

# F1 Ferrari's new age begins

BRITAIN'S BEST MOTORSPORT WEEKLY

4 APRIL 2024

# AUTOSPORT

## Why the Ferrari threat is finally real

Vasseur's team already has a 2024 win and Lewis Hamilton for 2025, so what next?

'Fred has been clear on which direction to take and it has paid off'

CHARLES LECLERC

**PLUS**

Why world champ Huff is returning to the BTCC

Maserati grabs late Japanese Formula E victory

Rovanpera avoids Safari drama to dominate







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# Is Ferrari getting closer to ending its wait for an F1 title?

Before all you realists out there reach for your pen/keyboard/smartphone (delete where applicable!), we're not getting carried away. We don't think Red Bull and Max Verstappen are about to be toppled off the back of one victory for Carlos Sainz. But there *are* reasons to believe that Ferrari is heading in the right direction.

As Jake Boxall-Legge shows in our cover feature from page 20, team boss Fred Vasseur has already made changes that many, Charles Leclerc included, believe should push Ferrari closer to ending its wait for a Formula 1 world title. It'll be 16 years at the end of this season since its last constructors' crown...

Sakon Yamamoto never had a proper chance at the pinnacle of the sport, but he tells us how his lessons in motorsport are helping him in his new challenge as a politician in Japan (p28).

Formula E finally made it to Japan last weekend (p44). Oliver Rowland looked as though he was going to become the third British winner this season, only for Maximilian Guenther to snatch victory for Maserati. There have now been five different winners in five races.

More predictable was another Toyota success on the Safari, this time courtesy of double world champion Kalle Rovanpera. Tom Howard reports on a tough event for Hyundai on p36, while Marcus Simmons talks to World Touring Car champion Rob Huff and finds out why he's returning to the British Touring Car Championship (p32).

British GT kicked off at Oulton Park this weekend and leads the reports in our 16-page National section (p53).



*Kevin Turner*

**Kevin Turner**  
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Special deals for  
Autosport p52



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# PIT + PADDOCK



## Formula 1 owner Liberty takes over MotoGP after €4.2billion buyout

### MOTOGP

Formula 1 owner Liberty Media has expanded its motorsport horizons with a blockbuster deal to take over majority ownership of motorcycle racing's MotoGP World Championship.

The US media giant has owned F1 since buying it from CVC Capital in 2016-17. CVC also owned MotoGP until 2006, when it was forced to sell its shares in commercial rights holder Dorna Sports by the European Commission's antitrust regulatory board. Since 2006, Dorna has been 40% owned by Bridgepoint Capital, 38% by the Canadian pension fund (CPPIB), and 22% spread among members of Dorna management.



Dorna chief Ezpeleta stays on as CEO

GOLDANDGOOSE

The €4.2billion buyout by Liberty means that the company will control 86% of shares in Madrid-based Dorna, with the remainder still in control of management.

The deal has been in the works for some time and was set to be announced prior to the start of the 2024 MotoGP season. But uncertainty over the possible reaction of antitrust regulatory bodies put a freeze on that plan. The fact that Liberty has gone ahead with the deal and now made it public suggests that the various antitrust bodies will put up no hurdles.

Liberty CEO Greg Maffei told investors, in a call open to Autosport, that there are several factors at play in its joint ownership of F1 and MotoGP being given the green light by regulators.

Maffei said that the media and sporting landscape has changed to such a degree since 2006 that this deal cannot be looked at in the same way as CVC's simultaneous ownership of F1 and MotoGP. "They [CVC] were under a tight timeframe to get a deal done to buy F1," he noted. "So, they did not have the time to go and work through the regulatory process. And they were a PE [private equity] firm which had a big gain in one product and were moving to buy the other when they had a contract to execute on. We are in a very different position.

"We are absolutely aligned as a group into a changed market. We're not under

the same sort of time pressures. We believe the regulatory process will move quickly and smoothly but will take the time they need, and this deal will get done."

Liberty will run the deal through the European Union's antitrust boards, as well as the UK's, Brazil's and Australia's. It will also be making FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) filings in Spain and Italy. It is confident that the latter will be greenlit quickly, and is expecting a smooth process with the antitrust regulators with a view to closing the deal at the end of this year.

For the time being, nothing will fundamentally change at Dorna, the commercial rights holder since 1992. It will continue to organise MotoGP and World Superbikes, while Maffei made it clear in the investors call that MotoGP will operate as an "independent company". Carmelo Ezpeleta will remain in place as CEO, a role he has held since 1994.

He also stressed that Liberty is "not planning to change this sport" under its ownership, potentially soothing fears that sceptical fans have of the new parentship. Dorna sporting director Carlos Ezpeleta said that there is "nobody better" than Liberty to boost MotoGP's global profile.

A key target for this deal is growing MotoGP in the US. This has been vital to Liberty's success in giving F1 a more mainstream appeal, with the series racing





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Maffei now king of  
two wheels and four

SUTTON

three times in the country last year and again in 2024. How this will manifest itself is unclear, but Liberty does inherit some strong building blocks. Chiefly, Bridgepoint had former NBA senior vice-president of global partnerships and media Dan Rossomondo installed as chief commercial officer at Dorna last year.

That was a statement of intent in pushing forward Dorna's ambitions to expand in the US, which has been followed by Trackhouse Racing joining the grid for 2024 and a new TV deal with TNT to broadcast the entire season in the country. This will inevitably come with the same Stars-and-Stripes pomp often derided by F1 fans and drivers. But Liberty's blueprint for success has proven to be effective, and MotoGP will have to move with the times, like it or not.

Other key questions yet to be answered include whether or not MotoGP and F1 could combine to host an event, as well as Liberty's plans to manage both series' calendars in order to avoid the myriad clashes already in play. Where World Superbikes fits into Liberty's long-term plans is also unclear.

LEWIS DUNCAN

## LATEST REJIG AT McLAREN; SANCHEZ EXITS

### FORMULA 1

The McLaren Formula 1 team has executed yet another restructure of its technical department, with head of car concept and performance David Sanchez exiting after only three months.

The departure of the ex-Ferrari engineer, who started in January after a period of gardening leave, is billed as a "mutual decision" after it "became apparent that the role, responsibilities, and ambitions associated with David's position did not align with our original expectations".

Accordingly, team principal Andrea Stella



Sanchez in happy times with  
Vettel after 2018 Belgian GP

GORIA

will take on Sanchez's old role, which has now been "streamlined to focus on performance", on an interim basis until a permanent appointment is confirmed. Meanwhile, ex-Red Bull stalwart Rob Marshall is now listed as chief designer, Neil Houldey as engineering director, and Peter Prodromou remains as aerodynamics boss.

The design team was overhauled only in early 2023 following a joint

assessment by Stella and McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown. This led to the departure of technical director James Key.

Stella said: "This step in the evolution of the technical department and of the working model within the team signify our commitment to constantly enhancing our technical capabilities and workflows for greater efficiency and effectiveness."

MATT KEW



GALLOWAY

## Antonelli to get first F1 test

### FORMULA 1

Mercedes protege and possible Lewis Hamilton heir Andrea Kimi Antonelli has been pencilled in for his first Formula 1 test this month.

The 17-year-old Italian is set to jump behind the wheel of a Mercedes W12 from 2021 at the Red Bull Ring for two days, starting on 16 April. Antonelli, who is competing in Formula 2 with Prema Racing, has several top-flight runs planned – as part of the Testing of Previous Car rules, from this year he is allowed to drive the 2022 W13

challenger for a more representative runout in ground-effect machinery.

After the opening three rounds of the F2 season, Anontelli sits ninth in the standings owing to a poor start to the campaign for his Italian team.

The series does not reconvene until a mid-May visit to Imola, so Antonelli has a window to sample grand prix cars to prepare for an F1 promotion. That said, Mercedes motorsport boss Toto Wolff has now gone on the record to say that Max Verstappen is his first choice to partner George Russell from 2025.

ROBERTO CHINCHERO



# Newey gets big-money offer to join Aston...

## FORMULA 1

Aston Martin is making a play to sign Adrian Newey. The pre-eminent Formula 1 designer has turned down opportunities to leave Red Bull since joining in 2006, notably rejecting advances from Ferrari, and signed a new multi-year deal in 2023. But Autosport understands that Aston owner Lawrence Stroll presented 65-year-old Newey with a big-money offer at last month's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

Stroll has made no secret of his desire to turn the Silverstone operation into a world championship winner. A new factory, wind tunnel, works Honda engine deal from 2026, and recruiting high-profile staff from Red Bull and Mercedes are testament to that. But locking in a first-rate driver line-up has proved more troublesome.

Fernando Alonso, out of contract at the end of this year, has so far refrained from pledging his future to the team as he tries to land a seat at Mercedes or Red Bull next season. So signing Newey would not only be a major coup for Stroll, but also bolster the case for Alonso to stay.

Hiring the Red Bull chief technology officer would also help Aston Martin make an ambitious swoop for Honda and Newey ally Max Verstappen. The reigning three-time world champion holds the key to the driver market. He has been unsettled by the instability at the top of Red Bull, which has jeopardised the positions of team boss Christian Horner and Verstappen family confidant Helmut Marko. While Verstappen is contracted until the end of 2028, he discretely had a clause added to his



paperwork that will allow him to break away should Marko, accused of leaking material to the press related to the investigation into allegations of inappropriate behaviour made against Horner, ever be sent packing.

Verstappen is the top target for Mercedes as it bids

to replace Lewis Hamilton for 2025. But the Three-Pointed Star's ground-effect malaise and any shock switch from Newey could move the needle in Aston's favour. The team declined to comment when approached by Autosport.

**ROBERTO CHINCHERO**

# ...as Honda sets up new factory to prep engines

## FORMULA 1

Honda is setting up a new Formula 1 facility in the UK that will specialise in carrying out post-race maintenance on the power units it will supply to Aston Martin from the 2026 season.

The Honda Racing Corporation

subsidiary has continued to provide engines to the Red Bull and RB (formerly AlphaTauri) squads since the manufacturer mothballed its top-flight powertrain programme at the end of 2021. But it will return for the advent of the new 2026 regulations, which ditch the expensive and complex Motor Generator Unit-Heat

and feature a shift to a 50:50 power split between the 1.6-litre turbocharged engine and hybrid system. To make its works partnership with Silverstone-based Aston Martin as seamless as possible, HRC has decided on the UK factory and will start a recruitment drive for engineers, technicians and PR staff.

An HRC statement read: "This new company has been founded to primarily perform post-race maintenance and preparation tasks on the Honda-built F1 power units (PUs), whilst also operating as a logistics operation for the European region. The establishment of HRC UK will further enhance the effectiveness of Honda's PU operations, in support of the partnership with Aston Martin [F1] Team."

The new site will fall under the management of HRC president Koji Watanabe, who joined Honda in 1987. California-based HRC USA also wants in on the act, and will help develop the new power unit and embed people in Aston Martin.

**MATT KEW**





# Williams pair clear for Japan, says Vowles

## FORMULA 1

Williams expects to field two cars at this weekend's Japanese Grand Prix, after repairing the chassis shunted by Alex Albon in free practice at the recent Australian GP. Albon's spill down under moved the team to bench slower driver Logan Sargeant in a bid to maximise its chances of scoring points, with production delays over the winter leading Williams to gamble on not building up a spare tub.

After Albon's Friday crash, the wreckage arrived back at the Grove factory in the small hours of Monday morning last week and was inspected, stripped and repaired. "We're in a good place for having the chassis back early enough for Suzuka," said team principal James Vowles.

"Actually, back in Melbourne, there were photographs and techniques called NDT, which is non-destructive testing. It allows us to fully understand how big the damage is, and what we have to do. That preparation was key. What it meant was



already at 0200 on Monday, work could start. So, in Suzuka, we'll have two cars without too many issues."

Williams still won't have a spare chassis for Japan and, with resources diverted to the repair effort, that third car will likely be delayed beyond the Chinese GP at the end of this month. "The original plan for the season start was to have three chassis as you would expect at round one," Vowles continued. "That gently slipped toward

round three as items became more and more delayed and since then, especially with the work that we're doing now on chassis number two, there is again going to be a small amount of delay. It's thousands of hours spent in composites in order to get it ready...

"We will have a chassis soon. In the meantime, we have to deal with the circumstances we have in front of us."

**FILIP CLEEREN**



# Hamlin swipes win from Truex

## NASCAR

A late-race caution allowed Denny Hamlin to swipe a near-certain NASCAR Cup victory away from his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota team-mate Martin Truex Jr at Richmond last Sunday night.

Truex appeared to have the win well in hand – he led 228 laps – until Kyle Larson got spun out with just one of the originally scheduled 400 laps remaining. That brought out a caution and sent the race into overtime.

All of the lead-lap cars pitted, and Hamlin's crew got him off pitroad ahead of Truex, giving him control of the

restart. Hamlin got a good jump on Truex to clear for the lead in Turn 1 as Truex raced hard with Larson and Joey Logano.

Hamlin held on to edge Logano's Team Penske Ford by 0.269 seconds at the chequered flag to secure his second win of the 2024 season, with Larson (Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet) also beating Truex to third.

Truex claimed Hamlin went before the first line of the restart zone, but NASCAR officials said that they had reviewed it and found no issues with it. "He jumped the start, then just used me up in Turn 1, so... definitely sucks," he said.

**JIM UTTER**

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## Cadillac excluded from Qatar as Ferrari team gets hefty fine

### WEC

Cadillac has lost its fourth-place finish from the World Endurance Championship opener in Qatar. The factory V-Series.R shared by Earl Bamber, Alex Lynn and Sebastien Bourdais has been disqualified for homologation irregularities.

Rear diffuser strakes were found to be higher than on the car as homologated, as well as being misaligned, at the end of the Qatar 1812Km on 2 March. The inconsistencies were picked up during three-dimensional scanning during scrutineering and confirmed by further checks after the race.

Stephen Mitas, team manager of the Cadillac Racing squad, subsequently revealed during a virtual hearing that the offending parts had not gone through the usual quality control checks at the manufacturer's technical partner, Dallara Automobili. The stewards of the meeting accepted the explanation that the irregularities were unintentional, but still disqualified the Cadillac for a violation of the technical regulations.

The manufacturer has chosen not to exercise its right of appeal. "We have cooperated with the FIA and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest [the co-organisers of the WEC], and accept their findings," it said.

The AF Corse Ferrari LMGT3 team has also been penalised after a post-Qatar investigation. It was fined \$60,000, with half the amount suspended until the end of the season, for what the stewards described as "concealment of operational personnel".



Three personnel who were not declared as part of the team were found in its working area, in violation of the WEC sporting regulations that limit the number of operational personnel to 14 per car in LMGT3. According to the stewards' report, they presented themselves to an FIA sporting delegate as marketing and communications staff, but were found to be working "on technical matters linked to race cars" via laptops.

It added that because the delegate believed that the engineers could have been linked to AF Corse's Ferrari Hypercar entries, he reported the offence to the stewards. The team manager of the GT3 squad also told the stewards that the personnel were not linked to the GT3 team.

But representatives from the AF Corse factory Hypercar squad and Ferrari stated that the personnel were not part of the Hypercar programme and were only working on the GT3 cars. This explanation was accepted by the stewards.

**GARY WATKINS**

## Entry list shows it's a Caddy duo

### WEC

Cadillac is pushing ahead with plans to run just two drivers in its solo Hypercar entry in the six-hour World Endurance Championship races this year. Earl Bamber and Alex Lynn will drive the Ganassi-run #2 Cadillac V-Series.R LMDh as a duo in this month's Imola 6 Hours.

Final confirmation of an arrangement that bucks the trend of running three drivers in all races in Hypercar, as well as in LMP1 before it, came on Tuesday with the publication of the entry list for the Italian WEC round on 21 April.

Team founder Chip Ganassi outlined at the Daytona 24 Hours IMSA SportsCar Championship season-opener in January an intent to run just two drivers in the Cadillac Racing WEC entry in the shorter races. He stated a desire on the part of the team to "keep it simple".

Stephen Mitas, team principal of the German-based Ganassi WEC operation, later elaborated on the plan. "Over a six-hour race there are some performance benefits to be had," he explained. "It's more prep time through free practice, and then over the course of the race, two drivers is a performance gain."

Cadillac has, however, remained non-committal. When Sebastien Bourdais was announced in the car for last month's Qatar 1812Km WEC curtain-raiser, it said that he and full-season IMSA partner Renger van der Zande, as well as "select Chip Ganassi Racing team-mates", would "complement" Bamber and Lynn through the season. It added that the team would "confirm the third driver ahead of certain endurance races".

Cadillac subsequently announced that IndyCar champion Alex Palou would be joining Bamber and Lynn in the vacant seat in the #2 car for the Le Mans 24 Hours WEC round in June.

**GARY WATKINS**







## Vettel enjoys 'fun' Porsche test

### WEC

Sebastian Vettel completed more than 350 miles on his maiden circuit test aboard a sportscar last week. The four-time Formula 1 world champion put in two double stints at Motorland Aragon at the wheel of a Penske-run factory Porsche 963 LMDh.

The tryout, officially to sate Vettel's curiosity for sportscar racing, came at the start of a 36-hour Le Mans 24 Hours test at the Spanish venue for the Porsche Penske Motorsport World Endurance Championship squad. Vettel put in a total of 118 laps (361 miles) over the course of his run.

Vettel, who retired from F1 at the end of 2022, described his time in the 963 as "definitely fun". "I first had to get used to everything and find my rhythm," he said. "The driving experience is different simply because of the roof over your head, as well as dealing with the higher weight and the tyres. The Porsche works drivers made it easy for me."

PPM managing director Jonathan Diuguid pointed out the value of having someone of Vettel's experience in the car. "Having his fresh unique perspective on

where the car is and feedback on our systems and performances is a unique opportunity," he explained. "We are happy to have him here. He came out of the car with a smile, which is all good."

The 963 completed over 4000 miles at the test with a total of eight drivers. The six WEC regulars were joined by fellow Porsche factory driver and reigning DTM champion Thomas Preining, plus Vettel.

There has been no further comment from Porsche on where the test for Vettel might lead. PPM still has two vacant seats in the additional 963 it will field at the Le Mans 24 Hours in June.

**GARY WATKINS**



## WEBB TO RACE TWO MCLARENS IN EUROPEAN PLAN

### INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN

Cheshire sportscar stalwart Oli Webb is to contest the International GT Open series this season for the first time with the Greystone GT squad.

Webb, the 2014 European Le Mans Series LMP2 champion and a British Formula 3 race winner in his single-seater days, has been a key part of the Greystone team run by fellow ex-Formula Renault UK ace Mark McLoughlin since its inception in 2021. With the team, he has won races in GT Cup plus the GT4 class at the Gulf 12 Hours in 2022.

Webb will share a McLaren 720S GT3 Evo with fellow Greystone regular Andrey Borodin, the duo switching across from the British GT Championship. He will dovetail this with another programme in the one-make McLaren Trophy Europe, where he switches from the Artura class to the 570S Trophy section to co-drive Ryan MacGregor.

"GT Open fits brilliantly into the gap between a top national series and the FIA WEC, and having a full grid of GT3 cars will be exciting to be a part of," said Webb. "The McLaren Trophy Europe is a high-level series but without the extra pressure of GT3 racing, so it's perfect for my co-driver."



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## Lola enters Formula E in power tie-up with Yamaha

### FORMULA E

British racing car company Lola has announced a first project after its revival in 2022. But it will not be building chassis, rather it has partnered with Yamaha to develop a powertrain for the Formula E World Championship next season.

A new relationship between Lola Cars and the Yamaha Motor Company was announced last week with the intent to enter FE in time for the start of the 2025 season, when the Gen3 Evo chassis comes on stream. Details of how they will achieve that have not been released, but they are expected to supply the powertrain to an existing team rather than take up the vacant grid slots for a 12th squad.

The project is the first for Lola since the brand was purchased by amateur racer and

green entrepreneur Till Bechtolsheimer in the summer of 2022. He suggested at the time that he wanted to use Lola as a “testbed and a platform for innovation in energy-efficient solutions”.

“The focus of this project is squarely around technological development in which Lola is fully invested,” he said on the announcement. “We see the highly efficient 350kW electric powertrain that underpins the manufacturer’s perimeter in FE as a cornerstone technology with exciting applications across many forms of top-flight international motorsport.”

Yamaha is making a return to international car racing for the first time since its involvement in Formula 1 as an engine supplier straddling the 1989 to 1997 seasons. The FE entry is part of a drive to “develop cutting-edge electric technologies

with the aim of raising expertise and capabilities”, it said.

Former Techeetah FE team boss Mark Preston, who joined Lola as its motorsport director in late 2022, revealed that the organisation had been working on an FE powertrain for 18 months. It has run on the dyno and the first test car has already arrived at its workshops. “This project will allow us to create a unique electrified platform with a software focus to provide a basis for Lola’s wider plans in defining the future of motorsport technology,” he said, adding that it would be the first of several activities focused on electrification, hydrogen and sustainable fuels.

The Abt team, which ends its tie-up with Mahindra at the end of 2024, is believed likely to run the Lola/Yamaha powertrain.

**GARY WATKINS**

## Nissan becomes first to commit to new Gen4 era



### FORMULA E

Nissan has become the first manufacturer to formally pledge to compete in the Gen4 era of Formula E from 2026 to 2030. The Japanese marque made the commitment ahead of its home race, the inaugural Tokyo E-Prix, last week.

Nissan has been involved in the series since 2018, when it took over the Renault e.Dams entry. Since

then it has claimed two race wins, with Oliver Rowland currently riding high in the points table in third place.

“I’m delighted to confirm our long-term future in Formula E,” said Nissan managing director and team principal Tommaso Volpe. “We’re also proud to be the first company to sign up until 2030, which is a big year for Nissan as we aim to match or exceed the targets set out in our

Ambition 2030 pledge.

“The team is on an upward trajectory, and our new [Paris] headquarters will contribute massively to future growth, with advanced facilities helping us to develop our car.”

The Gen4 machines will be a significant step up over the current Gen3 cars, with regeneration capacity up to 700kW, and an increased power output up to 600kW.

**STEFAN MACKLEY**



Lamborghini will  
need to add a second  
car to Hypercar grid

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## Two-car Hypercar teams for '25

### WEC

Manufacturers competing in the Hypercar class of the World Endurance Championship are set to be required to enter two cars from next season. The new rule is under evaluation as part of a planned expansion of the WEC grid to a minimum of 40 cars for 2025 from the current 37-strong field.

It would remove the ability of a factory team to run a single car as Cadillac Racing has done since last season, Iron Lynx Lamborghini is doing this year and as the Heart of Racing Aston Martin squad has announced for next season. WEC promoter and co-organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest has declined to comment on the prospect of a two-car rule, but it is looking increasingly certain to be implemented for the new season.

All the manufacturers with a one-car presence in Hypercar have outlined their aspirations to step up their programmes. Cadillac's negotiations with a replacement for Chip Ganassi Racing, for example, are known to centre on two cars. Heart of Racing left the door open to fielding a

pair of Valkyrie Le Mans Hypercars on the announcement of the programme in October. Garagiste Isotta Fraschini, meanwhile, has also talked about going to two entries, either with the Duqueine works team or a customer.

The new ruling could have implications on the independents in Hypercar, which compete in the FIA Endurance World Cup for Teams rather scoring world championship manufacturers' points. It is understood that the privateers would not be subject to the two-car rule, but it could reduce space for them.

On the presumption that the grid expands to no more than 40 cars and that the WEC sticks with 18 machines in the new-for-2024 LMGT3 class, extra entries from Cadillac, Lamborghini and Isotta plus a two-car Aston squad would leave only two grid spots for customer teams in what would be a 22-car Hypercar field. This year there are four non-manufacturer entries in Hypercar: two Jota Porsche 963s, one Proton Competition Porsche 963, and the solo AF Corse Ferrari 499P.

**GARY WATKINS**

### UNITED SHUFFLES LINE-UP

United Autosports has shuffled its Le Mans 24 Hours line-up. Filipe Albuquerque has moved across to the #23 ORECA-Gibson 07 entered in the LMP2 Pro/Am class to share with Ben Hanley and Ben Keating. The Portuguese, who was the only driver named for #22 on the release of the first entry list for the June event, replaces Nico Pino. An announcement of drivers for #22 is imminent.

### LORENZO IN GT3 ASTON

Three-time MotoGP champion Jorge Lorenzo continues his bid to emulate Valentino Rossi on four wheels. The Spaniard is stepping over from the Porsche Supercup to compete in Italian GT this season, where he will share an Aston Martin Vantage GT3 run by the Lazarus team. Co-driver is Finnish single-seater convert William Alatalo, a podium finisher in Formula Renault Eurocup and FRegional European before switching to GTs.

### VAN UITERT TO GTWCE

European Le Mans Series star Job van Uitert makes his GT World Challenge Europe debut in this weekend's Endurance Cup opener at Paul Ricard. The Dutchman will race a Comtoyou Racing Aston Martin Vantage GT3 Evo in the Bronze Cup alongside Comtoyou's ex-TCR Europe ace Kobe Pauwels and Am driver John de Wilde. The Belgian squad's lead Vantage, running for overall honours, features Nicki Thiim, Marco Sorensen and ex-Audi driver Mattia Drudi. Charles Clark, GT4 runner-up in British GT last year, is part of Comtoyou's Silver Cup line-up.

### THOMPSON'S BMW TEST

Just as we were going to press came news that underfunded British Touring Car Championship *cause celebre* Bobby Thompson would complete BMW team West Surrey Racing's four-car line-up for the first official pre-season test at Brands Hatch yesterday (Wednesday). The deal is at present for the test only, as strenuous efforts continue on the commercial side to get highly rated Thompson (below) onto the grid.





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**BTCC** Pre-season official British Touring Car Championship testing was due to kick off at Brands Hatch yesterday (Wednesday), but the teams had already been getting mileage in. Last week, the West Surrey Racing BMW and Power Maxed Racing Vauxhall squads pitched up at Snetterton, and Adam Morgan is seen leading Mikey Doble. Colin Turkington and Jake Hill also took to the track for WSR, whose 330e M Sports feature an evolution of their previous engines, with Aron Taylor-Smith behind the wheel of the other PMR Astra. **Photo by JEP**

## Sutton locked in until end of 2026

### BTCC

Four-time British Touring Car champion and reigning title holder Ash Sutton has extended his deal with Alliance Racing to run until the end of the 2026 season.

The 30-year-old joined the team – then known as Motorbase Performance – along

with sidekick Dan Cammish for 2022, and last season swept to the title aboard the much-developed Ford Focus ST. Each was already locked in for 2024, and Sutton's extension is understood to be motivated partly by Alliance, which has relocated from Kent to Northampton, wanting to immunise itself from any suitors wishing to prise him away – not just elsewhere in the BTCC, but to international series.

The deal need not necessarily keep Sutton in the BTCC for that period. Alliance owner Pete Osborne has been open about his ambitions to compete in endurance racing, notably the Le Mans 24 Hours. "As it stands, BTCC is the flagship – that's our priority and what we're committed to at the moment," said team manager Oly Collins. "Whether that changes is to be seen. We've been quite open that we're looking at other forms of motorsport, and clearly GT3 is an obvious one."

Alliance has also extended its title sponsorship deal with NAPA Auto Parts until the end of 2026. The initial season in 2022 featured just Sutton and Cammish in NAPA Racing UK Fords, before Dan Rowbottom and Sam Osborne also moved under the blue-and-yellow umbrella last season, continuing into 2024.

The Focuses hit the track to begin pre-season testing at Snetterton recently, following a shakedown at Dunton.

**MARCUS SIMMONS**



## KENYAN PRESIDENT WANTS ENDURANCE BACK IN SAFARI

### WRC

A return to a longer and more traditional Safari Rally is being pushed by Kenyan president William Samoei Ruto.

The Safari Rally is renowned as the most gruelling event on the World Rally Championship and, when it adopted a special stage format from 1996-2002, it featured 1000km of competitive tests. It returned to the WRC calendar in 2021 after a 19-year hiatus, but in a much shorter format – last weekend's edition was contested over four days, with crews covering 367.8km (228.5 miles) of timed stages.

Speaking at the rally's ceremonial start, President Ruto said: "We would like to revert to the old tradition when it featured longer distances. I direct our Sports Cabinet Secretary Ababu Namwamba to start engaging the FIA and the Promoter on possibilities of a much longer version of Safari."

Ruto's wishes could be realised because the FIA and WRC Promoter are keen to explore the possibility of more flexible event schedules. Introducing a variety of endurance and sprint rallies to the championship featured as part of the FIA's vision for the future of top-level rallying, which was released last month.

Former WRC team boss David Richards, a member of the FIA's working group behind a raft of proposals to improve the series, told media last month: "We are trying to give organisers more scope and freedom to develop the rally that works for them."

**TOM HOWARD**

### ➔ P36 SAFARI RALLY



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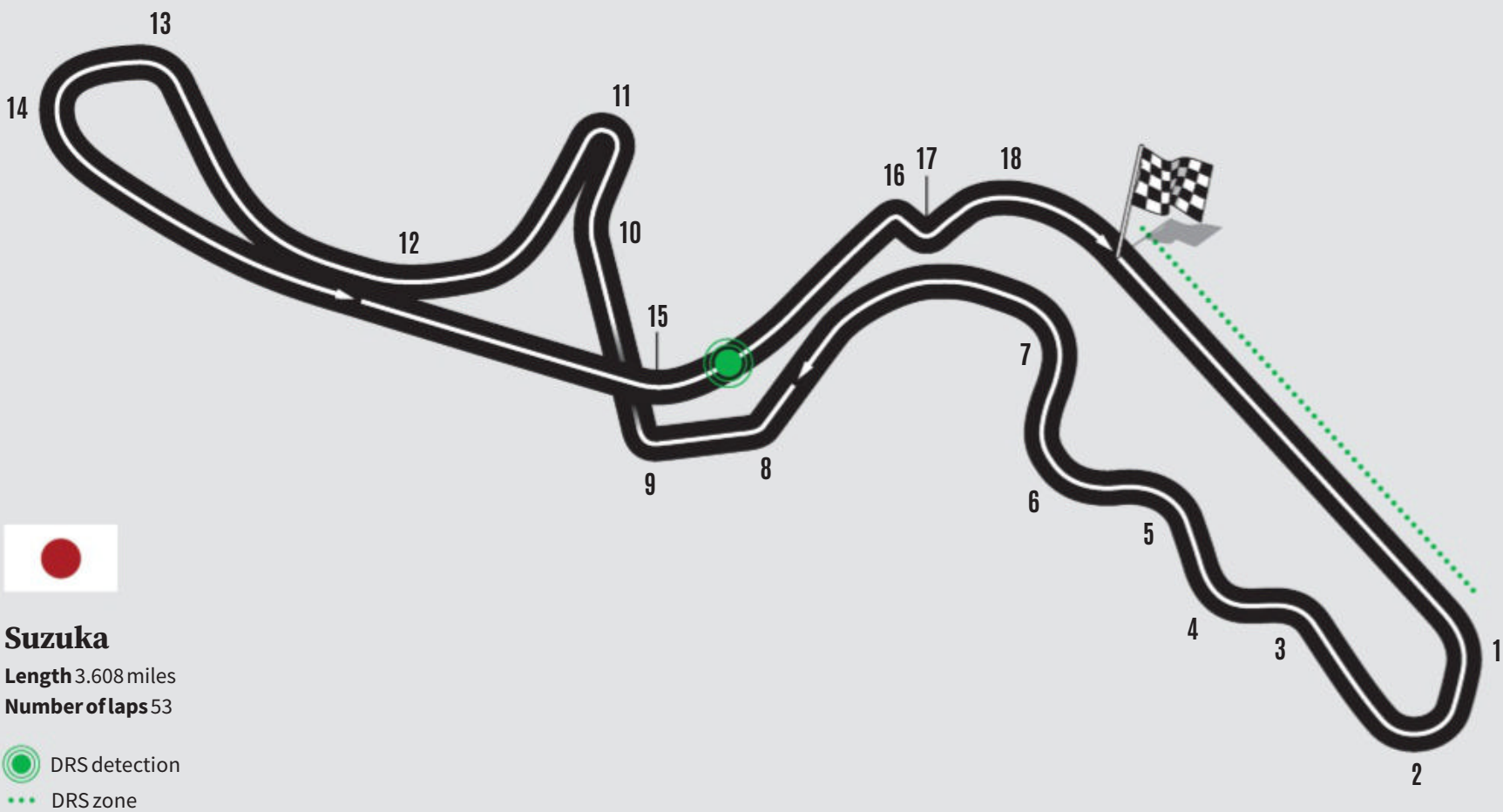
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F1 JAPANESE GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



Suzuka

Length 3.608 miles  
Number of laps 53

DRS detection  
DRS zone

UK START TIMES

Friday 5 April  
FP1 0330 FP2 0700  
  
Saturday 6 April  
FP3 0330  
QUALIFYING 0700  
  
Sunday 7 April  
RACE 0600

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BBC RADIO 5 LIVE  
  
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CHANNEL 4 1230

TYRE ALLOCATION



CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers			Constructors		
1	Verstappen	51	1	Red Bull	97
2	Leclerc	47	2	Ferrari	93
3	Perez	46	3	McLaren	55
4	Sainz	40	4	Mercedes	26
5	Piastri	28	5	Aston Martin	25



Tsunoda was seventh in Oz

SUTTON

SUZUKA STATS

Previous winners

2023	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2022	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2019	Valtteri Bottas	Mercedes
2018	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2017	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2016	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
2015	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2014	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2013	Sebastian Vettel	Red Bull
2012	Sebastian Vettel	Red Bull

2023 POLE POSITION  
Max Verstappen  
1m28.877s

POLE LAP RECORD  
Sebastian Vettel  
1m27.064s (2019)

RACE LAP RECORD  
Lewis Hamilton  
1m30.983s (2019)



Fuji 1976: Hoshino, here fighting Regazzoni, ran third in privateer Tyrrell

COLOMBO

Podiums

Michael Schumacher	9
Sebastian Vettel	8
Lewis Hamilton	7
Mika Hakkinen	6
Max Verstappen	5
Ayrton Senna	4
Fernando Alonso	4
David Coulthard	4
Gerhard Berger	3
Nico Rosberg	3



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# Another Suzuka repeat?

*While the smart money will be on a return to the front for Red Bull in Japan following Ferrari's day in the Aussie sun, the opening corners could be interesting...*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

**I**f you were on the internet at all following the 2024 Australian Grand Prix, you'll know all about the statistics and quirks that the result churned up – how Carlos Sainz and Ferrari are the only non-Red Bull winners in 26 races, and that in all three of the Spaniard's Formula 1 career wins George Russell has crashed out in a Mercedes. Now, thanks to F1's calendar twist for 2024, the championship is also heading back to the same track that followed Sainz's 2023 Singapore triumph: Suzuka.

After been humbled on Singapore's bumps and kerbs, Max Verstappen was out to set the record straight last year in Japan. The Suzuka track's mix of corner types and its abrasive surface are exactly the ingredients for a Red Bull of the current era to dominate upon. In 2023, the RB19 was so good on its tyres that Verstappen could unleash a medium-medium-hard strategy, and his winning margin was just 0.6 seconds shy of his 20s target. Therefore, predicting anything other than another Red Bull rise back to the front after its shock Melbourne defeat would be folly.

But, as ever, F1 is much more interesting than just the fate of the frontrunner. At Suzuka last year, McLaren led the way in terms of chasing Red Bull, and it will be hoping that Suzuka's high-speed sections and comparatively few low-speed areas can bring it to the front of the chasing pack for the first time this year, after going well in Australia. At Mercedes, its ongoing high-speed bouncing

## “The Ferrari drivers' contrasting fortunes remains a storyline worth following closely”

problem may well be exposed again.

But the contrasting fortunes of the Ferrari drivers continues to be a storyline worth following closely, with Charles Leclerc now winless in nearly 18 months and Sainz still unemployed for 2025. At Suzuka last year, the Spaniard arrived from his brilliant purple patch of Zandvoort, Monza and the Singapore win, with the Monegasque somewhat lagging behind. Yet it was Leclerc who led Ferrari on that autumn Suzuka weekend. The requirement to protect the rear tyres at this venue favours Leclerc's ability to cope better than Sainz with a more lively rear end. Avoiding such sliding is critical to any driver succeeding on what remains one of F1's classic, fearsome tracks – one the competitors love.

But, just six months on from the championship's last visit here, there are critical differences that may scupper expectations of an

exact 2023 repeat. The move to an April slot for the first time in the Japanese GP's history is important. Expect plenty of references to cherry blossom across the weekend, but the timing change means temperatures are likely to be much cooler than the sweltering conditions of 2023.

Early forecasts have the ambient falling by around 10C compared to a peak of 29C on race day last year. Pirelli is suggesting an average between 8C and 13C is possible – notably cooler still. This could boost Mercedes, which reckons its W15 struggles more when the mercury rises, but it also might worry Red Bull. It has occasionally struggled with nailing the tyre requirements and is just one race on from front-tyre graining hurting its potential in Australia (albeit with the caveats of Verstappen's retirement and Sergio Perez being compromised by damage).

The temperature drop means that, unlike the typical Suzuka two-stopper, a one-stop approach might be possible this time. That could in fact help Red Bull, given how well the RB20 treats its rubber. But if its huge downforce potential is unleashed at the expense of the tyres, then another squad trying the one-stopper might end up being hunted down late on.

Yet the opposition is going to have to be perfect to get into such a position. The lower temperatures therefore become relevant again, because they will make it harder for the drivers to keep the tyre temperatures in the correct window across the two axles. Losing this could mean starting out of position and a compromised race if the balance window is lost, given how close the grid is behind Red Bull. This is what hurt Leclerc in Melbourne. But Ferrari overall is in a very different place to 2023 with the less recalcitrant SF-24.

On the Sainz-vs-Leclerc battle, last year it was a floor update that helped Leclerc to turn the tables on his team-mate's great run of form. This time, although there have been rumours that Ferrari is rushing to bring the major upgrade it had initially earmarked for the Imola race in May to this event instead, a big shift in car balance isn't guaranteed for the red machines.

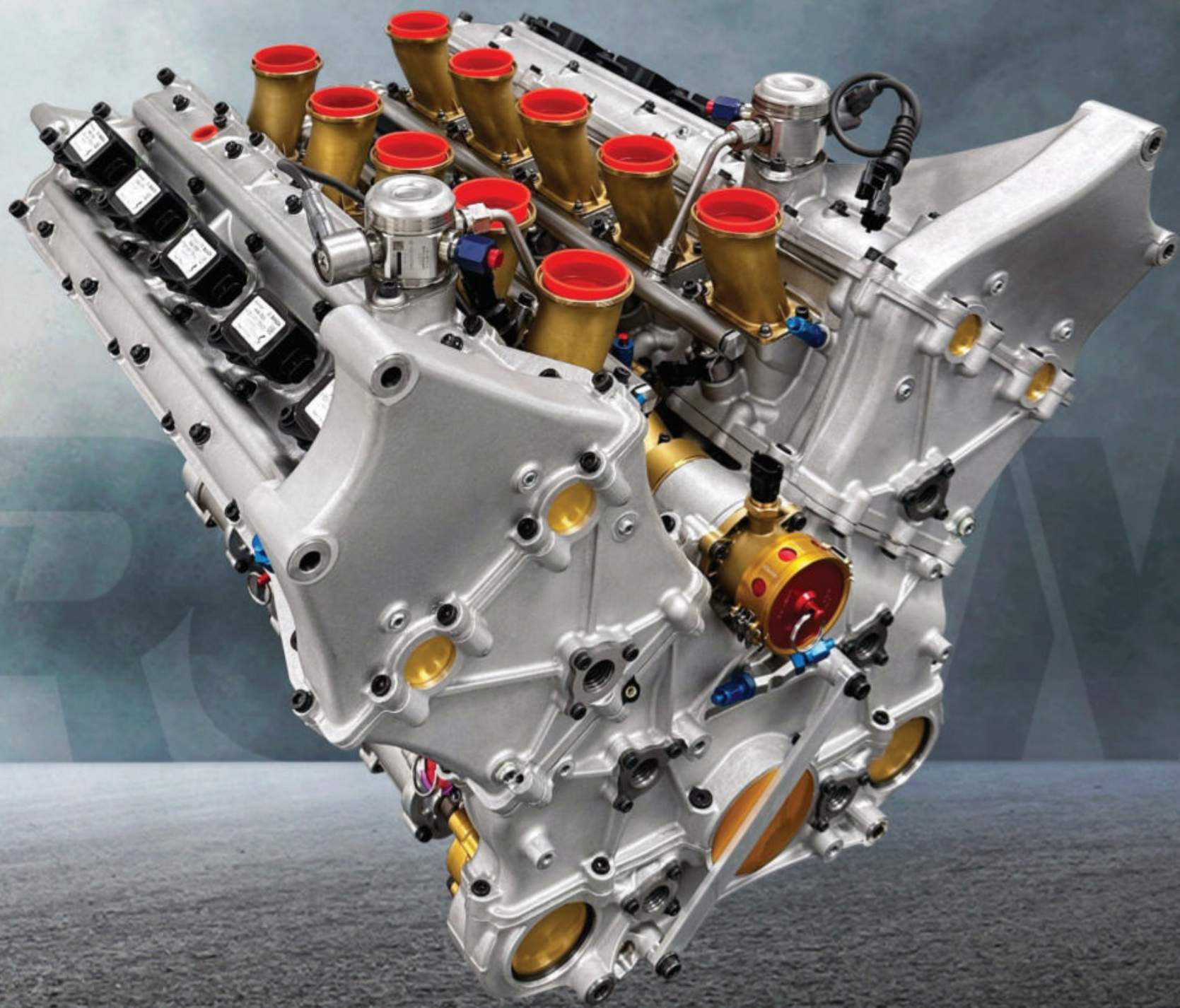
Sainz has the momentum for now, something that could also be vital when considering how the 2024 Suzuka race emulates last year's. In both post-pandemic Japanese GPs so far, Verstappen has started from pole but faced stiff opposition at the rapid opening turns. In the wet two years ago, he monstered Leclerc's better run on the inside, while last year he had to see off both McLarens, inside and out. If such a scenario happens again, the familiar stats and quirks that F1 fans love naturally suggest that there's a higher risk of an incident for Verstappen – at a beautiful, brutal track where crashes can happen. 🏎️

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# What next for the WRC?

*The FIA has drawn up a raft of proposals aimed at improving the health of rallying, but not all the plans have gone down well with competitors*

TOM HOWARD

**T**he World Rally Championship is at a crossroads as it strives for growth – in terms of manufacturers competing and a widening of its fanbase – to realise its potential. When it comes to spectacular motorsport, few can rival what the WRC can deliver. But there is no hiding from the fact that changes are required in technical, sporting and promotion facets, with the top-tier Rally1 entry struggling to reach double figures. And addressing the WRC's current weaknesses is a complex job.

Assisted by a working group led by FIA deputy president Robert Reid and former WRC team boss David Richards, the FIA has revealed plans for widespread reforms, some of which could come into force next year if ratified by the World Motor Sport Council in June. The sporting proposals, which include allowing organisers to be more flexible with event formats, and the creation of a new FIA team focused on improving promotion, have been met positively. But it's the FIA's vision on technical rules that have caused the most ire.

Rally1 cars in their current guise will no longer see out the original 2022-26 homologation window. Instead, the FIA plans to remove the cars' control hybrid units and bring performance levels towards Rally2 through a reduction in aerodynamics and in the air restrictor. In addition, upgrade kits, costing around €5000, are to be made available to Rally2 cars for those wanting to battle with Rally1 machines. The thinking is to increase the number of competitors that can fight for overall victory. These proposed changes will create a two-year transition period before new Rally1 regulations come into force from 2027. These 330bhp cars will be capped at €400,000 and based around the current Rally1 concept.

It's the 2025 changes that have upset teams and confused drivers, with most feeling they are too aggressive when the focus should be on ensuring the 2027 rules are a success. It's understandable why teams feel aggrieved, having committed vast amounts of money to a ruleset that is coming to an end two years earlier than planned. They'll have to go back to their management boards and explain the situation – and then likely need to ask for more funding to make changes for a two-year transitional period, before further expenditure for 2027. On top of that, the clock is ticking, with June's confirmation of the rules offering teams six months to be ready.

When Richards was asked last month if he was confident teams had enough time to prepare, he said: "It is 10 months to 2025 and we will be looking to the teams to come back with their proposals around the aero changes, but I think all of them have accepted the amount of money wasted on aero for these cars could now be spent in better ways promoting the championship."

Improving the championship's promotion is an area teams and drivers are particularly passionate about, but 2025 is not far away.

Toyota and M-Sport have raised concerns over the timeframe, while Hyundai team principal Cyril Abiteboul told Autosport that it's simply "not possible" to be ready. Hyundai has been hit hardest by these technical reforms, creating some uncertainty regarding its future participation. It had planned – and has already committed resources to – extensive updates to its current i20 N Rally1 for next year, which will now have to be scrapped.

Leading drivers have also been critical of the decision for 2025.

**"Of course, changes should be made if a ruleset is failing, but stability is also key"**

Last week reigning world champion Kalle Rovanpera said: "There are some good things about the new ideas, but there is also the car thing, which makes no sense for me, to make a big hassle for two years and use more money to make two classes that will never be fully equal or connected. I understand they want more cars on the same main class but that's it. They should focus now to make the new rules for 2027 and then maybe, hopefully, we will see new teams coming." Hyundai's Ott Tanak claimed that the FIA appears to be "working against manufacturers" with its technical reforms.

Of course, changes should be made if a ruleset is failing, but stability is also key. This proposal to make significant changes two years early does risk shaking the confidence of prospective manufacturers weighing up whether to commit to a future WRC programme. This situation could repeat itself in the future.

It begs the question, where does the WRC go from here? The FIA must be commended for its work in addressing the championship's future, and the 2027 regulations have the potential to be a success. But this transition period risks upsetting those already committed to the championship for seemingly little reward.

There is a blueprint that maybe the WRC should look to – the World Endurance Championship. LMP1 was in the doldrums after Audi and Porsche had left the top tier by the end of 2017, leaving Toyota as the sole manufacturer. The FIA conducted a study focusing on forming the next set of long-term regulations and subsequently launched the Hypercar class, in association with the ACO, in 2021. The category is now enjoying a boom that not only kept Toyota involved but attracted Ferrari, Peugeot, Cadillac, Porsche and more, with Aston Martin set to join next year. The WEC is proof that focusing on long-term future regulations, rather than tweaking the current rules, can achieve desired goals. 🌟



FERRARI

# IS FERRARI'S NEW AGE WORKING?

*While its 1-2 in Australia is unlikely to indicate an immediate title-drought-ending resurgence, the sense that tides are turning at the Italian squad is compelling*

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport  
IMAGES**







ETHERINGTON





# U

nless Carlos Sainz's victory at the Australian Grand Prix is the catalyst for a seismic shift in Formula 1's competitive order, Ferrari will likely match its longest streak without a title at the end of 2024. Sixteen lean years passed between the Prancing Horse's constructors' championship trophies in 1983 and 1999, and this remains its biggest drought. But the teams' title win in 2008 moves ever further away with the passage of time, the fading fingerprints of that year's success only recently

refreshed by Felipe Massa's legal action against the FIA.

In seasons past, Ferrari's failure to add to its tally of championships was often traced to the team itself. After the Jean Todt era, the group that had been instrumental in securing successive titles slowly began to disband. Ross Brawn left at the end of 2006, as did engine lead Paolo Martinelli. Chief designer Rory Byrne, the only man who could give Adrian Newey a run for his money in the early 2000s, wound down his involvement with the team on a consultancy basis until 2009. After 2008, the team looked markedly different to that which had conquered all before it only a few years before.

Over the next decade and a half, Ferrari became typecast as a team that couldn't string a race strategy together and sometimes had the propensity to build poor cars. The F60 of 2009 was an example of the latter point, where the team had sunk so much time and resource into its fierce battle with McLaren over 2008 that it had underestimated the scale of the new aerodynamic rules.

The fumbling of the drivers' crown in the 2010 Abu Dhabi GP with Fernando Alonso was a strategic miscue, and many of the cars

thereafter were only fit to win a couple of races per year. It had only really got close to a title in 2012, 2017, and 2018, but Ferrari was needlessly wasteful with race-winning cars. Titles are won with perfection in modern F1.

But the times, they are a-changin'. Ferrari appears to be genuinely in the ascendancy once again. Ambition now tangibly oozes from its pores, instead of the cold sweat of apathy that had plagued so many of its seasons. There's a key figure responsible for that shift in mindset, one who hopes to break Ferrari's title-less streak and restore the Maranello marque to the forefront of F1.

## THE VASSEUR EFFECT

Lewis Hamilton, who shocked the world with the announcement of his move to Ferrari in 2025, was open about the lure of joining team principal Fred Vasseur. The two had been successful together in the junior categories through Vasseur's ASM Formula 3 team and his ART squad in GP2, but there's more to Hamilton's decision than simply opting for a neat bookend to his career. Vasseur's leadership evokes memories of Todt's time as steward, not because of their shared nationality, but in taking a team starved of success and bringing in the right people to end the lengthy dry spell.

Like Todt's vision when he joined Ferrari in 1993, Vasseur's project is a long-term one, but the executives still want to see tangible results along the way to justify their decision. Its performance in Australia, a first 1-2 finish in two years, is just one such sign of improvement.

Ferrari needs the Vasseur era to work, having been through a few different custodians on the pitwall post-Todt. His successor Stefano Domenicali, now F1's CEO, strived to replicate Todt's successes (and very nearly did in 2010 and 2012), but fell on his own sword after Ferrari's poor start to the 2014 turbo-hybrid rules. Marco Mattiacci was a mere stopgap after Domenicali's departure, prior to the signing of Maurizio Arrivabene, who



Golden era under Jean Todt was based on long-term planning – Vasseur has a similar vision

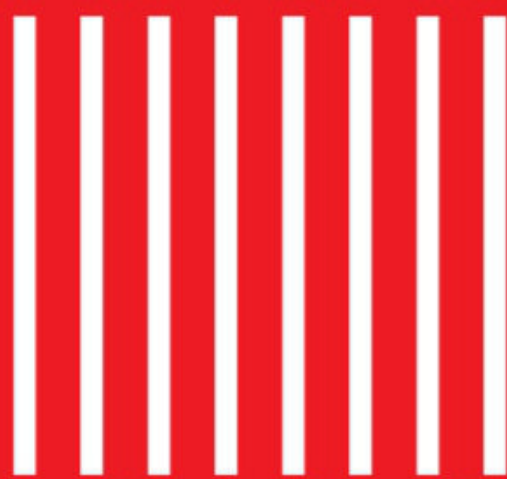
had prior ties to the team as a Philip Morris executive.

While Arrivabene almost steered the team to titles in 2017 and 2018 despite the might of Mercedes, a culture of fear started to erode at Maranello from within. This led to the promotion of technical director Mattia Binotto, who restored a sense of creativity to the design rooms – but also had to oversee Ferrari's recovery from an FIA technical directive that coincided with a drop in powertrain performance. Under Binotto, Ferrari also gained a reputation for tactical blunders, particularly in 2022 when it failed to make the most of its early competitive advantage.

Vasseur was tasked with eliminating the perception that Ferrari was a soft target. Unlike most of his predecessors, he had experience running an F1 team. Domenicali was Ferrari's long-time sporting director, Arrivabene was from a marketing and sales background, and Binotto was promoted from the technical department. Although the likes of Andrea Stella and James Vowles have proved that you don't need experience in running a race team to do so successfully, Vasseur nonetheless has decades of knowhow to fall back on.

Charles Leclerc, who has driven for Vasseur in GP3 and at Sauber, knows the good-humoured Frenchman better than most. He reckons that Ferrari has become a much more focused operation under new management, with Vasseur able to distill the most vital areas of improvement into a handful of key points over a weekend.

"I think what's really important for Fred is to have very clear ideas and to help the team to choose what are the main areas we need to work on," Leclerc offers. "When you look at the weekend, there's a thousand things that you could have optimised. But then you obviously need to make it clear that these are the top three things that we need to focus on, and that there are not 20 of them in order to have all the people on board pushing for the same thing. And I think on that, Fred has been very clear on which directions to take and for now it has paid off." »



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**“What’s really important for Fred is to have very clear ideas and to help the team choose the main areas we need to work on”**

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If Vasseur’s presence was enough of a pull to draw Hamilton to the team, then it may be enough to tempt more big-hitters in F1 to enlist. Vasseur won’t necessarily care where new staff come from, just as long as they’re among the best. If, however, any of Red Bull’s technical staff become unsettled by the team’s ongoing power struggle, Ferrari might sense an opportunity to weaken its main rival.

HOW THE NUMBERS STACK UP

“It’s not [just] a feeling,” Vasseur states on whether Ferrari had made strides into Red Bull’s advantage over the winter. “Last year in Jeddah, in the race, we were something like one second off. And this season, we are perhaps four tenths. For sure, we are much closer to Red Bull than one year ago, but we are still behind. The business is to be first, it’s not to be second and not too far away.”

Versus its start to 2022, when Ferrari briefly looked like a genuine challenger for Red Bull before its performance ebbed away, 2023 did not begin quite as well. Although its qualifying pace proved to be a match for Red Bull’s on occasion, both Mercedes and Aston Martin appeared to have moved ahead in the race performance stakes. McLaren later posed a more concerted challenge too when its upgrades started to bear fruit, but Ferrari began to make headway with its own car.

Set-up discoveries over the summer led to a noticeable performance upswing at Zandvoort and Monza, later yielding its sole victory of the season in Singapore. This was later underpinned by a new floor brought to September’s Japanese GP, which ensured that Ferrari could put Mercedes under pressure for second in the constructors’ championship. Ferrari’s 2023 can thus be broken into three acts: the

first half of the year, post-summer, and its end-of-season crescendo.

How do those acts compare with its opening three races of 2024? Using the supertimes metric, which expresses the fastest lap each team sets during a grand prix event as a percentage of the outright best lap, this can demonstrate the relative performance of each car. Ferrari’s average supertimes for the opening three races of 2023, the races after the summer break (Monza, Singapore, and Suzuka, given Zandvoort was rain-affected), and the last three races, are compared below with those for the first three 2024 races.

	Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Australia ...	100.401%
2023	Italy, Singapore, Japan .....	100.249%
	Brazil, Las Vegas, Abu Dhabi .....	100.167%
2024	Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Australia ...	100.240%

The direct comparison of the opening races of 2023 to those of 2024 demonstrates a clear improvement in pace relative to Red Bull by 0.161% which, given the championship winners’ own refinements over the winter, could denote the 0.6-second inroads that Vasseur estimates Ferrari has made.

Although the numbers comparing the end of 2023 to the start of 2024 suggest that Ferrari has regressed in its pursuit of developing F1’s fastest car, the small sample sizes do have their limitations. Last year’s Las Vegas race gave Ferrari a very clear edge (approximately 0.4%) in one-lap pace over Red Bull, although this was not something that Leclerc could quite convert into victory. In the prior trio of races, Ferrari had the fastest car over the weekend in Italy and Singapore. There were multiple instances over the second half of 2023 where Ferrari sat atop the supertime rankings, thanks to the breakthroughs it had made over the season.



Sainz leads Verstappen at Monza last year following set-up step forward





Improvement in tyre  
management rooted in  
Suzuka 2023 floor upgrade



**“When you have to manage  
tyres, it’s much easier and they  
are much more under control  
than they were last year”**



Yet, it could rarely challenge Red Bull for victories, and this was courtesy of a crucial race-day disadvantage. It became apparent through 2022, when Leclerc briefly looked to be a title contender, that Ferrari fell short in the tyre management stakes against Red Bull. Max Verstappen snowballed that over the middle portion of the year into a key advantage, denying Leclerc a chance to notch up another win after the Austrian GP. It was a weakness that persisted into 2023, costing Ferrari more chances to convert its latent qualifying pace into headline results. Now it seems to have got the balance right.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TYRES

There’s a cliché about tyre management in F1 being a ‘black art’. Building up a picture of Pirelli’s current construction is nowhere near as obtuse as it perhaps was in 2012 with high-degradation tyres, but understanding any race tyre offers huge amounts in performance rewards. There’s a reason why teams spend millions developing their own tyre models covering everything from grip, slip and expected degradation patterns.

Ferrari didn’t have a particularly good handle on this over 2022 and 2023. Its performance on tyres in the early rounds of 2022 was probably masked by Red Bull’s weight issues which, when fixed, gave Verstappen an edge and critically exposed Ferrari’s weaknesses. The 2023 Ferrari was a development of its predecessor and the tyre management deficiencies remained present, but it also yielded a breakthrough in that department. These improvements appeared to have their genesis in the floor that Ferrari took to Suzuka in September; Mercedes trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin hinted that the SF-23’s new floor had coincided with Mercedes losing its edge in race day tyre management. The development of that floor has continued into the SF-24.

Vasseur postulates that it was the capriciousness of the SF-23 in the hands of the drivers that was the main factor behind Ferrari’s inability to preserve its performance on race day. As the drivers tried to compensate, he suggested, this caused them to take more out of the tyres.

“What is true is that last year, the main issue was the fact that the car was very difficult to drive into the race, then you had to do a step [in the pace], doing mistakes, damaging the tyres,” recalls Vasseur. “And then it’s kind of a negative spiral. This year, it’s much easier I think to read for them, to know where is the limit and to stay just a bit below. And when you have to manage tyres, it’s much easier and they are much more under control than they were last year, when they were a bit in ‘survival mode’ and by this you are killing the tyres quite quickly. »



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**“Can Leclerc stamp out the mistakes, and can he maintain that learned steeliness over a season?”**





“Where we made a huge step I think it’s more on the consistency between the two compounds between one stint and the other one. The car is much easier to drive; much easier to read for our drivers, much easier to develop, and it’s probably the biggest step that we did compared to last year, at least to have a good read of the car quite early into the weekend.”

Leclerc reckons that Ferrari has now been able to demonstrate something approaching equality with Red Bull in the tyre degradation stakes. “There’s still more work to be done on that,” he remarked after the Jeddah round. “But what we are lacking at the moment, I wouldn’t say it’s tyre degradation. It’s more overall pace. Whenever we put the car in high fuel, we are losing more than what a Red Bull loses, more than the actual tyre degradation, which I think was more or less line-on-line in those past races.”

## IS LECLERC ON MAX’S LEVEL?

There’s one trait that Leclerc and Verstappen share: absolute fearlessness on a qualifying lap. Even though Verstappen has been the class of the field over the past few seasons, Leclerc has probably been the more impressive of the two in the single-lap stakes. The struggles in tyre management have rather restricted his performance in the races but, in the right car, Leclerc is capable of putting together excellent races.

Leclerc’s growth as a driver was accelerated after the 2019 Austrian GP, when he battled with Verstappen for the race win. The Dutchman, in his uncompromising pass for victory on the 69th lap that put the Ferrari driver off the road, exposed Leclerc’s weaker underbelly. To his credit, Leclerc toughened up and, in his battles against Lewis Hamilton in both the Belgian and Italian races that year, showed renewed vigour in his retention of the lead. He then returned the favour over Verstappen in 2022’s edition of the Red Bull Ring race, passing him multiple times through a back-and-forth pit strategy battle.

There are two key questions over Leclerc: can he stamp out the mistakes, and can he maintain that learned steeliness over a season should he emerge in a title fight? His propensity to fling the car into the wall has reduced significantly over the years, and errors in 2023 were



Austria 2019 battle with Verstappen a catalyst for Leclerc toughening up

BELLANCA

largely car-dependent.

The SF-23 was a flighty car.

In qualifying, Leclerc occasionally strayed over its limits of adhesion, although the improvements to it made that increasingly rare. In races on full tanks, the car was unpredictable, especially in changing wind conditions. A more predictable base in 2024 has largely given Leclerc much more room to manoeuvre, although he admitted to struggling with balance relative to Sainz last time out in Australia.

The jury remains out on his presence over a full season as a title contender. The 2022 campaign started well, but Red Bull’s growing momentum was far too difficult for Ferrari to overcome. But he’s won titles before in the junior categories, his back-to-back wins in GP3 and F2 in 2016 and 2017 demonstrating his ability to manage races.

With Vasseur’s guidance and Hamilton in the fold from next season, Leclerc can begin to add the tools required to win an F1 title to his arsenal. In that event, should Ferrari continue upon its current trajectory and deliver a championship-contending car in the next few years, Ferrari won’t need to break the bank to sign a Verstappen. It’ll already have its own star capable of reaching F1’s greatest heights. ✎

## HAMILTON OVER SAINZ THE RIGHT CALL?

When you have an opportunity to sign a seven-time world champion, it’s a decision that a team principal would usually make in a heartbeat. Lewis Hamilton’s call to leave Mercedes after a two-decade-plus association with the German marque to join Ferrari sent shockwaves through Formula 1, leaving Carlos Sainz without a drive. Despite his closeness to Charles Leclerc in the performance stakes over their three seasons as team-mates, you’d take Hamilton over Sainz, right?

After the Spaniard’s heroics in Melbourne, the choice perhaps looks a bit less compelling. Recovering from appendix surgery to race in F1 two weeks later was already a herculean feat, his abdominal scar having barely healed and with little opportunity to train in the lead-up to the Australian round. To come away with a victory thanks to a superbly managed race meant that Sainz earned every single plaudit he accrued on the Sunday afternoon.

In the meantime, Hamilton had floundered in Australia and was dumped out in Q2, and slow progress through the opening 16 laps



ended with an engine problem. Mercedes’ struggles with its new W15 have been well documented as it attempts to understand its all-new chassis, but it seems that Hamilton is finding it much harder than team-mate George Russell to get a tune out of it.

There are two ways that this could be construed: either Hamilton’s depreciation

so far in 2024 is as a result of the current Mercedes, and a drop in motivation as a result of this, or his abilities have genuinely started to wane. It’ll only be clear in 2025 whether Hamilton can return to the front when he joins Ferrari, since it’s evident that he won’t be challenging for honours in the current season.

Ferrari knows what it would get if it had retained Sainz; his cerebral approach to grands prix has become a much-lauded quality over the past couple of years, something that has largely compensated for his outright pace shortfall relative to Leclerc. Their pairing has been a fine double-act, but Ferrari felt that it was time to move on.

As a free agent, Sainz is at his peak and will command a number of suitors for 2025. Ferrari will miss his tactical mind and his technical feedback, but rolling the dice on Hamilton offers its own benefits. Leclerc can also test himself against one of the best in the same equipment, something that the five-time race winner will certainly benefit from in his development as a potential superstar.





INTERVIEW

# FROM F1 COCKPIT TO ANOTHER SEAT OF POWER

*Sakon Yamamoto had a tricky driving career, but he believes some of the lessons he learned are helping him in his quest to improve lives in Japan*

ADAM COOPER

One of the most satisfied spectators at last weekend's Formula E race in Tokyo was the man who first drove an electric racing car on the streets of Japan's capital. Back in 2015, former F1 driver Sakon Yamamoto, who made his only Formula E race start in London that year, conducted a street demo in the Roppongi district.

It took almost a decade – and a location switch from the heart of the city to a more remote exhibition centre area – for the category to finally run a race in Tokyo. And Yamamoto played a role by encouraging the local authorities to allow it to happen. That's because after his racing career ended, he followed in the footsteps of the likes of Carlos Reutemann and Patrick Tambay in moving from F1 to politics, taking up public office as a member of Japan's house of representatives.

Now 41, Yamamoto had an unusual career. He started 21 grands prix spread across three bursts of seven in 2006, 2007 and 2010, always starting in the second half of the season as a replacement for someone who had fallen out of favour, or run out of budget. As such he never raced in places like Melbourne or Monaco. The history books suggest that he didn't achieve very much in terms of hard results, but he realised his childhood ambition and sat on grids with drivers of the calibre of Michael Schumacher, Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton. It was a dream that was set in place in 1988.

"My mother loves motorsport, she was keen on Ayrton Senna with McLaren-Honda," he recalls. "So when I was six years old my mum took me to Suzuka for the Japanese GP. It was the first time I saw F1. I was amazed by the sound, the speed, the atmosphere, everything was like a big shock. Then after that I became a big fan of motorsport, but I didn't know how to be an F1 driver, or how to start."

A few years later he discovered from magazines that racing drivers were in karting aged four or five, and he realised that it might already be too late: "I was surprised that after 12 years old the guys who started motorsport or kart racing didn't get to F1, it was like a 0.1% chance.

So again I was shocked. Only one year left!"

Showing considerable initiative, he wrote to the Suzuka Racing School asking to enrol in the karting programme, but the application was returned with a polite note to the effect that the 11-year-old needed parental consent. After some debate – his family's main focus was on him one day taking over their hospital and social welfare business – that permission was forthcoming, and he had the chance to try karting. He proved to be quite good at it, even winning a national championship, before gaining his first car experience at the Suzuka school.

*"F1 is like a mountain. You can see the top when you start, but if you climb up, the curve is higher"*

In 2001 at the age of 18, Yamamoto skipped the local junior circuit category and went straight into F3 with TOM'S, finishing an impressive fourth in the championship as top local driver. He also contested a handful of races in British F3. The following year, and with just one season behind him, he headed to Germany at the start of a peripatetic career path that never allowed him to properly establish himself. "If I review my career, more consistency was needed," he admits. "Like racing in F3 in Japan, maybe I could do another year, and then go to Europe for the new challenge. And then do more research, and know which teams can be the best options."

In 2002, Yamamoto contested German F3, which transitioned into the new Euro Series the following year. "I didn't know anything, but I thought I need to be in Europe to go up to F1," he says. "It was quite a big step. And at the time, there was no person who supported me, so it was quite a hard time. I don't speak any German. And I wasn't





First of three seven-race F1 stints was at Super Aguri in 2006



One-off FE racer went on to advocate for the championship in Japan



Ambitions for political high office dismissed in favour of a more hands-on role

used to eating sausages and potatoes every day!"

Having struggled to make progress over two years in Europe, Yamamoto returned to Japanese F3 in 2004. He scored his first race win in the final round, and then graduated to Formula Nippon (now Super Formula) in 2005, finishing a modest 10th in the championship and taking one second place. "I saw F1 was getting closer, but it's like a mountain," he explains. "You can see the top when you start, but if you climb up, the curve is higher, more tough. Just before the top you don't see anything, just many clouds. I recognised I was getting close, but I didn't see how I can be there."

That year, courtesy of his former F3 boss Colin Kolles, Yamamoto

made a key step when he drove a Jordan in Friday practice at Suzuka. He began 2006 with a couple of top-six finishes in Formula Nippon. Then, in the middle of the year, the chance came to replace Franck Montagny at Super Aguri, starting at Magny-Cours. But an intervention from Bernie Ecclestone ensured that his graduation was delayed so that Montagny could be the token local driver in the field for what was the 100th anniversary of the French GP.

"I called Bernie and he said, 'I know you have a contract, but if you let Montagny drive, I'm very happy,'" Yamamoto recalls. "OK, understood. I don't know if it was correct or not, but I recognise now it was quite a political moment..." >>





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Yamamoto’s debut was thus postponed to Hockenheim, where a practice crash, pitlane start and first-lap retirement made for a nightmare baptism. He contested the final seven races of the season, finishing three of them and ending the year on a high by logging seventh fastest lap in Brazil. But for 2007 he was replaced by Anthony Davidson. Instead, he began that year in GP2 with the BCN team, but then a call came from Kolles inviting him to replace Christijan Albers at Spyker, again completing the last seven races of the season and achieving what would be a career best 12th at Fuji.

There was no chance to stay at ‘Team Silverstone’ as it morphed into Force India in 2008. Instead, Yamamoto stepped back to GP2 with ART, and gained his only F1 miles doing street demo runs with Renault, before moving to ADAC GT with a Team Rosberg Audi in 2009.

It wasn’t until 2010 that a chance to return to the F1 grid emerged, again courtesy of Kolles, who by this time was running the struggling HRT team and was juggling drivers around. Yamamoto replaced Bruno Senna at Silverstone and subbed for Karun Chandhok in Germany, and later was himself kicked out for Christian Klien. Even so, he completed his third set of seven races. Kolles even offered to sell him the ailing team for \$1 but, well aware of the mounting bills, Yamamoto wisely declined.

Sadly that was it. He was official reserve for Virgin in 2011, but never had another chance to sit on the F1 grid, and his racing career fizzled out, apart from the odd FE or Japanese appearance.







*“I always joined F1 mid-season. So everyone else had testing, more consistency, could build confidence”*

“Of course, it was not ideal,” he recounts. “And it’s a quite unique and strange career in F1, but still, that is what it is. I always joined in the middle of season. So everyone else has had testing, they are driving through the season, so they have more consistency, and they can build their own team with the team staff, and build their confidence. But always the chance came suddenly. And I always tried to grab the chance, because you never know.”

Having walked away from racing, the family business took priority for Yamamoto. “I just started to watch my family’s place,” he says. “I recognised that, as a racing driver, I drove for myself. But people working in a hospital or working in facilities are taking care of other people. So that’s a quite respected job. That was my turning point to switch.”

He also began to gravitate towards politics, his interest sparked by the social and financial impact of his country’s declining and ageing population. “The Japanese system was built 30 years ago,” he points out. “We had a different situation, there was an increase in population more and more, but now it’s decreasing. So we need to change the politics. That was my first motivation to become a politician.”

The same determination that got Yamamoto to F1, combined with the amiable personality that won him many friends in the racing world, paid dividends, and in 2021 he became a member of the lower house for the Liberal Democratic Party.

Yamamoto’s former life still plays a role in his current one: “There are many connections because in motorsport of course we use cars, and motorisation is huge in Japan’s economy. So my experience is quite useful even now in my new job. Especially the energy business, like in the future we need e-fuels, so I really push on this part. Evidence-based policy making, EBPM, is very important for us. So it is like F1, always a package of evidence, like how data shows how much you’re going on the throttle or brakes.”

What Yamamoto doesn’t want to do is to one day seek higher office, believing that he can do more where he is now, where he can be more hands-on. “To become the top is not my goal, because I became a politician so Japanese people can live more happily, or can have more wealth,” he asserts. “That is my goal. So to achieve these is my object. I always try my best for everybody.” ✎

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Huff ready for action with the Speedworks Toyota Corolla GR Sport...



# RETURN OF THE HUFF STUFF

*The 2012 World Touring Car champion is back in the BTCC for his first full-time campaign since 2004. What's driven his move from the global stage to the Speedworks Toyota line-up?*

MARCUS SIMMONS



R

ob Huff refers frequently to “stars aligning” as he talks enthusiastically of his full-time return to the British Touring Car Championship after an absence of 19 seasons since his rookie campaign of 2004. That’s no surprise bearing in mind the coincidence of life circumstances that have led the 2012 World Touring Car champion into the open arms of Speedworks Motorsport, where he will pilot one of the Cheshire squad’s Toyota Gazoo Racing GB Corolla GR Sports.

One particular aspect of astronomy can be ruled out though. Following his 18 seasons in the World Touring Car Championship, World Touring Car Cup and TCR World Tour (he skipped 2020 to go off and win the TCR Scandinavia title, as you do...), Huff still had offers to continue on the global stage despite Audi, his 2023 manufacturer, closing its customer racing department. But he said no and, at the age of 44, he’s coming home.

You can partly thank Nic Hamilton for that. After the brother of seven-time Formula 1 world champion Lewis abruptly quit Team Hard in the middle of last season, that squad needed a driver in the car for the Knockhill round in order to not forfeit the TBL entrants’ licence that goes with it. Team boss Tony Gilham gave Huff a call, and found some receptive ears. “My career was very much in the world championship and I felt not finished yet,” explains Huff, “and then I got a phone call from Tony asking if I would come and help him out at Knockhill, which I gladly did. Career-wise, looking at the future, we’d just moved back to the UK having been abroad, and it was a great opportunity for me to come with zero pressure, help Tony out and just have an unpressurised feel of what it would be like to be back in the BTCC again. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was everything I was hoping it would be from an experience – and more.”

Huff had relocated to his native East Anglia (in Newmarket) after five years in Dubai. “A lot of that was to do with the fact that we’ve got a lot of motorsport interests in China, with teams, the engineering side, race schools,” says a man who is big news out East, thanks to no fewer than 11 tin-top wins in Macau. “Spending three or four months of the year in China, doing the world championship, with Dubai’s airport hub it was kind of a no-brainer that there was where I needed to be. Then COVID came. We missed our family and friends dearly living in Dubai, and the summers are just far too hot to do anything, so we made the decision to move back to the UK to be more focused on the family.”

A strong factor in this relocation was the health of Huff’s father Peter. Like his son, Huff Sr is a tremendously popular figure in »



TOYOTA GAZOO RACING UK

...and leading one at  
Knockhill last year in  
Team Hard Cupra



JEP/MOTORSPORTIMAGES



HUFF IN THE BTCC



Winning in Lada Granta at Beijing Goldenport

RANCOIS FLAMAND/DPPI

HUFF’S GLOBETROTTING  
WORLD TOURING CAR WINS

VENUE	WINS
Macau (China)	8
Brno (Czech Republic)	3
Curitiba (Brazil)	2
Monza (Italy)	2
Hungaroring (Hungary)	2
Anderstorp (Sweden)	1
Valencia (Spain)	1
Marrakech (Morocco)	1
Pau (France)	1
Okayama (Japan)	1
Zolder (Belgium)	1
Porto (Portugal)	1
Slovakia Ring (Slovakia)	1
Salzburgring (Austria)	1
Sonoma (USA)	1
Shanghai (China)	1
Beijing Goldenport (China)	1
Paul Ricard (France)	1
Suzuka (Japan)	1
Sochi (Russia)	1
Vila Real (Portugal)	1
Anneau du Rhin (France)	1
Valllunga (Italy)	1
Sydney M’Sport Park (Australia)	1

MACAUGP

Huff came close to  
TCR World Tour title  
in 2023 Macau finale



Huff (right) and Speedworks  
man Buxton (left) flank Jason  
Templeman in 2002 Clio season

JEP

the paddocks – just a down-to-earth good bloke – and was quickly and affectionately dubbed ‘Huff Daddy’. “He’s got Parkinson’s, which is obviously pretty upsetting,” says Huff. “It’s a horrible illness, and anyone who knows Dad and me... Jason Plato [Huff’s team-mate in his BTCC season at SEAT in 2004] called us the ‘ultimate tag team’, and we always have been. We started this journey very much together.

“I’m a true believer in fate and things are meant to happen for a reason, and us moving back to the UK, Tony giving me that call to race at Knockhill, me being motivated to go and speak to the teams that I spoke to, getting this deal done with Speedworks, giving Dad the opportunity to come back racing at weekends, it’s the perfect scenario for me to tick that missing box of BTCC. Dad’s only 15 minutes up the road and it’s nice – he can come as much or as little as he wants. I think life has been very depressing for a lot of people in the last four or five years, and if you can help everyone and anyone in any way whatsoever to be a bit inspired, to produce a positive attitude, I will be the first one to do that, especially when it’s my family.”

Serendipitous or not, Huff’s trial test with the Speedworks Corolla came at Croft – the very circuit where the 2003 SEAT Cupra Championship that launched his career kicked off. That weekend 21 years ago, the Renault Clio Cup graduate took the first of three race wins on his way to defeating Gordon Shedden to the title – and the extraordinary prize of a works deal with the Spanish manufacturer for the 2004 BTCC.

“That was a typical wet Croft day,” recalls Huff of his outing in the Toyota last autumn. “There’s a couple of circuits I’ve not been to for 20 years and one of them was Croft, but I got into the swing of things very quickly. I was sharing the car on the day, but from my side it couldn’t have gone better. We did a



World Touring Car  
title went Huff’s  
way in 2012

JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES





Chasing Turkington in 2004  
BTCC with SEAT. Will there be  
more of the same in 2024?



Leading Priaux to  
maiden WTCC win in  
Chevrolet, Brno 2006

## “THE STORY OF MY CAREER IS VERY MUCH BEING THROWN IN AT THE DEEP END AND TOLD TO DEAL WITH IT”

fairly quick sweep-through of settings on the car, and the car responded really well – and not only that but the team and I responded really well to each other. That was at a time when we were seriously looking at working together in the future, but we probably needed a trial run to make sure we all get on!

“It couldn’t have gone better. We seemed to achieve a lot in a very small amount of time on that day, and everything we achieved meant progress and faster lap times. It’s difficult to describe, other than when it feels so right it can’t be wrong.”

It also brought Huff back into the orbit of Danny Buxton, who joined Speedworks last summer as the team’s head of racing after quitting One Motorsport. Huff immediately clicked with husband-and-wife team chiefs Christian and Amy Dick when he met them at last September’s Silverstone BTCC round, but had history with Buxton. Back in 2002, they had a spectacular Clio Cup shunt at Thruxton that resulted in Buxton rolling out of the race on the exit of the Complex. “That was the last time Danny and I spoke to each other until Silverstone last year!” laughs Huff. “We *might* have briefly touched on it as a bit of light-hearted banter... Danny was one of the judges on the Clio scholarship for 2002 as the reigning champion and was trying to get into BTCC, and he chose me, but he ended up back on the Clio grid. And yeah... we had a small to-do at Thruxton. We can laugh about it now, both of us still magically involved in motorsport and representing the same team.”

Talking of former Clio aces, Huff has BTCC champion-in-waiting Josh Cook in the Speedworks camp, forming one half of the team’s LKQ-backed duo alongside Aiden Moffat, while Andrew Watson is alongside him in the TGR brace after a highly impressive rookie season.

“Speedworks have done a brilliant job in putting a really good bunch of people together, off the track as well as on track,” asserts Huff, who has also grown his UK motorsport interests over the winter by becoming a director of Fewkes Sport Management. “Andrew made himself very well known at the first race at Donington last year [fourth on his debut], and he’s a thoroughly lovely gentleman. Josh and Aiden have been in the paddock a long time – a huge wealth of knowledge, and Josh the absolute maestro at Thruxton and always at the front. We will be a great little foursome. To have two vastly experienced drivers in Josh and Aiden, and the young – well, he’s not so young! – fresh-faced Andrew complements everything that we’re pushing for as a team. I think some people are going to be concerned about what we’ve got as a package.”

After six years in TCR machinery, what is Huff anticipating having to get his head around with the unique-to-Britain NGTC cars? “It’s a much busier race car than a TCR car is. We have a

manual sequential gearbox, and we obviously have the hybrid system, which means a lot more than just sitting there and using your two feet and your paddle-shift. Much more like touring cars of old that I’m used to from when I first joined Chevrolet in 2005, all the way through to when TCR started. Hybrid adds what I think is a valuable variable into it.

“In the sense of racing, I’ve always believed and known – and people might want to argue with it, I don’t know – that wherever you go in any championship across the world, the level of the frontrunners is always the same. The main difference is how many of those frontrunners there are. When I went to Scandinavia, I didn’t expect the level to be any easier than the World and it wasn’t. The main difference was that there were three or four of us at that level as opposed to the world championship, where it was 10 or 12. There’s a lot of negativity about the TCR World Tour, but the fact of the matter is that last year you had four Lynk & Cos with four pros, two Hyundais with two pros, two Audis with two pros, and then some very good other drivers. There were 10 or 12 drivers on a weekend who could win a race.”

Huff won two of the 20 in his Comtoyou Racing Audi and damn near claimed his second world title in a thrilling three-way showdown in Macau, against Hyundai’s Norbert Michelisz and Lynk & Co’s Yann Ehrlacher. With three laps remaining, he was right behind Ehrlacher’s second-placed team-mate Santiago Urrutia, and if Huff got past then *his* team-mate Frederic Vervisch would surely let him through for the race victory and the title. But then Urrutia checked his momentum exiting the tight Dona Maria turn, and Huff ran into the back of him, flipping his bonnet up and smashing the Audi’s windscreen. “That’s racing for you...” he sighs. “We were not in the fastest car but as a team, and team-mates, we worked far better than anyone else did and that put us in a position where we were going to win a world championship. What Fred and I achieved last year I think will go down in the books as one of the best years we’ve ever had – it was amazing to have that collaboration. When you’ve raced on a grid where you have Plato, Muller, Menu, Larini, Rydell, Tarquini, Monteiro – they’ve all achieved greatness but I don’t underestimate BTCC whatsoever.”

He just needs to recalibrate. Remarkably, Huff’s 36 race wins from 397 starts in world tin-top championships came at 24 different circuits (see panel). “Beijing Goldenport in a Lada through to Macau – there’s quite a variation in there!” What about Anneau du Rhin? “Ah, the club circuit... There’s some circuits that people won’t even have heard of, but I’m ready for this, I’m excited about it.”

Can he add to his pair of 2004 wins at Brands Hatch and Snetterton in the BTCC? As ever in this series, pre-season testing is at a premium, and Huff is scheduled to get down to serious work in the Corolla for the first time since his Croft run-out across two days at Brands this week. Along with the other teams, Speedworks will be hoping for some dry running... “I’d love a bit more time in the car, but then I’m sure everyone else would as well,” says Huff. “I did a little shakedown when we went to Toyota’s test track in Derby a couple of weeks ago, to tick a few little boxes on updates, which went very well. But the story of my career is very much being thrown in at the deep end and told to deal with it, and this is no different! 🌀



# RACE CENTRE

Championship  
part-timer Roivanpera  
was still a class apart  
with “such clever  
driving”





# Clever Rovannerp avoids the Safari pitfalls

*While rivals suffered the perils of the WRC's toughest event, the double world champion was near-faultless on his march to victory in Kenya*

TOM HOWARD

PHOTOGRAPHY MCKLEIN

**I** think you cannot do a better Safari Rally than what we did," said Kalle Rovannerp as he clambered out of his Toyota GR Yaris after a dominant run to a second career Safari victory. The reserved yet supremely talented double world champion is not one for making big statements, often preferring modesty when discussing his own skills and achievements. But on this occasion, it's difficult to disagree with his claim. Rovannerp and co-driver Jonne Halttunen delivered one of the most intelligent and faultless performances ever witnessed on the World Rally Championship's toughest round.

The Safari Rally is renowned as a battle of attrition, where survival takes precedence over outright speed. Crews expect trials and tribulations while attempting to tame Kenya's wild terrain, unpredictable weather and car-destroying roads. But this wasn't the case for Rovannerp, and his "clever" driving coupled with a bulletproof Toyota left his rivals in the distance.

"At this rally if you finish like this it is big relief because you are not fighting with all the drivers all the weekend, you are fighting the conditions," said the 23-year-old upon achieving a 12th career WRC win to draw one clear of 1984 world champion Stig Blomqvist. "We had no issues for the whole weekend, and it was such clever driving, I think it was a good effort."

A decision to move the event back to its more traditional March date in Kenya's rainy season triggered fears that this year's rally would be even tougher. This view heightened following a recce during which crews became literally stuck in the mud. To prepare for such conditions, Rally1 cars took on a rather retro Safari look, with the snorkel returning to the WRC's top tier following a change in the FIA regulations that had previously prohibited the devices for Rally1 machines. >>



As always, Kenya has a highly appreciative audience for the WRC



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Toyota, M-Sport-Ford and Hyundai added snorkels to their Kenya survival kits, with the kings of the African event, Toyota, unveiling an elaborate aero-efficient design. In truth, the snorkels were hardly required because the expected torrential rain, which can turn roads into ice-like slippery mud, failed to arrive. Hyundai's system only appeared on Saturday afternoon, while Toyota's and M-Sport's were permanent features.

Given its rich pedigree in Kenya, where it boasts 11 wins, Toyota was the pre-event favourite, but the pace advantage it once held over arch-rival Hyundai had seemingly decreased following the off-season upgrades to the i20 N. But while Hyundai, victorious in Monte Carlo and Sweden, made gains in one area, it was unable to shake its Kenya hoodoo.

It was Hyundai that started on the front foot when championship leader Thierry Neuville eclipsed his title rival, Toyota's Elfyn Evans, in Thursday's Kasarani superspecial head-to-

## “We had to do some *MacGyver* stuff to try to survive in the dust, but it wasn't as bad as expected”

head in front of a vociferous Nairobi crowd. The time was 0.1 seconds faster than Hyundai team-mate Ott Tanak, in search of a much-needed clean rally following mistakes in Monte Carlo and Sweden. Roanperera sat third, 0.8s behind and poised to lead Toyota's charge on Friday when the rally headed north-west through the beautiful Great Rift Valley back to its base in Naivasha.

Hyundai's hopes of adding to its concerning record of only one podium in three previous visits to Africa were soon in jeopardy on Friday morning as one by one Kenya hobbled its three charges. First to hit trouble was overnight leader Neuville when he clipped a rock with the right-rear. The tyre exploded towards the end of stage three, costing the Belgian 19.9s. The flailing rubber ripped the i20 N's bodywork to shreds, forcing Neuville and co-driver Martijn Wydaeghe to think on their feet to complete a repair utilising a tree branch and a cloth that reminded Neuville of a hit American television show.

“For the last stage we had to do some *MacGyver* stuff to try to survive in the dust, but it wasn't as bad as expected, and in the end we got through with no problem,” said Neuville, and he and Wydaeghe completed the morning loop without hybrid power, and wearing goggles to combat dust that entered the car.

Fresh from breaking a six-and-a-half-year WRC victory drought at Rally Sweden, Esapekka Lappi was in good spirits and it showed as he took the fight to Roanperera. But it seems as though he's upset the Safari Rally gods somehow, and his bad luck at the event continued. Sitting in second, 15.5s behind Roanperera, Lappi



suddenly ground to a halt in stage five when his i20 N's gearbox exploded. The failure follows on from four propshaft failures in the same rally last year, earning Lappi the nickname 'Mr Propshaft' within the Hyundai ranks. This year the propshaft had been beefed up, but the gearbox – another known Hyundai weak point – was again exposed by Kenya's harsh roads.

“Esapekka's retirement is a reliability issue and we are not happy with that, but we can't do much about that within the current [homologation joker] rules; it is difficult to fix it,” said Hyundai technical direction Francois-Xavier Demaison.

A frustrated Lappi saw little point rejoining the rally on Saturday given the car's weakness.

To compound Hyundai's misery, Tanak – who inherited second following Lappi's exit – crashed out on the following test, the second pass through Geothermal. Tanak was unable to avoid a large rock in the middle of the road that carried his i20 N off line and into a bank, causing terminal damage. “I had nowhere to go so I had to take the rock and it was far too big and it put us off the road,” he said. “I don't think the rock did too much damage, but I hit the bank so hard, and we got all the damage from there.”

Hyundai's day to forget contrasted with the perfection from Roanperera, who completed a clean sweep of fastest times from the day's six stages despite fighting “horrible” understeer in his GR Yaris that left him perplexed by his winning time in stage two. But Roanperera showed his class and ability to pick through everything Kenya can throw at competitors by posting a stunning effort in stage four, 11.1s faster than anyone else. As Hyundai's challenge wilted in the African heat, Roanperera ended Friday with a comfortable 56.7s lead from Evans, who also struggled for confidence before a set-up change ignited an afternoon push.

A third consecutive Toyota Safari podium lockdown appeared on the cards thanks to cautious and smart driving from Takamoto Katsuta, who was 3.9s behind Evans. Neuville recovered to fourth in front of M-Sport Ford duo Adrien Fourmaux and Gregoire >>





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Threat of heavy rain meant snorkels returned, the Toyotas sporting aero-friendly device

Munster, who methodically skipped through Kenya's hazards trouble-free, a feat worth its metaphorical weight in gold.

Kenya's demanding roads plus the threat of rain on Saturday ensured Rovannerp couldn't afford to relax. "The plan was to use our starting place well and push when it is clear and still have a bit of margin to take care in the rough places in the afternoon, and still do good times, so I am happy," he said. "I wouldn't say it [the lead] is enough and not even close to being enough."

Caution was emanating from the Toyota camp despite its stranglehold on the rally. "The most important thing is to be patient because if the rain comes it will be about survival," predicted team boss Jari-Matti Latvala.

Heavy rain fell overnight, but by the time the crews headed to the stages on Saturday morning the roads had dried in the most part. While the rain stayed away, a dry Kenya stage can still bite hard, as Evans and Katsuta learned to their detriment.

The Toyota duo suffered double punctures across the morning loop. Evans lost his left-rear in stage eight and a right-rear in the infamous Sleeping Warrior test, the only stage that featured the standing water remaining from the overnight rain. It dropped the Welshman from second to fifth. "I was driving as well as possible," recounted Evans. "You just have to do the best rhythm and drive to the notes you made on the recce. The two punctures are a mystery, not ideal."

Front and rear-right failures for Katsuta dropped the Japanese to third behind Neuville, who took aim at the event organisers since rocks that were not on the recce had appeared in the stages. "I hit something and got a puncture but there was nothing on the recce so I was very surprised; but this can happen," offered Katsuta, who had won stage eight, where he was driving "blind" thanks to the dust breaching the cabin of his GR Yaris. "It was very unfortunate, but you need luck here."

Neuville added: "We were told that the road wouldn't be modified after recce. We had a big moment. They put big stones in the middle of the road."

While angry about the state of some sections of stages, Neuville ultimately benefited from the pain suffered by his rivals. But once again the prospect of a podium was cruelly snatched from his grasp. An intermittent fuel system issue prompted a series of stoppages. The frustration was clear to see on Neuville's face as he nursed the car back to service in fifth place, losing more than 10 minutes.

"I'm really disappointed with the outcome when you put so much effort into that work and your preparations, and you don't get the reward, and it is the fourth consecutive year we have been hit by trouble – it doesn't feel very good," grumbled Neuville. "It is



**"I'm really disappointed when you put in so much effort, and you don't get the reward"**

not a Safari-related issue, which is even more frustrating."

Hyundai team principal Cyril Abiteboul added: "Thierry's issue is something we haven't really seen before, so we need to have a look at the data and the fuel tank to understand what is going on."

This wasn't the only drama Hyundai encountered as its Kenya woe continued. Tanak battled issues with his car on a road section before stage eight and was forced to pull over in-stage to fasten a flapping bonnet, before losing his intercom on the next test.

Lappi also didn't receive his wish to complete only the morning loop to save his weak transmission. After he'd clipped a zebra in the morning, two birds struck his car in separate incidents that smashed his windscreen, and Lappi was reduced to a crawl through the day's final stage. A second transmission failure on Sunday was the final dose of misfortune for the hacked-off Finn.

"The windscreen cracked immediately and I could live with that, it was not too bad but a couple of kilometres later there was another strike and now the windscreen was really inside [the car]," related Lappi. "I couldn't see anything anymore and we >>



needed to slow down a lot as it was not safe to drive.”

Saturday proved to be a day of chaos and incident. Munster retired from sixth when he hit a rock that resulted in terminal damage to his Ford Puma's left-rear suspension. Munster would rejoin the rally on Sunday. Meanwhile, Evans's tyre troubles continued and two further punctures left him in fourth, 5m35.6s adrift of the lead. It did earn him 10 provisional points under the new points system, two more than Neuville, who limped to service.

At the front, Rovannerpa seemingly had the Midas touch. His ability to know when to attack and when to back off was faultless and, with his rivals delayed, the world champion

**“We need to say a huge thanks to the team. I made some mistakes, but I could always trust the car”**

took a 2m08.9s lead over Katsuta.

Pressed on how much of his success was down to genius or luck, he said: “That is difficult to know, really, but for sure I’m quite confident that I’m doing well also. We have good notes and I am taking quite good care, I don’t have any big hits and the tyres have been in quite good condition, so it has to be something at least.”

Rovanpera put one hand on 18 Saturday points, with Katsuta taking a handy 15. But it was M-Sport man Fourmaux who was among the happiest of the drivers – his Rovannerpa-like approach was rewarded with third and 13 points. The Frenchman's enjoyment was plain to see, dishing out a “shake and bake” *Talladega Nights* movie reference with a beaming smile after his Puma's strong run through stage 12. A puncture picked up towards the end of the following test was his only drama.

Afforded with such an advantage, Rovannerpa cruised through Sunday's six stages to record one of the most impressive victories of his career by 1m37.8s from Katsuta, who bounced back from his Sweden crash with a third podium in four Kenya outings.

“It's always special – this event is so tough and also it's a legendary event for Toyota,” smiled Rovannerpa. “Like they say here in Africa, ‘The car in front is always a Toyota.’”

A point backed up by Katsuta: “It was a tough rally like always, so we need to say a huge thanks to the team because they prepared very well. I made some mistakes, but I could always trust the car.”



Munster's initially trouble-free run ruined by impact with rock

M-Sport also firmly answered its reliability critics as Fourmaux brought the Puma home safely in third, becoming the first driver since Dani Sordo in 2006 to follow up a maiden career WRC podium finish with another in the following event.

“We have been sensible, but it has been really positive,” said Fourmaux, who took 17 points (13 on Saturday, four on Sunday) to remain third in the championship. “We have had one podium on snow, one on gravel, so now we need one on Tarmac.”

“We got a lot of criticism last year [about reliability] but after three rallies we have scored two podiums,” added team principal Richard Millener. “I think that speaks for itself.”

Neuville survived slamming into a boulder in the middle of stage 16 to come home fifth overall, although his second-place finish in the Super Sunday classification and a Power Stage win extended his championship lead over Evans to six points, despite finishing behind his rival! The Welshman finished fourth overall, third on Sunday, and could only take a solitary point from the Power Stage. Tanak managed to salvage 12 points, benefiting the most from the new points system after winning Sunday's six-stage leg.

Rovanpera's almost perfect drive perhaps was only rivalled by the heroics of WRC2 winner Gus Greensmith, who finished sixth overall despite battling a stomach bug (see panel, right).

While Rovannerpa is only tackling half a season this year, Kenya proved that when the going gets tough, the Finn is in a class of his own. 🌟



Tanak's Hyundai makes perfect prop for impromptu pic



GREENSMITH FIGHTS OFF ILLNESS TO TOP WRC2



Fuelled by hydration tablets, a determined Gus Greensmith fought off a stomach bug to begin his WRC2 campaign with a thoroughly deserved victory. The Toksport Skoda driver had long targeted the wild surroundings of Kenya to open his WRC2 season, but hadn’t anticipated a health battle on top of taming the toughest stages on the calendar.

A severely under-the-weather Greensmith set the pace from the outset before delivering a mistake-free drive to move into a comfortable lead of more than three minutes at the end of Friday.

Once out in front, Greensmith could manage his pace after main rival Oliver Solberg dropped almost four minutes following punctures on stages two and three. Greensmith eventually took the victory from Solberg by 1m23.1s. An all-Skoda podium was completed by Kajetan Kajetanowicz.

“There was no point when I thought I was going to give up because I knew I couldn’t from my own personal thing,” said Greensmith. “The guys in the team have been saying that it’s my best rally – there was not a single mistake, so I’m very happy.

“It was good from the first stage, we took the lead and once we had a big lead we just controlled it. I was never under pressure. Having a three-and-a-half-minute lead is much easier than having to fight, but for sure going slowly you can sometimes make mistakes. Whenever we needed the speed, we had it.”

Although frustrated by the punctures, Solberg, who also battled fever-like symptoms earlier in the week, now leads the WRC2 standings from Greensmith. “This was one of the toughest rallies of course and the punctures happened unfortunately,” said Solberg, who won 11 of the 19 stages. “I think for the rest of the season it will be a little bit easier than Africa. The important thing is to keep the strategy we have been doing.”

RESULTS ROUND 3/13, SAFARI RALLY KENYA, 28-31 MARCH

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Kalle Rovannerp (FIN) Jonne Halttunen (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	3h36m04.0s
2	Takamoto Katsuta (JPN) Aaron Johnston (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+1m37.8s
3	Adrien Fourmaux (FRA) Alexandre Coria (FRA)	M-Sport Ford World Rally Team / Ford Puma Rally1	+2m25.1s
4	Elfyn Evans (GBR) Scott Martin (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+4m20.2s
5	Thierry Neuville (BEL) Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 N Rally1	+10m17.5s
6	Gus Greensmith (GBR) Jonas Andersson (SWE)	Toksport WRT / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+18m05.4s
7	Oliver Solberg (SWE) Elliott Edmondson (GBR)	Toksport WRT / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+19m28.5s
8	Ott Tanak (EST) Martin Jarveoja (EST)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 N Rally1	+21m02.0s
9	Jourdan Serderidis (GRC) Frederic Miclotte (BEL)	M-Sport Ford World Rally Team / Ford Puma Rally1	+26m13.3s
10	Kajetan Kajetanowicz (POL) Maciej Szczepaniak (POL)	Team RaceSeven / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+26m34.4s

OTHERS

12	Esapekka Lappi (FIN) Janne Ferm (FIN)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 N Rally1	+42m21.7s
15	Gregoire Munster (LUX) Louis Louka (BEL)	M-Sport Ford World Rally Team / Ford Puma Rally1	+57m55.9s

STAGE TIMES

STAGE	FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND
SS1 Super Special Kasarani (3.01 miles)	Neuville 3m19.9s	Neuville	Tanak +0.1s
SS2 Loldia 1 (11.91 miles)	Rovanpera 13m59.0s	Rovanpera	Tanak +1.4s
SS3 Geothermal 1 (8.15 miles)	Rovanpera 6m51.3s	Rovanpera	Lappi +3.0s
SS4 Kedong 1 (19.57 miles)	Rovanpera 15m42.1s	Rovanpera	Lappi +15.5s
SS5 Loldia 2 (11.91 miles)	Rovanpera 13m56.7s	Rovanpera	Tanak +18.6s
SS6 Geothermal 2 (8.15 miles)	Rovanpera 6m48.6s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +46.4s
SS7 Kedong 2 (19.57 miles)	Rovanpera 15m44.2s	Rovanpera	Evans +56.9s
SS8 Soysambu 1 (18.22 miles)	Katsuta 17m12.5s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +55.6s
SS9 Elmenteita 1 (9.37 miles)	Neuville 8m15.8s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +58.3s
SS10 Sleeping Warrior 1 (22.42 miles)	Rovanpera 20m23.8s	Rovanpera	Neuville +1m27.9s
SS11 Soysambu 2 (18.22 miles)	Katsuta 17m19.4s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +2m20.2s
SS12 Elmenteita 2 (9.37 miles)	Evans 8m24.7s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +2m17.7s
SS13 Sleeping Warrior 2 (22.42 miles)	Tanak 20m09.0s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +2m08.9s
SS14 Malewa 1 (5.18 miles)	Neuville 5m57.3s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +2m10.3s
SS15 Oserengoni 1 (11.39 miles)	Evans 11m27.5s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +1m58.9s
SS16 Hell’s Gate 1 (6.54 miles)	Evans 5m29.3s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +1m53.5s
SS17 Malewa 2 (5.18 miles)	Neuville 5m59.0s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +1m33.5s
SS18 Oserengoni 2 (11.39 miles)	Tanak 10m55.4s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +1m27.3s
SS19 Hell’s Gate 2 (6.54 miles)	Neuville 5m27.1s	Rovanpera	Katsuta +1m37.8s



NEXT REPORT

Croatia Rally  
25 April issue

DRIVERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP

- 1 Neuville 67 (pictured left);  
2 Evans 61; 3 Fourmaux 46;  
4 Tanak 33; 5 Rovannerp 31;  
6 Katsuta 30; 7 Sebastien Ogier 24; 8 Lappi 23; 9 Solberg 12;  
10 Sami Pajari 6.  
**WRC2** 1 Solberg 43;  
2 Greensmith 25;  
3 Yohan Rossel 25.

MANUFACTURERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP

- 1 Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT 131;  
2 Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT 127;  
3 M-Sport Ford World Rally Team 72.



# Guenther and Maserati win Japanese waiting game

*A slow-burner of a contest delivered the fifth different winner in as many races on Formula E's first visit to the land of the rising sun*

STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport  
IMAGES

**F**or more than a decade Formula E had attempted to stage a race in Tokyo, and that dream finally became a reality last weekend when the all-electric championship set up shop in the most populous city in the world. The patience of the sell-out crowd was pushed a little further in the race, with the inaugural contest a slow burner that only came to fruition in the final stages, when Maximilian Guenther and his Maserati MSG team put on a strategic masterclass that got the better of Oliver Rowland and home favourite Nissan.

Prior to the event Guenther had finished in the points across all four races in 2024, but none had resulted in a podium. Yet a remarkable climb through the order at the previous round in Sao Paulo, where he finished ninth after serving a 10-second stop/go penalty, hinted at a package capable of challenging for outright honours when presented with the right opportunity.

A talking point ahead of the event had been how difficult it would be to overtake around the 20-turn, 1.6-mile street circuit located in Tokyo's dockside Big Sight area, with little in the way of long straights or heavy braking zones. That proved to be the case, and track position became the key to strategy. That meant that, unlike previous races this season, both Attack Modes were not taken at the earliest opportunity.

Rowland initially maintained his advantage from pole while Guenther lost out to Edoardo Mortara, who from third got a better launch off the cleaner and grippier side of the grid and even briefly challenged for the lead into Turn 1. With the Mahindra driver having excelled in qualifying, but with no points on the board this season, it was reasonable to assume that he would gradually slip back as the race developed, and that proved to be the case.

With that in mind, Guenther was keen to move back ahead and launched his first serious attempt on lap 10, the order across the top half of the field having remained almost entirely static up to that point. As Mortara went defensive into the tight Turn 6 right-hander, the loss of momentum gave Rowland a small gap for the first time, which come the next lap was enough for him to take his first Attack Mode and still retain the lead.

By now Guenther had moved into second when Mortara also moved off the racing line to activate his extra power at the same

time as Rowland. Just two laps later Guenther was at the head of the race when Rowland took his second Attack Mode on lap 13. He fell in just behind Guenther, who then relinquished the lead a lap later with his own activation. It also momentarily dropped him behind Mortara, but the German got the better exit out of Turn 15 and moved back in front just before Turn 16, which proved crucial.

Once racing resumed after a brief safety car period to retrieve debris, with two laps added to take the total to 35, Guenther began to probe Rowland's defences, and the pivotal moment of the race came 10 laps from home. While Rowland was lifting-and-coasting to save energy, Guenther seized the opportunity to move ahead on the approach to the Turns 10/11 chicane.

"I surprised him, I guess, into Turn 10, and it just opened up the race for us," smiled the Bavarian. "I tried to pull a bit of a gap but I couldn't really enough [in the beginning] to take my Attack Mode, and this was key to winning the race. Obviously it was very tight with Oliver."

Guenther pulled the pin once in front, knowing that a gap of more than one second was going to be needed to take his remaining Attack Mode and resume in the lead. After two laps and with a margin of 1.7 seconds, Guenther took his final activation



Maserati MSG and Guenther celebrate strategy masterclass

FERRARO

STALEY





Guenther's momentum has been building in 2024, and he delivered in Tokyo docklands

## “If I’d stayed out front any longer then I probably would have been swallowed up by more people”

and did retain the lead, but any thoughts that the race was done were far from Rowland’s mind. Over the final lap the Yorkshireman made three attempts to force a way ahead before falling short in a race that for large parts looked like it had been his to lose. After leading for 23 laps and with seemingly the stronger outright race pace, Rowland admitted that the win “was on the table”.

“I was kind of in a position where if I’d stayed out front any longer then I probably would have been swallowed up by more people,” explained Rowland, who has hit his stride this season with a hat-trick of podiums on the bounce – this has put him third in the drivers’ standings, just nine points off top spot. “Of course I was trying to keep the lead, but when he [Guenther] had the energy and needed to do the Attack Mode, I knew he was going to try and attack because he needed to pull a gap and take it. It’s one of those things; if I did it again I’m not really sure what I’d do different. Would I have to relinquish the lead a bit earlier and stay in the slipstream?”

While Maserati and Nissan-powered machinery battled for the outright win, behind them Porsche showcased impressive form, with the factory team and customer squad Andretti Global locking out the following four spots. At the head of the group was reigning champion Jake Dennis, who like Mortara had moved up a »



Mortara deserved more than exclusion after impressive drive

GALLOWAY





position off the line, at the expense of Sergio Sette Camara, and remained in the leading quartet for much of the race. The Briton's race effort was aided by Andretti team-mate Norman Nato, who slowed the chasing pack twice to allow Dennis to take both his Attack Modes without losing position.

Nato was classified sixth when a 5s penalty for a collision with Robin Frijns was rescinded post-race, and the Frenchman was gifted another position after finishing behind Mortara on the road – the Swiss was heartbreakingly disqualified for energy overuse on the run to the line.

Dennis had been able to snatch the final podium spot from Porsche's Antonio Felix da Costa, who was left aggrieved at losing the position three laps from the end when attempting to overtake Rowland around the outside of Turn 15. "The overlap was 100% – my front wheel was on his front wheel and he pushed me completely on the wall," fumed da Costa, who had charged from eighth on the grid. "I'm a little bit disappointed because the FIA always say that they don't penalise on the consequence, but they do because I know if I hit the wall in that moment Oliver gets a penalty. And because I avoided the contact, he doesn't get a penalty, so I almost feel like I need to hit the wall for the FIA to penalise him, which really sucks."

Team-mate Pascal Wehrlein finished immediately behind after losing ground mid-race when he tried to overtake Dennis through the final sequence of corners, with the loss of momentum allowing both Nato and Frijns to move ahead. Despite also picking up damage to his front wing in his side-by-side battle

## "I almost feel like I need to hit the wall for the FIA to penalise him, which really sucks"

with Dennis, Wehrlein was able to recover to fifth, and retake the lead in the drivers' standings after a less-than-ideal weekend for Nick Cassidy and Jaguar.

The Kiwi came into the event with a four-point lead and initially progressed to the duel stage of qualifying, but his best lap was removed after "torque at the rear wheels did not respect the homologated primary throttle pedal map". It meant that Cassidy had to start from 19th and, on a track where overtaking was difficult, progress was slow. Unlike the previous race in Sao Paulo – where, after finding himself in a similar situation, frustration possibly got the better of him and he crashed out – Cassidy kept his nose clean. His reward was eighth at the chequered flag, which proved better than team-mate and compatriot Mitch Evans.

Evans, who like Jaguar was celebrating hitting the 100-race milestone in Japan, had benefited from Cassidy's misfortune in qualifying to make the duels before he was demoted three places on the grid for blocking McLaren's Jake Hughes in the group stage. Evans started ninth, lost two further places on the opening lap, and was on the fringes of the top 10 when he went for an overtaking move on Nico Muller into Turn 6.

After diving to the inside, Evans ran deep, colliding with Frijns in front and damaging his Jaguar's front wing, with the debris causing the race's only safety car period. A pitstop for a replacement meant Evans was only able to salvage 15th at the flag to register his first non-score of the season.

Despite the contact from Evans and also losing his front wing in a later collision with Nato, Frijns was able to take ninth in his Envision Jaguar, with Sette Camara securing his second points finish of the season in 10th for ERT.

Guenther's maiden win of the 2024 campaign has propelled him into championship contention and he sits fifth in the drivers' standings, just 15 points behind leader Wehrlein. Five different winners from the opening five races, all representing different teams, has showcased Formula E at its best so far this season, and the championship now heads to another new venue at Misano for a double-header next week. 🏁





## IN THE HEADLINES



STALEY

### ABT'S FIRST POINTS

Nico Muller scored Abt's first points of the season after finishing seventh in Tokyo. The Swiss (above) had started in the same position after making it through to the qualifying duels for the second time in a row. "If I hadn't got involved in a crash after the start, we could have even finished in the top five," he said. Muller's team-mate Lucas di Grassi failed to complete the distance after contact earlier in the race.

### BIRD BROUGHT BACK DOWN

Sao Paulo E-Prix winner Sam Bird suffered a difficult weekend in Japan, the Briton starting last on the grid before retiring from the race, having pitted earlier for a steering wheel check. The second McLaren entry of Jake Hughes fared little better, finishing 14th after having a broken front end replaced following a collision with Lucas di Grassi at Turn 15.

### PORSCHE'S JAPANESE CHARGE

Porsche reduced Jaguar's lead in the constructors' standings from 28 points to just seven in Japan. Jaguar Racing maintains its early lead in the teams' championship; it currently sits 17 points ahead of the works Porsche squad, but had started the weekend 35 points clear.

### FE'S SIXTH CENTURION

Mitch Evans (below) became the sixth driver to hit 100 Formula E starts in Japan, following Lucas di Grassi (leading on 120), Jean-Eric Vergne, Sebastien Buemi, Sam Bird and Antonio Felix da Costa. The New Zealander's 10 series wins put him fifth on the all-time list, behind Buemi and di Grassi (13), Bird (12) and Vergne (11).



GALLOWAY



ISHIHARA

Mortara challenges for lead at the start in front of sell-out crowd

## RESULTS FORMULA E ROUND 4/10, TOKYO (JPN), 30 MARCH (35 LAPS – 56.153 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM/CAR	TIME
1	<b>Maximilian Guenther</b> (DEU)	Maserati / Maserati Tipo Folgore	53m34.665s
2	<b>Oliver Rowland</b> (GBR)	Nissan / Nissan e-4ORCE 04	+0.755s
3	<b>Jake Dennis</b> (GBR)	Andretti / Porsche 99X Electric Gen3	+1.405s
4	<b>Antonio Felix da Costa</b> (PRT)	Porsche / Porsche 99X Electric Gen3	+1.822s
5	<b>Pascal Wehrlein</b> (DEU)	Porsche / Porsche 99X Electric Gen3	+3.897s
6	<b>Norman Nato</b> (FRA)	Andretti / Porsche 99X Electric Gen3	+4.573s
7	<b>Nico Muller</b> (CHE)	Abt / Mahindra M10Electro	+4.983s
8	<b>Nick Cassidy</b> (NZL)	Jaguar Racing / Jaguar I-Type 6	+5.542s
9	<b>Robin Frijns</b> (NLD)	Envision Racing / Jaguar I-Type 6	+5.929s
10	<b>Sergio Sette Camara</b> (BRA)	ERT / ERT X24	+6.504s
11	<b>Sacha Fenestraz</b> (FRA)	Nissan / Nissan e-4ORCE 04	+7.016s
12	<b>Jean-Eric Vergne</b> (FRA)	DS Penske / DSE-TENSE FE23	+7.583s
13	<b>Sebastien Buemi</b> (CHE)	Envision Racing / Jaguar I-Type 6	+8.467s
14	<b>Jake Hughes</b> (GBR)	McLaren / Nissan e-4ORCE 04	+8.859s
15	<b>Mitch Evans</b> (NZL)	Jaguar Racing / Jaguar I-Type 6	+9.316s
16	<b>Stoffel Vandoorne</b> (BEL)	DS Penske / DSE-TENSE FE23	+9.735s
17	<b>Jehan Daruvala</b> (IND)	Maserati / Maserati Tipo Folgore	+15.096s
18	<b>Dan Ticktum</b> (GBR)	ERT / ERT X24	+49.418s
19	<b>Sam Bird</b> (GBR)	McLaren / Nissan e-4ORCE 04	-1 lap
EX	<b>Edoardo Mortara</b> (CHE)	Mahindra Racing / Mahindra M10Electro	+4.354s/energy
R	<b>Lucas di Grassi</b> (BRA)	Abt / Mahindra M10Electro	17 laps-accident damage
R	<b>Nyck de Vries</b> (NLD)	Mahindra Racing / Mahindra M10Electro	17 laps-accident damage

**Winner's average speed** 62.884mph. **Fastest lap** Bird 1m19.731s, 72.440mph

**QUALIFYING** 1 Rowland 1m19.023s; 2 Guenther 1m19.044s; 3 Mortara 1m19.081s; 4 Sette Camara 1m21.244s; 5 Dennis 1m19.323s; 6 Wehrlein 1m19.560s; 7 Muller 1m19.756s; 8 da Costa 1m20.010s; 9 Evans 1m19.448s\*; 10 Frijns 1m19.822s; 11 Nato 1m20.056s; 12 de Vries 1m19.881s; 13 Vergne 1m19.883s; 14 di Grassi 1m20.269s; 15 Ticktum 1m19.952s; 16 Hughes 1m20.226s\*; 17 Daruvala 1m20.395s; 18 Vandoorne 1m20.027s; 19 Cassidy 1m20.401s; 20 Fenestraz 1m20.132s; 21 Buemi 1m20.678s\*; 22 Bird 1m20.660s\*. \* = grid penalty.

**DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 Wehrlein 63; 2 Cassidy 61; 3 Rowland 54; 4 Dennis 53; 5 Guenther 48; 6 Evans 39; 7 Vergne 39; 8 Bird 37; 9 Frijns 21; 10 Buemi 20.

**TEAMS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 Jaguar Racing 100; 2 Porsche 83; 3 Andretti 70; 4 Nissan 62; 5 DS Penske 57; 6 McLaren 55; 7 Maserati 48; 8 Envision Racing 41; 9 Abt 6; 10 ERT 3; 11 Mahindra Racing 0.

**MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 Jaguar 129; 2 Porsche 122; 3 Nissan 109; 4 Stellantis 97; 5 Mahindra 6; 6 ERT 3.

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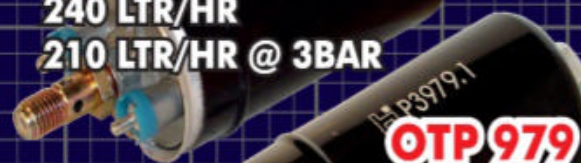
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**VALIDATION TESTING ENGINEER (TECHNOLOGY)**  
Alpine F1 Team

**Test Engineer – The Role**

Reporting to Senior engineer within Technology this role involves supporting the implementation of state-of-art testing labs working on a variety of rigs such as, but not limited to, linear dynos, multi-axial dynos, rotating dynos, 7P rig, gearbox dyno, brake dyno, BBW rig, K&C, gimbal rig, suspension durability rig, PAS rig, hydraulic rigs, vibration rigs, fuel rigs. You will also contribute to:

- The definition of "Build & Test" road map.
- Current rig upgrades investigation and specification for operational efficiency/continuous improvement with latest technology.
- Optimisation of current procedures and methodologies improving check lists, sign-off criteria, and data management.
- Involvement at early stages of test specification discussions to bridge the gap between existing capability and engineering requirements (technicians and designers).
- This role will involve working as an integrated "team" with Build & Test department setting up upskilling programs for all staff.

**Test Engineer – The Person**

We are looking for an experienced mechanical designer who has a proven track record in pit equipment design

The ideal candidate will possess:

- University Engineering MSc (Mechanical, Aerospace)
- Strong background on testing on motorsport / high-end automotive
- Good understanding of dyno control systems, sensors, actuators
- Experience supervising installation, acceptance test, maintenance, calibration, installation of old / new rigs
- Good programming skills (Matlab / Python) for data analysis

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**SENIOR SIMULATION AND PERFORMANCE ENGINEER**  
Dallara

**Duties/Responsibilities:**

- Working with multi-body modeling, performance analysis, offline and real time simulations.
- Supporting the management of internal and customer sessions at the driving simulator with the opportunity to become part of a dynamic, stimulating, and innovative reality.
- Work with race teams and fellow Dallara support to perform analysis studies using driver-in-loop (DiL) simulations
- Aid in development and refinement of vehicle modeling inputs

**Required Skills/Abilities:**

- In-depth knowledge of vehicle dynamics
- Experience with calculation software (Python, Matlab, Simulink or similar)
- Work experience with full scale vehicle testing
- Experience with control systems
- Work experience with Aerodynamic test (wind tunnel, CFD) preferred
- Knowledge of tire modeling
- Previous experience in data analysis software (Pi Toolbox, Atlas, Motec, etc).
- On-track race engineering experience in motorsports, a plus.
- Resourcefulness, professionalism, strong predilection for teamwork, open and optimistic character
- Effective communication skills and the ability to interact well with others

**Education and Experience:**

- Bachelor's degree in Mechanical, Automotive, Vehicle Engineering or related degree program
- Extensive coursework in Vehicle Dynamics
- Minimum of 3 years work experience in similar role

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**JUNIOR TRANSMISSIONS TECHNICIAN**  
M-Sport UK

**The Role**

As our company expands, we have an exciting opportunity for a keen and energetic Junior Transmissions Technician to kick start their career in motorsport and join our ever-growing team. The role will cover workload on a range of our projects and products.

The role responsibilities include:

- Working alongside our experienced technicians rebuilding top-specification transmissions units across all our projects.
- Servicing customer transmissions systems for a variety of high-performance competition vehicles.
- Building Transmissions units from technical drawings and following the build procedures.
- Responsible to keep all build documents filled and up to date.
- Assisting with fault diagnostics.

**Who We're Looking For**

We're looking for a self-motivated team player with a positive and enthusiastic attitude.

You should be educated to technician level and have a basic understanding of motor vehicles and their systems.

You should pride yourself on your attention to detail and be capable of delivering a high standard of performance and quality whilst working to strict deadlines in a time-sensitive environment. You should have excellent communication skills, and a keen eye for problem solving and implementing solutions with an analytical approach.

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**JUNIOR MECHANIC - 8 MONTH FTC**  
NEOM McLaren Electric Racing

The NEOM McLaren Extreme E Team entered Extreme E in 2022 with Tanner Foust and Emma Gilmour, McLaren Racing's first female driver in its 60-year history.

Extreme E is one of five racing series McLaren Racing competes in, including Formula E, Formula 1, IndyCar and esports.

This role forms part of the Racing for All Initiative which is open to those with less than one year's professional motorsport experience, to enable them to learn exactly what it takes to be part of a professional race team, providing a first step on the career ladder in a competitive industry. The successful candidate would be featured in public content to spread awareness of the initiative and work being done to reduce barriers and attract those who might not otherwise have this opportunity. Particularly those who are female, minority ethnic, or from a lower socio-economic background, are encouraged to apply.

**Purpose of the Role:**

You will work closely with the trackside team at the Extreme E races. As part of the car crew, you will be responsible for working on the Extreme E car, car sub-assemblies, individual car components and associated support equipment.

This role would be a minimum of three days a week with scope to be a full-time position. The main office for the role will be in Bicester, Oxfordshire and there will be a requirement to travel to race events with the team.

**Principle Accountabilities:**

- Build of the track infrastructure, packing and unpacking of the freight at each event
- Car and front-of-house presentation
- The build and service of all car components associated with the Extreme E Team

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**WEC RACE ENGINEER**  
Porsche Penske Motorsport

**Job Responsibilities:**

- Manage and execute assembly, disassembly, and maintenance of Porsche Penske Motorsport race cars in support of the above-mentioned series and a safe and efficient manner.
- Meeting specified deadlines for race car preparation while executing a high level of racecar preparation.
- Loading the race car on the transporters for safe and on-time transport of vehicle to each venue.
- Making the necessary adjustments to the car according to established procedures for each race and test event by collaborating with managers, chief mechanics, drivers, and engineers to meet design specifications and achieve desired results.
- Disassembling, cleaning, and non-destructive testing of race car components.
- Work in support of all mileage tracking and parts management programs. Supply build sheets and mileage sheets and input data into these programs.
- Maintaining accurate records of changes on all adjustable components of the car during post-race teardown, i.e., recording suspension lengths, pedal positions, tracking serial #'s, etc.

**Skills Required:**

- 4+ years' experience as race mechanic on Indycar, Sports Car or F1 series race cars.
- Demonstrate a complete understanding of set-up specifications for race cars and the appropriate safety mechanisms for each component.
- Ability to communicate to all team members.
- Meet professional level performance criteria to be a member of the pit crew.
- Be able to interpret and follow set-up designs for individual race and test events.

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**APPAREL BRAND DESIGNER**  
Red Bull Racing

**What You'll Be Doing:**

- Conceptualize, design, and develop apparel collections that reflect the Oracle Red Bull Racing brand identity, incorporating elements of speed, precision, and cutting-edge technology.
- Collaborate closely with the marketing, merchandising, and sponsorship teams to understand brand objectives and develop designs that align with overall brand strategies and campaigns.
- Create detailed design briefs, mood boards, and sketches to communicate concepts effectively, ensuring alignment with brand guidelines and design standards.
- Stay abreast of industry trends, market insights, and competitor activities to identify opportunities for innovation and differentiation within the apparel market.
- Work closely with suppliers, manufacturers, and production teams to ensure the successful execution of designs from concept to final product, including overseeing sample development and production processes.
- Participate in design presentations, meetings, and reviews, articulating design concepts and providing rationale for design decisions.

**We're Looking For:**

- Bachelor's degree in Fashion Design, Graphic Design, or a related field.
- Clear experience in apparel design, preferably within the sports or lifestyle sector.
- Proficiency in design software such as Adobe Creative Suite (Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign).
- A keen eye for detail and a passion for creativity with a knowledge of garment construction.
- Passion for motorsports and an understanding of the Formula 1 landscape is a plus.

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**NUMBER 1 MECHANIC**  
United Autosports

**The Role**

- We are looking for an enthusiastic and competent Number 1 Mechanic with previous high-level motorsport experience to work within our growing LMP2 / GT3 teams.
- The candidate will report to the Project / Team Manager.

**Roles & Responsibilities:**

- Upkeep, maintenance, setup and running of one of the company's fleet of LMP2 & GT3 race cars
- Assembly, service, and operation of the race cars at the workshop and events worldwide consistently to the highest standards
- Follow engineering and technical procedures during the rebuild and preparation of the car whilst respecting agreed deadlines
- Engage and efficiently lead a team of mechanics at race and test events promoting teamwork and effective communication
- Take an active role in the pit stop crew including identifying opportunities to improve pit stop routine or performance
- Component part numbering and component logging, to ensure accurate mileage records are kept
- Creation and upkeep of job lists and maintenance records whilst in the workshop and on-event
- Monitor and advise on spare stock levels for the project

**Essential requirements:**

- LMP2 / GT3 Experience as a No1 for a minimum of 2 years
- Knowledge and ability in all aspects of race car maintenance and repair, including composite and graphics repairs
- Knowledge and ability to use Lifecheck, Hh Timing and PI Toolbox
- Competent and confident computer skills
- Excellent record keeping abilities
- Sub assembly/ gearbox build knowledge and experience would be advantageous

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**JUNIOR COMMERCIAL CREATIVE**  
Williams Racing

**As a Junior Commercial Creative, you will:**

- Be integral in creating commercial proposal designs
- Support on ideation of Partnership activation
- Organise and execute Commercial design projects to meet team objectives, under the guidance of the Commercial Ideation manager
- Bring Visual concept to life and deliver high-standard work that sets the bar in the sports industry
- Contribute creative thinking and design ideation to the rest of the in-house team in collaboration with the other designers in the Creative Services team
- Support the development of design assets and visual content to ensure the needs of the Williams Racing Group are satisfied, and to continue to push the boundaries
- Produce, develop, and format presentation material for both internal and external lead proposals under the guidance of the Commercial Creative and Commercial Ideation Manager
- Seek and benefit from the experience and guidance of the other designers and Commercial / Partnership team members.
- Work collaboratively and maintain effective working relationships with key stakeholders.

**As a Junior Commercial Creative, you will have:**

- 2 year industry experience
- A degree in Graphic Design or similar vocation
- Strong communication and collaboration skills. Ability to cultivate highly effective working relationships at all levels with a wide range of group and disciplines
- Positively challenges the status quo to achieve a better outcome
- Works well under pressure, able to make good judgements and decisions

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All the Easter excitement from Monday's five events

# AUTOSPORT NATIONAL

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## Sharp cuts clear from his GB3 rivals

Reigning F4 champion grabs  
early advantage at Oulton



BRSCC reveals  
revamped **BMW** racer



O'Donovans on form  
at **Lydden** rallycross



Broadbent competes  
in very special **MX-5**



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YouTube star has previously  
driven his MX-5 in Time Attack



# Broadbent races 'insane' MX-5 in Classic Thunder

## CTCRC

One-time Praga Cup champion and YouTube star Jimmy Broadbent will dovetail a full season of competition in his wild Mazda MX-5 with GT racing in the Nurburgring-based NLS endurance series this year.

Broadbent, who took the 2022 Praga title alongside Gordie Mutch, gave his 700bhp MX-5 Mk1 its racing debut in the Classic Touring Car Racing Club's Classic Thunder series last weekend at Donington Park – the same venue where he first competed in a standard MX-5 three years ago.

"I bought this car in 2014 for £700, and it was my little runaround," said the 32-year-old, who drove the car last year in Time Attack, where contestants compete against the clock. "And since then, it's gone insane. It started off having a 'stock' engine, built to make 340bhp, which is still quite a lot on an MX-5 with a little bit of aero. Now we've

switched over to a 2.3-litre [Nissan] SR20, which makes just shy of 700bhp. And, with this aero as well, it's been pretty serious."

Mated to a six-speed sequential Quaife gearbox, the turbocharged engine was built by Dave Yandell, while Carbon Repair UK manufactured the car's vast diffuser that works in conjunction with the front splitter and flat floor.

"I've only driven it on a handful of occasions – it's quite a temperamental car," added Broadbent. "We spent a lot of the winter just trying to iron all those things out. We're putting horsepower into a chassis that was never meant to see more than maybe 200bhp at the most, and we had to really do a lot of work there."

"The plan was to just make it fast. Maybe an MX-5 isn't the right place to start but there's no other MX-5 like it. I want people to see this car and go, 'Do you remember that mint MX-5?' That's exactly what you want because racing should be spectacular. The only problem is coming out of tight corners, because you're trying to put down multiple hundred horsepower."

Broadbent qualified third in a 42-car field but suffered engine failure while running fourth in wet conditions.

Having raced a BMW 330i alongside fellow YouTubers Misha Charoudin and Steve Brown in NLS last year, Broadbent will graduate to a BMW M4 GT4 for the 2024 series, which begins this weekend.

MARK PAULSON



## NO BEC ROAR FOR GAMSKI...

Three-time Britcar Endurance champion Witt Gamski's intended return to the category was thwarted by a midweek testing accident for his Bentley Continental GT3. Gamski had been targeting a title challenge in the car shared with historic ace Michael Lyons. Bonamy Grimes's return to the series alongside Johnny Mowlem lasted a little longer, but they retired while running third when their Ferrari 458 Challenge suffered a left-front wheel failure.

## ...AS BEC ADJUSTS SCORING

To combat a lack of entries in four of its seven classes, the British Endurance Championship has introduced a handicapping system to combine them for points-scoring purposes. The handicap was based on qualifying times at Donington Park last weekend but now will use the previous round's fastest laps. The change should allow Peter Erceg's Class A Audi R8 GT3 to compete for overall championship honours, having been denied last year despite winning five of six races.

## TRUCK VSC IS INTRODUCED

Truck racing's 'virtual safety car', which is designed to help keep the action going in the event of non-critical incidents, was used for the first time at Brands Hatch last Sunday. Tom O'Rourke spun at Paddock but was able to reverse out of the gravel trap a lap later, while the rest continued under yellow flags at a reduced pace, waiting for the errant truck to join. A green-flag restart then took place, with extra laps added.

## LATEST MASARATI RACES

Luca Masarati, teenage son of 2005 British GT3 champion Piers, had his first races in Monday's opening Junior Saloons event at Brands Hatch. The 15-year-old impressed in testing and qualified seventh on a 22-car grid. Masarati Jr (below), the third generation of his family to race, converted a poor start to a fifth-place finish in the opener and was 10th in the second contest that was ended early amid treacherous conditions.





# BRSCC reveals heavily tweaked BMW racer

## BMW 1 SERIES SUPERCUP

The British Racing & Sports Car Club has revealed a completely redeveloped version of its BMW 1 Series Supercup car as eight of the machines took part in a demonstration day at Croft last week.

The club first revealed plans to launch a new category for F20 and F21 models of the 1 Series dating from 2011-15 ahead of the 2022 season, but felt the initial creation “didn’t quite hit the mark” and instead opted to concentrate on its new front-wheel-drive Audi TT Cup Racing series. Now interest has grown in that championship, attention has turned back to the 1 Series Supercup and many of the partners involved in creating the Audis have also had a role in the revamped BMW.

“Other than the chassis, it’s a completely different car,” explained BRSCC chief operating officer Paul McErlean. “We did some development work over the past six months, some reliability testing and tyre testing – and are all happy. We all stood back looking at them and there’s something really special there. Everyone can look at it and remember [Colin] Turkington racing that chassis [in the British Touring Car Championship].”



Eight cars took to the track at Croft last week

JAMES ROBERTS

McErlean felt the original version of the car was too sophisticated, as many bespoke parts were developed for it. “With sophistication, comes cost,” he said. “We’re trying to make sure the car retains reliability, getting that cost as low as possible – and we’re making sure it’s good fun to drive. It’s the same package as the Audi TT with a different chassis. It’s the same spec-level of components, the same suspension and brake kits.”

McErlean said it is important for the club to have a new rear-wheel-drive

offering alongside the front-wheel-drive TTs, adding: “This is what people have been waiting for.”

The cars will initially compete as a class within the Evolution Trophy series – which begins at Snetterton this weekend – and will continue to be tweaked during the course of the season. But McErlean is optimistic of attracting a strong standalone grid for next year. “Ten cars have appeared in as many weeks and we’ve got a lot of interest in it,” he said.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

# British GT figures like FCY, dislike interruptions

## BRITISH GT

British GT paddock figures welcomed the adoption of the full-course yellow procedure into the championship at Oulton Park, but lamented the regular interruptions in the season-opening round.

Both hour-long races featured lengthy FCY interventions, one of which filled the final 25 minutes of the second contest. Views on the procedure were broadly positive as organiser SRO moves to align British GT with other categories in its portfolio, including

GT World Challenge Europe. The entire field was allowed to complete their pitstops under FCY in the opener when a car needed rescuing just prior to the pit window.

Barwell commercial director Chris Needell said: “It’s absolutely the right thing to do. We showed in that race immediately that it allowed it to be a fair race and safe.”

Garage 59 boss Andrew Kirkaldy agreed: “It’s the right thing to do for the series, bringing it in line with European racing. The only issue we’ve got at the minute is people getting



Green-flag racing was limited at Oulton Park

used to it. There’s always going to be a bit of teething trouble, but generally it was implemented OK.”

However, there was disappointment at managing just 23 minutes of green-flag running in race two. Two-time champion Andrew Howard said it was a consequence of the “worst possible conditions”, with

rain in race one and a drying track in the sequel that only just reached a threshold for slicks being viable.

“Days like today are just tough – I think it is the nature of the track and the conditions,” reflected Howard, who set fastest lap in the brief window of dry running.

JAMES NEWBOLD



Wilson raced freshly restored Cooper Mk2



## Works Cooper returns to race in the UK for first time in 75 years

### 500cc F3

A newly restored works Cooper Mk2 from 1948 that returned to race in the UK for the first time in 75 years was a highlight of Monday's 500 Owners Association Formula 3 field at Castle Combe.

First of a run of eight, the factory car was debuted by John Cooper at the Luton Hoo Speed Trials on Easter Monday 1948, winning the 500cc class. He shared it with Sir Francis Samuelson, who had a sister car on order.

Cooper competed in further speed events that season and finished second in the first 500 race at Silverstone, in support of the British Grand Prix in October. The car was sold to Bill and John Lee of Belfast

in 1949 for hillclimbing and emigrated with them to New Zealand.

Hec McLean was first of a long line of subsequent Kiwi owners who added to its story, before Jim Baird rescued it from a scrapyard. Acquired in 2015 by Kenny Smith, the Cooper was repatriated in poor condition by aero engineer Chris Wilson in 2019.

Wilson's son James took on the restoration, around a JAP engine. It arrived, barely run, at Combe where inevitable teething problems, including a split oil tank, were overcome. James finished 12th in race two, won by brother Alex (Cooper-Norton Mk10) with Chris (Martin-Norton) fourth.

MARCUS PYE

### BROMLEY EYES CIVIC CUP...

After narrowly missing out on the 2022 MG Trophy title, Josh Bromley will return to front-wheel drive in this year's Civic Cup following a part-season in the Mazda MX-5 Supercup. He will drive the car successfully raced last year by Jack Harding, now prepared by AMW Motorsport's Adrian Wray. "My aim is to be a consistent top-10 finisher but I would like to at least get on the podium a couple of times," said Bromley.

### ...AS PETTERS ALSO JOINS

Junior Saloons race winner Jamie Petters, who spent his first season of senior racing in the Mini Challenge's JCW class last year, is another driver due to contest the 2024 Civic Cup. Petters is recovering from a back operation so his family-run ex-Alistair Camp EP3 was shaken down at the series' media day at Snetterton last week by older brother Daniel, who could remain in the seat for next weekend's Brands Hatch opener.

### KIVLOCHAN IS HSCC CHAIR

Four-time Historic Road Sports champion Kevin Kivlochan has been elected as the new chairperson of the Historic Sports Car Club, succeeding Roger Bevan. In recent years, Kivlochan has regularly raced a Morgan +8 and Shelby Cobra with the club. "His commitment to preserving the heritage and spirit of racing historic sportscars is admirable, and we are confident that, under his guidance, the club will continue to thrive and grow," read an HSCC statement.

### TOPHAM'S TOUGH TIME

Matt Topham had a troubled return to British GT at Oulton Park over Easter with two heavy crashes (below) and a penalty blighting his event. His Blackthorn Aston Martin was damaged in a smash at Shell Oils in first practice, which ruled him and Josh Rowledge out of qualifying. Topham struck a mechanic from the JMH Orange McLaren team in the opener, earning a 40-second penalty and two behaviour warning points, then crashed heavily out of race two at Old Hall.



## Champion Zelos opts for fresh Mini bid

### MINI CHALLENGE

Mini Challenge champion Dan Zelos will attempt to defend his title this season as he continues in the series with the Excelr8 Motorsport squad.

Zelos, who was also the Mini master in 2021, was dominant last year and won half of the races, and only missed out on pole once. It was all the more impressive after a tricky 2022 campaign, during which he only scored three podiums.

After being unable to make

a British Touring Car move for this year, Zelos has opted to try to secure more Mini success.

"It's no secret we had been targeting a step up to the BTCC, but due to a variety of factors – from budget to some personal reasons – it didn't fall into place," he said. "The BTCC is still very much my long-term goal, but it would need to be a proper commitment with the right team and package.

"In the meantime, I want to ensure I'm racing in a competitive championship

that gives me the best possible chance of putting myself in the shop window – and there is nowhere better to achieve that than in the Mini Challenge. I still feel on a high from last year, and I want to carry that form with me into Donington Park [the season opener]."

Meanwhile, inaugural Mini Challenge Scholarship winner Albert Webster will tackle the new JCW Sport class with JRW Motorsport, the team with which he won the Fiesta ST240 title last year.



# Radical aces Micouris and Chance to Ligier

## LIGIER EUROPEAN SERIES

Radical Cup UK champion Theo Micouris is progressing to the Ligier European Series this season, in which he will share a Team Virage-run JSP4 with fellow Radical star Haydn Chance.

Micouris impressively claimed the SR1 Cup and overall Radical titles last year in his first car racing campaign. He also sampled GB4 but, with an eye on progressing up the prototype ranks, feels that the Ligier series – which is run by Le Mans organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest and supports the European Le Mans Series – is a good way to experience the European circuits.

“The championship ticks all the boxes and it’s a great step up from Radicals and hopefully into LMP3, LMP2 and maybe Hypercar in the future,” explained Micouris, who has so far spent two days testing the JSP4. “The car itself is a lot of fun to drive



and it has a lot of front-end grip, so it suits my driving style as I like to have a pointy car. I loved it – I can’t wait to get going.

“It’s got a closed cockpit, whereas the Radical is open – the only difference is the heat and it’s going to get really hot.”

Micouris is targeting another championship challenge and is looking forward to working with Chance, who topped the SR3 class at last year’s Radical

World Cup event at Portimao. “I’ve known Haydn since we were in karting and we will work together as a team,” added Micouris. “From what I’ve seen so far, we look very quick. It’s not going to be easy, but I think we’re looking strong.”

Virage has a track record of success in the series – it has powered drivers to the JSP4 class title for the past two seasons.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**

# Igoe’s sixth sense lands him another rally victory



## CIRCUIT RALLYING

With the Circuit Rally title already sealed, Michael Igoe and Will Atkins made it six wins in a row with a dominant victory on the Alan Healy Memorial Rally at Cadwell Park on Sunday.

Igoe’s Citroen C3 Rally2 was 11 seconds down on the Paul Murro/Craig Simkiss Ford Fiesta R5 after the opening stage,

after getting held up. Tony Robinson/Paul Spooner (Skoda Fabia R5) were a further 10s down, despite contact with a barrier.

Over the next two stages, Igoe closed the gap to Murro to 4s, but Robinson was down to fourth behind Alasdair Stables/Neil Jones (Vauxhall Chevette HSR) after stalling at a hairpin. Murro had been delayed too and, once Igoe had

the scent of top spot, his recovery drive soon turned the deficit into a 4s lead.

Igoe’s margin more than doubled on stage five, and any hope Murro had of fighting back was lost when he had an engine bay fire at the start of the next test. Igoe therefore eventually headed home Robinson by over two and a half minutes.

**PETER SCHERER**

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# Winning with kids

*New British GT squad Forsetti Motorsport impressively won on its debut thanks to its teenage driver pairing, but instant success shouldn't be a surprise*

ED HARDY

**I**n the Oulton Park media centre, a colleague gave a hysterical laugh when hearing of the GT4 winners from British GT's opening round. It was the sudden realisation that he is older than both drivers' ages combined – and my colleague isn't exactly 'old'.

On a wet track, an unfazed Jamie Day, 18, and Mikey Porter, 16, comfortably won from pole to give Forsetti Motorsport a victory on its series debut. While many of their older rivals in more established teams spun off a tight and slippery circuit, the Forsetti boys kept it within the white lines to show extreme maturity.

"They're mega," says Forsetti's driver coach Matt George. "Obviously super young, but we've done a lot of days on track. They're like two little sponges: they take in all the information, digest it and pull it out of the bag when they need to."

A lot of that maturity stems from their team, a Snetterton-based outfit that showed fearlessness in placing two teenagers in the same car. Forsetti is a new organisation, one born last November, yet on British GT's opening weekend it generally operated like a well-oiled machine, with a victory in race one and double podium in the second hour-long contest.

"The framework for the team to succeed is there," says technical director Joe Holloway. "The cars are quick, the drivers are very strong, the results will come. But we're focused on a framework for the whole championship – not just a win here and there."

**"We're focused on a framework for the whole championship – not just a win here and there"**

The big ones are the three-hour races and they are what we need to execute correctly. We've targeted a very ambitious first year."

It seems like Forsetti has every chance to achieve what it hopes to with British GT – which "is the title", as George puts it. But that should come as no surprise. From the offset, Forsetti has operated like a frontrunning outfit with a clear vision of how a team should be built. Holloway first became technical director following time as a Formula 1 mechanic, George – the holder of five GT4 lap records – was appointed driver coach after being "sold a dream", while William Daniels, who has previously worked for series giant Barwell Motorsport, was appointed as its race engineer.

Forsetti was intent on hiring personnel who had the know-how of what it takes to compete at the front, which was evident at Oulton. A slightly mistimed pitstop that caused a 1-4 finish in

the opener and not a 1-2 aside, Forsetti remained level-headed like leading was the norm, as though it expected to win, despite it only being race one.

But why shouldn't Forsetti have expected it? Despite his age, Day is already a British GT4 winner, George has contested the series before, while Holloway previously spent time on McLaren's GT programme – so it's not quite their first rodeo.

Holloway is the leader and he impressed this writer with his thoughtful approach, which has given him the ability to read certain situations. That mindset was clear last year when it came to choosing a car for the squad's inaugural attack. Lotus was considered, as was McLaren, but Forsetti eventually became an official Aston Martin partner team with its Vantage GT4 Evo because it believed that would be the more competitive car. At Oulton, it certainly was.

What helped was the experience team personnel have with the Vantage – George drove an older version in 2016, likewise with Day in 2022. The only exceptions were Ginetta Junior podium finisher Porter, plus the second pairing of Mini graduate William Orton and Porsche Cayman ace Marc Warren, but the others have been able to pass on their expertise.

"I've been racing for 10 years," says George. "Nearly all of those years have been in Astons, so I think they're great. The new Evo has turned out to be a great product. We're still finding our feet with it, but we've got a lot of very clever individuals so we're working stuff out and putting our testing into practice."

Forsetti arrived at Oulton already knowing how to win races, though. In preparation for British GT, Day and Porter contested a highly successful GT4 Winter Series campaign, scoring victories at Estoril, Algarve Circuit, Jerez, Valencia and Motorland Aragon.

So, a winning partnership had already developed at a team that has chucked everything towards its project. This is why Forsetti is no flash in the pan. The team has a clear plan for its long-term development.

"We're always reflective of how we're getting on and where we're going," adds Holloway. "It is a short timeframe but, ultimately, the plan from the blank piece of paper of what we wanted to develop has played out exactly how we wanted and there's more to come."

"Now, the key thing is to be established in British GT. We're aligning good sponsors and that helps because it means everyone is on board with the vision."

Where could Forsetti finish this year? Perhaps it continues this fine trajectory and challenges at the front or maybe numerous wins in a debut year is too much to ask for. Whatever happens, Forsetti has proved that teams can in fact win with kids. 🏆

➡ P60 BRITISH GT REPORT



# Brilliant brace for Barwell sets British GT scene

**OULTON PARK**  
**BRITISH GT**  
**30 MARCH & 1 APRIL**

Barwell Motorsport enjoyed a bank holiday Monday to remember as its Lamborghini Huracan EVO2s shared victories in the British GT championship curtain-raiser at Oulton Park. Both hour-long races were won from pole in anti-climactic affairs blighted by lengthy full-course yellow periods, as the procedure was adopted for the first time in British GT (see News).

Father-and-son pair Rob and Ricky Collard were never headed in the wet opener, before it was the turn of Alex Martin and Sandy Mitchell to prevail on a greasy track in race two. Martin crucially repassed Mark Radcliffe on their out-laps by getting a better exit from Cascades, after the Optimum McLaren emerged from the pits ahead, before the race was neutralised on the following tour and never returned to green in the final 25 minutes. “You probably have to make 50 key



Safety car glitch  
 left Collard blameless



Mitchell and Martin took  
 race two win to complete  
 perfect weekend for Barwell

decisions on weekends like this, and we got a lot more right than wrong,” remarked elated Barwell boss Mark Lemmer.

Rob Collard controlled race one’s first stint, tracked by Ian Loggie’s 2 Seas Mercedes and Martin, before separate incidents involving GT4 cars at Shell Oils led to a lengthy interruption across the pit window. When racing resumed, Collard Jr took advantage of three GT4 cars splitting him from the pursuing Phil Keen (in for Loggie) to bolt into a 5.7-second lead.

What looked set to be a straightforward win was soon in doubt when a 30s penalty was announced. It was decreed Ricky Collard had dropped more than five car lengths behind the safety car, but this was rescinded as its lights had turned off exiting Cascades – making Collard the pacesetter – before switching back on. This was blamed on a loose connection in the wiring system and duly fixed for race two.

An apology was issued by the organisers to both Barwell and 2 Seas, but it was little consolation for a disappointed Keen, who had closed to within two seconds before being informed he was set to inherit the win. “I pushed on to get away from Sandy, but I didn’t want to catch [Collard] because I didn’t want to tangle with him and then Sandy catch us,” he grimaced. “Whether I could have overtaken him, that’s a whole different story, but I definitely could have got onto the back of him.”

In a race that featured little overtaking, Radcliffe and Tom Gamble were boosted to fourth when Shaun Balfe/Adam Smalley’s Garage 59 McLaren (which pitted one lap later) was delayed behind a GT4 car not running at 80km/h (50mph). Defending champion Dan Harper also dropped from sixth to ninth when the Century Motorsport BMW he shared with Michael Johnston slid wide at Druids and glanced the barriers.

## MORRIS DANCING AFTER GT4 TRIUMPH

Forsetti Motorsport made a dream British GT debut with victory in the first race at Oulton Park, but it was Team Parker Racing that came away from Cheshire with the points lead.

Series returnee Jamie Day and Mikey Porter produced a dominant performance to claim the opener in their Aston Martin Vantage, and a repeat appeared possible when Porter charged from eighth to lead race two. Their 10-second success penalty on top of the mandatory 14s for Silver crews relative to Pro-Am entrants meant Day rejoined third, but he never got the chance to chase after the pair of amateur drivers he’d fallen behind due to the full-course yellow that ended the contest. That left Parker

Mercedes duo Seb Morris and Charles Dawson to celebrate victory after taking second in race one.

“We were probably pretty lucky there with a long full-course yellow and there were some very quick Silvers behind us,” admitted Dawson. “We came to this championship with no expectations, we’ll just take it race by race, corner by corner.”

Day had set pole by 0.8s for the first race and romped away impressively from the squabbling Optimum McLaren of Jack Brown and his Forsetti team-mate Marc Warren. Dawson dropped from fourth to sixth, but remained in touch prior to the lengthy mid-race caution triggered when Will Moore’s Mustang became beached at Shell Oils, then elongated when Kavi Jundu crashed the

Speedworks Toyota under yellows. A longer stop for Optimum meant Zac Meakin rejoined fourth, behind Pro-Am runners Will Orton (in for Warren) and Morris, but he regained third when Orton was handed a one-second stop/go for a short pitstop.

Fortunately for Orton, the safety car that followed the full-course yellow split the top four from the rest of the pack, ultimately headed by Charlie Robertson’s Century BMW, limiting the damage. “I could see the people I was battling about a corner ahead, thinking, ‘I know we have a good car in the wet,’” lamented Robertson. “I had a clear track at the end to show the pace, but couldn’t do anything with it.”

His frustration was intensified at the start of





ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: JEP

Mitchell had been “right on the edge everywhere” to get pole for race two, and repelled Gamble at the start before a GT4 pile-up at the first corner resulted in a five-lap safety car period. Thereafter, the Scot impressively opened up a 7s gap on the wet-but-drying surface, which should have been enough to negate a 5s success penalty in the pits.

But Martin revealed “we had a bit of a problem with the belts” on his lap 15 stop that allowed Radcliffe ahead, with both now on slicks. “I was pretty revved up,” Martin recalled. He pounced on Radcliffe when the McLaren momentarily hesitated at the apex of Cascades and moved decisively ahead into Island, catching a wiggle as he did so. “Somehow, he kept it together, so I was like, ‘Well, rather you than me,’” reflected Radcliffe. “I’ve got to be fair to Alex and say that that was earned.”

Radcliffe never had a chance to fight



back at Martin as an accident at Turn 1 for Matt Topham’s Blackthorn Aston Martin froze the order. Hopes of resuming hostilities proved fruitless as Morgan Tillbrook’s overheating Garage 59 McLaren ground to a halt on the exit of Shell Oils.

Keen and Loggie ran third throughout, the latter coming under stern pressure from double Silver-Am class winner Balfe before the inflicted pause, while Rob Collard quickly passed Mike Price for fifth after losing two spots in the pits to his own 10s longer hold. Greystone Mercedes driver Price then came under pressure from series returnee Chris Buncombe (RJN McLaren), who capped his first race outing at Oulton since 2001 in Formula Renault by diving to the inside at Old Hall and seizing sixth alongside his brother Alex. As Price ran wide and lost momentum, RAM pair Raffaele Marciello and John Ferguson were elevated to seventh in the best result of a quiet weekend for BMW’s contingent, with Harper and Johnston languishing in 13th.

Martin and Mitchell now have a narrow lead in the standings over their teammates, setting the stage for a fascinating intra-Barwell tussle that Martin is confident will be fought on friendly terms. “The racing will stay on the track,” he said, “and we’ll all be pals off the track.”

**JAMES NEWBOLD**

## RACE RESULTS

### GT3

**Race 1 (27 laps) 1 Rob Collard/Ricky Collard (Lamborghini Huracan EVO2);** 2 Ian Loggie/Phil Keen (Mercedes-AMG Evo) +1.470s; 3 Alex Martin/Sandy Mitchell (Lamborghini); 4 Mark Radcliffe/Tom Gamble (McLaren 720S Evo); 5 Shaun Balfe/Adam Smalley (McLaren); 6 Mike Price/Callum Macleod (Mercedes).

**Fastest lap** Gamble 1m43.215s (93.89mph).

**Pole** Rob Collard. **Starters** 19.

**Race 2 (25 laps) 1 Martin/Mitchell;** 2 Radcliffe/Gamble +1.060s; 3 Loggie/Keen; 4 Balfe/Smalley; 5 Collard/Collard; 6 Chris Buncombe/Alex Buncombe (McLaren). **FL** Andrew Howard (Aston Martin Vantage Evo) 1m41.006s (95.94mph). **P** Mitchell. **S** 19.

**Points 1 Martin/Mitchell 40;** 2 Collard/Collard 35; 3 Loggie/Keen 33; 4 Radcliffe/Gamble 30; 5 Balfe/Smalley 22; 6 Buncombe/Buncombe 12.

### GT4

**Race 1 (27 laps) 1 Jamie Day/Mikey Porter (Aston Martin Vantage Evo);** 2 Charles Dawson/Seb Morris (Mercedes-AMG) +6.292s; 3 Jack Brown/Zac Meakin (McLaren Artura); 4 Marc Warren/Will Orton (Aston Martin); 5 Ravi Ramyeed/Charlie Robertson (BMW M4); 6 Erik Evans/Marco Signoretti (Ford Mustang). **FL** Robertson 1m51.182s (87.16mph). **P** Day. **S** 16.

**Race 2 (24 laps) 1 Dawson/Morris;** 2 Warren/Orton +2.000s; 3 Day/Porter; 4 Brown/Meakin; 5 Harry George/Luca Hopkinson (Mercedes); 6 Evans/Signoretti. **FL** Evans 1m47.259s (90.35mph). **P** Morris. **S** 16.

**Points 1 Dawson/Morris 43;** 2 Day/Porter 40; 3 Warren/Orton 30; 4 Brown/Meakin 27; 5 Evans/Signoretti 16; 6 George/Hopkinson 14.



For full results visit: [tsl-timing.com](https://tsl-timing.com)

race two. Contact on the exit of Old Hall from Tom Holland’s Ginetta sent Robertson spinning wildly in front of the pack and Jordan Albert (Audi) couldn’t avoid the BMW. Sai Sanjay (McLaren) and Matt Nicoll-Jones (Ford) were eliminated, too.

Porter took advantage of the melee to move into fifth, claimed fourth when Dan Vaughan’s Toyota was halted by a broken toe-link caused in the first-corner chaos, then pulled moves on Holland, Meakin and finally poleman Morris to take the lead. Orton followed in his wheeltracks up to third. “It was a really good fight,” grinned Porter. But Morris, the 2017 GT3 champion with Parker, kept him in sight before Dawson resumed ahead.

**JAMES NEWBOLD**



Morris and Dawson flanked by Forsetti after race two spoils





Reigning British F4 champion Sharp led the way on his GB3 debut at Oulton Park

# Sharp start from Rodin driver as he grabs the early GB3 initiative

**OULTON PARK**  
**GB3**  
**30 MARCH & 1 APRIL**

Reigning British Formula 4 conqueror Louis Sharp grabbed the early ascendancy in the GB3 Championship by taking a win on his debut at the opening round at Oulton Park.

The Rodin Motorsport driver stormed to a double pole in qualifying and converted the first of those into a maiden victory. His only challenge came after the start into Old Hall, with John Bennett trying a move around the outside before conceding at Cascades.

A collision at the rear of the field between Aditya Kulkarni and James Hedley necessitated an early safety car period, following which Sharp immediately pulled away and then edged further clear to finish 1.4 seconds ahead of Bennett.

"I really couldn't have asked for a better start," said Sharp. "Double pole was a big achievement, a big relief that all the hard work during the winter has paid off. I knew the pace was there, but wasn't expecting to be on pole by three

tenths. The first win of the season is always the hardest one to get, so to get that out of the way gives us that momentum for the rest of the year."

Further back, Gerrard Xie moved ahead of Ugo Ugochukwu for third on lap one but ran wide at Cascades, allowing the McLaren junior to reclaim the place and eventually finish on the podium, while McKenzie Cresswell and Tymek Kucharczyk came home close behind Xie in fifth and sixth. Arthur Rogeon was seventh ahead of GB4 graduate Colin Queen, who made a double overtake at the first corner to finish eighth on debut.

Wet conditions resulted in race two starting behind the safety car, with Sharp leading from Bennett once it was withdrawn, and Kucharczyk charged past Cresswell, Ugochukwu and Xie in the space of a few corners into third.

The safety car reappeared after Rishab Jain went off at Old Hall and, following the restart, Bennett made the better exit from Cascades before sweeping around Sharp at Island bend. From there, the JHR Developments driver pulled clear for a maiden victory by almost 3s.

"It's been a long time coming," said Bennett. "I've had one podium in each of the last two seasons, so to come away from the first two main races with a second and a win is amazing. I've always felt comfortable in the rain."

Kucharczyk retired after losing his front wing in a collision with Sharp, who held on for second, while Cresswell (Elite) climbed to third ahead of Ugochukwu (Rodin) and Xie (Hitech).

The final, partially reversed-grid

race, produced the most drama. Rodin's Rogeon made a quick getaway from fourth to gain an early 2s lead over Patrick Heuzenroeder, and he further extended his advantage to 5s while Hitech's Will Macintyre passed Jarrod Waberski for third. Macintyre then gained another place when Heuzenroeder stopped with an issue, bringing out the safety car.

Rogeon looked set for his first win after edging clear once more at the restart, but he dramatically slowed with a suspected gearbox problem a few corners from home, handing Macintyre his first win ahead of Waberski. Ugochukwu took his second podium of the weekend in third, with Kucharczyk fourth. Rogeon limped home sixth, one place behind Sharp, who gained the points lead by climbing from 12th to fifth while closest rival Bennett finished down in 14th.

**STEVE WHITFIELD**

## RACE RESULTS

### GB3

**Race 1 (11 laps) 1 Louis Sharp;** 2 John Bennett +1.433s; 3 Ugo Ugochukwu; 4 Gerrard Xie; 5 McKenzie Cresswell; 6 Tymek Kucharczyk.

**Fastest lap** Bennett 1m30.514s (107.06mph). **Pole** Sharp. **Starters** 21.

**Race 2 (10 laps) 1 Bennett;** 2 Sharp +2.898s; 3 Cresswell; 4 Ugochukwu; 5 Xie; 6 Will Macintyre. **FL** Bennett 1m46.490s (91.00mph). **P** Sharp. **S** 21.

**Race 3 (12 laps) 1 Macintyre;** 2 Jarrod Waberski +4.082s; 3 Ugochukwu; 4 Kucharczyk; 5 Sharp; 6 Arthur Rogeon. **FL** Macintyre 1m44.352s (92.87mph).

**P** Patrick Heuzenroeder. **S** 21.

**Points 1 Sharp 82;** 2 Ugochukwu 67; 3 Bennett 66; 4 Macintyre 53; 5 Cresswell 51; 6 Xie 46.

**For full results visit:** [tsl-timing.com](https://www.tsl-timing.com)

Bennett splashes towards maiden series win in race two



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: JEP



# Three different winners as GB4 season begins

**OULTON PARK**  
**MSVR**  
**30 MARCH & 1 APRIL**

Alisha Palmowski, Brandon McCaughan and Linus Granfors scored a win apiece as the new GB4 Championship season got under way at Oulton Park.

McCaughan edged Palmowski to pole for races one and two, but it was the latter who made the better start to lead the opening contest while McCaughan slipped to fourth. Palmowski built a 3.5-second lead while her Elite Motorsport team-mate Finn Harrison tussled with Harry Burgoyne behind, with Harrison eventually retiring with car damage after being squeezed wide at Cascades.

After reeling off a series of consistent laps, Palmowski cruised to maiden car racing victory on her single-seater debut ahead of KMR Sport duo Burgoyne and McCaughan.

"I've not had a win for a long time so it's a great confidence boost," said the Ginetta Junior graduate. "I was quite nervous about the start, so to get off the line well was perfect. [From there] I tried to remain focused and deliver those lap times."

McCaughan made pole count in the sequel to take a lights-to-flag win in wet conditions ahead of Burgoyne and Branden Templeton, while Palmowski stalled at the start and was classified fifth. Harrison capitalised on a mistake from Burgoyne to snatch second, but then touched a painted line approaching Druids and crashed into the barriers, bringing the race to an early end.

KMR's Chloe Grant pounced on an error from Dan Hickey to lead the reversed-grid finale and built a two-second gap over Mayer Deonarine, who had damaged his front wing while battling Hickey. Burgoyne



Palmowski was first of the new GB4 victors

soon passed Deonarine for second, but Palmowski was collected by the Graham Brunton Racing driver while alongside at Cascades, putting both cars out.

Having been tapped around on the first lap, Granfors recovered to pass Burgoyne before hunting down Grant and snatching victory on the final lap. McCaughan, meanwhile, spun out early on.

Ethan Jeff-Hall withstood race-long pressure from Charlie Hart to win the opening Ginetta Junior encounter. The R Racing driver ran wide several times at Shell Oils hairpin and faced a final-corner challenge but was able to remain ahead throughout. Hart, in turn, had to resist several attacks from Chase Fernandez, who eventually lost out to Isaac Phelps and then slipped to fifth after going off the road.

Henry Joslyn outbraked Jeff-Hall and Fernandez into Druids to lead race two, but then slid off in greasy conditions. Jeff-Hall spun after colliding with Phelps, who moved into the lead and held off Hart and Fernandez to take a maiden victory from eighth on the grid.

"I had an amazing start and was up to fourth, and then picked them off one by

one," said Phelps, who went on to win again ahead of Hart and Fernandez in a heavily disrupted final contest.

Scott McKenna passed McKenzie Douglass in the opening Ginetta GT bout before a track-limits penalty cost him victory to his rival, but McKenna made amends by taking two lights-to-flag triumphs thereafter. Elsewhere, James Nicholas, Mike Taylor and Harry Gamble shared the spoils across the Ginetta GT Academy races.

**STEVE WHITFIELD**

## RACE WINNERS

### GB4

**Race 1** Alisha Palmowski

**Race 2** Brandon McCaughan

**Race 3** Linus Granfors

### GINETTA JUNIOR

**Race 1** Ethan Jeff-Hall

**Races 2 & 3** Isaac Phelps

### GINETTA GT

**Race 1** McKenzie Douglass (G56)

**Races 2 & 3** Scott McKenna (G56, below)

### GINETTA GT ACADEMY

**Race 1** James Nicholas

**Race 2** Mike Taylor

**Race 3** Harry Gamble



For full results visit: [tsl-timing.com](http://tsl-timing.com)



Phelps narrowly defeats his Ginetta Junior team-mate Hart



# Bell fails to ring on a double Pre-'66 Mini win

**DONINGTON PARK  
BARC  
29-30 MARCH**

Saturday's Pre-'66 Touring Car thrash was the highlight of a busy British Automobile Racing Club meeting at Donington Park. At least half a dozen cars could have won – and one actually did – before Peter Smith was handed the laurels.

Joe Ferguson claimed an unusually dominant win in Friday's opener in the self-prepared Mini he shares with Tom Bell. But the change of driver meant Bell had to start race two from the rear of the 30-car grid. As Bell charged through, reaching eighth within a lap, Alan Greenhalgh powered his Ford Falcon ahead from pole position, harried by Barry Sime (Mini) and the interloping Lotus Cortinas of Ian Thompson and slow-starting Smith in a little-versus-large contest.

As Greenhalgh faded, a safety car set up a two-lap dash and new leader Thompson was swamped. Sime led until McLeans, where Bell hit the front and appeared to complete an unlikely double for the car. But restart-infringement penalties for Bell and Cortina-mounted Garry Townsend, and Thompson's censure for contact with Sime in the last-lap scramble, left Smith victorious from Bell, Sime and Thompson.

Last man standing Alex Morgan (BTC-T Vauxhall Astra Sport Hatch) won the Super Tourers' season-opener. Mechanical issues had already depleted the field, before Richard Wheeler's Nissan Primera twitched through the damp Craner Curves and collected Paul Whight's Honda Accord.



First time out in Wheeler's Honda Integra, Danny Harrison was in command before a couple of lock-ups presaged total brake failure at the Melbourne Hairpin and a heavy trip into the tyre barrier. Morgan's driveshaft issue on Saturday meant Pre-'93 dominator Stuart Waite won overall in his BMW, while Stephen Primett (Ford Escort Mk1) withstood Jonathan Corker's (Datsun) challenge for a Pre-'83 double.

Veteran racer Kevin Clarke (BMW M3 CSL) lost out to customer Bryan Bransom's outside pass at the Old Hairpin just before a race-ending safety car was called in Friday's wet Classic Thunder bout. As the V8 machinery struggled to transmit their power, James Card completed a BMW 1-2-3 ahead of Josh Lawton's raucous Honda Civic. A day later, both Bransom and Lawton suffered overheating after grassy excursions to avoid Andy Wilson's spinning Holden Monaro. Clarke took a comfortable

win from reigning champion Nick Vaughan (Audi A3) and Card. Twice fifth overall, Simon Light's Ford Capri V8 scooped double Historic Thunder success.

Three-time champion Piers Grange swept to a Blue Oval Saloon Series double. Malcolm Harding's similar Smith & Jones-powered Ford Escort Mk2 worked Grange hard in the opener but later succumbed to electrical gremlins. Gary Prebble (Honda Civic EG) was untroubled in the concurrent Pre-'03 Touring Car clashes.

Late entry Endaf Owens topped a very entertaining first Mini Miglia race, holding on to edge Ben Colburn, Aaron Smith and Jeff Smith, whose challenge weakened in the closing stages. Fuel-pump failure restricted Owens to a few laps from a pitlane start in the sequel, while Aaron Smith was tipped across namesake Jeff's bows exiting McLeans. Benefiting from set-up tweaks, Jeff Smith sealed victory





## RACE WINNERS

## PRE-'66 TOURING CARS

**Race 1** Joe Ferguson (Morris Mini Cooper S)

**Race 2** Peter Smith (Lotus Cortina)

## SUPER TOURERS/PRE-'93 &amp; PRE-'83 TOURING CARS

**Race 1** Alex Morgan (Vauxhall Astra Sport Hatch)

**Race 2** Stuart Waite (BMW M3 E36)

## CLASSIC &amp; HISTORIC THUNDER

**Race 1** Bryan Bransom (BMW M3 E46)

**Race 2** Kevin Clarke (BMW M3 CSL)

## BOSS/PRE-'03 TOURING CARS

**Races 1 & 2** Piers Grange (Ford Escort Mk2)

## MINI MIGLIA

**Race 1** Endaf Owens

**Race 2** Jeff Smith

## MINI SE7EN

**Races 1 & 2** Andrew Jordan

## BRITISH ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

Peter Erceg/Hugo Cook (Audi R8 GT3)

## BRITCAR TROPHY

**Race 1** Seb Dubois (Ginetta G56 GTA)

**Race 2** Chris Bialan/Simon Mason (Cupra TCR)

## BRITISH SUPERKARTS

**Race 1** Tom Rushforth (Spyda-VM)

**Races 2 & 3** Liam Morley (Anderson-VM)

For full results visit: [tsl-timing.com](https://tsl-timing.com)

from Colburn, who was then demoted to seventh for his role in a Melbourne Hairpin tangle that eliminated three cars. With his Miglia not ready, Andrew Jordan borrowed dad Mike's Se7en and proceeded to crush the regulars with a pair of 16-second victories in contrasting conditions.

Peter Erceg's 2023 dominance of the British Endurance Championship continued as his Audi R8 GT3 bested a field thinned by testing woes. Co-driven by Hugo Cook, substituting for British GT man Marcus Clutton despite receiving his own late entry for Oulton Park, the Audi won by more than a lap from John Seale/Jamie Stanley (Lamborghini), whose fading chances were ended by a drive-through penalty for pitlane speeding. On their step up to a Porsche 718 Cayman, Bal Sidhu and Josh Steed completed the podium.

There were maiden Britcar Trophy victories for Seb Dubois (Ginetta G56) and Chris Bialan/Simon Mason (Cupra). The Cupra bounced back from an all-TCR clash with Lewis Kent's Hyundai Veloster early in the first race to beat the Ginettas of Axel van Nederveen – who'd been caught in the same incident – and Maurizio Sciglio later on.

Sidelined from the lead of the Superkarts opener – in which Tom Rushforth triumphed – by a broken chain, Liam Morley was unbeaten thereafter, while Lee Harpham took a hat-trick of second places.

**MARK PAULSON**



**RESTORING PRIDE** Ace restorer Peter Bulbick finally raced a classic of his own by tracking his Ford Capri, a project that started from a friend's written-off shell. "We don't really work on Capris but my first car was a Capri so I fancied using one," said Bulbick, who has prepared it to Group 1 spec with a bored-out 3.1-litre V6. With only one prior race start to his name, Bulbick is eager to lose his novice crosses and share customer Simon Evans's Allard J2X Le Mans at September's Goodwood Revival.



**JAG BACK ON THE PROWL** Melvin Hooker's monstrous Jaguar XJS returned to action in Historic Thunder after a two-decade lay-off. The car was built by brothers Mark and Andrew Pearman in the mid-1980s, before Hooker acquired it at the turn of the millennium and enjoyed Classic Thunder success, but "we kept blowing up V12s, so we put it in the back of the garage". COVID lockdowns gave Hooker the opportunity to install a shorter, lighter, more powerful V8 motor developing 400bhp.



**ROVER RACES** Former Toyota MR2 frontrunner Nick Williamson burned the midnight oil to debut his Pre-'83 Rover SD1. After sourcing a rust-free shell from France, Williamson converted it to right-hand drive, built its 3.5-litre V8 and did all the race preparation himself, finishing at 2.30am on Good Friday. "They're quite a lazy V8 – normally they rev to about 5500 but you need to get them over 7000 to get the power," he said, "so it's got new heads, rods, pistons..." He finished second in class on its debut.





Waterfield leads Wilson. Both Cooper drivers were winners

OLLIEREAD

## Waterfield and Wilson top 500cc F3 at Combe's 500th

**CASTLE COMBE**  
**CCRC**  
**1 APRIL**

The contrast between junior single-seater formulas at Castle Combe in the 1950s and today are marked, yet both provided scintillating highlights at Easter Monday's season-opener, the Wiltshire venue's 500th car race meeting. Like 500cc Formula 3, which embroiled young bucks and veterans contemporarily, and does still in historic guise, rising stars measure themselves against champions in the circuit's FFord category.

Tom Waterfield and Alex Wilson won a 500 race apiece in Cooper-Nortons. Waterfield, 26, dominated the soaking wet opening stanza in Bristolian Tim Ross's Mk9 – originally owned by Jim Russell, winner of Combe's October 1955 class swansong – and was victorious by over 40 seconds. Wilson's Mk10 and Harry Painter (ex-Harry Whitney US import Mk7) splashed home

behind the Cotswolds engineer.

The dry second outing showed the cars at their best. Wilson made a brilliant getaway from the rolling start and fended off Waterfield, whose 1m27.045s (76.51mph) best lap shattered aerobatics pilot Steve Jones's 2014 record.

After Painter pitted briefly, the scrap for third between Simon Dedman (ex-Ninian Sanderson Erskine Staride-Norton) and Chris Wilson (Martin-Norton) went all the way. Welsh-domiciled Scot Finlay Mackintosh (Cooper Mk5) was a lonely fifth, but Jimmy May – in late grandfather Ray Petty's eponymous design – caught and passed the Coopers of Nigel Challis and Richard Kelly.

With four Combe FF1600 champions in the top five after damp qualifying, and four chassis marques occupying the first two rows, fans at Quarry anticipated a cracker as multiple title winners Josh Fisher (back in Richard Hudson-Evans's Van Diemen JL14), Luke Cooper (Swift

SC20) and Felix Fisher (Ray GR05) sat first, third and fourth, split by 2023 Festival winner Rory Smith (Medina JL18).

Gunning for a hat-trick of crowns, Felix Fisher made a sensational getaway from the standing start, leading over Avon Rise. Smith fluffed the Esses and came round eighth as the Fishers made the running, pursued by 2011 champion Rob Hall's new Swift, Tom Hawkins (Ray) and the delayed Cooper, with the Class B Swift SC92s of Sam Street and Nathan Ward behind.

The Fishers broke clear but, as Josh jinked past his sibling on lap seven of 10, they were caught by Smith and Cooper. Smith snared fastest lap slipstreaming up to Felix, but was unable to improve further, the top three finishing within half a second. Behind Cooper were Hawkins, Hall, Ward and Street. Next was Class C victor Tom McArthur (Van Diemen RF89), who had David Cobbold's sister car and Vincent Jay's RF90 in tow.

Second time out, the Fishers traded the lead until Felix ran onto the kerb exiting Camp, sapping momentum to Smith's advantage. They were joined by Cooper, whose 1m10.820s best lap was 0.007s inside Smith's earlier mark. A scant 0.81s covered the quartet on the line, Josh having completed a faultless double. Fifth overall, Ward won B again from Street and Jay, while Cobbold claimed C after McArthur's steed ailed.

The Lamborghini V10 versus turbocharged Ferrari V8 GT races ended with a win apiece for Keith Butcher and Doug Watson, after a scrape at the Esses in the opener. Dylan Popovic and Chris Everill (Ginetta-Chevrolets) chased Butcher in, with Jamie Sturges fourth



Fisher siblings battled in FF1600 but Josh (leading) prevailed

OLLIEREAD



## WEEKEND WINNERS

## 500 OWNERS' ASSOCIATION F3

**Race 1** Tom Waterfield (Cooper-Norton Mk9)

**Race 2** Alex Wilson (Cooper-Norton Mk10)

## CCRC FF1600

**Races 1 & 2** Josh Fisher (Van Diemen JL14)

## CCRC GT/INTERMARQUE SILHOUETTES

**Race 1** Keith Butcher

(Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo, below)

**Race 2** Doug Watson (Ferrari 488 Challenge)

## CCRC SALOONS

**Races 1 & 2** Harrison Chamberlain (VW Golf GTI)

## CCRC HOT HATCH

**Races 1 & 2** Dan Brown (Honda Civic)

## CMMC SUPER SALOONS/TIN TOPS/WRDA

**Race 1** Rod Birley (BMW E36 M3)

**Race 2** Chris Everill (Ginetta-Chevrolet G55 GT4)



For full results visit: [tsl-timing.com](https://tsl-timing.com)

in his new Cupra TCR. Watson and Butcher coaxed each other into the 67s bracket later. Sturges, fourth behind Popovic, also achieved that feat.

Harrison Chamberlain's VW Golf GTI celebrated its compliance with Combe Saloon rules with a brace of victories over Bill Brockbank's new SEAT Leon Cupra, the first after 2022 champion Adam Prebble was excluded for a flag infringement. Welshman Jez Williams (Peugeot 106) was named Driver of the Day after screaming from the back in the opener to finish third later.

Dan Brown blitzed the inaugural Hot Hatch championship races. Jason Stack (Renault Clio) and Shaun Deacon (106) chased him home initially after Craig Tomkinson's Vauxhall Nova hit a dropped exhaust at Camp and broke a wheel. He borrowed a pair of rears and was second in the sequel, despite one working loose. Ross Parker (Civic) wrested third from Stack.

Rod Birley outfoxed Everill's thunderous Ginetta, on fried wets, at Bobbies on the final lap of the Classic and Modern Motorsport Club Super Saloons opener. Everill, on slicks, was uncatchable later. A clash with Adrian Bradley's fellow BMW M3 skittled Birley back to eighth.

MARCUS PYE

# O'Donovans on top as British Rallycross begins



Father-son duo spent much of the Lydden event battling

TOM BANKS

## LYDDEN HILL BRX 30 MARCH/1 APRIL

Father-and-son team Ollie and Patrick O'Donovan swept the board in the opening British Rallycross weekend at Lydden Hill.

O'Donovan Sr, the 2007 champion, entered the campaign embarking on a title effort having not won a round of the series in almost six years, but with five title runner-up placings in the past eight seasons. His son Patrick, meanwhile, had been the driver to beat over the most recent two terms, although the 19-year-old's 2024 attack is not in the Peugeot 208 WRX with which he defended his title last year, but with the Ford Fiesta in which he was successful in 2022.

Even in the older car, O'Donovan Jr was the only driver to get near Q1 pacesetter Oliver Bennett's time on Saturday and, when Mini racer Bennett lost out in a first-corner Q2 scrum, O'Donovan capitalised to stop the clocks first. Bennett's weekend then got worse, water pump issues sidelining him before the semi-finals.

In the knock-out semi-final races,



O'Donovan Sr's Proton took the opening victory

TOM BANKS

O'Donovan Sr bettered his son with joker-lap strategy to win the first encounter in his Proton Iriz, while the Citroen DS3 of six-time champion Julian Godfrey won semi-final two to secure pole for the final. The engineer-turned-driver jumped the start, earning himself an extra joker lap, but Godfrey still claimed third place. Up front, O'Donovan Jr slowed in the closing laps, allowing his father to take the advantage. Michael Leonard (Fiesta) lost time and ultimately dropped to fourth after a final-lap joker. He was later excluded for his onboard judicial camera not working, promoting Steve Hill's Mitsubishi.

Things got better still for Hill in round two on Monday, despite enduring an opening-corner accident in Q1, then suffering a broken steering rack on his way to making the final. But, in the main event, as others hit trouble, Hill drove a clean and fast race to finish third, on his 74th birthday.

At the front, the O'Donovan duo had qualified 1-2, but Ollie was out in the semis with an engine issue and Patrick suffered a puncture and lost the semi-final win. Clutch woe for polesitter Leonard on the startline removed him from contention in the final, while team-mate John McCluskey led for half the race. But the British RX returnee could do nothing about O'Donovan Jr's sublime drive. A stall meant he was sixth away from the line, but he overtook two cars on lap one and another two in the opening corner of lap two before passing McCluskey to win in his ageing machine.



# Eventful Simpson plot for hectic Easter meeting

**BRANDS HATCH**  
**BARC**  
**31 MARCH-1 APRIL**

Pickups and their heavyweight brethren were rivals for top billing at the Easter truck extravaganza at Brands Hatch and, while Matt Simpson starred among the Pickups, Ryan Smith also commanded attention as he chases a ninth British Trucks title.

Engine gremlins in qualifying left Simpson at the back of the first Pickups grid. Instead, early leader Dale Gent came under pressure from quickest qualifier Chris Brockhurst, with Dean Tompkins on their tail. A bold move by Brockhurst on the final lap resulted in contact with Gent and Tompkins being delayed. Bursting through the confusion came the recovering Simpson for an unexpected win, with Mark Willis second and Tompkins third.

Through more chaos in race two came Simpson, seemingly having got rid of all his bad luck in qualifying. He won under heavy pressure from Gent while five pickups fought over third, Paul Tompkins grabbing the place. Simpson was left to rue a first-lap mistake on a drying track in the final that dropped him to the back. A series of



Ex-BTCC driver fought from the back to win

fastest laps brought him into contention, although he could only make it to fifth in a race won by Allen Cooper.

A modest dozen full-sized trucks came to Brands, only three of them in Division 2. Sunday's qualifying-based races were easy for series dominator Smith, even with a lack of boost in race two. David Jenkins was runner-up twice, and Michael Oliver fought his way past John Bowler for two third places. Paul Rivett, meanwhile, was a double Division 2 winner.

But Smith's task got much harder in Monday's reversed-grid encounters.

Local man Steven Powell clung on by his fingertips to inflict a rare defeat on Smith in the third race, the reigning champion overcoming everyone else in a terrific drive from eighth on the grid. Powell described "the hardest race of my life" in a truck rebuilt from a write-off at the disastrous 2023 finale.

Rivett's Division 2 truck won overall in race four, which was thrown into chaos by heavy rain and was halted with two trucks in the barriers protecting the road to the outer paddock. Smith, blinded by a steamed-up windscreen, fell off at Surtees

## Cook's perfect recipe for narrow BMW Car Club brace

**DONINGTON PARK**  
**750MC**  
**1 APRIL**

Paul Cook capitalised on a superb start to win the first BMW Car Club race from his fellow M3 driver Wayne Lewis and the E82 135i of Stuart Pywell as the 750 Motor Club season began at Donington Park on Easter Monday.

Cook, who enjoys wet tracks, shot into the lead from sixth on the grid,

leapfrogging polesitter Pywell. Cook was challenged most strongly by Lewis, who briefly snatched the lead mid-race, although Pywell also stayed within passing range and did attack, getting ahead of Lewis for a time. Ultimately, Cook was able to pull out a small gap on the final lap, with Pywell just making it to second ahead of Lewis.

On a drying track, Cook developed a race-winning lead more quickly second time around, only for a lengthy safety-car period to allow Pywell and Lewis to catch up. Cook eventually pulled clear on the resumption to double up, with Lewis runner-up this time, ahead of Pywell.

Dave Hodkin was the first 750 Formula winner in his HRD, passing Bill Cowley's family creation after Cowley started strongly, hitting the front from fourth. Cowley, who was dealing with sticking rear brakes, did his best to hold off David Bartholomew's PRS, although Bartholomew was quicker and pulled

away once he had taken second. He had missed a gear on the line from pole, but sliced back through the field to claim second, with Cowley third.

Bartholomew was the runaway winner of race two, quickly getting out of Cowley's reach. Hodkin had an early off but valiantly fought back, methodically picking off his rivals with a series of fastest laps. In the end, Cowley was just too far ahead and he had to settle for third.

Ma7das provided their usual frenetic action at the front of the pack. Ben Powney prevailed in the first race, which was red-flagged twice. His chief rival was Eddie Mawer, who was later disqualified due to his car lacking a catalytic convertor. Powney again figured strongly in the more lively second contest, which featured a six-way lead battle at one point, but inherited the win after Martin West's disqualification for overtaking under a yellow flag. West had looked like a clear victor, leading home David



Hodkin and Bartholomew shared 750 Formula spoils

STEVE JONES



Smith won first two races,  
but then faced sterner tests

GARY HAWKINS



GARY HAWKINS

and got stuck on the grass for a lap.

Twice red-flagged for accidents on the Brabham Straight and at Paddock, race five was stopped again with a truck off at Druids. Jenkins was in front when the result was declared and Stuart Oliver aggressively defended second from Smith, while Rivett completed his full house of class triumphs.

Stephen Berry's coupe-shaped Cooper S was the most prolific winner in last year's inaugural non-championship Mini Challenge Clubsport series, but he was well beaten in the first three of the 2024

races by Ross Alexander's conventional example. Berry initially seemed to have nailed saturated conditions in race three, but was reeled in by Alexander.

Harry Smith was in a class of his own in both Junior Saloon races, which were enlivened by some energetic battles for the minor placings. The second, run in a cloudburst, was halted after a heavy collision at Paddock. Meanwhile, Andy Preece in a ZR won Sunday's two MG Owners' Club races, which were also both ended early by red flags.

**BRIAN PHILLIPS**

Cook leads Lewis and  
Pywell to a BMW double



STEVE JONES

Hitchin, who was also penalised five seconds for exceeding track limits.

Andy Hiley's Chronos was the leading car in both Sport Specials races. He had the front mostly to himself for the wet first race, but faced stiff opposition from Martin Gambling's Eclipse in the sequel. Gambling, who vastly prefers dry tracks, was easily the quickest and worked his way to the lead from fifth on the grid. Sadly, his car expired after losing oil pressure in the closing laps.

The first Bikesports race of the year

resulted in a resounding win for championship newcomer Shane Stoney, driving a Radical. Even a long safety-car period could not stop him, although sole Mittell driver Charles Hall did his best.

Stoney took a second win in the pitstop race, although the lead was held by Hall for most of its distance. But Hall had a coming-together with a backmarker after regaining his position after the stops, sending him pitwards and Stoney to the top step of the podium.

**RACHEL HARRIS-GARDINER**

## WEEKEND WINNERS



GARY HAWKINS

### BRANDS HATCH PICKUP TRUCKS

Races 1 & 2 Matt Simpson  
Race 3 Allen Cooper

### BRITISH TRUCKS

Races 1 & 2 Ryan Smith (Daimler Freightliner)  
Race 3 Steven Powell (MAN TGA)  
Race 4 Paul Rivett (MAN TGX)  
Race 5 David Jenkins (MAN TGS)

### MINI CHALLENGE CLUBSPORT

Races 1, 2 & 3 Ross Alexander (Cooper S, above)

### JUNIOR SALOONS

Races 1 & 2 Harry Smith

### MG OWNERS' CLUB

Races 1 & 2 Andy Preece (ZR)

### TRACK ACTION

Race 1 Gareth Porter (Peugeot 205)  
Race 2 Paul Roddison (VW Scirocco)

### CATERHAM GRADUATES – SIGMA 135

Race 1 Tom McEwing  
Race 2 Paul Goldstein

### CATERHAM GRADUATES – SIGMA 150

Race 1 Jamie Ellwood  
Race 2 Harry Senior

### DONINGTON PARK

#### BMW CAR CLUB RACING

Races 1 & 2 Paul Cook (E46 M3)

### 750 FORMULA

Race 1 Dave Hodkin (HRD Mk2)  
Race 2 David Bartholomew (PRS 1b)

### MA7DAS

Races 1 & 2 Ben Powney

### SPORT SPECIALS

Races 1 & 2 Andy Hiley (Chronos HR1S, below)

### BIKESPORTS

Races 1 & 2 Shane Stoney (Radical PR6)

### CALM ALL PORSCHE TROPHY

Warren Allen (Cayman)



STEVE JONES

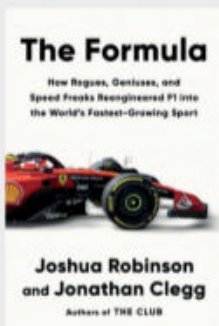
For full results visit: [tsl-timing.com](http://tsl-timing.com)



# FINISHING STRAIGHT

Confoundingly  
bizarre nature of  
Abu Dhabi 2021  
debacle is laid bare  
by the authors

## How to build a fanbase that's not too fussed about watching a race



### BOOK REVIEW

#### THE FORMULA

Joshua Robinson  
and Jonathan Clegg  
RRP £22

An Autosport reader  
could quite easily give  
*The Formula: How  
Rogues, Geniuses, and*

*Speed Freaks Reengineered F1 into the World's Fastest-Growing Sport* a bit of a pasting. If you're a dyed-in-the-wool Formula 1 fan with a penchant for detailed history, one who's remained invested throughout the Liberty Media makeover, you might come away not having learned an awful lot new. And, as avid lovers of motorsport, we're the butt of some of the jokes in this, at times, borderline flippant book. However, that shouldn't make this speedy 280-page read a write-off because, objectively, it's brilliantly executed.

Despite the title, it's thankfully nothing to do with will.i.am and Lil Wayne's recent car crash of a song. Instead, *The Wall Street Journal* writers Joshua Robinson and Jonathan Clegg track through the major political chapters – think the reign of Bernie Ecclestone, gates crash and spy,

the Middle East expansion, and the 2021 Abu Dhabi GP debacle – that have shaped, and dogged, F1. There are profiles of Enzo Ferrari, Williams, Lotus and Ecclestone's early years in business, but little from the first two decades of the championship finds its way in.

Given Robinson and Clegg aren't paddock regulars, their grasp of F1 and its current owner is superb. Not interested in a blow-by-blow account of F1's 74-year history, in beautiful prose they consider whether the growth of the championship has been a perfectly executed plan all along or is instead the lucky result of *Drive To Survive* capturing the imagination when everyone was welded to their sofas channel-hopping during the height of the pandemic.

The chapter on the 2021 season finale is arguably where Robinson and Clegg flex their writing muscles best of all. Aside from *DTS*, it'll be the first time for many reliving events in a heavily editorialised manner – given the toxicity that still surrounds it, there's been fair reason to at least try to move on... to the next controversy. Through their breakdown and engaging tone, you reacquaint yourself with just how utterly bizarre and baffling this sorry episode was for F1. But also,

how it was the perfect peak in Liberty Media's pursuit of popularity. It's here where the current crop of 'characters', Messrs Horner and Wolff, are at their best. The latter slams ex-race director Michael Masi as "completely irrelevant" and a "pathological egomaniac", for example.

Without giving too much away, the closing chapters also excellently frame how getting people to watch an F1 race isn't actually the true objective. Many new fans consume the series through social media, highlights and other bitesize forms without ever whiling away two hours on a Sunday afternoon. Again, Liberty Media is seemingly just fine with that.

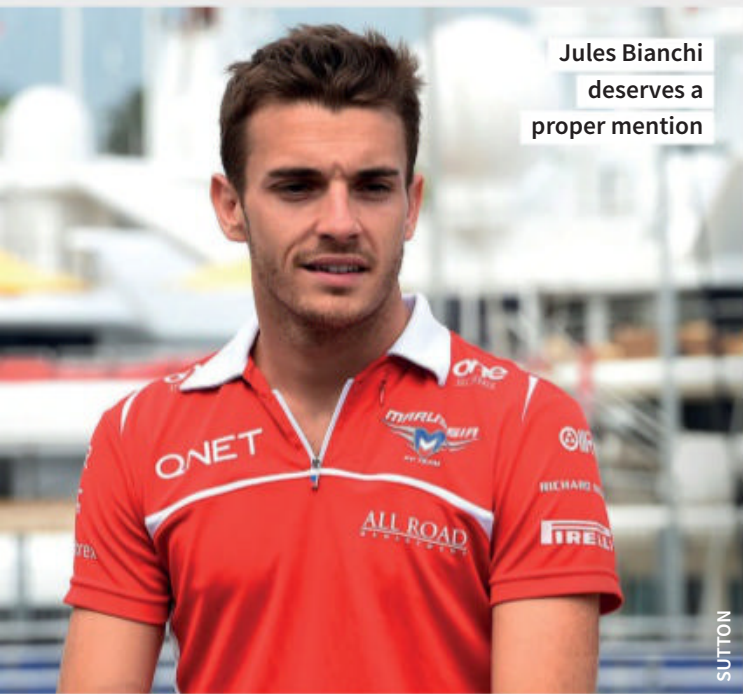
Downsides? There are a couple. Don't judge this book by its cover because it's pretty nasty to the touch, like a sheet of 80-grit sandpaper adorned with an incongruously glossy image of Charles Leclerc's 2023 Ferrari painted in its Italian Grand Prix special livery. And there's a smattering of factual blunders. Valtteri Bottas is not Estonian, for example. Plus, in the chapter centring on Ayrton Senna, it's wrong to omit Jules Bianchi (until a nameless mention 160 pages later) when saying "there has not been a single fatality during an F1 race" since the Brazilian's in





COATES

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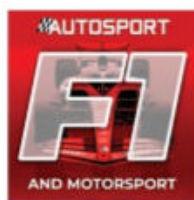
Jules Bianchi  
deserves a  
proper mention

SUTTON

1994. Senna wasn't pronounced dead for a couple of hours after the chequered flag. So, either Senna didn't die "during" a race, or Bianchi needs to be properly included too. Given print deadlines, we'll forgive references to F1 team bosses who have since been sacked. Oh, and a perennial Autosport gripe: motorsport is 'the sport' – F1 is a subdivision of it.

It's easy to imagine that quite a few of the F1 hardcore will come away simultaneously a little insulted while also nodding their heads in agreement with the authors' assessment of Liberty Media showing scant regard for anything that happened before its time. But the balance is stellar. So much so that this writing duo's book giving a similar treatment to the Premier League is on order.

MATT KEW



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



S BLOXHAM

### Japanese Grand Prix preview

Bryn Lucas is joined by Autosport's Filip Cleeren, Jake Boxall-Legge and Sam Hall to discuss what to expect at this weekend's Japanese Grand Prix. Plus, the latest developments in the silly season at it extends beyond the driver market – Carlos Sainz to Red Bull, Adrian Newey (above) to Aston Martin...



### WHAT'S ON

#### INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

**Japanese Grand Prix**  
F1 World Championship  
Round 4/24  
Suzuka, Japan  
7 April

**TV Live** Sky Sports F1,  
Sat 0600, Sun 0555  
**TV Highlights** Sky Sports  
F1, Sun 0930, Channel 4,  
Sun 1230

**GT World Challenge  
Endurance Cup**  
Round 1/5  
Paul Ricard, France  
7 April

**TV Live** YouTube, Sun 1530

**GT4 European Series**  
Round 1/6  
Paul Ricard, France  
6-7 April  
**Livestream** YouTube,  
Sat 1515, Sun 1155

**NASCAR Cup Series**  
Round 8/36  
Martinsville, USA  
7 April  
**TV Live** Viaplay 2, Sun 1830

**NASCAR Xfinity Series**  
Round 7/33  
Martinsville, USA  
6 April

**NASCAR Truck Series**  
Round 7/23  
Martinsville, USA  
5 April

#### UK MOTORSPORT

**Snetterton BRSCC**  
6-7 April  
C1 Endurance,  
CityCar Cup, Evolution  
Trophy, Mazda MX-5s  
(Championship, Clubman,  
Supercup), Supersport  
Endurance Cup

**Mondello Park MPSC**  
6-7 April  
Irish Championship  
Circuit Racing categories



ETHERINGTON





#### FROM THE ARCHIVE

Inspired by recent discourse about non-championship Formula 1 races (Top 5, 21 March; Your Say, 28 March), we couldn't resist this image from the 1965 Race of Champions at

Brands Hatch. Packed grandstands and grass banks watched the action play out over two 40-lap heats won by Lotus team-mates Jim Clark and Mike Spence, the latter taking overall honours on aggregate. Clark, who

also competed in the supporting British Saloon Car Championship round that bisected the RoC, started both heats from pole and was leading the second outing when he crashed out.



For classic motorsport DVDs and downloads head to [dukevideo.com](http://dukevideo.com)









**L**e Mans winner Stefan Johansson drove for 10 teams in Formula 1, including Ferrari and McLaren, before enjoying a successful Indycar and sportscar career. Now 67, the Swede points to a driver who he partnered for only 16 races, but is someone he believes is a game-changing F1 all-time great, as his favourite team-mate.

Johansson joined McLaren for the 1987 F1 season, replacing the retiring 1982 world champion Keke Rosberg, and teamed up with Alain Prost. “I’ve had so many team-mates, and so many great guys too, that it’s hard to pick one,” says Johansson. “But I’d have to pick Prost.”

Prost was coming off his second consecutive world championship with McLaren. But 1987 coincided with the rise of Williams-Honda as F1’s dominant force, along with Ayrton Senna starring at Lotus, and Prost’s three wins put him only fourth in the standings, two spots and 16 points ahead of Johansson.

“It was amazing just how good he was,” Johansson adds. “I learned a massive amount from him, more than I’ve learned in my whole career, just in that one year together. He was also a great guy, we had a lot of fun together, we became good friends and still are today – I had dinner with him just last month.

“We developed a great relationship. Back then, he was the master. His work ethic was above and beyond anybody



else. How he went about his work with the car and the team, and how he put the whole weekend together. He was at a totally different level than anybody else.”

Johansson made way for Senna at McLaren in 1988, sparking one of the bitterest of intra-team rivalries of all time, but he got along perfectly well with Prost. “He told me that the driver is the CEO of the car – all these people around you have to manage the car as best they can; extracting the most out of everybody led to the top of the podium on Sunday,” he remembers. “It was a completely different process that I experienced with anyone else.

“He’s still one of the best in history, highly underrated compared to some of the other guys who were more spectacular on the track. He was all about getting the job done. He was exceptional.”

**CHARLES BRADLEY**



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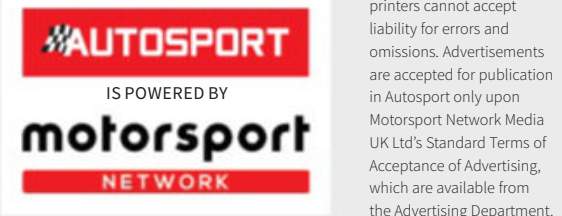
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