgarden (USA)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+1.7664s
4	Christian Lundgaard (DNK)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	+6.3835s
5	Agustin Canapino (ARG)	Juncos Hollinger Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	+8.7479s
6	Colton Herta (USA)	Andretti Global with Curb-Agajanian / Dallara-Honda	+15.8230s
7	Nolan Siegel (USA)	Dale Coyne Racing / Dallara-Honda	+16.4113s
8	Santino Ferrucci (USA)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	+17.0148s
9	Will Power (AUS)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+17.8747s
10	Kyle Kirkwood (USA)	Andretti Global / Dallara-Honda	+21.4089s
11	Sting Ray Robb (USA)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	+21.7870s
12	Scott Dixon (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+25.7655s
13	Rinus VeeKay (NLD)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	0 laps-accident
14	Romain Grosjean (FRA)	Juncos Hollinger Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	0 laps-accident

Winner's average speed 108.920mph. Fastest lap Dixon 1m40.7795s, 109.558mph.

HEAT 2 10 LAPS – 30.670 MILES

POS	DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Alex Palou (ESP)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	16m50.6089s
2	Marcus Armstrong (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+5.3375s
3	Graham Rahal (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	+18.0911s
4	Linus Lundqvist (SWE)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+18.9634s
5	Pietro Fittipaldi (BRA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	+19.7151s
6	Alexander Rossi (USA)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	+20.3456s
7	Pato O'Ward (MEX)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	+21.0031s
8	Tom Blomqvist (GBR)	Meyer Shank Racing / Dallara-Honda	+23.1783s
9	Callum Ilott (GBR)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	+23.3908s
10	Christian Rasmussen (DNK)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	+24.1938s
11	Kyffin Simpson (CYM)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+25.8233s
12	Marcus Ericsson (SWE)	Andretti Global / Dallara-Honda	+26.5815s
13	Colin Braun (USA)	Dale Coyne Racing / Dallara-Honda	+28.8333s

Winner's average speed 109.253mph. Fastest lap Palou 1m39.8051s, 110.628mph.

QUALIFYING GROUP 1

1 Rosenqvist 1m38.5831s; 2 McLaughlin 1m38.6068s; 3 VeeKay 1m38.6283s; 4 Lundgaard 1m38.6394s; 5 Newgarden 1m38.7926s; 6 Power 1m38.8056s; 7 Grosjean 1m38.8774s; 8 Canapino 1m39.5994s; 9 Dixon 1m39.7074s; 10 Ferrucci 1m39.7400s; 11 Herta 1m39.8331s; 12 Siegel 1m40.1218s; 13 Kirkwood 1m40.1268s; 14 Robb 1m41.5352s.

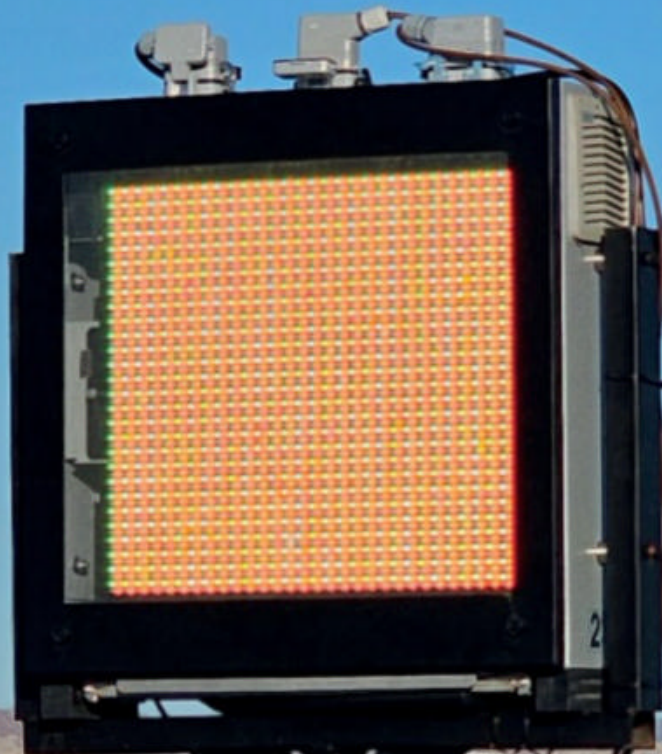
QUALIFYING GROUP 2

1 Palou 1m38.5675s; 2 Armstrong 1m38.7575s; 3 Rahal 1m38.9723s; 4 Lundqvist 1m39.0685s; 5 Blomqvist 1m39.0820s; 6 Fittipaldi 1m39.1117s; 7 Rossi 1m39.1140s; 8 Ilott 1m39.2575s; 9 O'Ward 1m39.4293s; 10 Simpson 1m39.9502s; 11 Rasmussen 1m40.2820s; 12 Braun 1m40.7843s; 13 Ericsson no time.

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REPORT**
Long Beach
25 April issue



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Triple Eight top dogs stopped by purring Percat

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS
MELBOURNE (AUS)
21-24 MARCH
ROUND 2/12

Triple Eight's stranglehold on the victories in the 2024 Supercars Championship has come to an end – by the margin of less than one second, and in just one of the four races at Albert Park.

Will Brown and Broc Feeney split the wins in the two opening races at the Melbourne track and their Chevrolets finished 1-2 in the third when the two cars that had been fighting for the lead – both Fords – managed to run into each other. In Sunday's final race, again the T8 Camaros trailed until – again – the two Fords fighting for the lead collided.

But this time around it was another Chevy that took the win. Nearly four years after his last series victory, Nick Percat took his first with his new team, Matt Stone Racing, and even the opposition seemed fairly pleased to see a nice guy finish first.



But if the Red Bull Camaros looked fairly speedy, so too were some of the Fords. The Mustang drivers who were fighting for the lead early in the Saturday race when they crashed out were Matt Payne (Grove Racing) and Cam Waters (Tickford), prompting a safety car, strong words between the pair and another Triple 8 1-2 result.

On Sunday, Payne's repaired car was nerfed out of the lead by the Walkinshaw Andretti United Mustang of Chaz Mostert, who copped a time penalty (dropping him from fourth on the road to fifth)

and apologised to the Grove team for his error. But 'friendly fire' must be wearing a bit thin for Ford fans, frustrated that even with technical parity looking far more even than it was last season, they are still waiting for one of 'their' drivers to register an actual win.

Mostert did manage to get his car onto the podium, finishing third in Saturday's race, as did Payne (third on both Thursday and Friday) and Team18 veteran Mark Winterbottom (second on Friday).

PHIL BRANAGAN

Byron is the Austin ambassador

NASCAR CUP
AUSTIN (USA)
24 MARCH
ROUND 6/36

William Byron continued Hendrick Motorsports' strong start to its 40th anniversary season with an impressive NASCAR Cup victory last Sunday at Circuit of The Americas. Byron, who opened the 2024 season with a victory in the Daytona 500, was fastest in practice on Saturday and won the pole. He then dominated Sunday's race, leading five times for 42 of the 68 laps.

Ross Chastain was the only driver

to pass Byron's Chevrolet for the lead on the track – at the start of the final stage – but Byron soon ran him back down to reclaim it. He then flawlessly navigated a round of green-flag pitstops and cycled back out front with 17 laps remaining and a large lead. Christopher Bell, who pitted later so had slightly fresher tyres, did an admirable job. He made up four positions over the closing laps and tried to run down Byron, but his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota fell short by 0.692 seconds.

Together, Byron and team-mate Kyle Larson have combined to win three of the season's first six races.

Bell's team-mate Ty Gibbs continued his fine start to the season. He was second to Byron until a couple of laps from home when Bell got past. Alex Bowman was fourth from Tyler Reddick, AJ Allmendinger and Chastain.

Three-time Australian Supercars champion Shane van Gisbergen was hampered by a pitroad speeding penalty and ended up 20th on his season debut. World Endurance hero Kamui Kobayashi was involved in several on-track incidents and finished 29th.

JIM UTTER



WEEKEND WINNERS

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS
MELBOURNE (AUS)

- Races 1 & 3 Broc Feeney
Triple Eight (Chevrolet Camaro)
Race 2 Will Brown
Triple Eight (Chevrolet Camaro)
Race 4 Nick Percat (below)
Matt Stone Racing (Chevrolet Camaro)

NASCAR CUP
AUSTIN (USA)
William Byron
Hendrick Motorsports (Chevrolet Camaro)

BRAZILIAN STOCK CARS
VELO CITTA (BRA)
Race 1 Felipe Massa
TMG Racing (Chevrolet Cruze)
Race 2 Cancelled due to rain



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Door slams shut, then ajar for Hadjar

Hadjar could be forgiven for being a touch confused with his F2 weekend in Melbourne



FORMULA 2 MELBOURNE (AUS) 23-24 MARCH ROUND 3/14

Isack Hadjar took the chequered flag first in both Formula 2 races supporting the Australian Grand Prix, but what happened at the start of the first cost him one victory, and what occurred on the 10th lap of the second set up one that had looked unlikely.

The Red Bull Junior had qualified his Campos Racing car eighth for Sunday's feature race, giving him third on the partially reversed grid for the sprint on Saturday. Hadjar made a good start, then veered right into the middle of the track to take the fight to polesitter Roman Stanek.

But Hadjar was unaware that Campos and Red Bull stablemate Pepe Marti had made an even better start from fourth on the grid. As he moved right, Hadjar made slight contact with Marti, forcing the Spaniard into the side of front-row starter Gabriel Bortoleto. Marti and

Bortoleto made heavy contact with the wall, resulting in the retirement of both within 100 metres of the start.

Hadjar's car was unscathed, and the Frenchman managed to execute his move on Stanek for the lead by the first corner. He maintained the advantage to the chequered flag, despite a pair of safety car interventions, the first for the start incident and the second after Andrea Kimi Antonelli and Richard Verschoor spun in unison at Turn 12 on lap 10. By the flag, the winning margin was over six seconds. But some hours later, Hadjar was handed a 10s sanction, which dropped him to sixth.

After a subsequent appeal was dismissed by the stewards, fortune smiled on Hadjar in the feature race when, having made little progress through the order, he was thrust into the net race lead after Dennis Hauger, who had initially controlled the race from pole in his MP Motorsport entry, crashed at the 'George Russell' Turn 6 after his pitstop.

When the virtual safety car, and eventually the full safety car, was deployed,

Hadjar was already in the pits, meaning he lost significantly less time than those forced to creep around the track at low speed. Invicta Racing's Kush Maini, on the alternate strategy of starting on medium tyres, had worked through to pass Antonelli for second. But the caution came too early to pit for supersofts. The Indian continued to lead on the restart, and had just lost the advantage to Jak Crawford (DAMS) when they both pitted with two laps remaining.

Hadjar's quick work in passing the slower alternate-strategy runners gave him enough of a buffer to be clear of second-placed Paul Aron (Hitech GP), while Rodin Motorsport pair Zane Maloney and Ritomo Miyata sandwiched Antonelli (Prema) in third and fifth.

Hadjar's loss on Saturday had been Stanek's gain. The Trident-run Czech just held off Hauger, who had passed Maini on the penultimate lap, and his first F2 podium was eventually converted into a maiden win. Close behind Maini were Franco Colapinto and Miyata, while an off for series leader Maloney cost him fourth.

It was a weekend to forget for Ferrari supersub Ollie Bearman. After an engine problem on his Prema car in qualifying, (a fact revealed by Ferrari F1 boss Fred Vasseur), the Briton was left to start both races from 16th. Only in the feature race was Bearman able to make significant progress, finishing ninth to score his first F2 points of the season.

It was a slightly brighter story for pre-season favourite Victor Martins. After crashing out of qualifying, the ART driver climbed from the back of the pack to record seventh and eighth-place finishes, banking his first points of the year.

SAM HALL



Beganovic begins F3 charge with Melbourne win

FORMULA 3
MELBOURNE (AUS)
23-24 MARCH
ROUND 2/10

The Formula 3 action was dialled up to 11 around the Albert Park circuit last weekend, with the four DRS zones providing a thrill-a-minute display. It culminated in Dino Beganovic finally scoring his first F3 win, the Ferrari protege at last kick-starting his 2024 title challenge with his first points of the season besides the two he claimed for taking pole position in Bahrain.

Beganovic was third in qualifying this time, behind second-placed Prema Racing team-mate Gabriele Mini, and session-topping Trident driver Leonardo Fornaroli. But in Saturday's partially reversed grid sprint race it was Martinius Stenshorne (Hitech GP) and poleman Laurens van Hoepen (ART Grand Prix) who fought out the lead. The duo swapped positions on multiple occasions, despite a tag from behind from the ART car of Christian Mansell costing Stenshorne time with a sideways moment. Eventually Stenshorne made it stick on the fifth lap and was never headed from there on, the Norwegian F3 rookie also surviving a late safety car restart.

By the time of that caution, Arvid Lindblad had worked his way through to second place, the Prema-run Red Bull Junior passing van Hoepen at Turn 3 just before half-distance. Van Hoepen was third, while local hero Mansell faded, the Australian reporting damage to his car from early-race contact. Mari Boya was fourth from Oliver Goethe and Beganovic, but a penalty for a passing move on Sebastian Montoya relegated the Swede to 13th and promoted Mini to sixth position.



Swede was not the last Ferrari man to win on Sunday at Albert Park

Sunday's feature race was dramatic from the start, with Tim Tramnitz squeezed into the side of Tasanapol Inthraphuvasak, who got stranded in the gravel. Later in the opening lap, at Turn 11, Joseph Loake attempted an ambitious move around the outside of Tommy Smith, which ended with the pair stuck in the gravel. Sophia Florsch also retired with crash damage.

At the front, Fornaroli led Mini and Beganovic into the inevitable safety car period. Nikita Bedrin was fourth, but at the restart championship leader Luke Browning, who had finished a lap down on Saturday following a pitstop, began his recovery from an average start by working past the Russian. Lindblad also took advantage to get through into fifth.

Across the weekend, the run to Turn 9 emerged as a primary overtaking spot, with drivers using DRS to pull off a move around the outside of the left-hander, before enjoying an additional DRS boost out of Turn 10

to stretch an immediate advantage. This was where Browning chose to make his move to climb into third at the expense of Mini, and it was also where, on lap 14 of 23, Fornaroli appeared to wave Beganovic through into the lead.

With tyre wear heavy and DRS advantage key, there were suspicions that the Trident driver was playing a tactical game by stealing DRS in order to make a move in the closing stages. But no such move materialised, with Beganovic pulling out of range in the final laps. Mini reclaimed third from Hitech driver Browning after saving his tyres expertly in the middle of the race.

Charlie Wurz emerged from the frantic battling behind to take fifth ahead of Montoya, Boya and Bedrin, while Lindblad slipped to 11th.

SAM HALL

WEEKEND WINNERS

FORMULA 2
MELBOURNE (AUS)
Race 1 Roman Stanek
Trident

Race 2 Isack Hadjar
Campos Racing

FORMULA 3
MELBOURNE (AUS)
Race 1 Martinius Stenshorne
Hitech GP
Race 2 Dino Beganovic
Prema Racing



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Stenshorne (15) takes lead from van Hoepen during thrilling sprint battle

Martin wins as Marquez and Bagnaia fall



MOTOGP
ALGARVE CIRCUIT (PRT)
24 MARCH
ROUND 2/21

The answer to the question ‘how many rounds will it take before tensions within the Ducati MotoGP ranks flare?’ was revealed last weekend at the Portuguese Grand Prix. That answer is ‘two’. Just 24 hours on from claiming a first podium on the Gresini Ducati with a ride to second place in the sprint at the Algarve International Circuit, Marc Marquez collided with reigning world champion Francesco Bagnaia on lap 23 of 25 in the GP.

Marquez, who’d risen from eighth on the grid after a qualifying crash caused by the accidental early activation of his bike’s rear ride height device, didn’t have the same pace in the long race as he did in the sprint. But acceptance of this led to a patience in waiting for his moment to come.

That moment was on the 23rd lap, after Tech3 rookie sensation Pedro Acosta had finally cleared Bagnaia at Turn 3 two tours earlier. Marquez had a couple of sniffs on that lap, and the following one, before trying his move at Turn 5. Up the inside he jammed his bike, taking advantage of a weak zone on the track for a struggling Bagnaia. Marquez got ahead but ran slightly wide. Bagnaia, looking to stem

his early points bleed to Pramac Ducati rider Jorge Martin, who was well on his way to victory in a ride of maturity, saw an opportunity to get back past.

The pair connected as their lines converged, with both crashing in a heap to the outer edges of the Turn 5 hairpin. Both riders remounted, but Bagnaia retired in the pits, and Marquez finished pointless in 16th. The FIM stewards felt that no further action was warranted upon review, something Bagnaia welcomed.

Marquez’s assessment, unsurprisingly, differed. He felt the clash was Bagnaia’s “mistake”, not least because he saw no sense in risking so much for two points two rounds into a 21-event championship. Now we’re in a three-week period before Bagnaia can make his public retort, and for Ducati to figure out how to stop a situation it was warned about last year spiralling.

When he saw the chaos on the big screens, Martin knew this was now a grand prix he had to win. After taking the holeshot from third on the grid, the Spaniard said getting to the first big stop at Turn 3 in front was key to his march to victory.

Even though the chasing Maverick Vinales, on the factory Aprilia, prevented Martin’s lead from ever swelling much beyond a second, and Enea Bastianini, close behind in third, was lapping well on his Ducati, the 2023 championship runner-up never looked like he could be defeated. His pace remained consistent in the high 1m38s/low 1m39s, Martin noting that he learned from last year’s Indonesian GP, where he crashed while leading by over three seconds, that he didn’t need to have a big gap in front, and that just enough to ensure victory was sufficient.

The maturity Martin has attained from his lessons of 2023 will make him a big threat. His Portugal win was also somewhat emotional, coming as it did at the track on



Martin has taken
 championship lead



which he suffered a serious incident in his rookie campaign of 2021 and “almost lost it all”. He was helped a little by a gearbox issue that thwarted Vinales from lap six onwards. Problems shifting from fifth to sixth gear meant Vinales lost 0.2s every lap on the main straight, undoing all the hard work he was able to do in closing down Martin through the rest of the circuit.

Vinales had taken his first win since 2021 in Saturday’s sprint, but any hopes of a repeat finally ended on the last lap when his Aprilia dropped into neutral on the main straight, and then spat him off at Turn 1 when the box clicked into second gear suddenly as he touched the gas. This released Bastianini into second and Acosta to a maiden podium in just his second GP, the teenager showing incredible natural talent battling through KTM pair Jack Miller and Brad Binder, as well as Marc Marquez and Bagnaia.

Top non-European bike at the finish was the Yamaha of Fabio Quartararo, who once again outshone his underwhelming machine to finish seventh between Marco Bezzecchi (VR46 Ducati) and Aleix Espargaro (Aprilia).

LEWIS DUNCAN

RESULTS ROUND 2/21, ALGARVE CIRCUIT (PRT), 24 MARCH (25 LAPS – 71.333 MILES)			
POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	Jorge Martin (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	41m18.138s
2	Enea Bastianini (ITA)	Ducati	+0.882s
3	Pedro Acosta (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	+5.362s
4	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	+11.129s
5	Jack Miller (AUS)	KTM	+16.437s
6	Marco Bezzecchi (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+19.403s
7	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Yamaha	+20.130s
8	Aleix Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia	+21.549s
9	Miguel Oliveira (PRT)	Trackhouse Aprilia	+23.929s
10	Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+28.195s
11	Augusto Fernandez (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	+28.244s
12	Joan Mir (ESP)	Honda	+29.271s
13	Alex Rins (ESP)	Yamaha	+31.334s
14	Takaaki Nakagami (JPN)	LCR Honda	+34.932s
15	Johann Zarco (FRA)	LCR Honda	+38.267s
16	Marc Marquez (ESP)	Gresini Ducati	+40.174s
17	Luca Marini (ITA)	Honda	+40.775s
18	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	Pramac Ducati	+52.362s
R	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Aprilia	24 laps-crash
R	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	23 laps-crash damage
R	Alex Marquez (ESP)	Gresini Ducati	17 laps-crash damage
R	Raul Fernandez (ESP)	Trackhouse Aprilia	3 laps-crash damage

Winner’s average speed 103.626mph. Fastest lap Bastianini 1m38.685s, 104.088mph.

QUALIFYING 2 1 Bastianini 1m37.706s; 2 Vinales 1m37.788s; 3 Martin 1m37.812s; 4 Bagnaia 1m37.922s; 5 Miller 1m38.032s; 6 Bezzecchi 1m38.072s; 7 Acosta 1m38.138s; 8 M Marquez 1m38.147s; 9 Quartararo 1m38.322s; 10 Binder 1m38.412s; 11 Rins 1m38.502s; 12 A Marquez no time.

QUALIFYING 1 A Marquez 1m38.060s; Acosta 1m38.065s; 13 Espargaro 1m38.279s; 14 Di Giannantonio 1m38.309s; 15 Oliveira 1m38.385s; 16 R Fernandez 1m38.448s; 17 Morbidelli 1m38.454s; 18 A Fernandez 1m38.934s; 19 Zarco 1m39.004s; 20 Mir 1m39.025s; 21 Nakagami 1m39.058s; 22 Marini 1m39.451s.

SPRINT RACE (12 LAPS – 34.240 MILES)

1 Vinales 19m49.636s; 2 M Marquez +1.039s; 3 Martin +1.122s; 4 Bagnaia +4.155s; 5 Miller +4.329s; 6 Bastianini +4.384s; 7 Acosta +5.088s; 8 Espargaro +6.161s; 9 Quartararo +7.501s; 10 R Fernandez +8.484s; 11 Bezzecchi +9.529s; 12 Oliveira +10.519s; 13 A Marquez +11.458s; 14 Mir +14.035s; 15 A Fernandez +14.853s; 16 Morbidelli +16.049s; 17 Nakagami +16.398s; 18 Marini +24.907s; R Zarco 5 laps-crash damage; R Binder 3 laps-crash; R Di Giannantonio 3 laps-crash; R Rins 2 laps-crash.

Winner’s average speed 103.615mph. Fastest lap Martin 1m38.479s, 104.306mph.

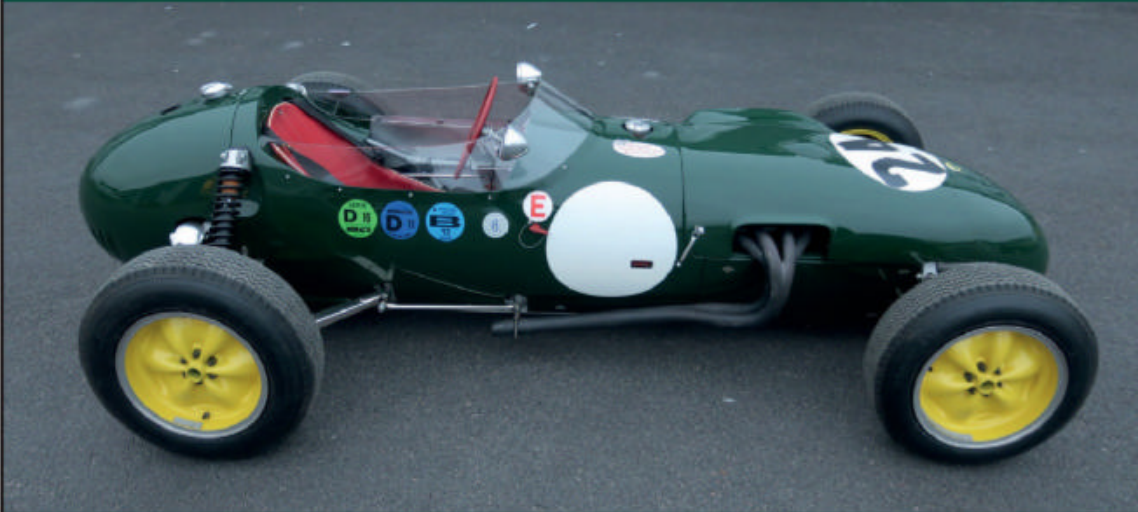
RIDERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Martin 60; 2 Binder 42; 3 Bastianini 39; 4 Bagnaia 37; 5 Acosta 28; 6 M Marquez 27; 7 Espargaro 25; 8 Vinales 19; 9 Miller 16; 10 Di Giannantonio 15.

CONSTRUCTORS’ CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Ducati 71; 2 KTM 50; 3 Aprilia 35; 4 Yamaha 15; 5 Honda 8.



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NASCAR race planned
for **USA Snetterton 300**

BRITISH GT

GET READY FOR A SUPERCAR STAMPEDE

The new British GT season begins this weekend, and it's set for another bumper year as new heights are reached for strength in depth

JAMES NEWBOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP



“It’s going to be tough,” states Jonny Adam. “With 19 cars in GT3, good line-ups, the quality I think has gone up another level from last year. And there’s good returning teams that know their baseline of where they should be.”

With Darren Leung, one half of Century Motorsport’s 2023 victorious pairing, switching to the international scene, the path is open for a new combination to seize the initiative in the British GT Championship, which kicks off this weekend at Oulton Park. But, as four-time champion Adam attests, any would-be title-winner needs to see off a stacked field that has no shortage of serious contenders – including six previous champions.

After racing a Mercedes last year, Adam is back in an Aston Martin, run by series newcomer Blackthorn, alongside Giacomo Petrobelli. The heavily upgraded Vantage he was integral in

developing is, Adam reckons, “for the Ams a lot easier to drive, very good on consistency”. That will help GT4 graduates Josh Rowledge and Matt Topham acclimatise to GT3 in Blackthorn’s second car, entered in Silver-Am.

“Ultimately, under the skin of it, it drives like a new car,” explains Adam, who points out that he won on his first outings with TF Sport (2016) and Optimum (2018). “Hopefully from the Ams’ side, it’s going to be a lot easier for them to get closer to the lap time of the Pros.”

Andrew Howard won both of his titles alongside Adam in 2013 and 2015, and is back for another crack with his Beechdean AMR team alongside GT3 rookie Jessica Hawkins. “This is my fourth year with them, so I think it’s about time I actually got to race one!” Aston Martin brand ambassador Hawkins quipped at media day. “I’ve got so much to learn, I’m very aware of that, but I think once



I've learned my trade we're going to be very competitive."

Howard reckons his 2023 was "probably the best Am side of racing that we've had for quite a few years", but stresses he's not putting too much pressure on his new co-driver, whose busy schedule attending grands prix will limit opportunities to test. "I've always said it takes two or three years to win a championship," he says. "Do we expect to win? No. Do we think we have the ability to win? Of course we do."

Remaining in the 2 Seas Mercedes team, Ian Loggie is hoping to recapture a title he won in 2022 and is alongside Phil Keen, making a welcome return to the series after a one-off outing with Loggie at



"Do we expect to win? No. Do we think we have the ability to win? Of course we do"

Portimao last season. An eleventh-hour deal for Leung's 2023 team-mate Dan Harper to defend his title aboard a Century-run BMW M4 alongside Michael Johnston (see News), the Northern Irishman stepping in for GT4 Pro-Am champion Chris Salkeld, means Nathan Freke's squad can also be expected to shine.

And at Barwell Motorsport there are two champions in the fold, with 2020 winners Sandy Mitchell and Rob Collard on either side of the garage, veteran Collard back for the first time since he

partnered the now Lamborghini factory ace as an all-Silver pairing.

Mitchell has his third different co-driver in as many years after race-winning campaigns with Adam Balon and Shaun Balfe, but team boss Mark Lemmer is quietly confident that ex-British Touring Car racer Alex Martin will prove a hit. "We've done our research on Alex, and I don't see any reason why he's not going to be competitive from the word go," he says. "Anything that he needs to learn, he'll learn pretty quickly from Sandy."

A rule change that prohibited Silver-Silver combinations prompted Collard to focus on Europe in recent years, but he's back following his reclassification as a Bronze alongside son Ricky, who moves across from the BTCC. Collard Sr joked "maybe not fashion or hairstyle advice" when asked at the media day if he would be happy to take tips from the mulleted Ricky, with whom he won the Pro-Am category at the 2020 Spa 24 Hours. But Lemmer expects that the Collards will "be a benchmark pairing".

"As a father it's a great thing to race with your son," says Collard,

who is keeping cautious on the prospect of becoming the first father-son pair to win the title since Jim and Glynn Geddie in 2011. "He's pretty fast – we perhaps wouldn't be doing it if he was slow!"

It's no surprise, therefore, that one team boss predicted that this could be the first year that a Silver-Am pairing could contend for the overall championship. >>





Factory Mercedes man Gotz
boasts Spa 24 Hours and
DTM title-winning pedigree

NEW FACES IN UNFAMILIAR PLACES

Hawkins isn't the only driver for whom pitstops will be new. Reigning Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Adam Smalley has joined Garage 59 alongside 2019 title contender Shaun Balfe, who is back aboard a McLaren 720S after a year with Lamborghini. Unused to racing for longer than 30 minutes, Smalley recognises that British GT will be a "step up" as he benchmarks himself against factory guns.

"GT racing is the place to be for young drivers like me at the moment," the 23-year-old reckons. And naturally, he's not limiting his ambition to Silver-Am success. "The dream is to win the title," adds Smalley. "I'm also realistic. But I've got a wealth of experience around me so I'm going to be maximising that, giving it my best shot and seeing where we end up."

As the 2021 DTM champion, factory Mercedes racer Maximilian Gotz has rather more GT3 experience than Smalley, but the British GT rookie will defer to 2 Seas co-driver Kevin Tse on circuit knowledge – he has never previously visited Oulton Park or Snetterton. Gotz, the 2013 Spa 24 Hours winner and 2014 Blancpain Sprint Cup champion, is eagerly anticipating his first season of racing in Britain alongside Macanese Tse, a winner on his series debut at Oulton in 2021.

"It's great to be here and to see new faces," smiles Gotz, happy to be already asked to sign autographs by knowledgeable British fans. And the German, who raced with the Bahraini-flagged team in last year's Gulf 12 Hours and knows many of the squad's staff from his



Carrera Cup GB champion
Smalley acknowledges that
"GT racing is the place to be"

time at Strakka in 2018, has another ace up his sleeve. Works colleague Jules Gounon, who partnered Loggie for the past two years, has pledged his support in the form of onboard videos: "I need to come up with speed quickly and he will help me."

OTHER CONTENDERS

Dark horses are in plentiful supply too. Certainly, any line-up featuring Raffaele Marciello can't be discounted. John Ferguson's RAM Racing team switches from Mercedes to BMW and has retained the services of its star driver, who will combine his World Endurance Championship commitments in the factory Hypercar team with hustling alongside Ferguson.

Marciello says "we have everything, all the help we needed" from the Bavarian manufacturer as it gets up to speed with the M4 GT3 and adds: "The team last year was their first year of John running it, so now it's all settled and for sure it will be better" than a 2023 campaign that yielded one win at Snetterton.

Marcus Clutton and Morgan Tillbrook were race winners in 2021

GT4

ARTURA VERSUS MUSTANG ROUND TWO?

The McLaren Artura was immediately competitive on its arrival in British GT last season. Optimum Motorsport pair Jack Brown and Charles Clark had a mathematical chance of clinching the GT4 title with two races to spare, only for luck to desert them across the final three races, while a purple



Brown teams up with
teenager Meakin

patch for Academy Motorsport drivers Erik Evans and Matt Cowley snatched away the crown on the swansong for the outgoing version of the Ford Mustang.

While Clark pursues GT3 opportunities, Brown will seek to make amends with Optimum after his Silver title consolation prize. He's joined by 17-year-old Zac Meakin, who impressed team boss Shaun Goff in testing after racing a Team Parker-run Artura last year and contesting the GT4 Winter Series in Elite Motorsport's example. "The overall championship is what we were there to do [in 2023], so we're hoping to put that right this year," states Goff. "We've got the same core team working on the car and we've refined some of the niggly issues which eluded us last year."

Evans will bid for a second successive title

with Academy's new Mustang alongside Marco Signoretti, while Cowley will do likewise aboard a Paddock Motorsport Mercedes shared with Ed McDermott, entered in Pro-Am. That deal came together "quite late in the off-season" for Paddock boss Martin Plowman, whose team will also run an Artura for Alex Walker and Blake Angliss and the McLaren 720S GT3 he shares with Mark Smith. Running three different models of car presents a few headaches for Plowman, who has hired staff from the disbanded Enduro Motorsport team and reshuffled his GT4 deck, with respected engineer Simon Pollock now overseeing the Artura.

"It's been flat-out for the last four weeks getting the Merc programme sorted," reveals Plowman, who has full confidence in Cowley. "There's no doubts that he's going to do a great job and that



Life's now a lot less complicated for Clutton in Garage 59 McLaren

BRITISH GT CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT
1 April	Oulton Park (2x1 hour)
28 April	Silverstone (3 hours)
26 May	Donington (3 hours)
23 June	Spa (2 hours)
14 July	Snetterton (2x1 hour)
8 September	Donington (2 hours)
29 September	Brands Hatch (2 hours)

and 2022 with their own Enduro Motorsport squad, which was shuttered over the winter. Now at Garage 59, Clutton's list of responsibilities has diminished considerably, while he also has access to data from a second car, a luxury not present at his own operation, where he also had to worry about hotel bookings, staff, and managing clients racing in GT4 on top of supporting Tillbrook. "Our pre-event prep can be a lot cleaner, there's certainly a lot less stress going on," he admits. "The amount of data they collect – they're already a step ahead and they always were last year. I'm hoping that can carry through into our results."

Fellow McLaren racer Mark Radcliffe has taken in the full Asian Le Mans Series with Optimum, scoring two podiums, and won his class in the Gulf 12 Hours to prepare for his second season of British GT, now paired with factory ace Tom Gamble. Team boss Shaun Goff, whose equipte snared the 2018 crown with Adam and

Flick Haigh, feels that both Radcliffe and Optimum are much better prepared for what is the second year of the 720S's Evo package. "That limited our testing because without having the Evo package, which was delivered in March, we couldn't really do anything," Goff asserts. "Now having understood the Evo package, we've been able to work with the drivers and look forward to hitting Oulton Park with a fully prepared team."

And so to a double-header round that Howard labels "a total lottery". "Winning championships – especially British GT – isn't about being the fastest at Oulton," he says. "It's about being consistent and accumulating points." Gotz knows well that "in the end it's not necessary to win every race – it's never happened", and that consistent points-scoring will be key. But that's not lost on anybody else either. With so many car crews scrambling to start the season on the front foot, it will make for unmissable viewing. 🏁



Evans is gunning for a second successive title in new Mustang

just diverts pressure away from the team. If we can give him and Ed a car to win, then I'm sure they'll get the job done."

Academy boss Matt Nicoll-Jones, who will share a second Mustang with Will Moore, says the new

Mustang is the culmination of "a lot of small changes in the right direction" that amounts to "quite a big change overall". He reckons it has "a lot more scope for adjustment", and praises the ergonomic improvements that make it "a lot more

comfortable" for drivers. While admitting "we've got a long way to go with it yet", he hopes that entering the same line-ups in the GT4 European series will accelerate the learning curve. "We've probably got the strongest pairings we've ever had," Nicoll-Jones adds. "I would hope that we should be there or thereabouts."

With GT Winter champions Jamie Day and Mikey Porter seeking to continue their momentum in a Forsetti Motorsport Aston Martin, 2017 GT3 champion Seb Morris reuniting with the Team Parker squad to race a Mercedes alongside GT Cup graduate Charles Dawson, and 2020 GT4 champion Dan Vaughan looking to rediscover winning ways in Speedworks' Toyota Supra, there is no shortage of viable contenders among the 17-car field.

SEASON

PREVIEW

Sharp (l) and Macintyre were F4 rivals last year and could now have a rematch in GB3



GB3

SHARP VS MACINTYRE REMATCH ON A NEW STAGE?

Last year's British F4 title rivals will be up against each other again in GB3, but some strong opposition will try to ensure they don't have things all their own way

STEVE WHITFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP

With another strong field of exciting rookies mixed with familiar faces, and a visit to the Hungaroring for the first time, the GB3 Championship looks set to thrive again this season. While some of the continuing drivers will be among the favourites for the crown, a potential rematch of last year's British Formula 4 title fight between Louis Sharp and William Macintyre is an intriguing prospect as the pair make the step up.

Sharp is entering his third year with the rebranded Rodin Motorsport team, which guided Callum Voisin to the 2023 GB3 title, and the Kiwi's chances of winning back-to-back single-seater championships have been boosted by a strong pre-season ahead of this weekend's Oulton Park opener.

"There is a lot to learn," says the 16-year-old. "I am a rookie compared to some of these guys in their second or third years, but I've got full confidence in myself and the team and there's no reason why we won't be fighting for wins and the championship at the end of the year.

"It's helping a lot," he adds on remaining with Rodin. "It fills me with a lot of confidence but also it feels like home. I'm really

familiar with how everything works, and I couldn't ask for a better place to be."

Also familiar will be the threat from Macintyre, who was runner-up to Sharp in British F4 in his first year racing single-seaters – having previously starred in Ginetta Junior. And, like his rival, Macintyre has the benefit of continuity by remaining with Hitech GP.

"He's at Rodin, I'm at Hitech again – two of the best teams in GB3 – so I guess it's going to be another one this year," he says on the chances of battling Sharp again. "It's both our first years, hopefully we can fight.

"I've got a lot of support behind me, we've all got a really good relationship. The car's good enough, so it's just about me getting the best out of it. I'm getting used to the aero and finding the limits, every time I get in the car I'm getting faster."

However, Macintyre is also likely to face strong competition from team-mate Tymek Kucharczyk, who has switched squads following a fast but inconsistent rookie GB3 campaign with Douglas Motorsport. Budget issues eventually took their toll in 2023 but the Pole feels better prepared this time around.



“He’s at Rodin, I’m at Hitech again – two of the best teams in GB3 – so I guess it’s going to be another one”

“Things that happened last year were not too nice,” he reflects. “It took me out of the rhythm a bit. I hope it will be better [this year] and we can just focus on driving. This is a team that I can fight for the championship with, that’s the main plan. They know what I’m capable of, I know what I’m capable of and we can now push on. I just need to finish the job on track.”

But, away from the Hitech and Rodin powerhouses, there are several other drivers who could play a part in this season’s title fight. As a third-year driver, McKenzie Cresswell will be many people’s favourite, especially as the 18-year-old remains with Elite Motorsport, who he finished fourth in the standings with in 2023.

“The initial plan was F3, and that was looking quite likely for a while, but the budget just wasn’t there,” he explains. “So, it was basically either switch disciplines and try something new or come back for another season and that’s what we’ve done.”

Cresswell has left no stone unturned over the winter with the sole aim of becoming champion, and has topped four out of six official pre-season test days. “A lot has changed behind the scenes,” he reveals. “Elite have put in a great effort to improve on what was needed last year, so just trying to make sure that, when we show up to round one, everything is as good as it can be.”

John Bennett is another driver to remain in GB3 for a third term following a tricky year with Rodin Carlin that ended with him 10th in the standings. A switch to reigning teams’ champion JHR Developments, however, seems to have reinvigorated the 20-year-old, who has shone in testing.

“It’s a fresh start,” Bennett says. “Putting last year behind me, you need to learn from it but in a lot of ways just want to move on, come to a new team, fresh start and see what we can do.”

“I showed pace at times last year, but I think this year will be about maximising every weekend and being consistently up the front. Going into my third year there’s an expectation

to do well, but I think we’ve settled in really nicely with JHR and the testing results so far have been pretty strong.”

Elsewhere, VRD by Arden is fielding an all-American line-up, with Noah Ping its most likely title contender having won twice last year. His team-mate Nikita Johnson will make his debut at Spa in June after turning 16 and could quickly become a frontrunner, having already accumulated several impressive single-seater accolades in his homeland since the age of 12.

McLaren F1 junior Ugo Ugochukwu is another part-time contender as he plans to tackle four rounds with Rodin alongside his full-time Formula Regional European Championship assault, and looks a likely victory contender at the Oulton Park opener.

The introduction of a new tyre could also prove a factor in who comes out on top. Manufactured out of a new base in Brazil, the Pirelli compound has taken longer to reach its operating window in the cool testing temperatures. “We’re learning every session about the new tyre,” says Cresswell. “Everyone’s in the same boat so it’s just about who can adapt faster.”

Another tweak for this year is race three will no longer feature a full reversed grid, instead just the top 12 from qualifying will be inverted. The addition of the Hungaroring to the calendar means five of the eight rounds will take place on current F1 circuits, something that has been well received among this year’s drivers as they try to emulate last season’s top three and use GB3 as a stepping stone to the F1 support bill in F3. 🌟



Third-year driver Cresswell has starred during testing

BLACKTHORN



BLACKTHORN'S FIRST STEP TO THE TOP

BLACKTHORN embarks on its first full-time season in the British GT Championship this year with its sights on the pinnacle of GT racing.

Founded in 2022 by Am racing driver and entrepreneur Claude Bovet, with Dan Jeal as Team Principal and David McDonald as Commercial Director/Pro Driver, Blackthorn is quickly establishing its place in the world of motorsport.

As a partner team of Aston Martin Racing, Blackthorn will field two new Aston Martin Vantage Evo GT3s in the upcoming British GT season with a third non-Evo car in reserve.

"This opens the door to racing events in Europe and globally," said Bovet. "I just felt there was an opportunity with Aston Martin. It's a storied brand in sportscar racing that is committed to delivering an exceptional experience for its customers. The new GT3 Evo is a great competitive package."

"I contacted them and, after good discussions, I made the decision to become a partner team. It's taken the team in a direction we are all very excited about."

While Blackthorn is aiming to climb the GT ranks globally, with the ultimate goal of competing in the Le Mans 24 Hours, the focus for this season is on the British GT Championship – the top category of endurance racing in the UK.

A statement of intent is having four-time champion and factory Aston Martin driver Jonny Adam as part of the team, where he will form a Pro-Am partnership with Giacomo Petrobelli.



"We are thrilled to have such strong drivers in our two-car line-up for our first year in British GT," said McDonald. "We are looking forward to an exciting year of racing and are confident we will be challenging at the front in both the Pro-Am class with Giacomo and Jonny as well as with our Silver-Am drivers of Matt and Josh. The whole team have worked hard over the winter months and we can't wait for the season to get started."

"Jonny was one of the key development drivers for the Evo, so he knows these cars inside and out. It's massive for the team when you've got a guy who can really communicate with the engineers how this car works," said Bovet.

The second car will include the Silver-Am partnership of Josh Rowledge and Matt Topham, who Bovet describes as "go-getters" and who he believes will be podium contenders during the nine-race, seven-round British GT campaign.

"We are also incredibly fortunate to have been able to put together a strong team of mechanics and engineers at Blackthorn which are additionally supported by AMR. With this team backing the drivers, I think we stand a good chance at a strong showing this year," said Jeal.

Both Aston Martin Vantage Evo GT3s that the team will run will also feature a stunning and unique livery created by Frank Stephenson, a renowned designer who has penned iconic supercars including the McLaren P1, Maserati MC12 and Ferrari FXX.

Bovet said: "I've always admired Frank and his exceptional career as one of the foremost car designers, and I just thought it would be cool to have a livery made by him that really stood out – I thought, let's try something different."

"It's always good to stand out and if we do well it could become an important livery that people remember."

Blackthorn also maintains a motorsport division, including 'Blackthorn Racing with Ferrari', where it runs a variety of its own cars as well as those of its customers, notably a Mercedes GT3, an LMP3 and two F3 cars, a Lamborghini GT3, and various Ferrari Challenge cars and a GT3, to name a few.

Group of drivers have
run demos at SpeedFest



GARY HAWKINS

NASCAR race to be held at USA Snetterton 300 event

MSVR

A race for NASCAR machinery will form part of the new USA Snetterton 300 event this year and, if it proves successful, further bouts could be added to MotorSport Vision's other American-themed fixtures.

The Historic American Stockcar Racing contest has been inspired by the growing number of NASCARs that have conducted demonstration runs at the American SpeedFest at Brands Hatch. MSVR's competitions manager Joe East has been working with one such driver, Simon Chalkly, on the idea of a race now the group of regular NASCAR demo participants has grown to between 15 and 20 car owners.

"A few members of the group decided to take their ARDS tests to obtain a race licence, with the aim of helping their understanding of how things work on track both inside and outside of the car," explained East. "After many years of

demonstrating at MSV's American SpeedFest, Simon Chalkly came up with the idea to start a race series for these American imported cars as interest kept growing, with more cars being imported.

"Working together with Simon's NASCAR knowledge and contacts, and MSVR's extensive knowledge of running race series, we hope this could be the start of something unique and special that will really add to the appeal of the on-track action."

The exact eras of NASCAR machinery that will be eligible for the race have yet to be determined, although it is likely to be for post-1990 cars. East said the inaugural race at the 7-8 September Snetterton meeting is a "toe-in-the-water exercise" to gauge enthusiasm for the idea.

"We are going to see how it goes, then evaluate the level of interest from competitors and how the racing feels and looks to spectators," added East. "Ultimately we want to put on an entertaining show for them as well as giving the owners of the cars the chance to really open them up and find the limits of what they can achieve. We know that we are very unlikely to reach capacity grids with these types of cars, but the noise and sight alone creates such a spectacle that we don't feel you need that."

Should the Snetterton encounter prove a hit, a calendar of events could be developed for 2025 that potentially includes SpeedFest and Oulton Park's US AutoShow.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



Rising number of NASCARs
are being imported to UK

GARY HAWKINS

BRITCAR CHAMPION HARRISON TO RACE EX-EAVES INTEGRA

CTCRC

One-time Britcar champion Danny Harrison will race a Honda Integra Type R in the Classic Touring Car Racing Club's Super Tourers category at Donington Park this weekend.

Harrison won the 2020 Britcar Endurance title alongside Jem Hepworth in a Praga R1T, before joining long-time backer Richard Wheeler in a Nissan GT-R the following year. Aside from a one-off GB4 outing in 2022, he has had few opportunities since but will now drive Wheeler's ex-Dan Eaves 2005 race-winning British Touring Car machine (below).

The BTC-T spec Integra has not raced since a few outings with Bernie and Marcus Hoggarth in 2017-18. Wheeler recently acquired the car, which has been prepared for Donington and Brands Hatch's Super Touring Power by John Danby Racing.

"I didn't have any plans for this year at all, so to have a last-minute opportunity come through... I was like, 'Definitely,'" said Harrison, who will not drive the car until Thursday afternoon testing. "You couldn't say no. And to be part of the Super Touring Power, that's a massive event."

In addition to the Integra and Wheeler's own Nissan Primera, also running from the JDR garage this weekend will be Paul Whight's 1996 Honda Accord. AJ Owen is also set to return to the series in his father Craig's Ford Mondeo after it blew its Duratec engine at Brands last summer.

Thirty-two Pre-'66 Touring Cars are entered for the CTCRC event, while the combined 38-car Classic and Historic Thunder entry features several new cars, including Jimmy Broadbent's outrageous Mazda MX-5.

MARK PAULSON



JEP

Rees joins Team Parker Racing for Porsche bid

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

GB3 race winner and 2021 British Formula 4 champion Matthew Rees is the latest significant driver to join this year's Porsche Carrera Cup GB grid after agreeing a deal with Team Parker Racing.

Rees impressively won the F4 title in his first season of car racing, before taking sixth and fifth in the standings in the subsequent two GB3 campaigns. Now he believes "it was time for a change" as he seeks to secure a professional career, and will join drivers such as British Touring Car Championship race victors Dan Lloyd and George Gamble in what is shaping up to be a competitive Carrera Cup entry. He said a Porsche move was "the main target" since he felt that the series is one where a driver can make a difference.

"There's not a lot you can do to the car – to be the best, you have to drive the best," said Rees. "It's a different way to challenge myself going forward and expand my horizons. I've spent a long time in single-seaters. I just wanted a change of scenery."



Single-seater racer Rees will switch to GTs in new season

Rees, 18, is aiming to follow in the footsteps of another former F4 conqueror, Kiern Jewiss, who also swapped single-seaters for sportscars by entering the Carrera Cup and won the 2022 title.

"There's some synergy as well with Team Parker Racing [Jewiss's squad], so I haven't really got any excuses!" said Rees, who admitted he is unsure what to expect in terms of results from his debut campaign. "The team has a lot of experience and knows how to build drivers up from having little experience to be winners."

Rees has so far completed two days of testing in the Porsche at Donington Park and believes he is now getting used to the "patience" required to achieve strong lap times. "It's getting a bit more like second nature," he added.

Other drivers to have confirmed a place on the grid include 2021 British GT4 champion Will Burns and Formula Ford 1600 racer Andrew Rackstraw, while Josh Malin is set for a full campaign after finishing third last year despite missing the opening two events.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Indy 500 winner Franchitti to race Mustang



Mustang will be out at Goodwood

GOODWOOD

Experienced historic racer Andrew Haddon will share his newly rebuilt Ford Mustang with three-time Indianapolis 500 winner Dario Franchitti in the Ken Miles Trophy race at the Goodwood Members' Meeting on

13-14 April.

Haddon's car has been a racing machine all of its life and competed extensively in the US when new, racing at tracks including Daytona, Sebring and Riverside.

"It's got a cool racing history – it is one of the few Mustangs with a period

racing history but it was looking a bit tired when we got it," said Haddon.

Andy Wolfe's team has now repaired the car and it will run back in period livery at Goodwood before contesting some Masters Pre-'66 Touring Car races.

PAUL LAWRENCE

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Harper (left) took the GT3 title with Leung last season in BMW

Reigning champion Harper stays at Century in last-minute deal

BRITISH GT

A late change to Century Motorsport's line-up means that 2023 British GT champion Dan Harper has been given an unexpected chance to go for another title.

The Northern Irishman had been set to sit out the season after his co-driver last year, Darren Leung, switched to the World Endurance Championship. But it was announced on Monday that Harper will race in the series after all alongside Michael Johnston, taking the place of Chris Salkeld aboard the team's BMW M4 GT3.

Johnston and Salkeld had planned to graduate to GT3 together in the Silver-Am class after claiming the GT4 Pro-Am title last season, with Salkeld appearing at the championship's media day earlier this month. No reason for the change was

given before Autosport went to press.

BMW factory driver Harper said that he had no clashing commitments and "perhaps it was meant to be".

"I haven't raced with MJ before, but we shared Century's garage and motorhome last year so know each other pretty well," he said. "It's not like we're starting from square one, and obviously I know the car and team. We're lucky to be starting from such a strong position given how late this came together."

In another change to the Oulton Park entry list, 2007 Le Mans 24 Hours LMP2 class winner Chris Buncombe will replace Simon Watts in the Team RJN McLaren 720S GT3 due to a prior commitment for Watts. He will partner brother Alex in his first British GT outing since he joined Jenson Button at Silverstone in 2020.

JAMES NEWBOLD

Superlicence points for top GB3 drivers

GB3

Superlicence points needed to race in Formula 1 will be awarded to the top five drivers in the GB3 Championship for the first time this season.

Across a three-year period, 40 points are necessary in order to be allowed to race in F1, with 10 points set to be handed to this year's GB3 champion and further points of seven, five, three and one

for the next four drivers in the standings.

Other changes to be introduced to the series this year are pit-to-car radios for the first time, while race control officials will have a direct link to the teams to further aid communication and improve general safety.

There will also be a ban on testing at Spa, Zandvoort and the Hungaroring unless in an officially organised

championship session, with all three overseas venues set to feature on the 2024 calendar. There remains no restriction on testing in the UK.

Late driver announcements ahead of this weekend's season-opener at Oulton Park include race winner James Hedley at Arden again, while Singaporean Rishab Jain and British-born Aditya Kulkarni will race for Chris Dittmann Racing and Hillspeed respectively.

GRANFORS JOINS GB4

Linus Granfors, younger brother of 2022 GB3 Championship runner-up Joel, will race in GB4 this season with Fortec. The 16-year-old Swede joins after dominating Formula Nordic last year, winning a record 13 consecutive races to clinch the title. "I attended several races when Joel drove for Fortec in 2021 and 2022, so I do feel at home and integrated with the team already," said Granfors. GB4 gets under way this weekend at Oulton Park with at least 14 drivers expected to compete.

BYRNE MOVES TO EUROPE

Mini Challenge Trophy frontrunner Jack Byrne will graduate to Clio Cup Europe this season, driving for GPA Racing, with the series beginning at Nogaro this weekend. Byrne was named as Motorsport Ireland's Young Driver of the Year at the end of last season and has now used his €50,000 prize fund to make the progression to Europe. "The calendar is mega and I am very lucky to get to compete on some of the most renowned circuits in Europe," said Byrne.

MINI CHALLENGE FOR KING

Nelson King will continue in the Mini Challenge for a second season and retains the backing of Laser Tools Racing. The 2022 Cooper class champion finished third in the JCW standings last year. "The support from Laser Tools Racing in the crucial stages of last year's championship was a key factor in my success, and I believe that, together, we can achieve phenomenal results this year," said King.

MORE GINETTA FOX CUBS

Fox Motorsport will run car racing rookies Colin Cronin and James Shotton this season in Ginetta Junior. Cronin (below right) moves up from karting and follows in the footsteps of his brothers Robert and Daniel into circuit racing, while eldest sibling Keith is a four-time British Rally champion. Shotton also graduates from karting, having raced under the tutelage of Terry Fullerton. The season gets under way at Oulton Park this weekend.



Ingram off to a flier on disrupted BRC opener

BRC

It was a short, sharp shock for the revived British Rally Championship on Saturday as a convoluted North West Stages opened the 2024 campaign in Lancashire, with WRC2 regular Chris Ingram taking the spoils.

Ingram, who won the event in 2022, wasted no time in stamping his mark on the leaderboard in his Volkswagen Polo, going almost six seconds faster than four-time BRC champion Keith Cronin on the opening stage. In turn, Cronin's Fiesta Rally2 was 5.8s up on 2022 title winner and fellow Ford driver Osian Pryce.

Ingram made the most of a clean road in front of him to edge out another 8s on the second test and, despite a scratch time for Pryce, Ingram enjoyed a comfortable 18s gap after three tests. But the brutal Lancashire lanes were unforgiving, and the changeable March weather led to several incidents across the capacity field, forcing organisers to scrap the fourth and fifth stages (see below) to bring the delayed rally back on track.

Pryce challenged for the lead as the event resumed, going 8s faster than anyone else, but exited the rally on the very next



Late gearbox woes didn't stop Ingram's BRC charge

test with mechanical issues. Instead, as the afternoon progressed, fastest times came from Junior World Rally champion William Creighton, who was looking for seat time ahead of a WRC2 campaign in his Fiesta Rally2, but there was nothing that could be done about Ingram and co-driver Alex Kihurani, who sailed to victory despite encountering gearbox struggles late on.

"It's amazing to win at home against such strong competition," said Ingram. "I knew there were going to be some quick guys, especially the Irish, who have had a lot of seat time. It's going to be one hell of a battle for the rest of the season."

Creighton took his second podium in as many weeks with the runner-up spot following his third place at West Cork, while Meirion Evans gave the Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 a positive UK debut to complete the rostrum. Hyundai driver James Williams overcame new-car niggles to salvage fourth, while Neil Roskell rounded out the top five in his Fiesta Rally2, ahead of Cronin.

Kalum Graffin took his Peugeot 208 Rally4 to a sensational Junior BRC win. The 17-year-old and co-driver Richard Crozier battled hard all day to take victory by just 11s from Robert Proudlock in his similar car.

MATT COTTON

Praise and criticism for North West organisers

BRC

British Rally Championship manager Reece Tarren has praised the organisers of the North West Stages, the disrupted opening 2024 round, for salvaging the afternoon loop of stages after a troubled morning.

The first trio of stages were all halted due to incidents – most of them competitor-related – which put the rally almost two hours behind schedule. As a result, both SS4 and SS5 were cancelled, but all five of the afternoon's stages were able to run, the organisers also halving the gaps between

cars to 30 seconds to help.

Organisers did, however, come in for criticism when a statement on social media initially said that the morning loop had been "scrubbed", leaving many to believe the rally would be restarting from zero. But a 'statement of clarity' was later issued outlining that notional times were handed to competitors who didn't complete SS1-3.

Event director Mark Hothersall said: "I have read posts letting us know we could have communicated better. While I'm sure there are things we could do better, our primary focus was the management of



Full points were still awarded to drivers

a critical incident. I accept this must have been frustrating for marshals and spectators, particularly those who could not access the limited online information, and for that I apologise."

Tarren praised the organisers for saving enough miles to ensure full points could be awarded. "Under enormous amounts of pressure, the organisers

made the right call to ensure everyone was able to complete the afternoon loop to ensure they got enough miles under their belts – credit to them," he said.

Rally winner Chris Ingram said "it would have been ridiculous if they'd cancelled those first stages", and "justice prevailed" when the clarification was issued.

LUKE BARRY



Blackwell-Chambers injured in Silverstone MX-5 Supercup crash

MAZDA MX-5

Multiple Mazda MX-5 champion Will Blackwell-Chambers is targeting a swift return to racing as he recovers from injuries sustained in a heavy accident at Silverstone earlier this month.

After being tipped into a spin at Club Corner during the first MX-5 Supercup race of the year, Blackwell-Chambers was collected heavily in the driver's door by a following car. The 2022 champion, who has three titles in MX-5 Mk1s, was knocked unconscious, and painstakingly extracted from his car in a 30-minute process.

He was taken to hospital in Banbury and diagnosed with five broken ribs, a torn artery and concussion, before being transferred to Oxford's John Radcliffe hospital and released the following day.

"Luckily, the tear is apparently minor,"

Blackwell-Chambers said. "It definitely could have been worse. The John Radcliffe staff were good – to be fair, both places were excellent. They reckon it's going to be six to eight weeks before it fully heals. They've got me on a cocktail of drugs to try and keep the pain at bay.

"I'd like to be back on track this year. We're not going to make the next round at Snetterton [next weekend]. Oulton Park [in May is unlikely] because of its downhill, left-hand nature. So we'll try and target some rounds after that. Health's probably not going to be the problem – it's mainly going to be budget, in all honesty."

A GoFundMe page had raised 70% of its £2500 target earlier this week. He added: "Clapham North and George Grant [racer and series sponsor] have been incredibly generous – I can't thank George enough."

MARK PAULSON

Nova signs major hillclimb tyre deal

BRITISH HILLCLIMB

The new Nova Motorsport brand that has acquired the assets of Avon Motorsport has signed a five-year agreement to supply tyres and become title sponsor of the British Hillclimb Championship.

Avon had a long history in hillclimbing prior to its owner Goodyear deciding to close the Wiltshire factory at the end of 2023, and Nova is seeking to

build upon that legacy. In the short term, it will continue to supply Avon tyres for the series but will look to develop new offerings in the future. Many of Nova's key staff joined from Avon with experience of the hillclimb world.

"Hillclimbing holds a very special place in the hearts of everyone at Nova Motorsport," said Jack Price, the company's product category manager. "We are honoured to uphold

the legacy of Avon Motorsport and continue its support for the British Hillclimb Championship with the announcement of Nova as the title sponsor for five years.

"This partnership not only reaffirms Nova Motorsport's dedication to the sport; it also underscores our mission to provide the highest quality products and services to drivers and teams competing at the highest level."

MARSHALL BACK FOR MORE

Joe Marshall has confirmed his continuation in TCR UK this year. The former Ginetta GT4 Supercup racer scored three podiums during his debut season in the category last year and will again pilot a Rob Boston Racing-run Audi RS3 LMS. "My aim this year is to win the championship," he said. "With a year under my belt to learn the car, and having already worked with the team, I believe we can be real title contenders."

SUMPTON RACES WITH CSCC

Restart Racing's British Touring Car recruit Scott Sumpton, 19, made his Classic Sports Car Club debut at Donington Park last weekend, sharing Luke Sargeant's Cupra Leon Competition TCR in Sunday's Slicks Series race. After starting sixth, the Motorsport UK Academy member survived a gravelly excursion at the first corner and clawed his way back into the top 10, but front subframe failure pitched Sargeant "backwards through the Craners" into retirement two laps from home.

GREEN'S GINETTA RETURN

Former DTM Trophy champion Ben Green will partner Stephen Fresle at the wheel of a Century Motorsport-run Ginetta G56 GTA in the Britcar Trophy this year, starting at Donington Park this weekend. It represents a return to UK competition for 2018 British GT4 runner-up Green, who has predominantly raced in Germany in recent seasons. "It's always a joy to work with Ben – he's carving out a great career as a professional driver and it will be good to get the team back together," said Century boss Nathan Freke.

MALLORY F3 ANNIVERSARY

The 60th anniversary of the first one-litre Formula 3 race was marked at Mallory Park last week (below). Drivers from the Historic F3 category honoured the inaugural one-litre F3 race at Mallory on 8 March 1964. Sixty years on, the HF3 contenders marked the start of their anniversary year with a test day and a lunchtime gathering of cars on the grid at the Leicestershire track.



Christopher adds further Ferrari success at Donington

Ferrari driver got ahead of his Lamborghini rival to take the Slicks Series spoils

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: MICK WALKER



DONINGTON PARK CSCC 23-24 MARCH

Nine hours after Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc turned Formula 1's formbook on its head with a 1-2 in the Australian Grand Prix, 12,000 miles away Andrew Christopher piloted his F488 Challenge to victory in the Slicks Series thriller at the Classic Sports Car Club's Donington Derby season-opener.

The race was always going to be between polesitter Kevin Clarke's 5.2-litre V10-engined Lamborghini Huracan ST and veteran prancing horseman Christopher's turbocharged 4.5-litre V8 machine. From the rolling start, they arrived at Redgate abreast, Clarke clinging to a tenuous lead as a melee sent pursuers everywhere.

After plunging through the Craner Curves together, the supercars were still centimetres apart as they braked for Robert's Chicane to end the lap. Christopher fractionally misjudged the closing speed and a crump up the Lambo's rump left a bite out of the Ferrari's lip. Undeterred, they raced on, but on lap 10 Clarke slowed and dived for the pits, his left-rear tyre in tatters.

A new Pirelli went on and he resumed

but, on a sunny 7C afternoon, cold rubber on the loaded rear corner spat Clarke off into the gravel before the Old Hairpin. The safety car was summoned, but Christopher – directly ahead of it – was home and dry. Another caution was called when Tommy Grout's BMW M3 spluttered to a halt at Coppice, but Christopher's work was done. "A really good first few laps", not the bodyshop bill, is how he'll remember it.

After a turbo pipe came adrift in qualifying, Tom Walpole wrung his Ariel Atom's neck in advancing from 35th to second ahead of series debutant Aaron Cooke's Ginetta G55. "It looked like carnage in my mirrors [at Redgate after the start]," said Cooke. "I had no idea where I was."

Sunday's Tin Tops finale was another

cracker behind Andrew Windmill's Honda Civic EP3, quicker still following a winter diet including steel crank, carbon seat and new Rays wheels. "I fluffed the start," admitted the poleman but, once ahead inside a lap, James Slater and Cameron Elder (Hondas) could only scrap for second after usurping Adam Brown's Ford Fiesta.

Slater's undoing was a penalty for re-emerging from the mandatory pitstop within the specified 90 seconds, which Elder's partner Josh Files was aware of, not that it reduced their duel's intensity. Slater was bumped to seventh, after also picking up a sanction for causing a collision. "I needed a bit more waft," grinned Files.

Amalgamation of categories to amortise circuit hire costs packed fields. In most

Just 0.012s separated Osborne's E-type and Snee/Greensall Elan





BEST BATTLE: JAGUAR FIGHTERS The 10-strong Mike Hawthorn Jaguar Challenge race within the Classic K contest – for which they are eligible anyway – featured Welshman Grant Williams (left) and Scot Darren McWhirter waging wonderful wheel-twirling warfare in tail-happy Mk2s either side of the pitstops. In contrast to the recent ultra-close Six Nations rugby by international, the Williams dragon prevailed...



they proved compatible across a 14-race programme spanning 400-plus entries. Both sides of the returning Jaguar championship and new-to-CSCC MG Trophy proved this with exemplary conduct from grids despatched separately. Saturday's lead fight between Andrew Harper's supercharged S-type R, Colin Philpott's XJS and Jack Robinson's XK8 was superb until Philpott retired. Harper doubled up on Sunday, Chris Boon (supercharged XK8) a distant second.

The 190bhp MG ZRs of Scot Graham Ross and Sam Meagher brought them up to fifth and sixth overall in the opener. Ross reached third on Sunday, then drifted at Redgate, ceding the class to Meagher. Four drivers grappled for 170bhp class supremacy, invitee Steve McDermid beating James Cole and Fergus Campbell after Tylor Ballard stopped. Lap record breaker Ballard's track-limits penalty promoted Cole second time out.

On a drying track, Steve Osborne slithered his Jaguar E-type to Swinging Sixties victory, pipping Nigel Greensall – finishing locally raised Ben Snee's Lotus Elan – by 0.012 seconds! The charging Greensall was around four seconds quicker than Osborne on each of the final two laps, but it was not quite enough. Irishman

Paddy Shovlin (Lotus Cortina) and James Hughes (ex-Andy Southcott Lenham) chased hard and won classes, too.

Osborne beat another Elan, Paul Tooms's, by 11s in Saturday's dry Classic K closer. Shovlin was gifted third when Snee/Greensall were penalised for a short stop.

The second Swinging Sixties race started badly from a topsy-turvy 38-car soggy qualifying order. Behind poleman Connor Kay (TVR Tuscan V6) and Stephen Pickering (Sunbeam Tiger), Shovlin and Claire Norman (BMW 2002) formed row two. At the rolling start, Jon Wolfe's five-litre TVR Tuscan V8 blasted from eighth to second by Redgate, before which Simon James's Tiger walloped Norman back alongside Wolfe and into the gravel. The Beemer ended up on its side, whereupon Norman alighted unscathed but angry.

Front hub failure stranded Wolfe at the Old Hairpin, leaving Pickering with no opposition at the restart. Alistair Dyson (E-type) finished 39s adrift, but won his class, as did Kay – who shared the TVR with Radical racer Ben Caisley – in fifth overall.

The Ramair BMW championship's CSCC debut was the domain of bewinged E46 M3s. Kevin Clarke challenged in Matty Evans's gruff 1M, but was thwarted

WEEKEND WINNERS

SLICKS SERIES

Andrew Christopher (Ferrari F488 Challenge)

TIN TOPS/PUMA CUP

Andrew Windmill (Honda Civic CSL Type R)

JAGUAR CHAMPIONSHIP/MG TROPHY

Races 1 & 2 Andrew Harper (Jaguar S-type R)

SWINGING SIXTIES

Race 1 Steve Osborne (Jaguar E-type)

Race 2 Stephen Pickering (Sunbeam Tiger)

CLASSIC K

Steve Osborne (Jaguar E-type)

RAMAIR BMWs/OPEN SERIES

Race 1 Bryan Bransom (BMW M3 E46)

Race 2 Niall Bradley (BMW M3 E46)

MG MIDGETS & SPRITES

Races 1 & 2 James Hughes (Sprite)

MODERN CLASSICS/FUTURE CLASSICS

Aston Blake/Tony Blake (TVR Tuscan Challenge)

NEW MILLENNIUM/TURBO TIN TOPS

Tom Walpole (Ariel Atom 4)

MAGNIFICENT SEVENS

Tim Davis (Caterham C400)

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

by an electrical glitch that cut its four-litre engine on upshifts. Bryan Bransom and Niall Bradley, from 18th in race two, each beat Jason West home. John Cutmore's supercharged Spire and Colin Watson's Caterham C400 won the Open sections.

Presided over in its 48th season by stalwarts Larry and Dorothy Quinn, the MG Midget and Sprite Challenge was dominated by James Hughes in his 'defrogged' 1959 Sprite. Once battler Pippa Cow retired with a misfire, he lapped all bar Ian Burgin on Saturday. John Faux (in Burgin's froggy), Hugh Simpson and Dean Stanton chased on Sunday, when Hughes almost lapped fifth-placed father John (Lenham) under the chequer.

Relayed by son Aston into the family TVR Tuscan, Tony Blake growled from 21st to win Future Classics from Geoff Beale's Talbot Sunbeam Lotus and 'Red Roger' Hamilton's giant-slaying Ginetta G20. Hamilton claimed Modern honours from David Whelan/Aidan Farrell's Porsche 993 RSR and Aussie Dave Griffin, whose BMW M3 E36 ran out of fuel while leading.

Walpole's Atom blitzed the safety-car split New Millennium race, as Andrew Marson (Abarth) zoomed to Turbo Tin Tops spoils. Rich Webb's supercharged RLM Cup 400 took the Magnificent Sevens chequer, but a short-stop penalty dropped him behind Tim Davis's BOSS Caterham. Behind the Kumho-shod pair, Cutmore led the chase Nankang-style.

MARCUS PYE

Spin and win for Smith on first Lotus outing

**BRANDS HATCH
EQUIPE
23-24 MARCH**

Fans of historic and MG Car Club racing in recent years will know that Tom Smith is no stranger to success at the wheel of an MGB Roadster, but the twin triumph he achieved in the Equipe Libre double-header at Brands Hatch last weekend came as a surprise to even himself as the Equipe Classic Racing season got under way.

Driving a newly built Lotus Elan that he first tested only two weeks ago, Smith came out on top in a memorable battle with David Methley's 4.7-litre AC Cobra to take victory in an opening race where mixed weather conditions contributed to the excitement. Poleman Methley initially held the advantage from Smith before a hailstorm soaked the track and Smith spun backwards at Clearways. Having avoided digging his rear wheels into the gravel, Smith was able to rejoin, albeit 11 seconds in arrears.

Despite the lack of a working windscreen wiper, Smith was able to carve back the deficit and pass Methley at Druids on lap 18 of 28 before going on to claim victory. In an equally tight battle for third, Richard Hodson came out on top in his Lotus Mk6 after holding off the Austin-Healey 3000 of Richard Hywel Evans. "I don't know quite what to say after that," said Smith. "My expectation was never to win here first time out. The car has literally just been built."

The second contest proved to be a rather



Smith's Elan left the competition behind in tricky conditions

calmer affair, both in terms of action and weather conditions. Smith was victorious once again after relieving Brian Caudwell's Cobra of the lead early on, while Paul Kennelly brought his Shelby Mustang GT350 R home third.

In the first BCV8 encounter, the drama began even before the race had got going. With the track damp following an earlier shower, front-row man Neil Fowler spun his MGB GTV8 into the barriers at Druids on the green-flag lap. That helped James Wheeler claim an unchallenged win in his similar car, while former Ginetta Junior racer Jack Rawles (GTV8) recovered from a tardy start on his series debut to claim second after he usurped the MGB Roadster of Babak Farsian three laps from home.

After another untidy first lap in race two, Rawles charged back to hound

Wheeler for the race lead. An exciting battle between the pair followed, and Rawles emerged victorious after Wheeler ran wide at Graham Hill Bend. Fowler bounced back from his first-race frustration to take third. "The noise of the car is just the best thing and it's an absolute rocketship to drive," said Rawles. "I have to stop making mistakes at the start, though!"

Joe Willmott also made an error at the start of the opening Equipe Pre-'63/50s race that ultimately proved costly in his battle with Charles Angrave's Lotus Mk6. After powering his Austin-Healey 3000 into an immediate lead, Willmott then spun away his advantage moments later, promoting Angrave and Marc Campfield's Healey. By lap three, Willmott was back up to third before Campfield slid off at Paddock, leading to a safety car. Willmott



Wheeler claimed an unchallenged win in first BCV8 contest at Brands

WEEKEND WINNERS

EQUIPE LIBRE

Races 1 & 2 Tom Smith (Lotus Elan)

BCV8s

Race 1 James Wheeler (B GTV8)

Race 2 Jack Rawles (B GTV8)

EQUIPE PRE-'63/50s

Race 1 Charles Angrave (Lotus Mk6)

Race 2 Andrew Wenman (Morgan +4)

EQUIPE 70s

David Wenman/Andrew Wenman (Morgan +8)

EQUIPE F2 ATLANTIC

Races 1 & 2 Glenn Eagling (GRD 273, below)

TRIPLE M

Races 1 & 2 Anthony Seber
(Wolseley Hornet Special)

EQUIPE GTS

Race 1 Rob Cull (TVR Grantura Mk3)

Race 2 Andrew Wenman (Morgan +4)

MG CUP

Races 1 & 2 Mark Wright (F Cup)



For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

moved back to the front shortly after the resumption, but his start was deemed to be false and the resultant 10s penalty ensured Angrave was declared the victor.

Willmott was at the centre of the action again in the early stages of race two when he indulged in a lead tussle with Andrew Wenman's Morgan +4. A decisive move at Druids on lap nine of 31 helped Wenman prevail.

Wenman also claimed the glory in the sole Equipe 70s event when he teamed up with his father, David, to take a dominant win at the wheel of their Morgan +8. The battle for the runner-up spot looked set to go the way of the Ford Escort Mk1 RS2000 of Mark Lucock after he had broken clear of Tom Pead's BMW 1600Ti, but a penalty for a pitlane speeding infringement demoted Lucock to seventh, while third was taken by Martin Reynolds in his Ford Mustang Mach 1.

Only five cars appeared on the grid for both Equipe F2 Atlantic races after damage sustained during Saturday qualifying forced historic racing ace Martin Stretton to withdraw his March 742. Glenn Eagling, driving his ex-Reine Wisell GRD 273, eased to a double success, while Martin Wood claimed a pair of seconds in his March 73B.

MARK LIBBETER



BLAST FROM THE PAST The most striking of the 12 pre-war machines entered in the Triple M races was Steven McEvoy's 1935 MG Bellevue Special. Originally built as a standard M series to race at Brooklands, the 1.5-litre MG was subsequently converted into a Bellevue with the addition of a supercharger. McEvoy, who has owned and rebuilt the car over the past couple of years, took a best finish of third in race one, as Anthony Seber secured a double win in his 1935 Wolseley Hornet Special.



MAKING THE WRIGHT TYRE CALL Being on the correct tyre for the conditions is vital, even if that means using old rubber. Mark Wright ran "two-year-old slicks" on his full-specification MG F Cup Car, but the second-hand tyres did not stop him cantering to a lights-to-flag victory in the first MG Cup race. He then opted for wet-weather rubber in the sequel and took another dominant triumph. "I went on wets for this race because I thought the track was too precarious for slicks," he said.



CULL BOUNCES BACK Despite an engine failure in practice preventing him from racing his Andy Rouse-replica Ford Capri in the Equipe 70s event, the weekend was far from a failure for Rob Cull. In the opening Equipe GTS race, Cull steered his 1962 TVR Grantura Mk3 to a lights-to-flag success, although the action was brought to an early end due to a hailstorm. He also led the early stages of race two before giving best to Andrew Wenman's Morgan +4.

AUTOSPORT

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Ballantyne took a narrow win in the opening Scottish Mini encounter



Three different drivers at the head of Scottish Mini herd at Kirkistown

KIRKISTOWN
500MRCI
23 MARCH

Mini Coopers are, it seems, herd animals. At least the ones in Scotland seem to be, and their annual visit to Northern Ireland last weekend certainly proved the theory. Fifteen cars crossed the Irish Sea, and the by-now-expected Caledonian carambolage ensued at Kirkistown, with some extra weather factors adding to the fun.

Three contests provided opportunities for close contact in cold/dry and cold/wet conditions, as they huddled together for extra warmth in races that produced three different winners.

Race one gave Jason Ballantyne victory by 0.4 seconds from Chad Little and the ever-competitive Oly Mortimer. This was despite a prolonged mid-race delay after the only local driver, Jack Irvine, contrived to roll at the Hairpin on lap five while in the lead bunch. Undaunted, Irvine was back in action for the second contest – which went to Mortimer by just over a second from the jousting Ballantyne and Little – and claimed a fighting fourth

spot from Ian Munro.

And to complete an interesting day, the local lad took second spot in the finale, behind runaway victor Daniel Patterson, with Munro nipping at his heels. Throughout the field there were the usual paint-swapping moments, which gave everybody plenty to chat about on the ferry home. Meanwhile, a small field of local Minis provided their own fun, with wins going to Darren Gilmore and Peter Bennett.

Formula Ford – back to strength after a sparse 2023 season– featured Jason Smyth in commanding form in his Team Dolan-run Van Diemen when he was triumphant twice ahead of team-mates Morgan Quinn (race one) and Jordan Kelly (race two). David McCullough completed the podium party both times. Brazilian teenager Isaac Canto placed fourth twice, while the Pre-90 section fell to birthday boy Philip Harris.

Completing the single-seater action, Formula Vee provided a win for Andy Keogh among the B and C class runners from Robert Fleming and Kieran Hannan while, in the overall encounter, there was glory for Gavin Buckley from Jack Byrne and Colm Blackburn. Keogh took fourth.

The small Saloon field produced some good racing. Both bouts were won by Gavin Stanfield's Subaru, but race two offered an extra challenge with pouring rain – especially for Stanfield, who was on slicks! Despite this, he kept rally man and Kirkistown debutant Stephen Wright (SEAT Supercopa) at bay, but his winning margin shrunk from 25s to 1.1s!

Elsewhere, Roadsports provided Steven Larkham with two unopposed Radical wins, while Peter Drennan dominated a small Global GT field.

WEEKEND WINNERS

SCOTTISH MINI COOPERS

Race 1 Jason Ballantyne

Race 2 Oly Mortimer

Race 3 Daniel Patterson

KIRKISTOWN MINI COOPERS/FIESTAS

Race 1 Darren Gilmore (Mini)

Race 2 Peter Bennett (Mini)

NORTHERN IRELAND FORMULA FORD 1600

Races 1 & 2 Jason Smyth (Van Diemen JL12)

FORMULA VEE

Race 1 Andy Keogh (Sheane FV99)

Race 2 Gavin Buckley (Sheane FV99)

SALOONS/GTs

Races 1 & 2 Gavin Stanfield (Subaru Impreza)

ROADSPORTS/GLOBAL GT LIGHTS

Race 1 Steven Larkham (Radical PR6)

Race 2 Peter Drennan (Global GT Light)

MAZDA MODI-5-CUP

Races 1 & 2 Craig Ewing

For full results visit: speedhive.mylaps.com



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY CRAIG

And then there were the Mazdas. The Mazda Modi-5-Cup has been energised by the arrival of some new faces for this year and the hero of the day, sprinter Craig Ewing, proved to be one of them, winning both times on his first day at the races. Behind him, Francis Allen delivered the challenge in race one but, in the damp sequel, it was another 'newbie', James Crowe, who piled on the pressure, with Allen demoted to third.

Meanwhile, some of the older faces provided their own entertainment. David Cousins – 'father' of the class – managed to damage his tail lights during an overtaking move that didn't quite come off. Not very paternal, perhaps, but it almost worked.

RICHARD YOUNG

Over 70 years
since the 500cc F3
machines first graced
Combe, they are due
to return on
Monday



THE 500cc CARS CELEBRATING COMBE'S 500TH EVENT

Easter Monday is a major landmark in the Wiltshire circuit's history – 500cc Formula 3 was at its very first car race meeting, and is back for its 500th

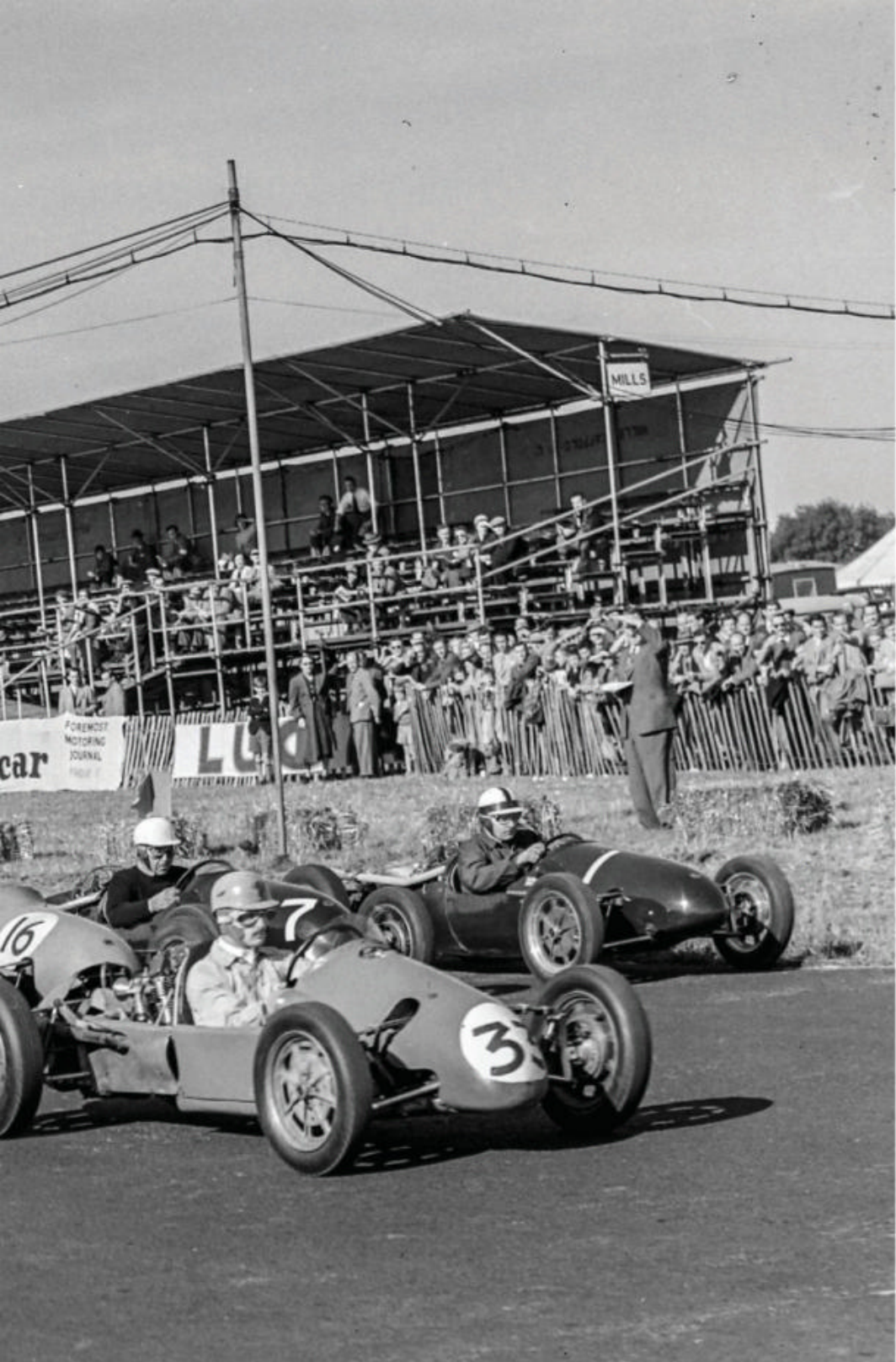
MARCUS PYE

Castle Combe celebrates its milestone 500th car race meeting on Easter Monday, with 500cc Formula 3 cars rolling back the years to the Wiltshire circuit's inaugural event, run behind closed gates by the Bristol Motor Cycle & Light Car Club on 8 July 1950.

The 500cc initiative, which blossomed rapidly from seeds sown by motorsport-hungry Bristol enthusiasts in 1946, was adopted as Formula 3 in 1950 and a key to Second World War aerodrome Castle Combe's early success as a race track. Its opening meeting featured pre-war Morgan ace Clive Lones win the programme-closing 500cc event in his bright red Tiger Kitten II. Evolved from the first production Iota P1, which the class pioneer had debuted in 1949, Lones's intriguing confection was powered by a JAP engine manufactured by JA Prestwich Industries in North London. The long-established and prolific marque's accessible products played a pivotal role in the category's growth.

Nonetheless, competitors enjoyed free rein to choose their engines, most of single-cylinder configuration sourced from motorcycles. While the inexpensive and readily available JAP overhead valve designs opened the doors to racing to many, more powerful and reliable overhead cam Manx Nortons – tuned by experts such as Francis Beart and Robin Jackson, Steve Lancefield and Ray Petty – soon outgunned them. Even so, some drivers/engineers preferred to plough their own furrow. Vincent HRD units and Triumph twins were not uncommon, while others opted for BSA and Rudge motivation. Continental marques such as BMW and Gilera were also represented as the word spread.

With the Royal Automobile Club satisfied of the wartime aerodrome perimeter track's suitability in practical terms at the trial event – a mix of car and motorcycle races – the first public meeting at Castle Combe took place three months later, on 7 October. An estimated 12,000 spectators witnessed Ronald



Le Mans victor Bueb was among Combe conquerors

“The list of Combe 500cc F3 winners reads like a Who’s Who? of the sport’s rising stars”

‘Curly’ Dryden (Cooper Mk2) and Stirling Moss (Cooper Mk4) win the 500cc F3 qualifying heats, the latter after a battle with Peter Collins in a sister car. Collins narrowly won the final from Dryden. Moss, slow away, was soon flying but was thwarted by engine issues. From there, the list of Combe 500cc winners reads like a Who’s Who? of the sport’s rising stars and Half-Litre Club’s most famous alumni, which included older drivers such as Dryden, Don Parker, Jim Russell and Les Leston, who started competing late due to the war. The diminutive Parker – who did not make his competition >>

THE ROLL CALL OF COMBE 500cc F3 VICTORS



CASTLE COMBE WINNERS 1950-55

DATE	DRIVER (CAR)
8 July 1950	Clive Lones (Iota Tiger Kitten II-JAP)
7 October 1950	Curly Dryden (Cooper-Norton Mk2) H1
7 October 1950	Stirling Moss (Cooper-Norton Mk4) H2
7 October 1950	Peter Collins (Cooper-Norton Mk4) F
31 March 1951	Don Parker (JBS-JAP) H
31 March 1951	Ken Carter (Cooper-Norton Mk5) H
31 March 1951	Ken Wharton (Cooper-Norton Mk5) F
12 May 1951	Clive Lones (Iota Tiger Kitten II-JAP)
6 October 1951	Don Parker (JBS-JAP) H
6 October 1951	Les Leston (JBS-Norton) H
6 October 1951	Charles Headland (Kieft-Norton CK51) F
12 April 1952	Michael Barclay (Cooper-JAP) H
12 April 1952	Don Truman (Cooper-Norton Mk6) H
12 April 1952	Stirling Moss (Kieft-Norton CK52) H
12 April 1952	Stirling Moss (Kieft-Norton CK52) F
3 May 1952	Les Leston (Leston Special-Norton)
4 October 1952	Stirling Moss (Cooper-Norton Mk7) H
4 October 1952	Reg Bicknell (Revis-JAP) H
4 October 1952	Stirling Moss (Cooper-Norton Mk7) F
4 April 1953	Don Parker (Kieft-Norton CK52) H
4 April 1953	Dennis Taylor (Martin Special-Norton) H
4 April 1953	Dennis Taylor (Martin Special-Norton) F
25 April 1953	Andre Loens (Kieft-Norton CK52)
3 October 1953	Don Parker (Kieft-Norton CK52) H
3 October 1953	Stirling Moss (Cooper-Norton Mk7) H
3 October 1953	Don Parker (Kieft-Norton CK52) F
3 April 1954	Reg Bicknell (Revis-Norton) H
3 April 1954	Ivor Bueb (Cooper-Norton Mk8) H
3 April 1954	Reg Bicknell (Revis-Norton) F
28 August 1954	Don Parker (Parker Kieft-Norton)
28 August 1954	David Boshier-Jones (Kieft-Norton) J
28 August 1954	Don Parker (Parker Kieft-Norton)
9 April 1955	Don Parker (Parker Kieft-Norton)
9 April 1955	Don Parker (Parker Kieft-Norton)
1 October 1955	Ivor Bueb (Cooper-Norton Mk9)*
1 October 1955	Jim Russell (Cooper-Norton Mk9)*

Key: H=Heat; F=Final; J=Junior; *International Meeting



AUTUMN CLASSIC WINNERS

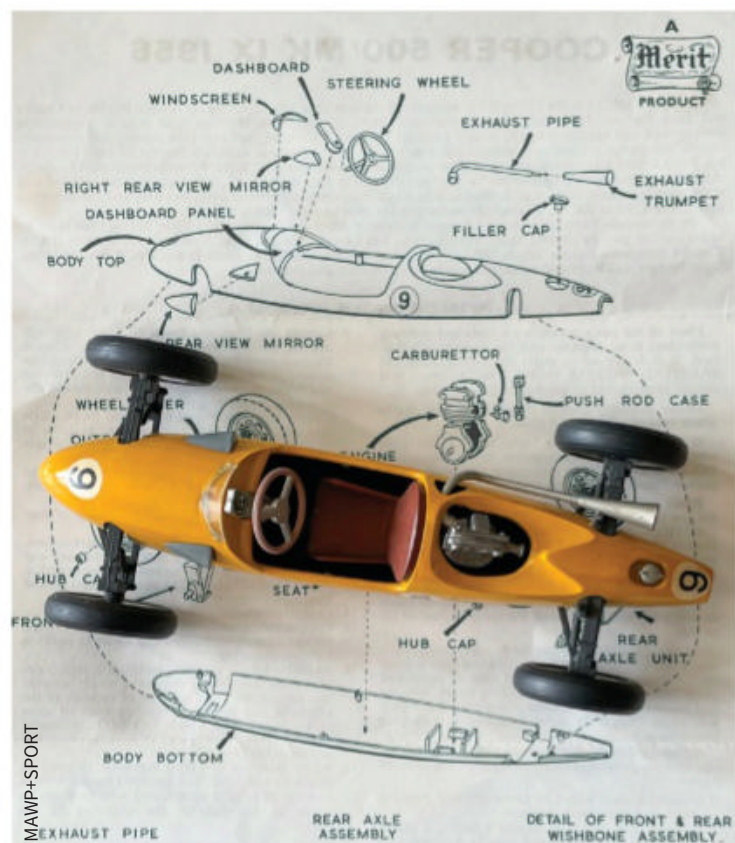
YEAR	DRIVER (CAR)
2014	Steve Jones (Cooper-Norton Mk10)
2015	Xavier Kingsland (Staride-Norton Mk3)
2016	Richard De La Roche (Cooper-JAP Mk5)
2017	Darrell Woods (Staride-Norton Mk3)
2020	Mike Fowler (Cooper-Norton Mk5)
2021	Tom Waterfield (Cooper-Norton Mk9)
2022	Alex Wilson (Cooper-Norton Mk10)

500s IN MINIATURE

The height of 500cc Formula 3 – and popularity of Cooper cars in particular – was reflected when J & L Randall Ltd added a 1956 Cooper Mk9 to its range of beautifully moulded 1/24-scale plastic Merit kits for enthusiasts to assemble at home.

Featuring a ‘double knocker’ Norton engine, detailed cockpit and suspension, it was in august company, alongside contemporary Mercedes-Benz W196, Maserati 250F, Vanwall, BRM P25 and Connaught grand prix cars and Aston Martin DB3S, Jaguar D-type and Lotus 11 sports-racers in the range.

Danish manufacturer Tekno also produced 1/43 white metal Cooper-Norton 500 ‘Midget Racers’ in the racing colours of Britain (green), Belgium (yellow), France (blue), Germany (white), Holland (orange), Switzerland (red/white) and of course Denmark (silver), with national flags and driver figures.



debut until his early forties – won more races than anybody else at the Wiltshire venue (four heats and five finals) between 1951 and 1955, to F1-bound Moss’s six. Tragically, wartime RAF pilot Dryden lost his life, aged 42, when his JBS-Norton turned over at Combe’s Camp Corner in October 1951. Moss was more fortunate when he was pitched out of his Cooper 500 – fitted with a 1000cc JAP V-twin engine for an F2 race – at Quarry two years later!

While the sleek Cooper cars built by Charles Cooper and his son John in Surbiton, initially around Fiat Topolino suspension units, were numerically dominant in period – production ran into the hundreds – rival marques also tasted success at Combe. JBS (creation of Rye House speedway star Alf Bottoms), Kieft (founded by Welshman Cyril Kieft in Bridgend), Revis (built by former Spitfire pilot Reg Bicknell in Southampton) and Ray Martin’s eponymous cars were also winners. After some crafty gamesmanship by company director Moss, Christchurch garagiste Andre Loens and Jack Westcott chased him home for a Kieft 1-2-3 in April 1952.

Other winners included Ivor ‘the Driver’ Bueb, who won the Le Mans 24 Hours race twice in Ecurie Ecosse Jaguar D-types,

“The little machines rebooted single-seater sport and founded the racing car industry that Britain led”

shared with future F1 champion Mike Hawthorn (1955) and Ron Flockhart (1957). Also enjoying Combe 500cc F3 success were Welsh garage owner David Boshier-Jones – who claimed three successive British Hillclimb championships in 1958-60 driving a 1000cc Cooper-JAP V-twin – and long-time British Racing & Sports Car Club clerk of the course Don Truman, who had abandoned his Marwyn-based Bardon Turner for a proprietary Cooper Mk6.

After spinning at Camp in the opening 25-lap race of a glorious afternoon, handing victory to works Cooper Car Company team-mate Bueb, the honour of winning the last 500cc race at Combe fell to future racing school guru Russell in his Cooper-Norton Mk9 on 1 October 1955.

Using Lancefield-tuned Manx Norton engines, Russell won 11 of the 27 frontline races that year to deservedly be crowned Autosport British F3 champion, but the tenacious Bueb kept the title race alive until October, claiming six victories across a consistent season.

Although F3 was losing popularity to small capacity sportscar

SOME OF THE NOTABLE CARS SET TO RACE THIS YEAR

Among a bumper grid of 500cc Formula 3 cars entered for Easter Monday’s 2024 season-opener at Castle Combe, the Cooper-Norton Mk8 (chassis Mk8/19/54) of Simon Hewes is of special interest. Recorded as Stuart Lewis-Evans’s works car in 1954, it debuted at Kirkistown. A fortnight later, 70 years ago this weekend, the combo finished third in the final at Combe, behind Reg Bicknell (Revis) and Ivor Bueb in his works Cooper Mk8. Wins at Brough, Brands Hatch, Orleans (France), Teramo and Senigallia (Italy) followed. In 1955, entered by Brooklands tuning guru Robin Jackson, Lewis-Evans was victorious at Charterhall, Brands,

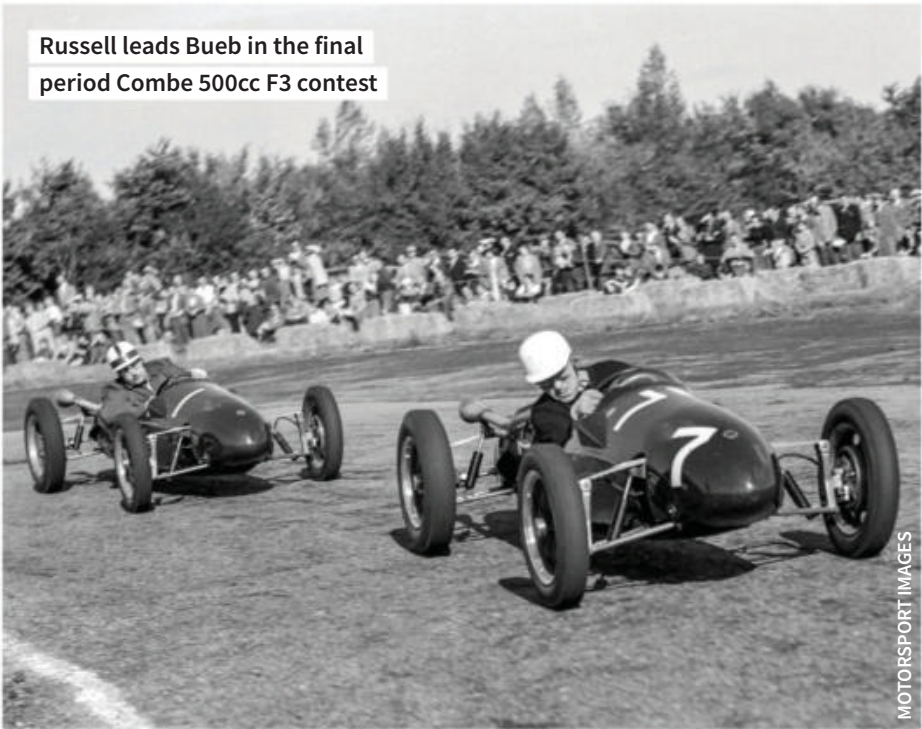
Orleans, Oulton Park and Cosenza (Italy).

After Lewis-Evans graduated to F1 in 1957, his Kent garage owner father Lewis – known to the fraternity as ‘Pop’ – raced the Cooper. It was subsequently sold to Germany, where 18-year-old Kurt Ahrens Jr, inspired by his speedway racer father, won five times in 1958 en route to a fine FJunior and F2 career.

Also out at Combe is the unique Jason – reflecting its construction in July, August, September, October and November of 1952 – the creation of Midlander Godfrey Messervy. Then in his mid-twenties, the future chairman of Lucas CAV industries raced it with a

fuel-injected Triumph twin engine. Serial 500 restorer Andy Raynor is the proud new owner of this early P1 class contender, JAP-powered since German Heiner Reinhart recommissioned it in the 1980s.

Another interesting debutant repatriated to its birthplace will be the 1948 Cooper Mk2 of James Wilson, who completes a three-strong team alongside aero engineer father Chris and brother Alex, winner here in 2022. Found derelict and incomplete via the legendary Kenny Smith in New Zealand in 2019, it has been subjected to a ground-up restoration, finished with days to spare.



racers by the latter part of the 1950s, and Formula Junior would supplant it, Castle Combe played no further part in the 500cc category after the momentous but loss-making international event that closed its 1955 season. In fact, such was the call for comprehensive safety improvements across motor racing in the wake of the appalling accident at Le Mans in June that local promoter Bristol MC & LCC was unable to countenance the cost of the requisite upgrades. Regretfully, Castle Combe was closed and did not reopen for car racing until 1962, after the BRSCC dug deep to make the investment in earth banks.

By then, the charismatic 500cc era, and the waft of its aromatic race fuel, was over. Effectively the F2 and F3 of its time, Formula Junior created a more cohesive and relevant training ground for aspiring grand prix drivers.

But F3 was reinvigorated in 1964 with the adoption of 1000cc ‘screamer’ engine rules that prevailed until 1970. That evolution celebrates its 60th anniversary this year as Historic 1-Litre F3, and will be showcased at the Castle Combe Autumn Classic in September. Meanwhile, the 500 Owners’ Association, founded in 1968, strives to preserve the history of its predecessor, promoting circuit racing, hillclimbs and sprints for the little machines that rebooted single-seater sport and founded the production racing car industry in which Britain led the world after the Second World War. 🏁

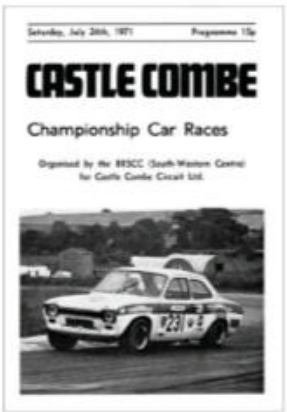


WERE YOU THERE?

Monday’s event is the 500th car race meeting at Castle Combe, dating back to 8 July 1950. Long-time racegoers may have attended the 100th, 200th, 300th and 400th, so here is a flashback to the programme covers and winners at the landmark events of 1971, 1988, 1999 and 2011 respectively.

100TH EVENT, 24 JULY 1971

- **Formula Atlantic**
Tom Belso (Brabham BT28/35)
- **Townsend Thoresen Formula Ford**
Heat 1 Mike Campbell-Cole (Merlyn Mk11A)
Heat 2 Stan Matthews (Lotus 69F)
Final Jeremy Gambs (Lotus 61M)
- **Mini Miglia** Len Brammer
- **Mini Se7en** Graham Wenham
- **Single-Seaters/Sports Cars** Belso
- **Clubmans/Modsports** Peter Evans (U2 Mk6B)
- **Saloon Cars** Vince Woodman (Ford Escort)



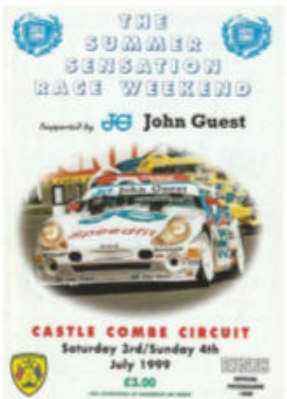
200TH EVENT, 4 APRIL 1988

- **Castle Combe Formula Ford**
Howard Lester (Reynard 83FF)
- **Castle Combe GT** Richard Ward (Lotus Elan)
- **Formula First Qualifying race**
Keith Farrance **Final** Farrance
- **Fiesta Qualifying race** Mike McInerney **Final** Brian Farminer
- **Mini Miglia** Russell Grady
- **Mini Se7en** Bill Sollis
- **Modified Porsches** Richard Chilton (959)
- **Modified Saloons** Brian Chatfield (Rover Vitesse)



300TH EVENT, 3-4 JULY 1999

- **TVR Tuscan Challenge**
Races 1 & 2 Mike Jordan
- **Porsche Cup Races 1 & 2**
David Jones (996 Carrera)
- **Castle Combe Formula Ford**
Richard Carter (Van Diemen RF92)
- **Castle Combe GT**
Bob Light (B6 Sport)
- **Castle Combe Saloons**
Brian Cox (Peugeot 205 GTI)
- **ARP Formula 3** Jeff Gresswell (Dallara-VW F388)
- **Formula Saloons** Ric Wood (Holden Commodore)
- **Mini Miglia** Peter Baldwin
- **Mini Se7en** Mark Hunt
- **Alfa Romeos** Graham Presley (75), Dave Ashford (33)
- **Ford XRs** Richard Casey (Fiesta XR2)
- **Autoitalia** Rory Fordyce (Ferrari 355C)



400TH EVENT, 30 MAY 2011

- **Castle Combe Formula Ford**
Rob Hall (Swift SC10)
- **Castle Combe Saloons**
Mark Funnell (BMW Mini)
- **Mazda MX-5 Mk1s Races 1 & 3**
Tom Roche **Race 2** Paul Sheard, **Race 4** Tom Davis
- **Mazda MX-5 Mk3s Race 1** Tom Roche **Race 2** Rob Boston
- **Nippon Challenge** Vaughan Fletcher (Subaru Impreza)



FINISHING STRAIGHT

Worries ran deep over Verstappen's 2021 Jeddah qualifying crash



Revelations, anecdotes and fascinating



BOOK REVIEW
F1 RACING
CONFIDENTIAL
– INSIDE STORIES
FROM THE WORLD
OF FORMULA 1
Giles Richards
RRP £20

Autosport loves a challenge – even one we’re posing ourselves as we delve into *F1 Racing Confidential – Inside Stories from the World of Formula 1*. In this new release from *The Guardian*’s F1 correspondent, Giles Richards, will we really learn something new about F1 in every one of the 19 chapters contained within as the introduction so declares? Game on, Gilo...

First up, we hear from two very familiar figures: Red Bull and Mercedes team principals Christian Horner and Toto Wolff. Richards’ style in telling their tales is also something of an immediate surprise that will continue throughout. This is not a series of first-person essays that lay out the perspectives of 20 figures from six F1 teams and Pirelli, as we’d expected. Instead, we get delightful editorialising and analysis – Richards instantly speculating whether Horner’s relentless determination in his role comes from an overwhelming fear of failure.

The varied life stories of each figure are the background deliciousness of this work – the humbler, testing beginnings of many

are more compelling than the privileged elements of Horner’s and Wolff’s famous lives. Although, we’re delighted to discover how Wolff’s anaesthesiologist mother savagely reacted to his finger-breaking FF1600 crash in 1990 (“You idiot”).

There’s only one driver interview – McLaren’s Lando Norris – but it’s all the better for it. Norris and his peers are so well known, their tales as glowing as their driving exploits in the current age’s social media insights and *Drive to Survive* storytelling. But we do discover the shock of Norris’s parents taking away a beloved quad bike fearing their five-year-old daredevil would hurt himself, plus how F1 cockpits initially feel rather alien to their regular pilots for the first lap of each new event.

The pain former Sauber head of race strategy Ruth Buscombe had to overcome is altogether more impressive: she was hit by a car while cycling just after starting at Cambridge University and had to undertake her early studies while recovering from life-threatening injuries. Mercedes technical director James Allison reveals he is colour blind, while Red Bull chief engineer Paul Monaghan’s insight into just how worried the team was that Max Verstappen had wrecked his gearbox in *that* 2021 Jeddah qualifying crash is gripping.

Oscar Piastrì’s race engineer, Tom Stallard, once produced circuit simulator design software for Apex, which the company behind the new Miami track apparently still uses today. Pirelli team tyre

engineer Peter Mabon explains how closely he and his colleagues work with their designated squads, to the point their extra insight on conditions changing can help teams rapidly make car set-up changes.

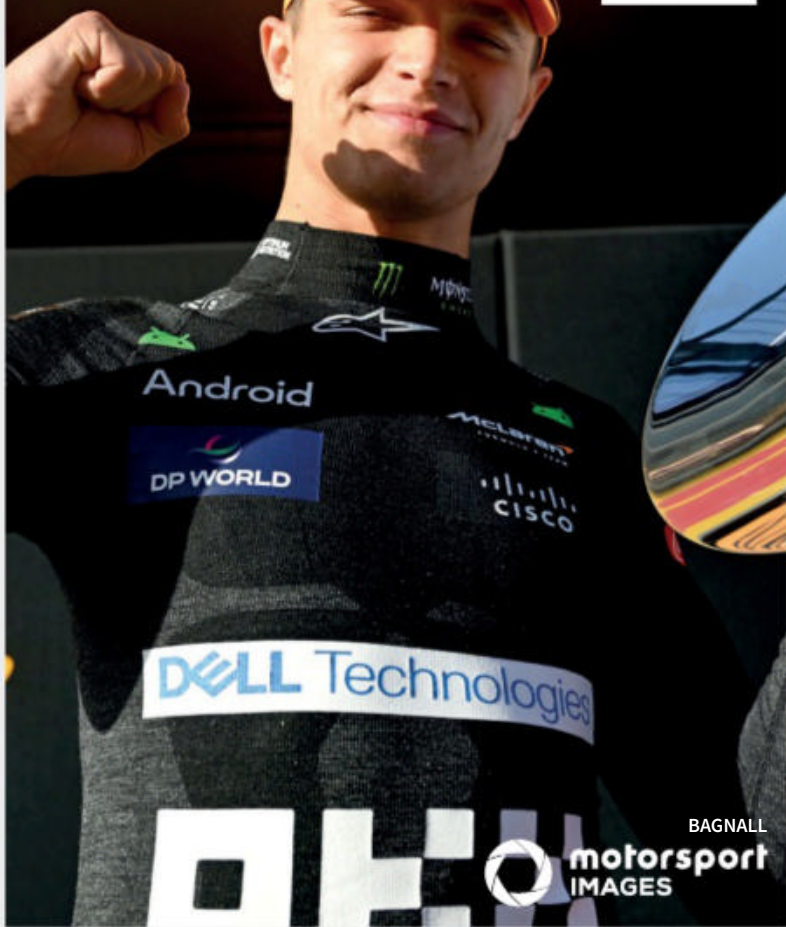
Verstappen’s trainer, Rupert Manwaring, has a brilliant anecdote of how a traffic-light meeting led to work with boxer Derek Chisora, while former McLaren aerodynamics department head Marianne Hinson outlines the complexity of modern F1 wind tunnels. That’s robot arms, lasers and all. Red Bull CNC machinist Neil Ambrose’s memories of celebrating Verstappen’s 2021 title right next to huge tooling devices demonstrate how the work never stops at F1 squads, while former Aston Martin PR chief Matt Bishop reveals the green team’s plan to showcase the many worthy interests of Sebastian Vettel in 2021-22 was codenamed ‘Saint Seb’.

Frazer Burchill’s “balls in my face” and “punched in the face” descriptions of the intimacy and risks of constructing an F1 car (alongside his fellow McLaren mechanics) and servicing it as a front jack operator are vividly enlightening. And no one outdoes Mercedes CFO Russell Braithwaite in the simile stakes, as he explains how team departments must now pitch their cases for more money in the cost cap era “like *Dragons’ Den*”.

McLaren trackside logistics co-ordinator Sarah Lacy-Smith explains how teams now create virtual cars to log the lifespan of all parts on the real things, while Aston garage

LANDO
NORRIS

Norris is sole
representative
of F1 drivers



BAGNALL

motorsport
IMAGES

FINISHING STRAIGHT

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



FERRARO/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Australian Grand Prix review

Carlos Sainz's spectacular winning return from an appendectomy gave the Australian Grand Prix a feel-good factor, after Max Verstappen endured his first retirement of the season. Host Bryn Lucas is joined by Alex Kalinauckas, Filip Cleeren and Matt Kew.



insights

technician 'truckie' Jack Partridge's day-long job to construct the squad's intricate pit gantry equipment takes 45 minutes to dismantle in the reverse work post-race. Red Bull's junior driver academy boss Guillaume Rocquelin (of Vettel engineering fame) took inspiration from football varieties of such training schools.

McLaren chief mechanic Kari Lammenranta can hear when a pitstop has been performed perfectly, Mercedes' marketing operations director Victoria Johnson gets Lewis Hamilton and George Russell into livery conception meetings and McLaren's 2022 F1 Esports champion Lucas Blakeley goes to work in "very thin cotton socks". In our final two examples, the standout emotion and dedication of a life's ambition being realised is the true worth of this book.

It does suffer from a timing problem. Horner's pontification on fostering "the right spirit" at an F1 team rings hollow in the context of the allegations made against him by a female employee, for example. There's also a 2019 Hamilton Melbourne pole erroneously attributed to Valtteri Bottas. But, frankly, given the individual insight we've cited could've been tripled for each figure, such is this book's depth, detail and enthusiastic telling, these gripes matter not. Some may have heard such tales before, but to us they were genuinely new and revealing.

Challenge completed. Well done, Gilo.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Tokyo E-Prix

Formula E

Round 4/10

Tokyo, Japan

30 March

TV Live TNT Sports 1, Sat 0500

Safari Rally Kenya

World Rally Championship

Round 3/13

Nairobi, Kenya

28-31 March

TV Live TNT Sports 2, Thurs 1100, TNT Sport 3, Fri 0500, 0630, 1045, 1200, TNT Sports 4, Sat 0445, 0600, TNT Sports 3, 1230, Sun 0445, 0700, 0915, 1200

TV Highlights

TNT Sports 4, Fri 2145, TNT Sports 1, Sat 1915, TNT Sports 3, 1930

NASCAR Cup

Round 7/36

Richmond, USA

31 March

TV Live Viaplay 2, Sun 2230

NASCAR Xfinity

Round 6/33

Richmond, USA

30 March

UK MOTORSPORT

Oulton Park MSVR

30 March-1 April

British GT, GB3, GB4, Ginetta GT Academy, Ginetta GT Championship, Ginetta Junior

TV Live **Livestream**

[britishgt.com](https://www.britishgt.com)

Donington Park BARC

29-30 March

BEC, Britcar Trophy, CTCRC (Pre-'66, Pre-'83/Pre-'93/ST,

Pre-'03/BOSS, Thunder), Mini Challenge (Miglia, Se7en), Superkarts

TV Live **Livestream**

[barc.net](https://www.barc.net)

Brands Hatch BARC

31 March-1 April

British Trucks, Caterham Graduates (Sigma 135, Sigma 150), JSCC, MGOC, Mini Challenge Clubsport, Pickup, Track Action

TV Live **Livestream**

[barc.net](https://www.barc.net)

Castle Combe CCRC

1 April

500OA, CCRC (FF1600, GT, Hot Hatch, Saloon), CMMC (Super Saloon/Tin Tops/WRDA)

Donington Park 750MC

1 April

750 Formula, Bikesports, BMW Car Club, CALM Porsche, Ma7da, Sport Specials

British Rallycross Championship

Round 1/5

Lydden Hill, England
30 March-1 April



JEP

British GT



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Juha Kankkunen's third place in the 1995 Monte Carlo Rally salvaged some pride for reigning world champion manufacturer Toyota after Didier Auriol and Armin Schwarz fell

by the wayside. The Finn had complained about his Celica GT-Four being down on power, although he still bagged three stage wins. The car's pace soon picked up and come the season's penultimate round,

Catalunya, he was a title contender – then Toyota was caught using an illegal turbo restrictor and was disqualified from the championship and banned from official WRC participation for 12 months.



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HARTLEY

Jerez

“I really love this track,” says Franck Montagny of the Jerez circuit in southern Spain. “My chief engineer in Renault’s test team was always saying, ‘If there was a championship of 15 races in Jerez, you are world champion every year.’”

The Frenchman never raced at the track he picks as his favourite, but relished every time he tested Formula 1 machinery there between 2002 and 2007. That’s just as well; he completed just shy of 5000 laps of the circuit for Renault, Toyota and Force India, including 2312 tours across 22 days in 2005 alone.

“It suited a lot the Renault car at this time,” notes Montagny, who started seven grands prix for Super Aguri in 2006. “I understand that people don’t really love it. But I tell you, it was a magic track. I always had a lot of pleasure there.”

After hosting seven F1 races between 1986 and 1997, Jerez became a popular test venue during the era of unrestricted running in the early to mid 2000s. Since Michelin tyre testing was typically the order of the day during Montagny’s spell at Renault, he was mostly driving with new rubber and had “always full capacity of the car” on the track’s prevalence of medium and high-speed corners.

“It was really cool,” Montagny reflects wistfully. “Jerez is perfect for an F1 car – it’s dry, sunny, hot, you can work easily and there are all the corners you need to develop the car. It’s a perfect place



BELLANCA

and you get the good *jamon!*”

Montagny first visited the track in December 2002 for a test with Renault that eventually parlayed into a more regular gig, just at the point “I was not thinking anymore about F1”. He concedes that “special feeling with Jerez maybe comes from there”.

Fittingly, his last outing in an F1 car before concentrating on sportscars with Peugeot also came at the Spanish track in December 2007 with the newly rebranded Force India team.

Now an F1 pundit on French TV for Canal+, Montagny stresses that Jerez was a circuit he never tired of visiting. “It was a good place, I don’t get bored of it,” he adds. “I’m sure if I go back tomorrow, I will be very pleased.”

JAMES NEWBOLD

IN NEXT WEEK’S ISSUE

Can Ferrari maintain its challenge?

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF RED BULL’S RIVAL

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