



Max makes it **9** as Red Bull bounces back

BRITAIN'S BEST MOTORSPORT WEEKLY

5 DECEMBER 2024

AUTOSPORT

McLaren vs Ferrari

Qatar disaster for Norris sets up constructors' showdown in Abu Dhabi

McLAREN
640
FERRARI
619

'I've made the job of the team much harder'

LANDO NORRIS



'It's going to be tight and it's exciting'

CHARLES LECLERC



PLUS

Martin's road to the **MotoGP** crown

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Specsavers



Verstappen nails it once more

Not for the first time in the 2024 Formula 1 season, Max Verstappen won a grand prix that his Red Bull probably shouldn't have done last weekend. Lando Norris's McLaren was the fastest car around the Losail circuit but Verstappen got the job done in qualifying (penalty aside), made a good start and maximised what he had.

Given McLaren's pace on the harder tyre, Norris's best chance would have come in the final stint, but that was scuppered by his penalty for not lifting for double waved yellow flags. Race control's decision not to throw a virtual safety car or the real thing for Alex Albon's wing mirror was controversial, but it was still Norris's mistake that led to the censure. Alex Kalinauckas outlines the key moments in our report on page 14 and also argues that it is now the small details Norris has to nail to truly take on Verstappen and fight for a world championship in 2025 and beyond (p12). The result also sets up a constructors' showdown in Abu Dhabi this weekend as both McLaren and Ferrari try to end their long waits.

A new title battle kicks off in Brazil this weekend with the Formula E opener. Stefan Mackley is your guide to the start of the Gen3 Evo era on p34, while Richard Asher looks back at the contest for the MotoGP crown in our season review (p40). It's also time for our Christmas gift guide (p46) and Stephen Lickorish's annual assessment of how UK racing clubs have fared this season (p60).

- Many thanks to those who have been in touch following the news that Autosport magazine will change to a monthly in 2025 as part of our 75th birthday celebrations. The subscription fees will change and further information will be provided soon.



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PIT + PADDOCK

Doohan replaces Ocon for F1 debut in Abu Dhabi GP

FORMULA 1

Jack Doohan will make an early Formula 1 race debut for Alpine when he replaces Esteban Ocon in the season-closing Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at Yas Marina this weekend.

Discussions had been taking place between Ocon and the team about the Frenchman standing down for Abu Dhabi. Ocon has struggled for performance compared to team-mate Pierre Gasly in recent races, despite a podium finish in the Brazilian Grand Prix. Changing drivers now works out for all parties, since it allows Alpine to kickstart six-time Formula 2 race winner Doohan's (right) preparation for the step up to a full-time seat next year, while also clearing the way for Ocon to begin work early for the Haas squad, which he is joining for 2025.

It is understood that one of the ways the deal was set in motion was for Alpine to agree to release Ocon for the post-Abu Dhabi GP tyre test so he could drive for Haas in exchange for not racing this weekend. It represents the end of an increasingly fraught five-year spell for Ocon with Alpine, which yielded his only F1 win to date at the 2021 Hungarian Grand Prix.

As well as racing in Abu Dhabi, Doohan will also take part in the post-season test. The 21-year-old, son of five-time motorcycle world champion Mick Doohan, has undergone an extensive Testing of Previous Cars programme in preparation for his debut in 2025 in lieu of any racing activities this season. Alpine team principal Oliver Oakes believes that Doohan should cope well with the demands, although says that the performances of substitutes such as Ollie Bearman this season does raise the bar of expectation.

"I think anyone who gets thrown into an F1 car in a race like that, it's never easy to judge, is it?" said Oakes. "The problem is you've got the benchmark that Bearman set [at Jeddah], which was phenomenal. And I mean this in a nice way, as he's hugely talented, but you had [Andrea] Kimi [Antonelli] with the sort of pressure in Monza [where the Mercedes rookie crashed in his practice outing]. "I think at the end of the day, Jack's just got to take



SUTTON

it as he finds it. I think he's professional enough to handle it. Once you ease into the weekend, FP1, FP2, you can build up to it as well."

Doohan will race with his reserve driver number of 61 in Abu Dhabi, but will take the #7 for 2025 after Kimi Raikkonen's hold of the number expired this season. His place as Alpine's reserve driver will be filled by Estonian Paul Aron, who is set to finish third in F2 this season with Hitech, the team Oakes founded.

"It's incredibly special to be joining the Alpine Formula 1 team," said the 20-year-old. "It is clear that this is a great place to be for any young driver and I'm really pleased that Flavio [Briatore, executive advisor] and Oliver have given me this opportunity."

JONATHAN NOBLE & JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



Ocon's Alpine farewell ended with first-lap exit in Qatar GP

HONE

BEN SULAYEM HITS BACK AMID MOUNTING EXODUS AND CRITICISM

FORMULA 1

Defiant FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem has dismissed talk of turmoil within the governing body, and told Formula 1 drivers it is “none of their business” how he runs the organisation.

Ben Sulayem has found himself under the spotlight recently in the wake of a host of high-level departures from the FIA, including F1 race director Niels Wittich (see p8). Furthermore, he was sent an open letter from the Grand Prix Drivers’ Association, which demanded he start treating them like adults and asked for transparency about where the money from fines goes.

Speaking for the first time since the latest developments, Ben Sulayem told Autosport ahead of last weekend’s Qatar Grand Prix that he was unmoved by any recent criticisms or suggestions that the FIA had descended into chaos under his rule. Asked specifically about the GPDA’s calls, ex-rally ace Ben Sulayem said: “With all respect, I am a driver. I respect the drivers. Let them go and concentrate on what they do best, which is race. But OK, you want to know how much we paid in grassroots? I’ll give you: 10.3million [euros] we invested in grassroots last year. I think that’s a lot of money. We’ll do whatever is good for the FIA. So it’s really none of people’s business to interfere in ours. It’s the results that we produce.”

Ben Sulayem believed that the losses of staff had been given unnecessary traction considering the FIA had been on a recruitment drive over the past two years



Sulayem makes a point to the world champion

and employed far more people than had left. From his perspective, any suggestion of chaos within the FIA was wide of the mark – as he doubled down on stating that he would do whatever it takes to protect the governing body.

His comments arrived after fierce criticism by former race steward Tim Mayer, who has recently been ousted by Ben Sulayem. Speaking to the BBC, Mayer said Ben Sulayem “directly involved himself in making his views known” within the organisation, with the clampdown on swearing a direct result of his intervention.

Mayer’s accusation comes after Ben Sulayem was subjected to an internal investigation into the outcome of the 2023 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. A whistleblower had claimed that Ben Sulayem allegedly intervened to overturn a post-race penalty issued to Fernando Alonso. Ben Sulayem was cleared after review by the FIA’s Ethics Committee. Paolo Basarri, the compliance

officer in charge of the investigation, has since also been removed from his position.

Mayer, who worked for the organisation for 15 years, said he learned of his sacking via text message from one of Ben Sulayem’s assistants, with the president “taking offence” to the way Mayer handled a recent spectator track incursion at the United States Grand Prix.

Deputy F2 and F3 race director Janette Tan, who was expected to step up to replace Rui Marques (who has taken Wittich’s former F1 role) in Qatar at the helm of the junior formulas, was also part of the latest raft of FIA departures. The Singaporean has gained experience as Marques’s deputy and was going to be in charge for the final F2 rounds in Qatar and Abu Dhabi before likely stepping up to the role full-time in 2025. Her departure meant Marques had increased duties at Losail, which was also an F1 sprint weekend.

JONATHAN NOBLE & FILIP CLEEREN

Qatar takes minority stake in Audi

FORMULA 1

Audi has reached an agreement to sell a minority stake in its Formula 1 team to the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA).

Qatar’s sovereign wealth fund has already been investing in Audi parent company the Volkswagen Group since 2009, and has now agreed to acquire a reported 30% stake of the

F1 team, which currently races under the Sauber name, for \$350million.

The deal came at a time when the VW Group is under pressure in Germany over plans to shut down factories and make tens of thousands of workers redundant – regardless of Audi CEO Gernot Dollner’s claim that the QIA deal has nothing to do with the Group’s financial issues. VW recently reported

a 60% drop in profits.

Dollner made clear that there was no question of Audi’s commitment to continue spending what was needed to be successful in F1. “We have a business plan, and it’s a business for us,” he said. “This F1 project is an integral part of the transformation story of Audi. You can’t build a future by only saving money. You have to invest. And we have to



transform the company. We believe that the F1 project is an integral part of that transition of Audi.”

STUART CODLING & CHRISTIAN NIMMERVOLL

Herta top of list for Cadillac, says Andretti

FORMULA 1

American racing hero Mario Andretti has insisted that IndyCar race winner Colton Herta remains a “priority” interest for Cadillac’s Formula 1 entry.

The General Motors marque has finally been accepted as a new F1 team for 2026 and beyond, albeit with a number of compromises to push it over the line where its previous Andretti Global guise failed earlier this year. This time, GM has committed a full-blown manufacturer effort, developing works power units for the 2028 season.

The team’s original figurehead, Andretti’s son Michael, stepped away in September, with majority owner Dan Towriss now in charge of the organisation. But Andretti Sr, the 1978 world champion, still remains involved as a

director and has revealed that the team’s current IndyCar star Herta (right) tops the list of potential drivers for F1’s 11th team.

“From the beginning of this project, the team always looked at the prospect of Colton Herta to be one of the drivers,” Andretti told Autosport. “I’m sure that’s the direction he would like to go. He trained there [in Europe], he raced alongside the likes of Lando Norris [in 2015 in British F4], so he is from that era and ready to go.”

One stumbling block is the FIA’s superlicence system, with Herta currently on 32 of the required 40 points to gain entry. That means he needs to finish at least fourth next season to gain the necessary points, or fifth if paired with an F1 practice session.

Another name linked to the project is Valtteri Bottas, who is set to become a Mercedes reserve driver



SKIBINSKI/PEC

after losing his Sauber race seat. The 35-year-old Finn is keen to remain involved in F1, but has indicated his interest in competing in the Indianapolis 500 classic.

“I’ve had talks and approaches at this point,” Bottas said about an IndyCar move. “I’ve made it pretty

clear that next year comes a bit too quick. My priority still stays Formula 1. Indy 500 has always been on the list; I’ve been always a fan of V8 Supercars. I just need to decide what is the next move and then we’ll see.”

JOEY BARNES & FILIP CLEEREN

Browning set for Williams FP1 debut in Abu Dhabi

FORMULA 1

Williams Racing Academy driver Luke Browning has been lined up for his maiden grand prix weekend outing with the Grove-based squad – taking part in the first free practice session at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix tomorrow (Friday).

The 22-year-old Briton, who is also competing in his third F2 round at the Yas

Marina season finale, will then participate in the end-of-season young driver test on the Tuesday after the race. Browning, the 2022 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award winner, gets the nod after impressing with a third place in the 2024 F3 season, where he was in the title fight until the final round at Monza and scored a brace of poles and feature race wins. Williams was originally expected to put fellow academy

driver Franco Colapinto in the seat, but the Argentinian is no longer eligible after competing in more than two grands prix, forcing the team to reshuffle its plans.

“It’s an honour to be driving a Williams F1 car for the first time in Abu Dhabi,” said Browning. “A huge thank you to everyone at Williams Racing for supporting my development as part of the Williams Racing Driver Academy and entrusting me with the FW46. I’ll be working hard to prepare and make the most of the opportunity.”

Williams sporting director Sven Smeets said that Browning’s FP1 chance is the logical next step after his impressive F3 campaign and quick adaptation to F2: “He has made important contributions to the team through his development work and has demonstrated rapid progress in his understanding, maturity, and racecraft. We’re now looking forward to giving Luke the opportunity to drive the FW46 in Abu Dhabi as the next step in his development as a Williams Racing Academy driver.”

FILIP CLEEREN



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Schumacher stays at Alpine, Makowiecki in

WEC

Mick Schumacher will remain as part of a rejigged driver roster at Alpine for its second World Endurance Championship assault with its A424 LMDh prototype. Long-time Porsche driver Frederic Makowiecki has joined the squad, while Jules Gounon takes a full-season race seat after acting as reserve in 2024.

Former Haas driver Schumacher will continue in sportscar racing after failing to secure a return to Formula 1, which he insisted was his priority throughout this season. The announcement by Alpine last week was quickly followed by the news that he will no longer act as Mercedes' F1 reserve in 2025.

Makowiecki and Gounon have come into the Hypercar class line-up in place of Nicolas Lapierre and Matthieu Vaxiviere. Lapierre retired from the cockpit after September's Fuji WEC round to concentrate on team management, including a new role as sporting director at Alpine, while Vaxiviere leaves the Renault brand after



four seasons that included a pair of Hypercar wins with the grandfathered A480 LMP1 in 2022.

Makowiecki, 44, insisted following his departure from Porsche after 11 seasons that he had communicated his desire to leave to seek what he described as a "fresh challenge" before its decision to slim down its full-time driving crew to two drivers. He revealed that he was "extremely proud" to join Alpine.

"It's something special to represent a French manufacturer in the WEC with the possibility of aiming for an overall victory

in the Le Mans 24 Hours, especially as Alpine has a vibrant motorsport history," he said. "I truly liked the team's approach and development: Alpine improved and excelled in its first season against very tough competition."

Gounon, 29, is making the step up to a race seat after contesting four rounds with Alpine in 2024. This is despite having a year left to run on his contract at Mercedes, whose GT roster he has been part of since 2021. Alpine has yet to reveal how the six drivers will line up across the two A424s.

GARY WATKINS



Pourchaire gets Peugeot role

WEC

Reigning Formula 2 champion Theo Pourchaire has landed a test and development driver role with the Peugeot World Endurance Championship squad. He has been signed by the French manufacturer after trying out in one of its 9X8 2024 Le Mans Hypercars in the official WEC rookie test at Bahrain last month.

Pourchaire is making the move into sportscars after a season in which he started out with Team Impul in Super Formula before switching to IndyCar for a partial season with Arrow McLaren.

He is taking over the role from Malthe Jakobsen, who is being promoted to the race line-up for 2025 after the departure of Nico Muller to Porsche.

"An incredible opportunity" is how Pourchaire described the deal to become Peugeot's seventh driver. "I see it as a fresh start, as endurance racing is a new challenge for me," said the 21-year-old.

Pourchaire looks likely to dovetail the role at Peugeot with a European Le Mans Series programme in LMP2, possibly with 2023 champion team Algarve Pro Racing.

GARY WATKINS

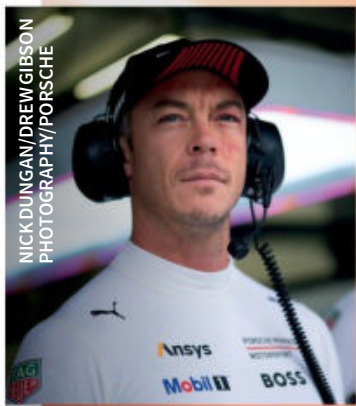
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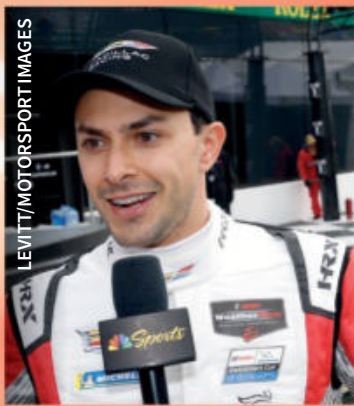


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NICK DUNGAN/DREW GIBSON
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LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Lotterer and Derani
(inset pics) have
joined Hyundai for its
2026 WEC entry



HYUNDAI MOTORSPORT

Lotterer and Derani on board for Genesis hypercar

WEC

Andre Lotterer and Pipo Derani are the first drivers to be named for the Hyundai Genesis brand's new LMDh prototype that it has been confirmed will debut in the World Endurance Championship in 2026. Their announcement came yesterday (Wednesday) as Hyundai Motorsport launched its programme in Dubai.

Genesis laid out plans for its entry into the top flight of sportscar racing, revealed in September, with a contender to be known as the GMR-001 Hypercar co-developed by the German Hyundai Motorsport organisation and French constructor ORECA. It will field a two-car WEC entry under the Genesis Magma Racing banner after a development year in 2025 with

reigning WEC champion Lotterer and four-time Sebring 12 Hours winner Derani, who will then segue into race seats. That will be followed in 2027 by an expansion into the IMSA SportsCar Championship, also with two cars. The French IDEC Sport team, which finished third in LMP2 at this year's Le Mans 24 Hours, will be its partner for its race programmes.

The development of the Genesis LMDh, which was presented in half-scale model form in Dubai, will be dovetailed next year with an assault on the European Le Mans Series in LMP2 together with IDEC. Ex-Williams Formula 1 driver Logan Sargeant will drive along with Indy NXT race winner Jamie Chadwick and silver-rated Mathys Jaubert, who is moving up from the Porsche Supercup.

Lotterer is joining Genesis following the end of his relationship with Porsche after eight seasons. The German described the move as "the perfect fit for me to channel my work, my experience, passion and motivation into a new project with a team of highly ambitious individuals". Derani, who announced he wouldn't be staying at the Action Express Racing IMSA squad in the summer, said going to Genesis was "an opportunity too good to refuse".

Hyundai Motorsport president Cyril Abiteboul will act as team principal, as he has for the South Korean manufacturer's ongoing World Rally Championship campaigns. A new base will be established at the Paul Ricard circuit where both ORECA and IDEC are located.

GARY WATKINS

Ousted Wittich steps in after GT controversy



SBLOXHAM/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

Recently ousted F1 race director Niels Wittich was drafted into the equivalent role for the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup finale at Jeddah last weekend as a legacy of Barcelona's Sprint Cup event in October.

In the wet conditions of the Saturday race at the Spanish circuit, and with a safety car period overlapping the pit window, the regulations dictate that the window be delayed, which did not happen. BMW squad Team WRT protested the result and the on-event stewards dismissed the application, but

WRT appealed to the National Court of Belgian governing body the RACB.

Race director Alain Adam was suspended pending the decision, which was announced last Thursday, with the results of the Barcelona race – 'won' by the Boutsen VDS Mercedes of Jules Gounon and Maximilian Gotz – annulled and no points awarded. While this does not change any of the drivers' titles, it gives WRT the Sprint Cup teams' crown.

Paddock sources suggest that Adam will not return next year, but no decision has yet been made as to whether Wittich will be a permanent replacement.

DAVID ADDISON



One returns as Restart switches

BTCC

What continues to be a highly entertaining silly season in the British Touring Car Championship has continued apace in recent days, in no small part prompted by series organiser TOCA revealing the list of TBL entrants' licences for the 2025 campaign.

Although the TBL total of 24 is down on the 27 from 12 months ago, the signs are that the grid will be bigger than the 20 cars we saw for the majority of the 2024 season. TOCA supremo Alan Gow described the drop-off in numbers this year as "the outlier" caused by the late withdrawals of One Motorsport and Team Hard. But while Hard is gone, albeit with its Cupra Leon machinery living on in new hands, One is back, with the Steve Dudman-owned team credited with two TBLs on the TOCA list.

The Brackley squad was staying tight-lipped on the 'whos' and 'whats' as we went to press, but the unconfirmed talk is that it will likely be with the Honda Civic Type R, while Josh Cook, the winner of 16 BTCC races with the team over 2019-23, appears to have slipped out of the reckoning at other teams on the grid.

The TBL list was swiftly followed by news that Restart Racing, which entered the BTCC with two ex-Team Hard Cupras in 2024, is switching to become a

customer team of Hyundai squad Excelr8 Motorsport. Excelr8 will build two new versions of the i30 N Fastback for Restart, which will use the same Swindon-built bespoke Hyundai powerplants.

Pete Jones, the former Excelr8 sponsor who is one of the leading figures at Restart, said: "I want to drive the team forward with the best car available to us and the best drivers available to us."

Chris Smiley, who is another leading figure at Restart, is unsurprisingly being confirmed this week as one of the drivers, and raced the Hyundai with Excelr8 in 2020-21. He is tipped to be joined by Dan Lloyd, three times a winner with Excelr8 in 2022, after the Yorkshireman's one-year sabbatical in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB. "Dan's a great driver and I've always wanted him in one of my cars," was all Jones would say about the speculation.

Over at Excelr8, 2022 champion Tom Ingram and veteran Tom Chilton are both locked in, while Nick Halstead has stated that he will not remain on board. Team owner Justina Williams waxed lyrical to Autosport about the team's late-2024 stand-in Dan Zelos, and said she would even help the three-time Mini Challenge champion secure a drive elsewhere should he not attain an Excelr8 budget. Adam Morgan is also tipped for a seat, Williams saying "we're talking to lots of drivers".

MARCUS SIMMONS

JARVIS AND HANLEY STAY

Britons Oliver Jarvis and Ben Hanley will remain on United Autosports' European Le Mans Series squad for next year. Jarvis, second in the 2023 points in one of the team's ORECA-Gibson 07s, will share with United regular Marino Sato and Brazilian Daniel Schneider in a pro/am entry. Team-mates for Hanley have yet to be revealed.

MENEZES RETURNS IN ELMS

Former Peugeot WEC driver Gustavo Menezes will return to competition next season after a year's absence. The American will drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 in the LMGT3 class of the ELMS for the Italian Iron Lynx squad. Iron Lynx has also announced that its relationship with Porsche in the WEC, where its all-female Iron Dames crew will run in LMGT3 aboard a Manthey-run 911 GT3-R, has been extended to the ELMS, the Asian Le Mans Series and IMSA. In each of those series it will work with Proton Competition.

BENNETT'S F2 DEBUT POINTS

John Bennett became the first multiple Ginetta GT5 Challenge race winner to score points in Formula 2 last weekend, when he replaced Enzo Fittipaldi at Van Amersfoort Racing for his debut in the series in Qatar. Bennett, this year's GB3 runner-up, finished eighth in the feature race at Losail. "We kept our heads and called the strategy perfectly – all in all, I'm very happy with that," said Bennett, who remains on board for this weekend's season finale at Yas Marina.

NEWCOMERS JOIN F3

The latest newcomers to the world of Formula 3 for 2025 are Javier Sagrera and Theophile Nael. Spaniard Sagrera, provisionally champion of the Eurocup-3 series for Formula Regional machinery, steps up with AIX Racing. French youngster Nael, a race winner in European FRegional, makes the move with Van Amersfoort Racing.

HUFF IN A BENTLEY

Team Parker Racing has assembled an intriguing line-up to race a Bentley Continental GT3 in next month's Dubai 24 Hours. Former World Touring Car champion and current BTCC racer Rob Huff will join up with experienced British GT ace Scott Malvern, as well as Cadillac WEC star Alex Lynn's dad and brother! Shaun and Maxwell Lynn are both renowned as accomplished historic racing exponents, and are long-time friends of Huff.

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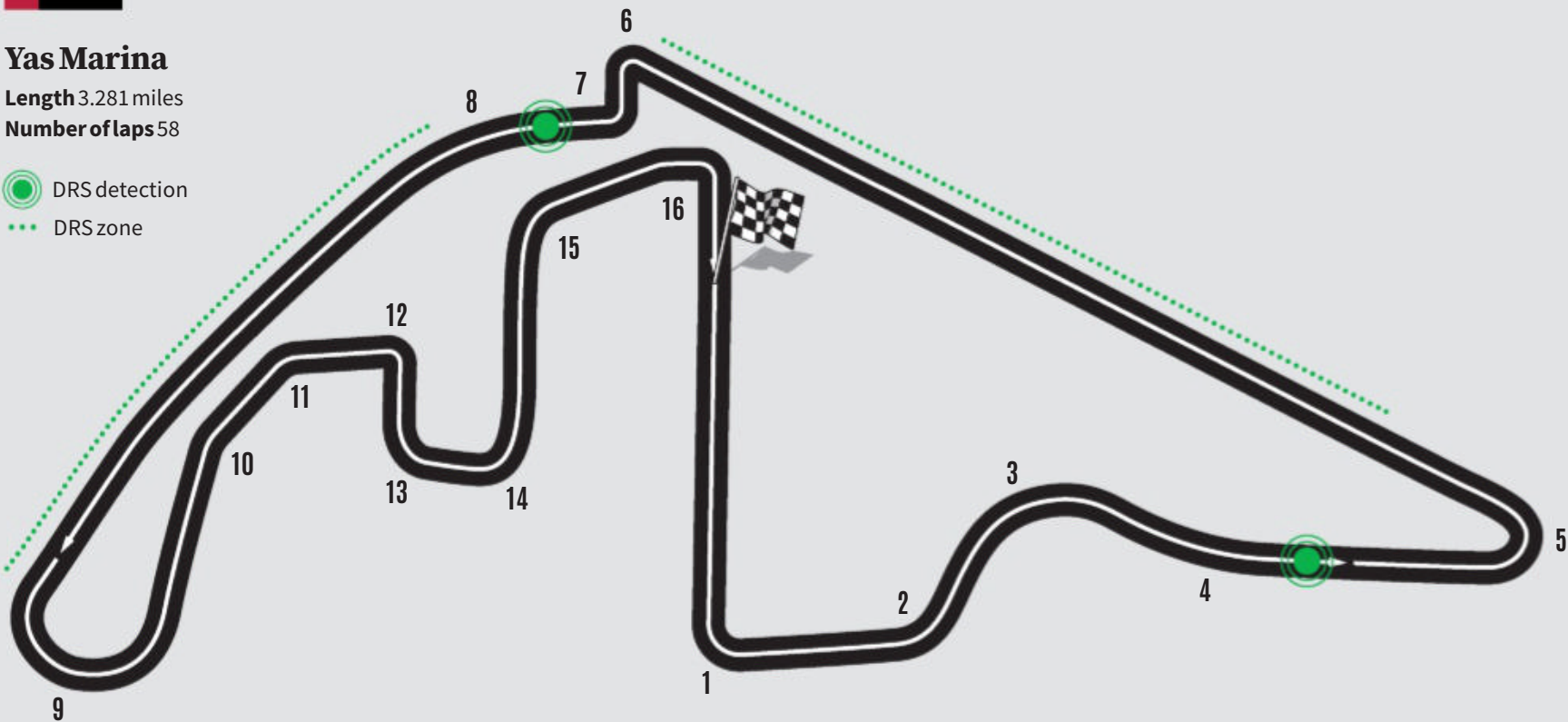
F1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix Preview



Yas Marina

Length 3.281 miles
Number of laps 58

DRS detection
 DRS zone



UK START TIMES

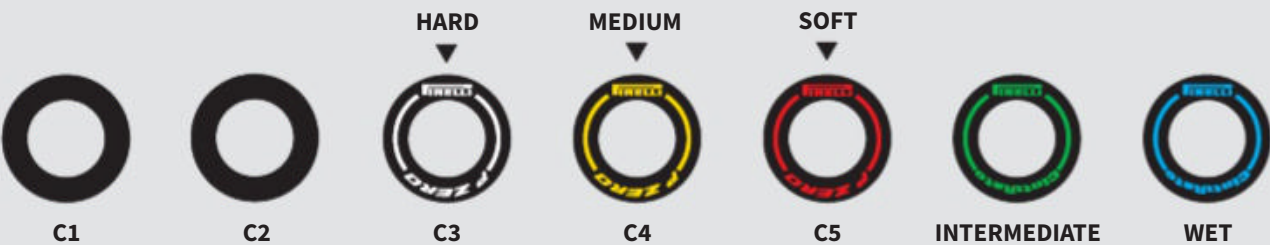
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FP1 0930 FP2 1300

Saturday 7 December
FP3 1030
QUALIFYING 1400

Sunday 8 December
RACE 1300

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TYRE ALLOCATION



CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers

1	Verstappen	429
2	Norris	349
3	Leclerc	341
4	Piastrri	291
5	Sainz	272

Constructors

1	McLaren	640
2	Ferrari	619
3	Red Bull	581
4	Mercedes	446
5	Aston Martin	92



YAS MARINA STATS

Previous winners

2023	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2022	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2021	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2020	Max Verstappen	Red Bull
2019	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2018	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2017	Valtteri Bottas	Mercedes
2016	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2015	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
2014	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes

2023 POLE POSITION
Max Verstappen
1m23.445s

POLE LAP RECORD
Max Verstappen
1m22.109s (2021)

RACE LAP RECORD
Max Verstappen
1m26.103s (2021)



Yas Marina podiums

Lewis Hamilton	10
Sebastian Vettel	7
Max Verstappen	6
Valtteri Bottas	3
Nico Rosberg	3
Charles Leclerc	3
Jenson Button	3
Kimi Raikkonen	2
Mark Webber	2
Fernando Alonso	2



Small things Norris needs to find

The McLaren driver's penalty in Qatar is a reminder of the necessity of eliminating errors at key moments. He can start putting that right this weekend in Abu Dhabi

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Very fine margins are deciding Formula 1 races. Even over the course of a grand prix or sprint distance – think Lando Norris leaving the door ajar for Max Verstappen in the shorter Austrian contest this year – a split-second call can make the difference. Maybe this is why the drivers are so tetchy these days, George Russell's understandable efforts to get Verstappen penalised after Qatar GP qualifying last weekend utterly enraging the Dutchman. Yet Verstappen emerged as the winner in the fifth nailbitingly close direct contest against Norris of this term. It was another Verstappen performance peak that the rest just don't seem able to scale.

But the main Qatar race was also a reminder of how much title potential Norris possesses. He edged a team-mate as good as Oscar Piastri in both qualifying sessions on this rapid, technical track last weekend. That ended up being the critical difference on Sunday for Piastri, who was left stuck behind Russell and later the excellent Charles Leclerc. Norris, meanwhile, was right with Verstappen before Alex Albon's mirror changed the race.

But the reason why the race for the win was ruined came down to Norris failing to lift when passing waved double yellow flags with the mirror lying off the racing line of the Losail circuit's main straight. His penalty was deserved and in keeping with precedent, such as the sanctions handed down to Nikita Mazepin and

“I’ve let the team down. I’m not an idiot – if there’s a yellow flag, I know I need to slow down”

Nicholas Latifi for the same infraction at the end of the 2021 Austrian GP. True to form, Norris held his hands up afterwards.

“I’ve let the team down,” he told reporters, his helmet only just having left his hands in a rare appearance for such kit in the media pen, highlighting the discombobulation of Norris computing his error. “I’m not an idiot – if there’s a yellow flag, I know I need to slow down. That’s rule number one you learn in go-karts. I can only apologise for the rest of the year to the team.”

This is what is so odd about what happened on Sunday night: Norris knows this rule intimately, after that Baku Q1 encounter. There, he was chastised for being too fast in some quarters, having clearly done what was required and not reacted to a different colour flag.

The 2024 title challenge clearly came earlier than either

McLaren or Norris expected – remember how he still lacked a GP victory as the season started. But the mistakes narrative has reignited over the final rounds. At least Norris has one more chance to banish this in this Sunday's Abu Dhabi finale. McLaren should again be favourite given the plethora of medium-speed corners at Yas Marina, and Norris has shone there in the past.

But Verstappen has won the past four Abu Dhabi contests, his 2020 triumph against a COVID-shedding Lewis Hamilton giving him a springboard to launch into that campaign of campaigns the following year. Norris needs something similar. And Verstappen is also providing another important lesson on being across key, if tiny, details when the pressure is on.

Perhaps with the memory of his 2021 Qatar qualifying penalty for also not lifting at a waved double yellow flag, Verstappen immediately knew that his rival hadn't slowed as they passed the marshal waving them. He also remembered the right procedure for an aborted start in Brazil, when Norris and Russell hadn't. It's an underappreciated part of his formidable game. Not that he really wanted to talk about it on Sunday night when asked about how he stays across such details. “Well, I mean, I knew that I lifted because I saw the double yellow,” Verstappen replied. “And I know that, of course, if I wouldn't have lifted, it would have been investigated straight away. So, you're just on it. And I know, of course, with double yellows, they're quite strict...”

In a different way on Sunday, both drivers pleasingly showed how they've taken on board the most high-profile racing rules lesson of the season. When the safety car lights malfunction left Verstappen vulnerable at the second restart, he and Norris ended up going wheel to wheel yet again. But Norris, in this latest skirmish, showed he understands exactly where he must race to in getting his nose ahead at the turn-in apex. And Verstappen didn't run him completely off-track this time. This may only matter for one more race, with changes to the Driving Standards Guidelines coming for 2025. Autosport understands that this is set to feature more revisions than simply altered inside-line attack etiquette, as had been suggested as the Qatar event began.

But it showed again how brilliant this pair are. And, overall, Qatar had a whiff of Bahrain 2021 – a race Verstappen lost through his own tiny error. If this is the start of the 2025 title fight between these two – with Hamilton, Leclerc and Piastri additional challengers, but perhaps facing more question marks than the 2024 protagonists – then it's off to a thrilling start.

Soon it'll be for more than just dead rubber bragging rights. And the tiny calls will have to go Norris's way if he wants to topple an undisputed F1 heavyweight, as Verstappen himself got in 2021. 🏆

➔ **P14 QATAR GP REPORT**



A Porsche ace's roller coaster ride

The Porsche specialist and BRDC SuperStar recaps his race-winning season and eyes a possible new direction for the future

HARRY KING

I started my 2024 season with the Bathurst 12 Hour. That came off the back of winning all three races in the Porsche Carrera Cup Australia there last year, and we won our class. An endurance race is always tricky, so it was great to do it with an awesome team around me in EMA Motorsport.

I adapted quite quickly to GT3. You have assists, so you've got to understand how they work and how they help you. I also had the dynamic of not driving flat-out for 30 minutes, which was new territory for me, so I was delighted to do a faultless job – and to come away with the Pro-Am class win was the cherry on top.

A dynamic I hadn't seen before was the pitstops and the team working well together over a long race, and it brought out a new passion for me seeing how hard the mechanics and engineers work. To repay them with success and to see the joy on their faces is probably something I took more satisfaction from than standing on the podium and collecting my trophy.

Then the Carrera Cup Middle East was in preparation for the Supercup and the Carrera Cup Germany programmes, and that went very well, with three wins out of four with Lechner Racing. That's a series that I thoroughly enjoy.

Cup racing in recent years has been competitive and, with the amount of driving that the competitors are doing and the level that they're competing at, it's fundamental that you do a dual programme to be fresh in the car and to optimise that one lap in qualifying. You only have 30 minutes, so where you start on the grid has the biggest impact on your result.

I had the luxury of doing Carrera Cup Germany with Allied Racing. One highlight was round one alongside the World Endurance Championship at Imola, walking away with two wins. I hadn't done the double on a weekend in that series, so that was one to add to the list of accomplishments.

Supercup with Lechner also started at Imola, where I qualified and finished second. There really wasn't much opportunity to take the win, and it's so important to take the points and not take any risks. The points scale is very biased towards the top three positions, so you have to take these points and swallow a bit of pride. Finishing second was a good feeling at Imola, but Monaco and Red Bull Ring, where we finished second both times, really annoyed me.

Silverstone, where I finished fourth, is one that's going to remain with me for a little while. It was one of my dreams to win my home event, but we were missing a bit of pace to another team and the win wasn't realistic. I'm sure every successful racing driver will have events where they feel they could have done a better job or they should have got a better outcome, and that weekend I did everything in my power to get the best result.

In the end, the outcome of both championships was finishing as runner-up. Knowing how competitive they are, it's not a bad achievement. My goal this year was to walk away with absolutely zero regrets, and I felt I maximised every weekend to the best of my ability. We had the greatest number of wins in Germany, we were the only car in Supercup to finish in the top five at every single event, and we were on the podium more times than any other drivers. It would be nice to end my time in Carrera Cup

“Bathurst was a real eye-opener. It changed my focus and shifted my passion towards endurance”

cars with four championships, but winning two titles and finishing runner-up twice is not bad at all.

Ultimately, my main goal was to see it as a stepping stone. I'm not content with just becoming a champion in one series, I want to see how far I can test myself in other cars, other machinery and other championships. The Carrera Cup is a comfortable environment, but I want to explore more of what the sport has to offer.

Bathurst was a real eye-opener for me, in an environment where everybody is working towards the same goal. It changed my focus and shifted my passion towards endurance, where you have to work collectively to reap the rewards. I take a lot of satisfaction in that, and I realised that this is where I want my career to end up.

It's an exciting time. I don't think I've ever found myself almost wishing the winter would pass by, even after such a busy year, but I'm motivated to get it started. What will come at the end of this year and into next year is something that as a young boy I would have dreamed of.

The British Racing Drivers' Club and the SuperStars programme is something that I'm very passionate about, and I realise the significance of being a full member and being one of a limited number of drivers that can say they're a SuperStar. To continue to be representing that is always a big honour and privilege.

Achieving the Gold Star last year was a nice thing to tick off the bucket list, as not many drivers in the BRDC have even been close to that, and to win it again this year was another big privilege. My name will be on the wall at the BRDC forever, and it will be there twice, which is even better. 🏆

RACE CENTRE



Verstappen and Red Bull back to classic form for world champion's 63rd career GP win

VERSTAPPEN DELIVERS AS RED BULL RECOVERS

The newly crowned world champion seemed to be struggling in Qatar, but a remarkable team turnaround was followed by clinical execution from the Dutchman

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY RED BULL AND  motorsport
IMAGES



FOX/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

That's more like it. The outcome that we got so used to from mid 2022 to early 2024 returned last weekend at the Qatar Grand Prix: Max Verstappen displaying utter brilliance to win for Red Bull.

It was a race of intrigue and controversy, like so many of this season's contests. Once again at the Losail venue, there was tyre drama. And for McLaren and Lando Norris, as Verstappen's closest challenger yet again, there were more reminders of the tiny details they still need to nail to prevail in their expected 2025 title challenge, and their first chance to seal this year's constructors' title after a dominant sprint race performance ultimately went begging.

In the end, however, Verstappen ended the weekend with career GP victory number 63. And the driver who runs that car number each week was firmly on his mind at the race start.

Russell's qualifying complaints rile Verstappen

Verstappen should have been lining up on pole, but for his impeding of George Russell ahead of their final fliers in Q3 (see panel, p17). The Red Bull driver was incredulous at the sanction, calling it "like I was talking to a brick wall" with the stewards. He cast particular ire at what he saw as Russell's effort to "screw someone over that hard", saying he'd "lost all respect" for the Mercedes driver.

But Russell, as would Verstappen as we moved into the closing stages of the GP a day later, was only playing a blame game that is so much a part of F1 these days. This also got him away from the non-rubbered-in side of the grid, which Russell reckoned was worth 1.5 car lengths in extra wheelspin. Red Bull team boss Christian Horner said "it only added to his enthusiasm to get off the line well", with Verstappen >>



HONE

Polesitter
Russell had no
defence against
Verstappen into
Turn 1...

lining his RB20 up in menacing fashion – pointing toward the polesitting Mercedes.

When the lights went out, Russell launched well enough – 0.03 seconds better in fact. But, just as in Mexico, the RB20's low-grip start prowess came to the fore again. Verstappen was quickly powering up alongside Russell and braked later on the inside into Turn 1.

Norris, cunningly chasing the racing line after starting third, emerged from the hairpin right-hander with enough momentum to get his McLaren's nose into the lead as Verstappen and Russell went deep. But, critically, Verstappen still had the inside line for Turn 2, and the Red Bull was thrillingly thrusting back to a lead it had previously only very fleetingly possessed.

Norris stayed close enough to force Verstappen off line into Turn 4, but any hopes of further battle – including around the immediate DRS factor from lap two – were dashed when the safety car was called out as Verstappen reached Turn 11.

The problem was all the way back at Turn 1, where Williams had just suffered yet more crash damage and Esteban Ocon's Alpine career ended (see p4). Yet neither was to blame. Their cars were left with nowhere to go when Nico Hulkenberg dropped his Haas – which had started on hard tyres yet to warm up – and spun, whacking Ocon, who in turn hit Franco Colapinto. While this pair were out on the spot, Hulkenberg was able to carry on with just a left-rear puncture.

The first-stint stalemate

This was a boost to Verstappen, since it meant that Norris had to navigate a safety car restart with the world champion leading the way – something Verstappen typically handles with aplomb. Indeed, when

“I FELT QUITE GOOD IN THE FIRST TWO SECTORS. THEN IN THE FINAL SECTOR, LANDO STARTED PUSHING A BIT MORE”

racing got under way again at the start of lap five of 57, Verstappen had already dropped Norris as they left the preceding Turn 15, with the chasing Russell ending up with such a good run to Turn 1 that Norris had to jink in defence from his compatriot's late look.

Verstappen then duly pinned it through the opening two sectors, crossing the line with a 0.95s lead after Norris had stolen a few tenths back in the final third of the lap. This would play out time and again over the first half of the race, the McLaren's higher downforce level giving Norris the confidence to push in the high-speed corners in the final sector of the Losail circuit. Verstappen, meanwhile, had to take it easier here and take his time elsewhere.

“Most of the first stint, I felt quite good in the first two sectors,” Verstappen later explained when asked about this cat-and-mouse chase. “But then in the final sector, Lando already started pushing a bit more from the beginning of the race. And I was managing probably a little bit more. It just evened out around the lap, almost every single lap. It was nice. I enjoyed it – making sure that you don't make any mistakes.”

The gap generally held “between 1.6 and 1.9s, the whole stint”, said Verstappen, with the maximum at 2.0s on laps 11 and 23.



...then Norris briefly got
his nose ahead before the
safety car was dispatched...



S BLOXHAM



S BLOXHAM

Why the medium tyres lasted unexpectedly long

"He managed the race incredibly well," Horner said of Verstappen's opening phase of the grand prix. "He looked after his tyres so that he had the longevity on the medium."

This was becoming ever-more significant, because by lap 24 the leaders were beyond the pre-race prediction for time spent on the medium tyres before being able to switch to the hards to go to the finish. The 16-17C cooler track temperatures and rounded kerbs combined to convert 2021's winning two-stopper and 2023's prescribed three-stopper into the expectation of a single pit visit this time around.

The heat and energy saved with the four laps under the safety car at the start helped, but this didn't explain why the times for the two leaders were still steadily dropping. That's even with, according to Verstappen, the fact that they were pushing "flat-out".

"On this track what we have seen is high wear but very low degradation," explained Pirelli motorsport boss Mario Isola. "And with a very low degradation, there is no incentive to change the tyres. You try to keep the tyre as long as you can, or you try to find a sweet spot to change the tyre. When a tyre is worn, there is a part of the tread where you still have some rubber. And the drivers are able to adapt their driving style in order to try to minimise this excessive wear."

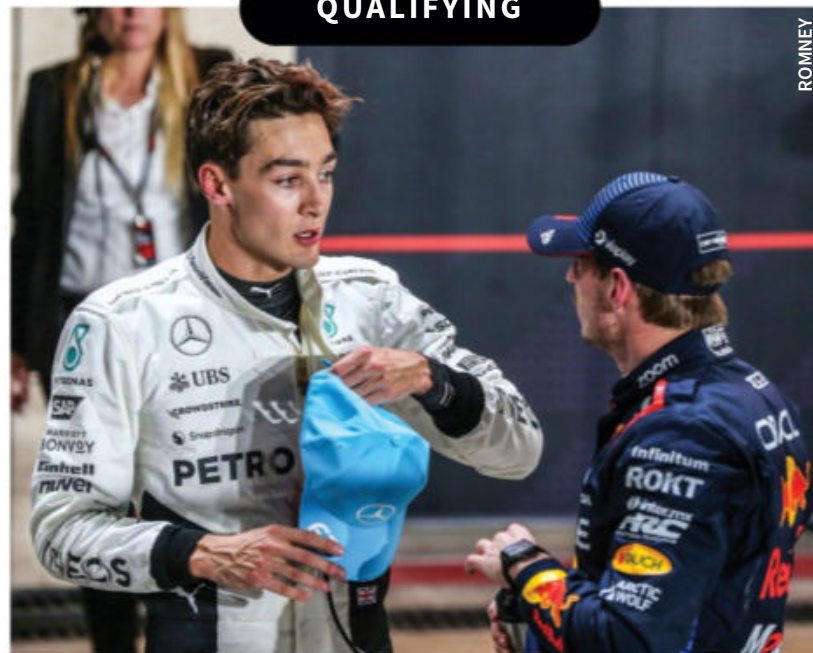
After increasing pace from the mid-1m26s down to the mid-1m24s, Verstappen and Norris had dragged themselves 8.5s clear of Russell by the time they started the 23rd lap. The Mercedes came in at the end of that tour, but suffered a slow change of the right-rear tyre.

Russell's 7.0s wait meant McLaren had no need to bring in Oscar Piastri, who'd been threatening an undercut. Now that he was unleashed into free air, he could get down to the lap times being set up front. But, just as attention turned to whether McLaren might attempt to undercut Verstappen with Norris, the story of the race changed considerably.

Albon's missing mirror punctures the race

As he ran down the main straight at the start of lap 29, Alex Albon's right-side mirror flew off his Williams. This would lie just off the racing line for five laps, the biggest gap between the cars a near-20s stretch between Verstappen and Kevin Magnussen in 16th (with the Haas >>

QUALIFYING



ROMNEY

For two hours last Saturday, Max Verstappen had secured his first official pole position since June's Austrian Grand Prix. But, as the clock ticked into Sunday, the wait for the FIA's final classification document suggested predictions that he'd "only get a reprimand" for impeding Mercedes' George Russell ahead of their final qualifying laps were premature.

Verstappen had been completing the second of his cooldown laps, after taking one out of the pits and then pushing for a sighter lap – the same tyre preparation strategy he'd used to vault from relative obscurity to lead Q2. Finally, around post-sprint-race ride height adjustments, he and Red Bull had nailed the main tyre challenge of the weekend – getting the rubber on both axles into the narrow temperature windows, with no big-stop slower corners to power from and heat the rears.

But, as Verstappen traversed Turn 12, Russell was flying up behind on his own prep lap – just one required for the Mercedes, its Las Vegas-style tyre warming prowess on display. Russell had to jink left and clipped the kerb-hugging gravel strip on the outside of the rapid right, and the stewards eventually decided Verstappen deserved a one-place grid drop. Had Russell been on a flying lap it would have been three.

But, before the arguments began raging – Russell claiming "it felt like the floor was scraping over that kerb and through the gravel", and Verstappen clearly feeling his rival was making a meal of things – those last laps still had to come in.

Here, Russell was leading Verstappen by 0.045 seconds after putting in a 1m20.575s first Q3 effort. He would later say his personal best was just "really strong", with tiny snaps of oversteer at the long Turns 10 and 16 on his final attempt ultimately the difference in why he ended up slower. Verstappen, however, improved to a 1m20.520s.

"I felt confident in the car," he said of his tweaked set-up. "So, I was pushing it. And honestly, the whole lap was hundredths here, then two hundredths and then the last corner a little bit. It was not a lot compared to the previous lap, but it was just everywhere a little bit better."

All that tyre heating and cooling played its part, but it was Verstappen's last corner gain that made the critical 0.055s difference to Russell – per the GPS trace data from each car.

Third, ahead of Oscar Piastri, Charles Leclerc, Lewis Hamilton and Carlos Sainz, was McLaren's Lando Norris. He'd "dipped a wheel into the gravel" on his first Q3 effort, having eschewed any prep laps. He backed off and charged again, but ended up 0.25s short of Verstappen and 0.2s back from eventual polesitter Russell.

"The whole lap was hundredths here, then two hundredths and then the last corner a little bit"

SPRINT RACE

TEE

Norris's decision to gift team-mate Piastri the win did not have management approval



"I made my mind up in Brazil," Lando Norris revealed after handing his McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri victory in the Qatar sprint race. "I don't think any of us are necessarily proud of winning a sprint..."

A McLaren 1-2 opened the team's first chance to seal the 2024 constructors' championship, but they hadn't lined up in that order after SQ3. Mercedes driver George Russell had trailed Norris by only 0.012 seconds and might have qualified ahead had he not pinned it flat through Turn 15. This confused his engine's mapping, meaning it didn't deploy off the corner because the software didn't recognise that it had gone through without a lift.

This trio's fortunes would define the 19-lap Saturday evening contest, which began with Norris and Russell launching in unison from the front row. Norris jinked right to cover off his compatriot's run towards the inside, then retook the racing line before swinging back across the Mercedes' bows.

This was a deliberate tactic, Norris claimed, of "instead of running wide and giving Oscar the dirty air, I tried to stay tight and give George the dirty air".

"I basically got a bit of clean air

"There's a big speed difference and there's a closing of the door so late it's pretty sketchy"

on the outside and was able to just get on the throttle and drive around," Piastri said of the move that was now unfolding.

The Australian powered around the outside of Russell and claimed second place at the long Turn 2 left. Russell tried to mount a fresh attack at Turn 4 but was rebuffed, wasn't close enough to make Piastri pay for clipping the Turn 5 exit kerb gravel, and his Turn 7 look was speculative.

Norris duly ran to a lead of 1.1s after lap one, with DRS activated immediately. Russell's presence within 1s of the rear of Piastri meant Norris was soon having to



Leclerc fought back ahead after losing out to future team-mate Hamilton

drop back to aid his team-mate, running far enough ahead to retain the lead to Turn 1, but towing his DRS-armed team-mate down the main straight to thwart Russell.

Not that the Mercedes driver didn't have attacking chances. On lap four, with Piastri just 0.4s ahead, Russell tried down the inside of Turn 1 but had his route chopped off. A similar story on laps nine and especially 14 earned much radio ranting from the W15's cockpit.

"There's a big speed difference and there's a closing of the door so late it's pretty sketchy," Russell said of Piastri's tactics afterwards.

But, while Norris was holding

back, the extra sliding at the rear was harming Piastri's medium tyres – everyone was running this compound – and he repeatedly fell out of DRS range. Norris, therefore, had to go from coasting away a few tenths per lap through the high-speed corners of the final sector – a boon to his tyre life in turn – to lifting off and gifting Piastri whole-second chunks.

Russell tried one last Turn 1 look on the final lap but, when that was unsuccessful, Norris was free to unleash a plan McLaren had warned him against. He lifted off fully out of the final corner and Piastri breezed past to win by 0.1s, with Russell just 0.3s back in third.

The McLaren tactics meant Sainz was only 0.9s adrift of Russell in fourth, with Charles Leclerc fifth after catching and repassing start gainer Lewis Hamilton with a punchy series of attacking and defensive moves on his soon-to-be team-mate. Max Verstappen lost ground sliding with much oversteer on lap one, and could only recover to eighth behind Nico Hulkenberg's Haas.

Russell watches on as the McLarens execute last-gasp switcheroo



SBLOXHAM

having pitted after running solidly in ninth) – insufficient time for a marshal to intervene.

Isola reckoned that the teams were banking on the fate of the mirror when it came to finally calling their single pitstops. “Most of the teams were waiting for a safety car when the mirror was in the centre of the straight,” he explained. “They didn’t want to lose the opportunity to have a tyre change under a safety car that is giving you an advantage. So then when Valtteri [Bottas] destroyed the mirror, it was clear that the situation was going to be different.”

Bottas’s Sauber sent the smithereens flying as he allowed Charles Leclerc through to lap him on the 34th tour, and seconds later both the following Carlos Sainz and Lewis Hamilton had sustained left-front punctures to their Ferrari and Mercedes respectively.

McLaren called Piastri in to pit immediately, worried, as team principal Andrea Stella explained, about “the integrity of the car and there was also a safety consideration to be made”.

But the Australian was soon stifled when the safety car was called with Verstappen and Norris nearly at the end of the 35th lap. They duly headed to the pits to take on hard tyres, the leader having already been called in.

“I think so,” was Isola’s answer to whether the shards of Williams mirror had caused the punctures on the Mercedes and Ferrari. “But we have to check and analyse the tyres as usual. The front-left is the tyre with the higher wear. And most of the front-lefts used in the first stint have construction that is visible. So, when they are completely worn, you have less protection. Even if the debris is very small but it’s sharp – like carbon fibre – you puncture the tyre.”

Ferrari team boss Fred Vasseur insisted that “for sure, tyre wear is not helping, but [this didn’t cause] the puncture, it is the debris”. However, Sainz at least was already reporting a problem when he arrived on the carbon and glass detritus distributed by Bottas...

How the safety car lights nearly “had over” Red Bull

With Verstappen and Norris now on the hard tyres, they spent the next two laps running behind the safety car with Hamilton in between. On the second occasion that they followed the safety car through the pitlane, Hamilton didn’t initially activate his pitlane speed limiter and, when he braked a few seconds later, he caused Norris to slow savagely and flatspot both his new front hard tyres. The incident would later result in Hamilton serving a drive-through – he had also been handed a 5s penalty for fractionally jumping the start.

But he and Bottas behind were able to unlap themselves ahead of the restart, which is where the moment of greatest peril to Verstappen’s ninth GP win of the campaign played out last Sunday.

Having been told by his race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase that the safety car was coming in for a lap 40 restart, as he rounded Turn 13 on the previous tour Verstappen noted that the Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series’ lights were still flashing. To the drivers, this signifies an ongoing race neutralisation and so Verstappen – who later reckoned the safety car’s lights system had broken, since the lights on the front of the car had extinguished while the rear set remained flashing to the drivers



“HE COULDN’T SLOW THE PACK UP, BECAUSE HE WAS UNSURE WHAT THE SAFETY CAR WAS GOING TO DO”

behind – couldn’t drop back as he wanted.

If he had done, Verstappen risked falling foul of Article 55.14, which allows the race leader to “dictate the pace and, if necessary, fall more than 10 car lengths behind” only once it is clear that the safety car is about to come in.

“The rule nearly had us over today,” Horner said afterwards. “The message came: ‘safety car in this lap’. But the light stayed on on the safety car. And you’re then supposed to keep a distance to the back of the car. So, he couldn’t slow the pack up, because he was unsure what the safety car was going to do.

“He was following the instructions from the safety car, basically. And then it came into the pits, which obviously then compromised him, but he was still fortunate to stay ahead of Lando down at Turn 1.”

Indeed, although he’d dropped back from the safety car somewhat when Lambiase gave enough assurance over what was going on – the pitlane car entry warning alarm sounding in the background of his radio messages was as big a clue to his driver as any – Verstappen still wasn’t enjoying his normal restart process.

The delay in backing the pack up meant he chose to do “something different out of the last corner”. This was booting it back up to speed at that point. But, with the hard tyre needing a longer warm-up phase, Verstappen found he had “no rear grip”.

Norris was therefore able to blast down to Turn 1 and, when Verstappen covered the inside, got his nose ahead at the apex. But, although Verstappen defended fiercely, he critically allowed Norris enough space, and so what the Dutchman called getting “a bit spicy” didn’t ignite into a fresh driving standards controversy.

Norris’s penalty ruins the race, but is the right call

The safety car was back in action for a third time before Verstappen could re-establish his previous lead. First, the virtual variety had come on, with Sergio Perez having spun out of the fifth place he’d inherited when Sainz suffered his puncture. Perez then burned his Red Bull’s clutch out and ended up stranded between Turns 14 and 15. Then Hulkenberg spun again with cool tyres, his Haas this time going around at Turn 9 and getting beached in the gravel.

Verstappen aced the following restart by dropping Norris again out of Turn 15 – this time with masses of wheelspin for the McLaren – and by the time they got round to start lap 43 the Briton’s race was already under threat. When they’d first come across Albon’s mirror, Verstappen and Norris had passed double waved yellow flags – with a marker board further back activating just as the McLaren flashed past it. Verstappen >>



Moment of peril for Verstappen as things get “a bit spicy” with Norris at second restart



PORTLOCK/GETTY IMAGES/REDBULL CONTENT POOL

had lifted and lost 0.5s; Norris – with DRS from lapping Bottas – had not.

Verstappen was fast on the blower to report his rival, Russell’s complaints seemingly forgotten in what is a tedious game to many, but obviously necessary to the competitors in the modern age.

“We have the GPS data live, so we can see the speed compare,” Horner said of Red Bull’s report about Norris’s infraction. “He was still absolutely flat-out. And there was a double waved yellow there. So, I think with Max having spent a little bit of intimate time with the stewards on Saturday, he was very keen that it was looked at thoroughly.

“And he kept reminding us, ‘Had it been looked at?’ And, of course, that then gets passed by the sporting director to the race director.”

On lap 44 came the inevitable penalty. The severity of a 10s stop/go sanction came as a surprise to many, but is consistent with other incidents in recent years – such as Nikita Mazepin and Nicholas Latifi not lifting in the aftermath of Kimi Raikkonen taking out Sebastian Vettel at the end of the 2021 Austrian GP.

Stella questioned the “proportionality and specificity” of the penalty, but Norris disagreed. “I f***** it up – I don’t know what I did wrong,” he said. “If I did what [the stewards] said I did wrong, then good on them for giving the correct penalty.”

Could Norris have won without his penalty?

Norris stayed out until the end of lap 45 before serving his sanction, by which point Verstappen was leading by just 0.7s as Norris harried him into the mid-1m23s for the first time.

From there, Verstappen was left to run easily clear of Leclerc. The Ferrari had fought past Piastri at the start, been overtaken by the Australian into Turn 1 at the first restart, been dropped before coming

“WE HAVE THE LIVE DATA. HE WAS STILL ABSOLUTELY FLAT-OUT. AND THERE WAS A DOUBLE WAVED YELLOW THERE”

back strongly at the second McLaren, and ultimately been the biggest gainer of the leaders with a pitstop during the second safety car.

Leclerc then held off Piastri to secure second and take a potentially important bite out of McLaren’s constructors’ championship lead for his Ferrari squad. Verstappen was 6.0s ahead at the flag. It was, he said, a stunning turnaround from “fighting Haas in the sprint to fighting for the win in the main race”.

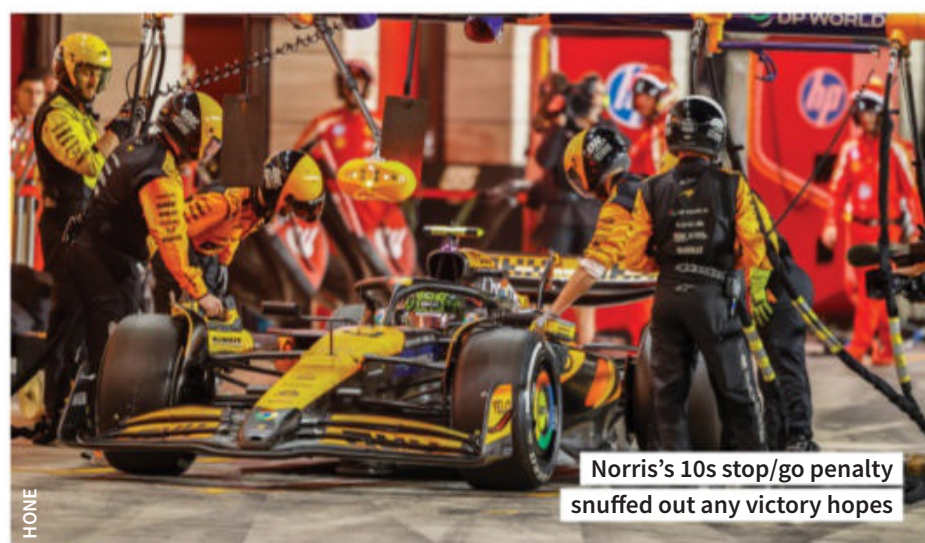
Red Bull had fitted Perez’s car with a more steeply angled front wing during the sprint to try to solve its awful balance issue from its simulation and wind tunnel tools not providing the best initial set-up. But it didn’t do likewise for Verstappen’s downforce package into GP qualifying. Instead, adjusting the RB20’s ride height and damper settings to provide a more compliant ride around the massive amount of kerb-riding required here did the trick.

But it might not have been enough to win, with Norris insisting afterwards he had “easily the quickest car out there”. The leaders were also running the harder tyre compound to the end, something the Red Bull has struggled with at times this season. The McLaren can “extract some additional performance out of the car” as race ends approach, as Stella put it. Its rivals are still mystified as to why.

This was on display when Norris roared back from exiting the pitlane after his penalty in 15th and last position to finish 10th, doubling his points tally with the fastest lap from that run.

His average, once you remove the three laps where he caught then passed Liam Lawson, Yuki Tsunoda and Albon, comes in 0.42s quicker than Verstappen each time over the same distance – 1m22.880s playing 1m23.300s.

But, with Norris gone, Verstappen said he “drove it to the end with good pace”, the obvious caveat being that he had no need to push, and so it can never be known whether Norris’s charge on the hard tyre would have yielded the win. Stella concluded that it was “difficult to say, not necessarily [that we] would have won the race”.



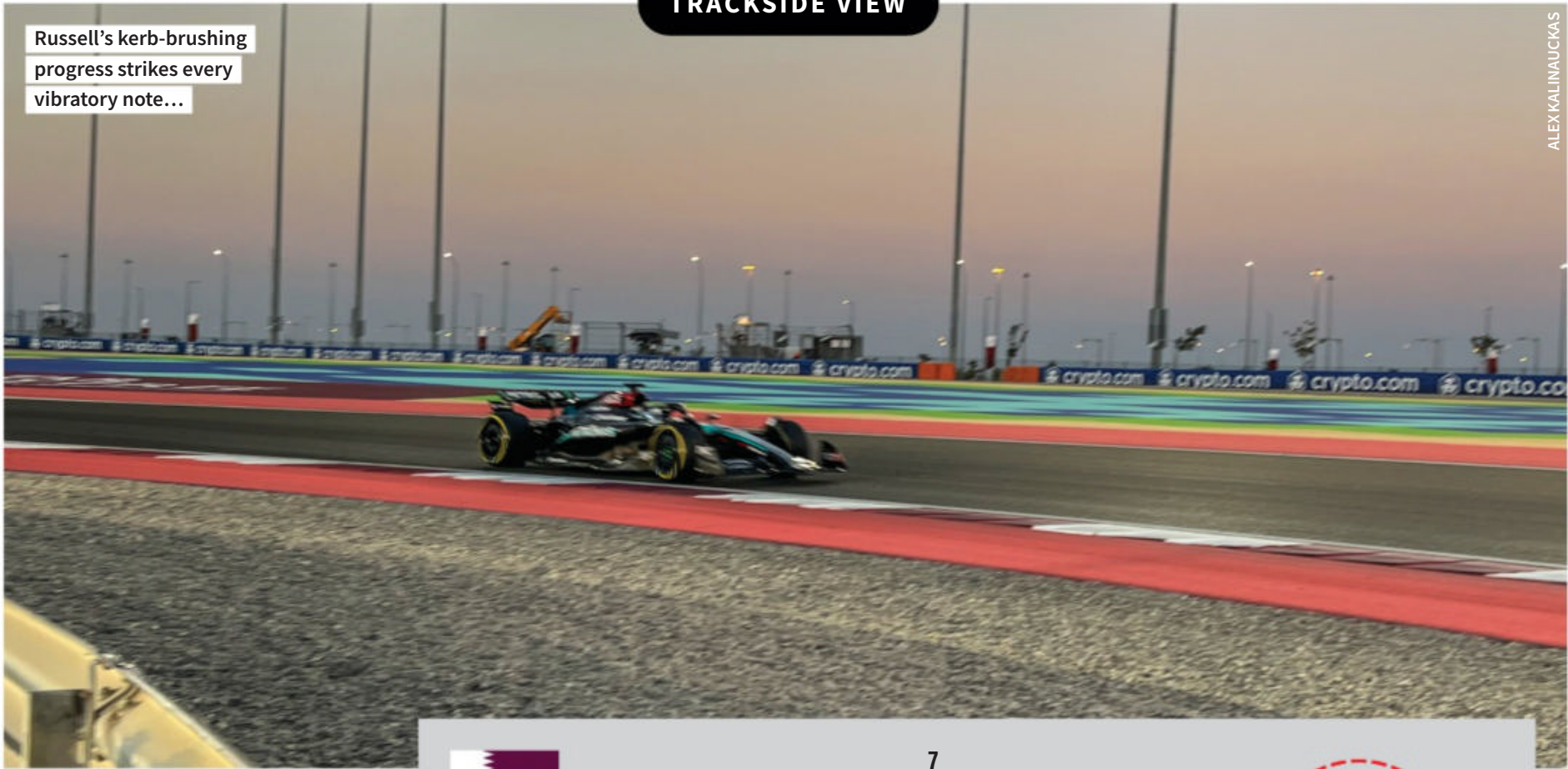
Norris’s 10s stop/go penalty snuffed out any victory hopes

NEXT
F1 REPORT

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix
12 December
issue

TRACKSIDE VIEW

Russell's kerb-brushing progress strikes every vibratory note...



ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Formula 1 cars racing around the Losail International circuit have a unique audible quality. Which is good, because everything visually about this place is relentlessly repetitive. Desert, lights, run-off – repeat, repeat, repeat.

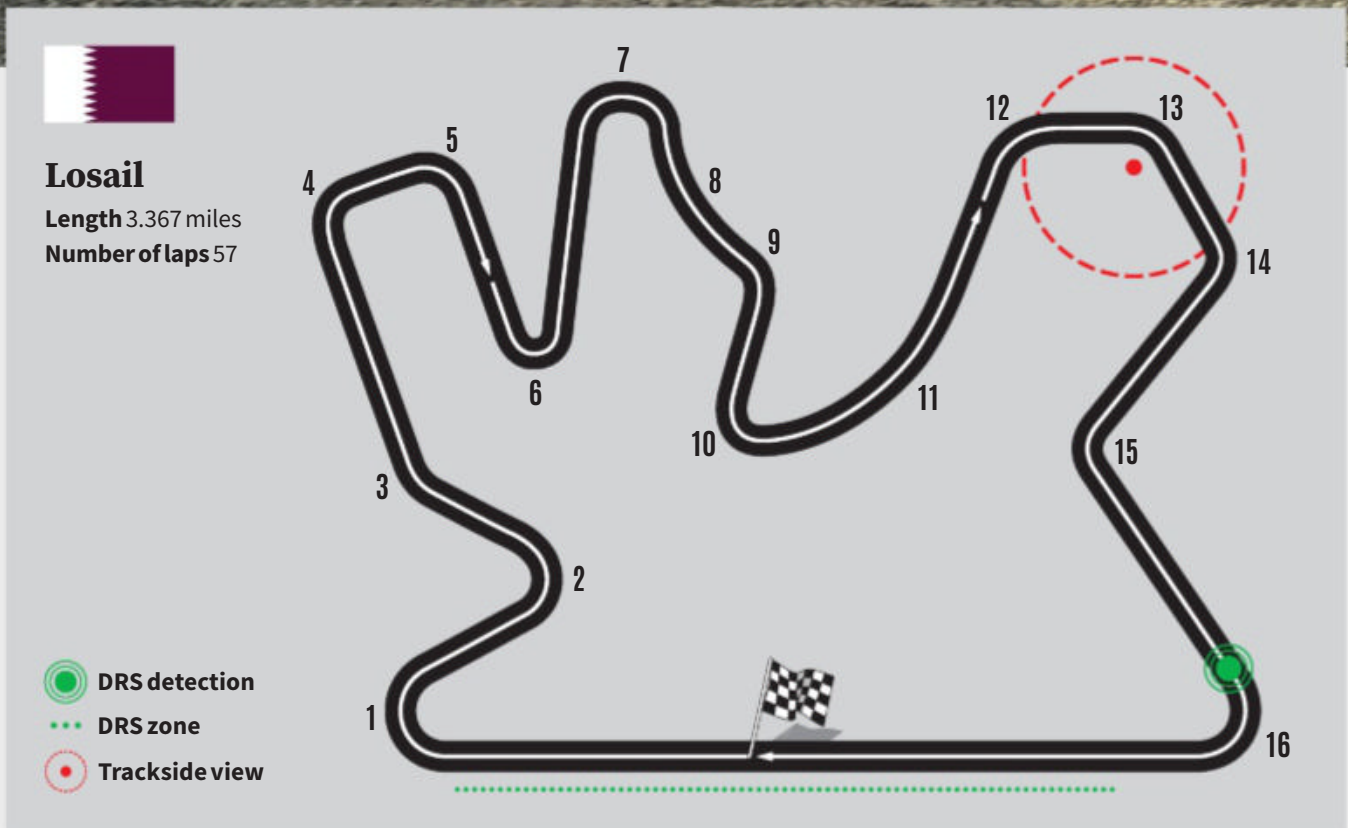
But, standing on the inside of the Turns 12-14 run of high-speed right-handers for the sole practice running at the Qatar Grand Prix, the extra noise really stands out. It's coming from how long the drivers are still willing to spend on the raised kerbs here, even after

“It's with our ears we first notice how the Mercedes are taking different lines”

the disastrous results this approach had for the tyres in 2023.

Go to any circuit on the current calendar and you'll hear the same noise at specific turns, albeit infrequently. Here, because of how often and how long the drivers run on the kerbs, the hum has an oddly symphonic quality.

After wandering up from Turn 12 as the one-hour session gets under way, we're on the inside



of Turn 13 as the drivers get up to speed on the harder compounds. This means we can hear the higher-pitched vibrations of the cars running and rubbing (none more than the Mercedes pair) along the exit kerbs of the preceding kink, the lower hum of the drivers clipping the Turn 13 apex kerb with their right-side wheels, then the return of the higher whine as they shoot off to sweep in from the

Turn 14 approach kerbs. It's rather hypnotic. Or as much as the sound of differently tuned guiros (the wooden 'fish' percussion instrument inhabiting UK primary schools) being accompanied by wind-section-expanding vacuum cleaners can be anyway.

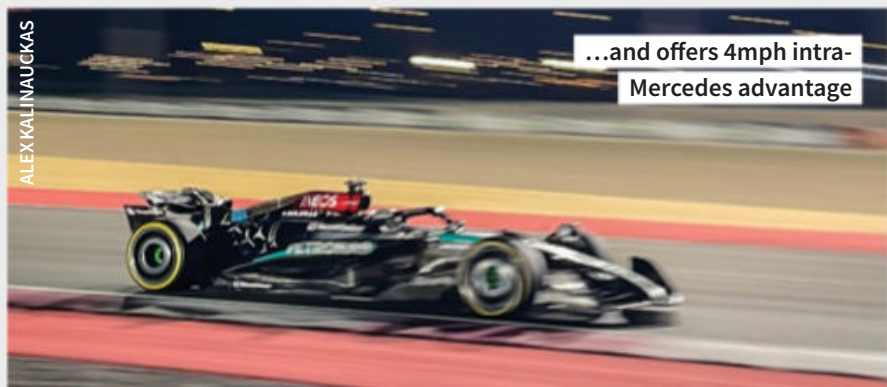
The note changes are helpful, given the cars are blasting through this sequence at such frequency that headspin is never far away. So, it's with our ears we first notice how the Mercedes drivers are taking different lines here. George Russell is striking every note, but Hamilton is skipping the middle by turning in a bit later from the Turn 12 exit and taking a shallower line overall. A later scan of their GPS trace data reveals Russell's line is worth an extra 4mph at this stage.

We walk on to the inside of Turn

14 for the session's middle phase, where the wind really picks up. This is clearly making it harder for the drivers to judge the right turn-in point from the outside approach kerbs. Franco Colapinto hangs on a fraction too long and so swings in deeper, thwacking the inside kerbs as the rear traverses more wildly than before. He runs wide as his Williams bottoms out. A few minutes past the halfway stage, Charles Leclerc is stepping fully off the gas of his Ferrari to avoid the same off.

The wind dies and the pack is switched to the soft tyres for a late series of performance runs. Now it's not just the Mercedes pair sparking spectacularly, but the Ferrari and McLaren too. Some visual variation – at last.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS



...and offers 4mph intra-Mercedes advantage

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

GASLY HOLDS OFF SAINZ TO GIVE ALPINE THE EDGE

Pierre Gasly enjoyed “an incredible race” in the Qatar Grand Prix, and finished fifth after winning out in a late tussle with Carlos Sainz’s Ferrari.

Gasly’s race had initially focused on Kevin Magnussen, with Alpine and Haas hoping to strike a decisive blow in the battle for sixth in the constructors’ championship. This seemed to be going the American team’s way while Magnussen and Gasly recovered from falling back at the start, with the Frenchman taking longer to rise back ahead of Fernando Alonso and Yuki Tsunoda.

When Magnussen pitted, Gasly upped his pace and gained massively by staying out until the second safety car and rising to fifth. Sainz’s puncture contributed to this, but he was already feeling a problem with his left-front even before he hit Alex Albon’s mirror debris.

Sainz chased Gasly after the final two restarts. In the wake of Lando Norris’s restart attack on eventual winner Max Verstappen, Gasly locked up defending fifth from George Russell and went off, allowing Sainz past. But when Sainz in turn slid wide out of Turn 5 while attacking Russell, Gasly got back ahead and resisted Sainz’s close attentions to the finish. “I really wanted to get that P5,” he said.

Alpine is now five points clear of Haas with one round to go.



Zhou gets Sauber on the scoreboard in Qatar contest

“Just exiting the whole season at Q1 – that’s not what I wanted to put myself in before I go to start my new chapter.”

Thankfully for Zhou Guanyu, his Formula 1 career-equalling best finish of eighth in the 2024 Qatar GP means he will leave the top tier on a high. His Losail result also helped Sauber avoid becoming F1’s first point-less team since Haas in 2021.

Zhou had reached Q2 for the second time in a week and started the GP 12th, but his race initially took a hit when he had to go off at Turn 4 avoiding the consequences of Lance Stroll whacking Alex Albon. From 15th at the first restart, he gained when Liam Lawson lightly tagged Valtteri Bottas in the other Sauber, then pressed on while managing his medium tyres, in the process getting past Yuki Tsunoda’s RB.

The second safety car meant Zhou could make a cheap pitstop for hard tyres along with so many others, although he fell behind Fernando Alonso when the Aston Martin driver attacked. Zhou held position at the third restart, then moved into eighth thanks to Lando Norris’s penalty. He was in no man’s land between Alonso and Kevin Magnussen at the flag.

“Zhou drove superbly,” said Sauber team representative Alessandro



Alunni Bravi. “Staying in control.”

Bottas, meanwhile, sustained floor damage in his Turn 1 off around Lawson’s spin. He dropped back from running 13th, when he was in with a strong chance of scoring his own first points of 2024. Pitting between George Russell and Magnussen before the second safety car meant he rejoined last. Now on medium tyres, Bottas was able to keep ahead of the soft-shod RB pair late on, and overcome the medium-tyred Williams of Albon by the finish. But Norris’s charge deprived Bottas of the final point.

“WAS IT MIRROR? I HEARD BEAVER. MY ENGINEERS SAID: ‘THERE’S A BEAVER’. BUT WHY IS THERE A BEAVER IN THE MIDDLE EAST? LIKE HOW IS IT POSSIBLE A BEAVER IS IN THE MIDDLE EAST? BUT OK, MAYBE THERE’S A SURPRISE WITH GLOBAL WARMING - KICKING A LOT OF INTERESTING THINGS IN THE EARTH.”

Yuki Tsunoda, who fell from a strong start to finish 13th for RB after a late stint on the fragile softs, was confused by a radio miscommunication around the race-changing debris.



Tough race for Haas duo

Haas slipped perhaps conclusively behind Alpine in the fight for sixth in the constructors' championship, with Kevin Magnussen undone by the second safety car in Qatar and Nico Hulkenberg enduring a horror show.

Magnussen's first-lap off into the gravel at Turn 5 undid his typical good work at the start and he slipped back, but he soon recovered past Fernando Alonso and Yuki Tsunoda. Critically, he led Pierre Gasly in ninth at DRS-arm's length until he pitted, with Haas's tactics centred solely on beating the lead Alpine. But Magnussen's lap 27 service for hard

tyres was eight tours before the second safety car, and he was 10th after the final two restarts.

He fell behind Alex Albon and was narked by the Williams driver's subsequent defence, but he eventually powered past on the outside of Turn 1 to gain ninth around Lando Norris's penalty.

Hulkenberg's Turn 1 spin eliminated Esteban Ocon and Franco Colapinto and he ran at the rear of the field before taking medium tyres, also just before the second safety car. He then spun out of 13th, pushing too hard at Turn 9.



HAMILTON AND PEREZ SUFFER NIGHTMARE GPs

Lewis Hamilton and Sergio Perez produced awful main races in Qatar, the Briton keen to retire his Mercedes early and the Mexican spinning solo under the safety car and burning out his Red Bull's clutch trying to rejoin.

Hamilton's Sunday got off to an awful start when he fractionally jumped the lights and earned a five-second penalty. He then chased Perez once they'd both got past Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin during the early stages, but as half-distance approached Hamilton was three seconds adrift. Perez, in turn, was almost 10s back from Carlos Sainz in fifth.

Hamilton's night was then ruined when his left-front tyre punctured running over Alex Albon's mirror debris and, in touring all the way back to the pits, he was briefly lapped. Before he undid this under the safety car, his failure to get his pitlane speed limiter on the second time the pack was ushered through the pits, and subsequent braking hard in front of Norris, meant he got a drive-through penalty too. Hamilton wanted to stop, but Mercedes insisted he make the finish in 12th.

Perez got up to fifth thanks to Sainz's puncture, but he threw this away by spinning in front of Pierre Gasly on the lap ahead of the second restart. He was stranded between Turns 14 and 15 after his attempts to turn around did for his clutch and briefly put him in peril of being hit as the safety car snake slithered past.



Q&A

FERNANDO ALONSO ASTON MARTIN DRIVER

How did you get on, going from eighth to seventh?

A very good Sunday for us. A lot of points, six points for the team. P7 is better than we anticipated. Obviously, we capitalised on some of the action in front of us, some DNFs, some penalties. We were ready there to take the opportunity and happy for that.

Did you expect such a strong display?

It was unexpected. But the car felt good already in qualifying and P8 I think it was a good surprise. In the race, we were relatively fast together with Alpine and Haas, and a little bit lucky at the end with all the safety cars and penalties of [Lando] Norris and DNF of Checo [Perez]. You have to be there. Sometimes when we are P14, P15, even if there is something happening in front of you, you don't take the opportunity. We were in the right place at the right time today.



What were you complaining about regarding straightline speed?

We had some issues. It's not the first race that we are lacking top speed in the first lap of the race or after the safety car. I think the car is confused – still thinking that we are behind the safety car. So, we don't deploy the energy properly out of the last corner when it's green flag. And that obviously is very costly if you don't deploy the energy when you have all the cars around you. We're still investigating. I think we know what the issue is. We just need to find the solution.

Why aren't you doing the Abu Dhabi tyre test next week?

I'm tired and it's no secret that I've been struggling physically for four races now. It seems that I'm now out of the darkness and I feel good. I felt good in Las Vegas, that I wanted to race immediately after Vegas, but I think I need to stop and take care of myself a little bit as well.



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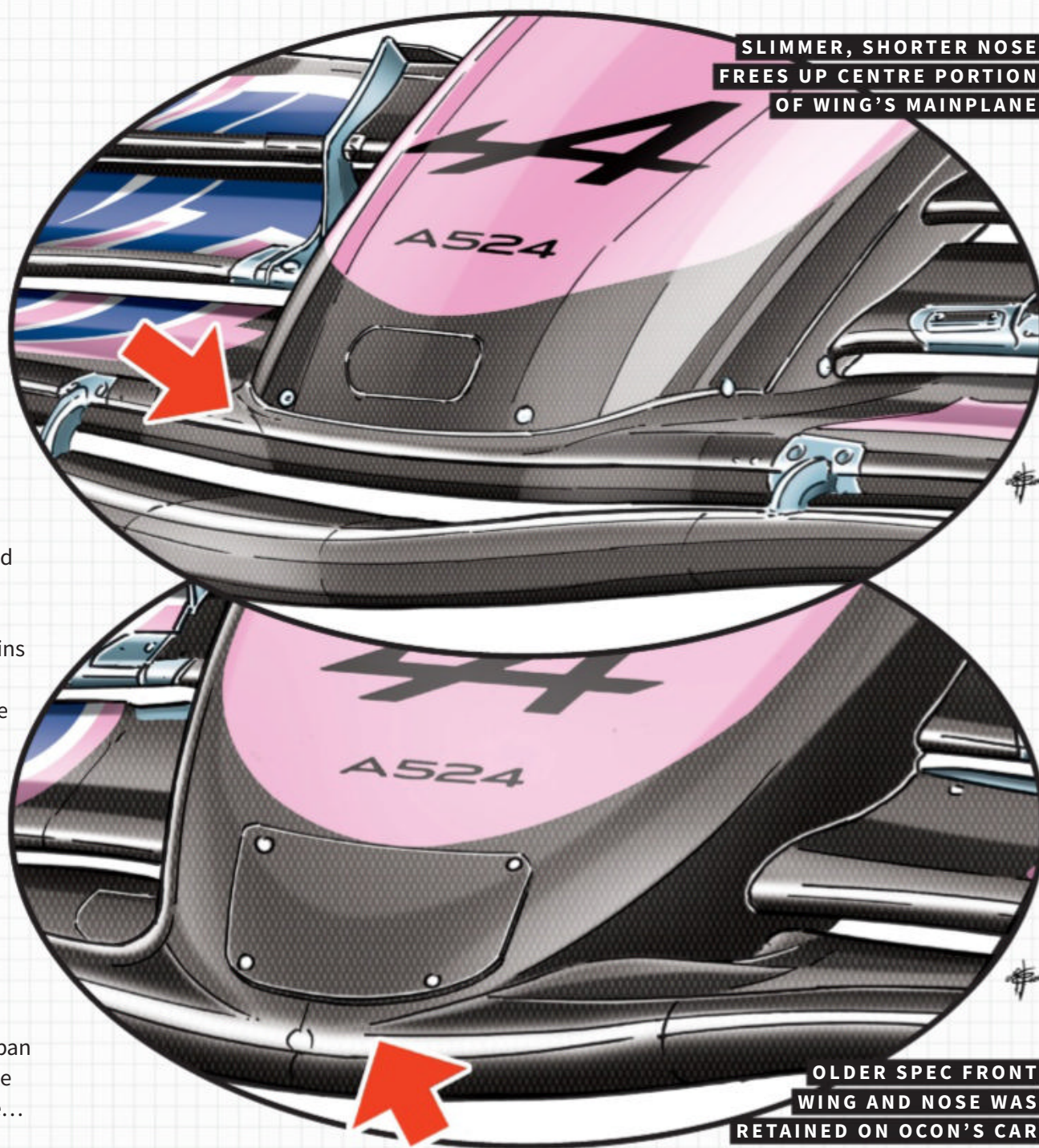
ALPINE APPROACHES PEAK WITH NEW NOSE

Alpine continued its pursuit of sixth in the constructors' title with a new front wing and nose, which it hoped would offer a couple of extra tenths of a second versus its competitors Haas and RB.

This featured a shorter nose tip, truncated at the wing's second element in order to free up the centre portion of the mainplane. The new nose is noticeably slimmer, while the new front wing is completely reprofiled and tends towards a more inboard-loaded set of elements versus the previous variant.

Alpine's pre-event technical notes stated that "the reprofiling of all front wing elements, mainly inboard, offers a better flow management as well as local load gains through the car operating envelope. The nose has been shortened to be compatible with the new front wing geometry and its detached first element, offering healthier flow interaction." Executive technical director David Sanchez confirmed that this new nose/wing pairing was introduced to get more out of the earlier upgrades taken to the United States Grand Prix in October, and that it would form part of the team's basis for 2025. There was only one new nose available, given to Pierre Gasly while Esteban Ocon retained the older spec – likely a wise move, given that Ocon was out on lap one...

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



SAUBER FLIES WITH NEW WING AND FLOOR

Sauber finally got off the mark in 2024 thanks to Zhou Guanyu's eighth in Qatar, as the team found performance with its Las Vegas GP floor and an updated front wing taken to the Losail circuit to set those changes off.

It made comprehensive changes to the floor last time out, with an entirely new body, diffuser

and floor edge to assess its merits ahead of 2025, and the new front wing seemed to unlock good potential from the car.

Sauber says the new wing was "a trimmed-down version" of its previous design, which "allows us to extend our potential balance range of the already existing front wing flap".

Valtteri Bottas said that, although the wing was trimmed back, the floor was "making the difference. It's just all-round downforce, a bit more consistency. As the grid is tight, everything helps." He measured the uptick in performance at around three tenths of a second.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

20 Ocon #31
1m22.714s

18 Hulkenberg #27
1m22.442s

16 Albon #23
1m22.390s

14 Tsunoda #22
1m21.771s

12 Zhou #24
1m21.501s

19 Colapinto #43
1m22.594s

17 Lawson #30
1m22.411s

15 Stroll #18
1m21.911s

13 Bottas #77
1m21.731s

11 Gasly #10
1m21.437s

FREE PRACTICE		
POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m21.953s
2	Norris	1m22.378s
3	Piastri	1m22.425s
4	Sainz	1m22.535s
5	Tsunoda	1m23.045s
6	Bottas	1m23.064s
7	Stroll	1m23.099s
8	Russell	1m23.160s
9	Albon	1m23.161s
10	Hamilton	1m23.188s
11	Verstappen	1m23.213s
12	Alonso	1m23.227s
13	Hulkenberg	1m23.245s
14	Lawson	1m23.562s
15	Gasly	1m23.620s
16	Magnussen	1m23.715s
17	Zhou	1m23.880s
18	Perez	1m24.039s
19	Colapinto	1m24.200s
20	Ocon	1m24.280s

WEATHER Dusk/night, air 20-21C track 23-24C

SPRINT QUALIFYING		
POS	DRIVER	TIME
Q3 1	Norris	1m21.012s
2	Russell	1m21.075s
3	Piastri	1m21.171s
4	Sainz	1m21.281s
5	Leclerc	1m21.308s
6	Verstappen	1m21.315s
7	Hamilton	1m21.474s
8	Gasly	1m21.978s
9	Hulkenberg	1m22.088s
10	Lawson	1m22.577s
Q2 11	Alonso	1m22.433s
12	Albon	1m22.526s
13	Bottas	1m22.538s
14	Stroll	1m22.599s
15	Magnussen	1m22.738s
Q1 16	Perez	1m22.718s
17	Tsunoda	1m22.722s
18	Ocon	1m22.906s
19	Zhou	1m22.948s
20	Colapinto	1m23.423s

WEATHER Night, air 18C track 20-21C

RACE QUALIFYING		
POS	DRIVER	TIME
Q3 1	Verstappen	1m20.520s
2	Russell	1m20.575s
3	Norris	1m20.772s
4	Piastri	1m20.829s
5	Leclerc	1m20.852s
6	Hamilton	1m21.011s
7	Sainz	1m21.041s
8	Alonso	1m21.251s
9	Perez	1m21.425s
10	Magnussen	1m21.500s
Q2 11	Gasly	1m21.437s
12	Zhou	1m21.501s
13	Bottas	1m21.731s
14	Tsunoda	1m21.771s
15	Stroll	1m21.911s
Q1 16	Albon	1m22.390s
17	Lawson	1m22.411s
18	Hulkenberg	1m22.442s
19	Colapinto	1m22.594s
20	Ocon	1m22.714s

WEATHER Night, air 18-19C track 20-21C

SPRINT RACE 19 LAPS – 63.81 MILES

POS	DRIVER	FINISH TIME	LED	TYRE	FASTEST LAPS
1	Piastri	27m03.010s	1	M	1m24.494s
2	Norris	+0.136s	18	M	1m24.329s
3	Russell	+0.410s		M	1m24.380s
4	Sainz	+1.326s		M	1m24.405s
5	Leclerc	+5.073s		M	1m23.923s
6	Hamilton	+5.650s		M	1m24.337s
7	Hulkenberg	+8.508s		M	1m24.284s
8	Verstappen	+10.368s		M	1m24.577s
9	Gasly	+14.513s		M	1m24.930s
10	Magnussen	+15.485s		M	1m24.568s
11	Alonso	+19.204s		M	1m24.281s
12	Bottas	+23.351s		M	1m25.447s
13	Stroll	+24.421s		M	1m25.369s
14	Ocon	+30.379s		M	1m25.598s
15	Albon	+33.062s		M	1m25.443s
16	Lawson	+34.356s		M	1m25.762s
17	Tsunoda	+35.102s		M	1m25.838s
18	Colapinto	+35.639s		M	1m25.599s
19	Zhou	+1m11.436s		S, M	1m25.051s
20	Perez	+1m14.371s		M	1m24.892s

WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 141.532mph
FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED 144.441mph

SPEED TRAP (GP QUALIFYING)

Aston Martin	202.1mph
Red Bull	201.6mph
Mercedes	201.0mph
Haas	200.8mph
Alpine	200.6mph
Ferrari	200.5mph
RB	199.2mph
Sauber	198.8mph
McLaren	198.5mph
Williams	197.6mph

NEXT RACE

8 December
Abu Dhabi GP
Yas Marina

SEASON STATS

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1 Verstappen	429	1	1
2 Norris	349	1	1
3 Leclerc	341	1	1
4 Piastri	291	1	2
5 Sainz	272	1	1
6 Russell	235	1	1
7 Hamilton	211	1	2
8 Perez	152	2	2
9 Alonso	68	5	3
10 Hulkenberg	37	6	6
11 Gasly	36	3	3
12 Tsunoda	30	7	3
13 Stroll	24	6	8
14 Ocon	23	2	4
15 Magnussen	16	7	7
16 Albon	12	7	7
17 Ricciardo	12	8	5
18 Bearman	7	7	11
19 Colapinto	5	8	9
20 Zhou	4	8	12
21 Lawson	4	9	5
22 Bottas	0	11	10
23 Sargeant	0	11	12

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

	PTS
1 McLaren	640
2 Ferrari	619
3 Red Bull	581
4 Mercedes	446
5 Aston Martin	92
6 Alpine	59
7 Haas	54
8 RB	46
9 Williams	17
10 Sauber	4

QUALIFYING BATTLE

Verstappen	22	1	Perez
Hamilton	5	18	Russell
Leclerc	14	8	Sainz
Leclerc	1	0	Bearman
Norris	19	4	Piastri
Alonso	18	5	Stroll
Gasly	11	10	Ocon
Albon	6	1	Colapinto
Sargeant	0	13	Albon
Tsunoda	4	0	Lawson
Ricciardo	5	12	Tsunoda
Zhou	3	19	Bottas
Magnussen	5	14	Hulkenberg
Hulkenberg	0	2	Bearman

WINS

Verstappen	9
Leclerc	3
Norris	3
Hamilton	2
Piastri	2
Russell	2
Sainz	2

POLE POSITIONS

Verstappen	8
Norris	7
Russell	4
Leclerc	3
Sainz	1

GP qualifying sessions only, not sprints. Events removed when one driver in a team could not record a representative lap time for reasons outside their control

STARTING GRID

10 Magnussen #20 1m21.500s	8 Alonso #14 1m21.251s	6 Hamilton #44 1m21.011s	4 Piastri #81 1m20.829s	2 Verstappen #1 1m20.520s
9 Perez #11 1m21.425s	7 Sainz #55 1m21.041s	5 Leclerc #16 1m20.852s	3 Norris #4 1m20.772s	1 Russell #63 1m20.575s

GP RESULTS ROUND 23/24 (57 LAPS – 191.76 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISH TIME	LED	TYRES
1	Max Verstappen (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	1h31m05.323s	57	Mn, Hn
2	Charles Leclerc (MCO)	Ferrari	+6.031s		Mu, Hn
3	Oscar Piastri (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	+6.819s		Mn, Hn
4	George Russell (GBR)	Mercedes	+14.104s		Mu, Hn, Hn
5	Pierre Gasly (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	+16.782s		Mn, Hn
6	Carlos Sainz (ESP)	Ferrari	+17.476s		Mu, Hn
7	Fernando Alonso (ESP)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+19.867s		Mn, Hn, Mu
8	Zhou Guanyu (CHN)	Sauber-Ferrari	+25.360s		Mn, Hn
9	Kevin Magnussen (DNK)	Haas-Ferrari	+32.177s		Mn, Hn
10	Lando Norris (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	+35.762s		Mn, Hn
11	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	Sauber-Ferrari	+50.243s		Mn, Hn, Mu
12	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	Mercedes	+56.122s		Mn, Hn
13	Yuki Tsunoda (JPN)	RB-Honda RBPT	+1m01.100s		Mn, Hn, Sn
14	Liam Lawson (NZL)	RB-Honda RBPT	+1m02.656s		Mn, Hn, Sn
15	Alexander Albon (THA)	Williams-Mercedes	-1 lap/+12.969s		Mn, Sn, Sn
R	Nico Hulkenberg (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	39 laps-accident		Hn, Hn, Mn
R	Sergio Perez (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	38 laps-spin/clutch		Mn, Hn
R	Lance Stroll (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	8 laps-accident damage		Mn, Hn, Hn
R	Franco Colapinto (ARG)	Williams-Mercedes	0 laps-accident		Mn
R	Esteban Ocon (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	0 laps-accident		Mn

WEATHER Night, air 18-19C track 21C

WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 126.313mph FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED 147.139mph.

FASTEST LAPS

POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP	LAP
1	Norris	1m22.384s	-	56
2	Verstappen	1m22.905s	+0.521s	55
3	Piastri	1m23.218s	+0.834s	51
4	Leclerc	1m23.242s	+0.858s	53
5	Russell	1m23.355s	+0.971s	50
6	Sainz	1m23.465s	+1.081s	52
7	Alonso	1m23.667s	+1.283s	57
8	Gasly	1m23.705s	+1.321s	56
9	Hamilton	1m23.865s	+1.481s	52
10	Zhou	1m23.889s	+1.505s	57
11	Magnussen	1m24.259s	+1.875s	55
12	Perez	1m25.288s	+2.904s	31
13	Bottas	1m25.533s	+3.149s	53
14	Albon	1m25.559s	+3.175s	47
15	Hulkenberg	1m25.767s	+3.383s	33
16	Lawson	1m26.076s	+3.692s	46
17	Tsunoda	1m26.144s	+3.760s	47
18	Stroll	1m30.935s	+8.551s	6
19	Colapinto	no time	-	-
20	Ocon	no time	-	-

RACE BRIEFING

SPRINT GRID PENALTIES
PEREZ and **COLAPINTO** required to start from the pitlane – cars modified while under parc ferme conditions

GP GRID PENALTIES
VERSTAPPEN one-place penalty for driving unnecessarily slowly

GP PENALTIES
STROLL 10-second penalty and two licence points for causing a collision with Albon
LAWSON 10s penalty and two licence points for causing a collision with Bottas
HAMILTON 5s penalty for false start and a drive-through penalty for pitlane speeding
ALBON 10s penalty and two licence points for causing a collision with Magnussen
NORRIS 10s stop/go penalty and three licence points for failing to slow for double waved yellow flags
RUSSELL 5s penalty and one licence point for falling more than 10 lengths behind the safety car

TYRES

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



LAP CHART

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	Russell	Verstappen	Norris	Piastri	Leclerc	Hamilton	Sainz	Alonso	Perez	Magnussen	Gasly	Zhou	Bottas	Tsunoda	Stroll	Albon	Lawson	Hulkenberg	Colapinto	Ocon
G	63	1	4	81	16	44	55	14	11	20	10	24	77	22	18	23	30	27	43	31
1	1	4	63	16	81	55	11	14	44	22	20	10	77	30	24	23	18	27		
2	1	4	63	16	81	55	11	14	44	22	20	10	77	30	24	23	18	27		
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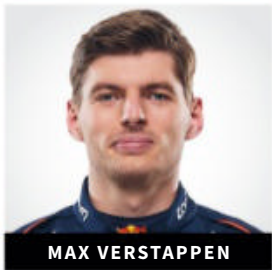
KEY: 1 Classification 5 Lap number 1 Safety car lap
G Starting grid 77 Lapped 18 Pit entry
81 Overtaken 16 Overtaken 43 Retirement

QATAR GP DRIVER RATINGS

Verstappen, Gasly and breakthrough points-scorer Zhou are Qatar's star turns, while Perez beats Stroll to the weekend's booby prize

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

RED BULL



MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started **2nd** — Result **1st**

9 Docile in sprint with ill-balanced car but devastating in grand prix. Unlucky to lose pole to apparent Russell block, but this fired him up. Managed sporadic threats from Norris well, and impressed with metronomic pace and race management. Covered off Norris on race restarts.



SERGIO PEREZ

Started **9th** — Result **R**

2 Sprint a disaster with SQ1 exit and missed pitlane start lights; his claim that he was seeking clean air debunked by his own team principal. Made Q3 for Sunday's race and looked to benefit from safety car madness, but dropped it in Turn 12 and burned out his clutch trying to recover.

MERCEDES



LEWIS HAMILTON

Started **6th** — Result **12th**

4 More like Brazil than Las Vegas. Got sixth in sprint, lined up sixth for grand prix, but lost three places at start. About a second per lap slower than Russell through the race, was undone by a puncture, and then picked up a drive-through penalty for speeding in pitlane. Hated balance of car.



GEORGE RUSSELL

Started **1st** — Result **4th**

7 Slipped back at start after failing to convert pole into Turn 1. Defended well from Piastri, but race was hindered by strategy – and then disagreed vehemently with choice to keep hard tyres through safety car phases. Recovered to fourth after losing podium through strategic misfortune.

FERRARI



CHARLES LECLERC

Started **5th** — Result **2nd**

8 Surprised to be second but drove an assured race to get there. Finished 3.7s down on Sainz in sprint, with impressive move for fifth on Hamilton. Kept in touch with leading pack, and pounced on Piastri's grasp of third with cheaper safety car stop. Maintained enough gap to keep the Australian behind.

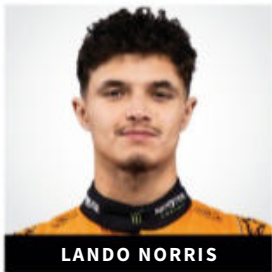


CARLOS SAINZ

Started **7th** — Result **6th**

7 Had advantage over Leclerc in sprint to finish fourth, but puncture hurt his Sunday. Looked on for fifth place until burst front-left cost handful of places. Reclaimed some places through safety car pitstops and pounced on Gasly on second restart, but got stuck behind the Alpine again.

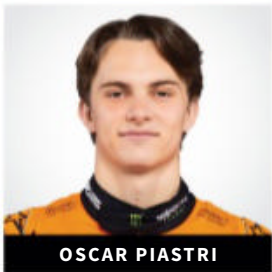
McLAREN



LANDO NORRIS

Started **3rd** — Result **10th**

6 Loses a hatful of points for fundamental misjudgement of yellow flags. Imperious in sprint and helped Piastri claim win, then challenged Verstappen on occasion during Sunday's race. Could not quite break past the Red Bull, and recovered to 10th after losing 35s on track to stop/go penalty.



OSCAR PIASTRI

Started **4th** — Result **3rd**

8 Pitstop timing before safety car very unlucky and ultimately cost second place. Lost a place to Leclerc at start but reclaimed it on first restart. Put Russell under scrutiny, and benefited from Mercedes' decision to pit early. Sprint race win made possible thanks to Norris's DRS assistance.

ASTON MARTIN



FERNANDO ALONSO

Started **8th** — Result **7th**

7 Very worthy drive on Sunday despite clear straightline speed deficit. Missed out on SQ3 by 0.04s, but broke into Q3 proper on Saturday. Gazumped on first restart, but held onto his tyres to take safety car stop, running hards for one lap before reverting to mediums.

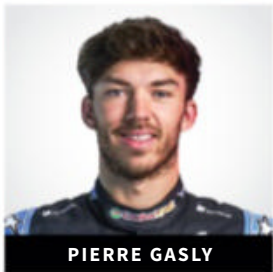


LANCE STROLL

Started **15th** — Result **R**

3 Performed as expected in sprint mired in midfield, but GP was terrible; drove into Albon, got a 10s penalty, then wanted to retire. Team cleared his penalty before allowing him to take an early bath. Did a passable impression of someone who didn't want to be there.

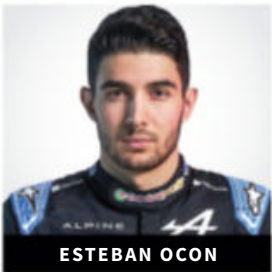
ALPINE



PIERRE GASLY

Started **11th** — Result **5th**

9 Marked down for Turn 1 slip after second safety car restart, but otherwise excellent. Grew into the grand prix slowly and benefited from safety car pitstop, and then recovered fifth from Sainz after losing places on restart #2. Defended from the Spaniard despite heavy lift-and-coast.



ESTEBAN OCON

Started **20th** — Result **R**

4 Not having access to Alpine's new nose could account for some of gap to Gasly, but not all; he was simply slow all weekend. Fell out at first hurdle of sprint qualifying, finished nearly 16s behind his team-mate, and then qualified last for grand prix. Race lasted about 500 metres.



Both Sauber drivers shone but only one bagged points

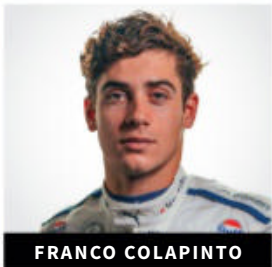
WILLIAMS



ALEX ALBON

Started 16th – Result 15th

5 Unrewarded for some good performances, but scruffiness in battle with Magnussen hurts score. Made intermediate phase of qualifying for sprint but not GP. Recovered from Stroll clout in main event, but battle with the remaining Haas over points ultimately cost him with iffy racecraft.

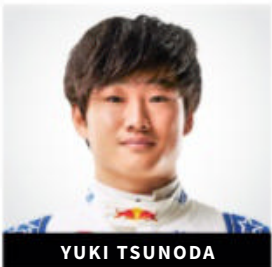


FRANCO COLAPINTO

Started 19th — Result R

4 Probably guilty of underdriving after Las Vegas shunt, although showed great mental acuity with Perez pass from pitlane start. Felt set-up changes after sprint didn't go in right way, leading to lowly qualifying position. Ultimately couldn't do anything in grand prix after being taken out at first corner.

RB



YUKI TSUNODA

Started 14th – Result 13th

5 Burned brightly at start of Sunday's race, but not for long as RB pace was poor. Rocketed up to ninth with moves on Magnussen and Alonso but couldn't hold on, with alarming slide down the order. Attempt to salvage something on late-race soft-tyres stint did not pay off.

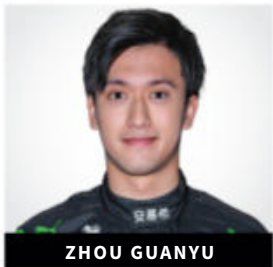


LIAM LAWSON

Started 17th – Result 14th

4 Strong but surprising appearance in SQ3 didn't hold water, and fell down sprint race order as RB struggled in race trim. Outqualified by Tsunoda for GP and spent most of it near the back, plus earned penalty for shoving Bottas off track with clumsy overtake, in which he also spun.

SAUBER



ZHOU GUANYU

Started 12th — Result 8th

9 Loses point for ceding three places at start but otherwise exceptional. Showed good form with Sauber upgrades, and held onto tyres well to benefit from safety car pitstop. Looked strong on hard compound, pace ensuring he pulled clear of cars behind to secure first Sauber points of 2024.



VALTTERI BOTTAS

Started 13th – Result 11th

8 See Zhou, but with lasting effects of Lawson's assault early in race and without fortune of a safety car pitstop. Nibble from RB driver caused floor damage and cost a place to Zhou, which meant he was in the supporting role. Had a shot at 10th, but denied by Norris's late-race surge.

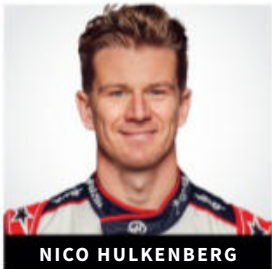
HAAS



KEVIN MAGNUSSEN

Started 10th — Result 9th

8 Catapulted his way from 15th to 10th in sprint. Outqualified Hulkenberg, but pitstop timing was hardly ideal. Battled back into points, although nose was put out of joint by 'robust' Albon defence. Broke past for ninth, and got up the road to have a healthy gap over recovering Norris.

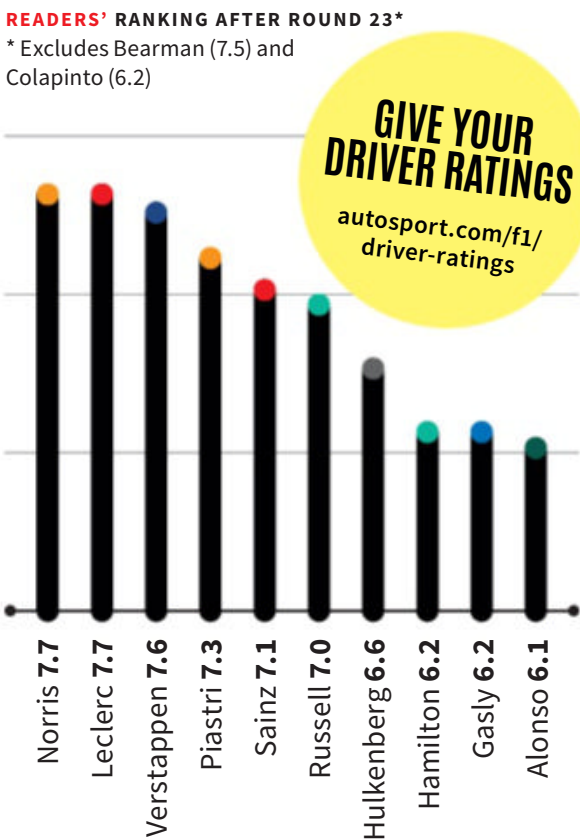
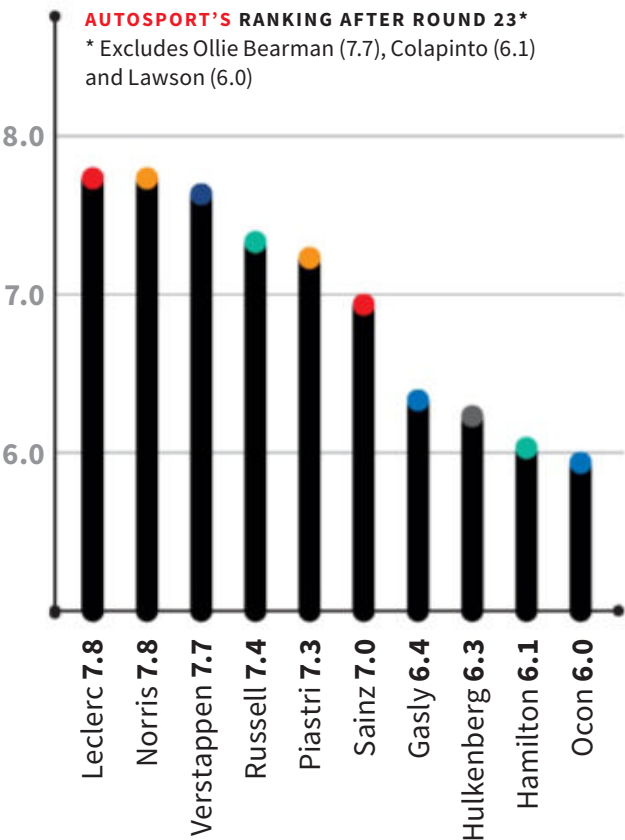


NICO HULKENBERG

Started 18th — Result R

5 Heroics in sprint race doing a lot of heavy lifting here; clinching seventh after a lightning start was big boost to Haas's hopes for sixth. Not to blame for first-corner clash with Ocon and Colapinto. That said, throwing his car off the road at Turn 9 was completely unforced.

TOP 10 AVERAGE RATINGS



GIVE YOUR DRIVER RATINGS
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Try as he might, Bortoleto could not pull out the required gap to Aron (chasing)

Just half a point in it as F2 season showdown looms in Abu Dhabi

FORMULA 2
LOSAIL (QAT)
30 NOVEMBER-1 DECEMBER
ROUND 13/14

Just half a point – that’s all that separates Gabriel Bortoleto and Isack Hadjar in the Formula 2 standings going into this weekend’s finale in Abu Dhabi. That’s after Paul Aron – who retains an outside shot of the crown himself – beat both of them in the feature race in Qatar last weekend, but only after on-the-road winner Bortoleto was given a penalty.

Hadjar would be in front were it not for an error just after conceding the lead of Saturday’s reversed-grid sprint race to Ollie Bearman. Prema driver Bearman started from pole position with hard tyres fitted, and somehow had enough grip to surge ahead at the start to lead from the medium-shod Campos Racing car of Red Bull Junior Hadjar. But it couldn’t last, and Hadjar took over the race lead on the second lap.

As the race wore on, those on medium tyres began to struggle, and Bearman came

back at Hadjar. The Briton made his move with the assistance of DRS and some late braking into Turn 1 on lap 21 of 23, just before Hadjar spun at Turn 4. That dropped him to fourth behind Jak Crawford (DAMS) and Richard Verschoor (the F2 veteran on his return to MP Motorsport).

Victor Martins fared worse than Hadjar on his medium tyres. The ART Grand Prix driver had burst through to third from seventh on the grid and, as he faded, he somehow kept Crawford behind until lap 17 – with Aron, Verschoor and Bortoleto joining the queue – before the floodgates opened and he plummeted to ninth. Aron finished fifth ahead of Bortoleto, but the Hitech GP driver was penalised behind the Brazilian and Zane Maloney to seventh for causing a collision with Martins.

The feature race pivoted on two quickfire caution periods around the pitstop window. Wheelspin at the start dropped poleman Aron behind Bortoleto as the lights went out, and the Brazilian had established a narrow lead by the time the Estonian pitted to switch onto hard tyres.

Bortoleto’s race came undone on the following lap, when the virtual safety car was deployed as he turned towards the pit entry. An unsafe release from Verschoor’s MP team had led to a collision with Andrea Kimi Antonelli in the pitlane, and the damage forced the Italian to park up in the gravel at Turn 1. Because mandatory stops cannot be completed under the VSC, Bortoleto veered suddenly away from the pitlane, but ran the wrong side of a marker cone and was handed a 5s penalty.



Bearman passed Hadjar late on to win sprint

WEEKEND WINNERS

FORMULA 2

LOSAIL (QAT)

Race 1 Ollie Bearman
Prema Racing

Race 2 Paul Aron
Hitech GP

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE ENDURANCE CUP

JEDDAH (SAU)

Lucas Auer/Maro Engel/Daniel Morad
Winward Racing (Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo)



For full results visit motorsportstats.com

When the action resumed, it was only for half a lap before Crawford and Rafael Villagomez collided at Turn 6, causing the safety car to emerge. At the green flag, Bortoleto – who had pitted under the full safety car – was a man on a mission, with Aron and Hadjar directly behind him. The Sauber F1-bound series leader begged his Invicta Racing team to instruct stablemate Kush Maini – who was yet to stop – to help by allowing him past before holding up his challengers to create the required 5s margin. But this did not transpire, and Maini pitted rather than assist.

By the chequered flag, Bortoleto could only pull out 1.8s on Aron and 4.6s on Hadjar, dropping him to third in the results. Next up were impressive recent F3 graduates Oliver Goethe (MP), Dino Beganovic (on his debut with DAMS) and Christian Mansell (Trident), the last-named climbing 14 places from his grid slot.

SAM HALL

Ferrari's crown as Mercedes wins curtain closer

**GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE
ENDURANCE CUP
JEDDAH (SAU)
30 NOVEMBER
ROUND 5/5**

At the end of the first hour of the final GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup race of the season, AF Corse's race-leading and championship-chasing Ferrari looked to have shot itself in the metaphorical foot. A dreadful pitstop under a full course yellow cost it over 30 seconds and caused Alessio Rovera, Alessandro Pier Guidi and Davide Rigon to tumble down the order. The team had scrambled the car into the pitlane to cover off the Team WRT BMW of Valentino Rossi, Raffaele Marciello and Maxime Martin, who had vaulted up the order by pitting as the FCY was called. By the end of the six hours, though, the picture was very different.

Rovera led the opening stint from Marco Mapelli (Grasser Racing Team Lamborghini Huracan) and Christopher Haase (Tresor Attempto Racing Audi R8) who, with team-mates Alex Aka and Ricardo Feller, was tied on points with Rovera and Pier Guidi. When Rovera pitted, his bay was already full of AF Corse's fleet of cars and he had to overshoot. Dollies were needed under the Ferrari 296 GT3 to wheel it into place and it fell to 24th. Also in strife was the championship-leading Aston Martin Vantage of Nicki Thiim/Marco Sorensen/Mattia Drudi, which struggled for pace all weekend, and Drudi dropped down the order early on.

After the first round of stops it was Rossi who led, and his double stint overlapped a lengthy FCY period that



Champions Pier Guidi (centre) and Rovera (right) celebrate Endurance title with Rigon

developed into a safety car period after Arthur Rougier's Audi crashed with Niccolò Schiro's Ferrari at Turn 22. On the restart, Rossi fell behind Lucas Auer, who had replaced Daniel Morad in Winward Racing's Mercedes-AMG, and that car became unstoppable as Auer double-stinted and handed to Maro Engel for the final 100 minutes. Engel controlled the race, with the Haase/Aka/Feller Audi and Franck Perera/Jordan Pepper/Mapelli Lambo third, but the Audi lost pace in the second half of the race and its early-weekend speed ebbed away. As the Audi faded, the Lamborghini took second and at one stage the two teams tied on points.

A final FCY turned things upside down again. As Job van Uitert's Aston Martin expired on the inside at Turn 1, the field duly bunched up for a safety car restart and suddenly Thiim was up to fourth and looking as though the

championship would go the way of Comtoyou Racing. As Engel built his lead from Perera on the restart, Thiim's Aston continued its unequal struggle for power and dropped to 10th, an inspired Pier Guidi charging up to third and the title. It was a third for him and a maiden one for Rovera (Rigon was subbing for Antonio Fuoco). "I was lucky with the yellow," smiled Pier Guidi. "The car had the performance but we lost a lot of time at the first stop. After that, I gave it my maximum."

The race win for Engel, Auer and Morad secured the overall GTWCE title (based on Endurance and Sprint results) for the Austro-German Mercedes duo, while Gilles Magnus/Jim Pla/Paul Evrard (Sainteloc Racing Audi) won the Gold crown, and Bronze fell to Chris Froggatt/Jonathan Hui/Eddie Cheever (Sky Tempesta Racing Ferrari).

DAVID ADDISON



Race win secured overall GTWCE crown for Merc pairing Auer and Engel



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Left to right: Pin, Weug, Pulling and Al Qubaisi battle it out at start

Briton Pulling secures title one round early

F1 ACADEMY
LOSAIL (QAT)
30 NOVEMBER-1 DECEMBER
ROUND 6/7

Abbi Pulling secured the F1 Academy title in last Saturday's opening race in support of the Qatar Grand Prix before Sunday's action was cancelled due to a heavy crash in the preceding Porsche Carrera Cup Middle East event.

Alpine junior Pulling needed just 18 points from the remaining four races across Qatar and Abu Dhabi to seal the deal, irrespective of what chief rival Doriane Pin could achieve. The Rodin Motorsport-run Briton had featured on the front row for every race this term, but her streak was ended on Saturday

when Pin, in Mercedes colours, and her Ferrari-backed Prema Racing stablemate Maya Weug locked out the top two positions for both outings.

There was another first for Pulling in the opening exchanges of race one. She went wheel to wheel with Weug through Turns 1 and 2 before gaining second position – her first on-track pass of the campaign. With Pin out front and on her way to victory by 6.7 seconds, the top three positions remained unchanged to the chequered flag, resulting in Pulling taking the crown and, with it, a fully funded GB3 seat with Rodin for 2025.

"It's been a tougher season than most think," said Pulling. "Going into the year, I had no choice but to win. I've struggled financially in the past and to get the prize

for next year – I know it's so early to be talking about next year – that makes me so happy, so incredibly proud."

As well as claiming the crown, second place continued Pulling's 100% rate of podium finishes, and she has only once ended a race outside the top two. With Sunday's race cancelled, the battle for second in the standings between Pin and Weug carries into the Abu Dhabi finale.

Behind the leaders, the racing was frenetic, with Hamda Al Qubaisi fourth in the Red Bull-liveried MP Motorsport entry, and wildcard Alisha Palmowski impressing with a confident drive to fifth on the GB4 runner-up's debut with Prema. Palmowski also took fourth in qualifying for the shelved second race.

SAM HALL

Lebbon and Rattican crowned

GT4 EUROPEAN SERIES
JEDDAH (SAU)
29-30 NOVEMBER
ROUND 6/6

British duo Tom Lebbon and Josh Rattican swept to GT4 European Series Silver Cup title glory in Jeddah, despite championship rivals Robert Consani and Benjamin Lariche winning both races.

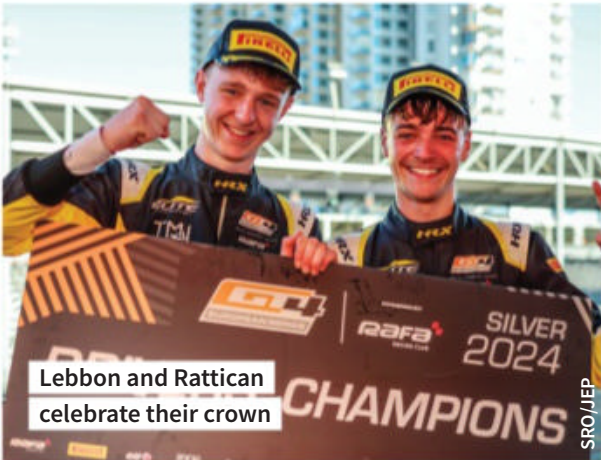
After a power failure in free practice, Rattican qualified on the front row for the opening race, which was won by the French drivers' Audi while the Elite Motorsport

McLaren headed for third place. That gave Consani and Lariche a mathematical chance of taking the title, especially when former rally driver Consani qualified on pole for race two, but he was given a three-place grid drop for impeding the second McLaren of Alex Denning.

Consani battled his way into the lead during the opening stint, but Rattican and Lebbon only needed to be in the top eight in class to take the title. They kept out of trouble by playing the points game and securing fifth in the season-closing race to wrap up the crown. "That was a really good race and it's a great feeling to win the championship," enthused Lebbon. "It was hard [for pace] in a straight line here, but we didn't need to do anything other than just bring it home to win." A delighted Rattican reckoned: "I lied before the race when I said it wasn't nerve-racking! It was the toughest race I have ever been in but the result was what we needed."

The title was the first for a British duo since Bailey Voisin/Charlie Fagg in 2021, and the first for Eddie Ives's Elite squad.

DAVID ADDISON



Lebbon and Rattican celebrate their crown

WEEKEND WINNERS

- F1 ACADEMY**
LOSAIL (QAT)
Doriane Pin
Prema Racing
- GT4 EUROPEAN SERIES**
JEDDAH (SAU)
Races 1 & 2 Benjamin Lariche/Robert Consani
Team Speedcar (Audi R8 LMS GT4, below)
- SUPER FORMULA LIGHTS**
MOTEGI (JPN)
Races 1 & 3 Syun Koide
B-Max Racing Team
Race 2 Rikuto Kobayashi
TOM'S



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FORMULA E

HUNGRY FOR MORE TITLES

*Porsche and reigning drivers' champion
Pascal Wehrlein head into the new
Formula E season this weekend
as the combination to beat*

STEFAN MACKLEY



GRIFFITHS

When Pascal Wehrlein prevailed in a three-way, winner-takes-all title fight at the final round just five months ago, his superb drive and championship win showcased his abilities to their very best, and proved why the German was once on the books of Mercedes.

Wehrlein's journey to the Formula E crown had been a long and winding one. He joined the series in 2018 with something of a point to prove after failing to make his mark in Formula 1, first with Manor and then Sauber, which somewhat diminished his achievement of becoming the youngest champion in DTM history in 2015. Since he joined Porsche in 2021, the partnership has developed and ultimately flourished last season. And despite technical regulation changes initially threatening to flip the pecking order, it shows every possibility of continuing.

Wehrlein and Porsche enter the 2024-25 Formula E World Championship, which gets under way this weekend in Sao Paulo – before a further 15 races at nine different locations take place in 2025 – as the combination to beat. With the monkey now off his back and the lingering shadow of doubt cast aside, the 30-year-old could well be entering his prime, having proven to himself and any doubters that he's capable of beating allcomers.

"I would say a bit more relaxed than in the past having done it,

but the important thing is the hunger is still the same to do it again," Wehrlein asserts. "It starts from zero now, whatever happened last year doesn't affect the next season.

"I just want to enjoy having a very strong team behind me and having a car where I can show my talent, and I think we have everything to win all three [driver, manufacturer and team championships]. In the end, everyone else will try the same and as we know in Formula E the competition is very close, but I think in terms of package, we have what it needs, and now we just need to optimise and make the best out of it. But for sure it's not guaranteed that we will win any championships. We still need to work really hard and have a clean season."

A clean season is almost what Wehrlein achieved last term. He registered just two non-scores in 16 races – at Misano and Shanghai, both after damaging his front wing, an issue that may now be a thing of the past courtesy of a sturdier front element on the new Gen3 Evo cars. But the challenge facing Wehrlein and Porsche is one that only Jean-Eric Vergne has been able to conquer in 10 years of the championship's history – winning consecutive drivers' titles. Remarkably, Vergne's achievement spanned the Gen1 and Gen2 eras and, while the introduction of the Gen3 Evo is more evolution than revolution, it still poses a significant challenge with the addition of all-wheel drive (AWD), a more



A now more relaxed Wehrlein has the motivation to become a double champion

2024-25 FORMULA E CALENDAR		
RD	VENUE	DATE
1	Sao Paulo (BRA)	7 December
2	Mexico City (MEX)	11 January
3	Jeddah* (SAU)	14-15 February
4	Miami (USA)	12 April
5	Monte Carlo* (MCO)	3-4 May
6	Tokyo* (JPN)	17-18 May
7	Shanghai* (CHN)	31 May-1 June
8	Jakarta (IDN)	21 June
9	Berlin* (DEU)	12-13 July
10	London* (GBR)	26-27 July

*Double-header events



Wehrlein clinched title at London finale



There are downsides to having two customer teams, says Modlinger, but also a payoff

temperamental tyre and the Pit Boost concept (see page 39). One area that affects Porsche is that it now supplies powertrains to a second customer team in the form of the newly rebranded Kiro squad. It will also continue supplying Andretti as it has done since 2023, meaning Porsche is the only factory effort to provide services for two customer teams. That creates extra work, but also more data to tap into. “In the ramp-up phase, it’s clearly a disadvantage because we do not have the resources, or we need

to stretch the resources a lot to get everything ready,” admits team principal Florian Modlinger, “but long term for sure we try to get an advantage out of that.” Quite how much impact that ramp-up phase has had on the efforts of the factory team as well as the car’s development remains to be seen, but it certainly didn’t seem to hinder Porsche during pre-season testing last month. The Jarama circuit, which was a last-minute stand-in venue due to the devastating flooding >>



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GRIFFITHS



FORMULA E ENTRY LIST

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Pascal Wehrlein	Porsche
13	Antonio Felix da Costa	Porsche
2	Stoffel Vandoorne	Maserati MSG
55	Jake Hughes	Maserati MSG
3	David Beckmann	Kiro (Porsche)
33	Dan Ticktum	Kiro (Porsche)
4	Robin Frijns	Envision (Jaguar)
16	Sebastien Buemi	Envision (Jaguar)
5	Taylor Barnard	McLaren (Nissan)
8	Sam Bird	McLaren (Nissan)
7	Maximilian Guenther	DS Penske
25	Jean-Eric Vergne	DS Penske
9	Mitch Evans	Jaguar
37	Nick Cassidy	Jaguar
11	Lucas di Grassi	Lola-Yamaha Abt
22	Zane Maloney	Lola-Yamaha Abt
17	Norman Nato	Nissan
23	Oliver Rowland	Nissan
21	Nyck de Vries	Mahindra
48	Edoardo Mortara	Mahindra
27	Jake Dennis	Andretti (Porsche)
51	Nico Muller	Andretti (Porsche)

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Wehrlein third fastest in testing at Jarama and led Porsche 1-2 in simulation race

“Heads down, full focus, extract the best and the most potential of all areas, then let’s see where we are”

in Valencia that has claimed the lives of more than 200 people, was a welcome surprise to drivers and teams. Its high-speed, cambered corners along with an abrasive surface was quite different to other layouts featured on the upcoming FE schedule, while the uncapped use of AWD and the performance benefit of fresh tyres somewhat muddled the waters when it came to the leaderboard.

Even so, Wehrlein finished the test with the third fastest outright time and led home a Porsche 1-2 in the simulation race, with team-mate Antonio Felix da Costa insisting the team was “just replicating this test as close as we can to a race weekend”. Modlinger adds: “When I look around, some manufacturers have a big update, but we developed our complete powertrain also further. This means we looked in every dedicated area, checked for potential where it makes sense to spend the resources and the money, and we touched nearly every part of the powertrain from inverter, motor to the differential and also the suspension. This means little updates, but I hope effectful updates in all areas.”

This season will be Porsche’s sixth campaign in FE, during which time it has noticeably made steady and consistent progress, moving from eighth in the first two years to just missing out on the teams’ title most recently. The manufacturer is, of course, no stranger to success. And, with the taste of one FE championship, there’s every reason to suspect it will be leading the charge for even more trophies this season.

“Gen3 [new in 2023] was the first time that Porsche was there from the beginning of a generation and that season was already successful,” points out Modlinger. “We had still some weaknesses, the qualifying performance, and for last season we improved the weakness.

“We were good for wins with both drivers, and we want to be good for wins every year. I do not say, and never will be confident, in such a highly competitive series because what you won last year, there’s no guarantee for the future. This means heads down, full focus, extract the best and the most potential of all areas, and then let’s see where we are.” ❄

➔ P38 FIVE THINGS TO WATCH THIS SEASON

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FIVE THINGS TO WATCH THIS SEASON



1

JAGUAR THE BIGGEST THREAT DESPITE ISSUES

After coming within a whisker of the drivers' title with both Mitch Evans and Nick Cassidy last season, Jaguar enters the new Gen3 Evo era as the reigning teams' champion and appears to be Porsche's biggest rival once again. Evans finished pre-season testing at Jarama fastest on the final day, with Porsche's Antonio Felix da Costa suggesting that the Big Cats had been sandbagging during the earlier part of the running.

But the test wasn't without its issues. Jaguar, as well as Nissan, were forced to miss the opening three-hour session in Spain after both teams were found in breach of the cost cap limit for the 2022-23 season. Cassidy also came to a halt on track with a technical problem during one session, and hints that the team had been on the back foot during the off-season

having not "rolled out of the box as we wanted to with a new car".

Evans adds: "Everyone has improved their powertrain. Hopefully the pecking order is the same, but I think the next two years are going to be even tighter than what we've seen in the past."

The decision not to implement team orders and favour early points leader Cassidy over Evans last term arguably cost Jaguar the drivers' title, with team principal James Barclay admitting that things will be handled differently this season if in the same position. "We probably won't quite approach it in the same way," he says. "That doesn't mean it was wrong last year. We gave everyone an equal opportunity, it didn't work out and now we say, 'OK, next year let's not put ourselves in that position.'"



2

THE MIDFIELD RUNNERS LOOKING TO BREAK FROM THE PACK

Oliver Rowland and Nissan were the dark horses last season, taking two wins and mounting a challenge for the drivers' title before an illness ruled the Briton out of the Portland double-header late in the season and scuppered his chances. With Rowland alongside the returning Norman Nato, who replaces Sacha Fenestraz, the Japanese manufacturer has one of the most experienced pairings on the grid and looked strong during pre-season testing.

"I think naturally you always have to aim to improve what you've previously done," reckons Rowland. "But also, I think what was good for us last year was there was almost no pressure and it was kind of a learning year, it allows you to be a bit more relaxed in your approach. I think it's important we keep that relaxed approach."

Looking to rebound this season will be 2023

champion Jake Dennis, who with Andretti has the title-winning Porsche powertrain to launch an assault on another crown. Nato's spot in the team has been taken by Nico Muller, who impressed last term with Abt and has also been made a Porsche works driver with his move. "The lack of testing we had throughout the year was obviously hindering us compared to some of the manufacturers – we lost against four manufacturers basically," says Dennis. "We were the best customer team, but it wasn't good enough, so hopefully we can do better this year."

After scoring in 14 of the 16 races last season, FE's only two-time champion Jean-Eric Vergne will likely feature in the mix again, with the DS Penske team pushed forward by team principal Phil Charles as well as new recruit and multiple race winner Maximilian Guenther, who switches from Maserati.

NEW GENERATION READY TO MAKE THEIR MARK

Three new full-time drivers will take to the grid this season: Taylor Barnard at McLaren, David Beckmann at Kiro and Zane Maloney at Lola-Yamaha Abt.

After an impressive three races last season, which included a last-minute debut in Monaco and a double points finish next time out in Berlin, ex-Formula 2 driver Barnard will partner fellow Briton Sam Bird, who he replaced during his part-time outings.

“Formula E is not the traditional route that a young driver would perhaps take, but I feel like it’s definitely a good opportunity for me to be able to keep progressing in my career and also still compete at a very high level in a world championship against good drivers,” says the 20-year-old Barnard, who became the youngest driver to start and score points in Formula E.

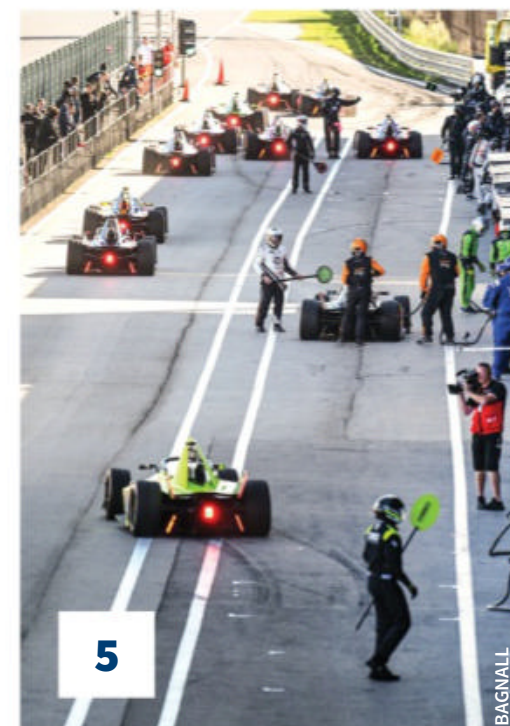
Beckmann joins the renamed Kiro team, formerly ERT, which will use Porsche powertrains this season. Team principal Alex Hui insists that “there’s zero pressure from Porsche, it’s completely our decision” to put the 24-year-old Porsche reserve in the team. It was in this capacity that ex-F2 driver Beckmann was loaned out to customer team Andretti during



STALEY; GALLOWAY; FERRARO

2023, when he competed in the Jakarta double-header. More recently, he topped one session during pre-season testing for his new team.

Maloney joins Lola and Yamaha’s new venture into FE with Abt, and in the process forfeited a chance of going for this year’s F2 title to make the jump. “It’s not really about performance for us right now – it’s about understanding where we need to improve and where are the biggest jumps that we can make from the very beginning,” says the 21-year-old Barbadian who, although he has never raced in FE, was Andretti’s test and reserve driver. “It’s a new manufacturer coming in, so it’s difficult to say how good or how bad it’s going.”



BAGNALL

‘PIT BOOST’ FINALLY GETS GREEN LIGHT

After more than two years of testing and development, the ‘Pit Boost’ concept is due to be introduced during the 2024-25 season. The initiative was originally intended for the start of the Gen3 era in 2023, but problems with reliability meant the technology has only now been sufficiently developed to be used in a race situation.

Pit Boost will require all drivers to make a mandatory pitstop during a race where their cars will receive a recharge of power, equating to approximately 10% of the battery’s capacity at a rate of 600kW, with the whole procedure lasting approximately 30 seconds.

The concept was trialled during the 24-lap simulation race in pre-season testing, and the data analysed by both the FIA and Formula E. It will feature during only one of the races across double-header weekends, in order to vary strategies between each race at the same location, with its first appearance set to come in Jeddah in February on a truncated version of the layout used by Formula 1.

Further rounds to feature Pit Boost include Monaco, Tokyo, Shanghai, Berlin and London, but some drivers are wary of how the concept will impact races, with a single specific lap likely to be the ideal time to take it, while any safety car or full course yellow will impact half the field in a negative manner.

“We are not allowed to box everyone at the same time – it’s always one car per team,” warns Pascal Wehrlein. “Half of the field, so 11 cars, are boxing on lap 15 and the other half is maybe boxing on lap 18, but between those laps there’s a safety car. It’s a huge advantage for the second group.

“It could well be that you could end up from being in P1 to completely out of the points, because there was an unfair situation with a safety car.”

4



GALLOWAY

TYRES A MAJOR TALKING POINT

The new Gen3 Evo car sparked much attention during the off-season, in particular the all-wheel-drive (AWD) aspect that will be activated in 350kW mode, which includes qualifying duels, race starts and Attack Mode. While the peloton style of pack racing is likely to remain, despite minor bodywork modifications to the newer model of car, the AWD is set to drastically change the strategic element of races due to the performance advantage it will offer.

“Overtaking will take place out of the corner – this will make a difference for the drivers how to position the car, how to defend,” predicts Porsche team principal Florian Modlinger. “The racing will look completely different.”

But while most of the focus was on the new technology prior to pre-season testing, another area that came under the spotlight last month

in Spain was the new, softer compound of tyre from Hankook. The South Korean manufacturer’s previous model of rubber had come in for stark criticism from drivers due to its hard nature, which offered little performance.

While the less durable tyre initially offers a substantial performance advantage over its predecessor, it loses grip progressively during a stint, and this will impact race strategy.

“The tyres are becoming a big factor, which hasn’t been a thing in the past,” says Kiro’s Dan Ticktum. “It’s sort of behaving like a slick tyre – there’s a big peak when it’s new and then it drops off quite a lot and then kind of stabilises for a bit. It’s hard to gauge where everyone is in terms of pace because we only got six sets for the whole three days [of testing], and people were putting them on at different times.”

SEASON REVIEW

MOTOGP

PROVING YOUR INDEPENDENCE

Jorge Martin shrugged off rejection by the factory team to win the title with satellite squad Pramac against the might of Bagnaia and Ducati

RICHARD ASHER

PHOTOGRAPHY GOLD AND GOOSE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Another season, another duel between Jorge Martin and Francesco ‘Pecco’ Bagnaia. But this time it was a year-long fight; a gruelling contest of 40 battles. In essence, this production set up as a repeat of 2023. Independent Pramac Ducati tries to topple mighty factory Ducati; a private wrangle set against the Italian marque’s choking dominance in terms of both numbers and performance. But casting matters. And one of the protagonists came to the stage a new man in 2024. A playwright might call it character development. Name it what you will: it was a subtly different performance by Martin that earned him success this time around. The words ‘if’ and ‘would’ crop up with monotonous regularity in any analysis of an attritional tug of war that fell to Martin by just 10 points after his steady ride to third in the Barcelona finale. They’re probably swirling in Bagnaia’s mind as much as any this winter. But going down that path only lands you with a book’s worth of fiction and an unfair conviction that Bagnaia lost this championship rather than Martin winning it. The reality is that Martin earned the title by displaying a better level of consistency than Bagnaia, primarily through falling off less than his rival. This story is best told by the year-end podium tallies. Bagnaia won 11 grands prix to Martin’s three. Yet Martin equalled him on the Sunday podium count: 16-16. When Pecco won, in other words,

it was rarely a hammerblow for Martin. He would be just a little down the road, amassing good points. Now for the sprints. Each man won seven. Nothing to split them there, despite Martin’s fearsome Saturday reputation. However, Martin took 16 podiums to Bagnaia’s 10. See above. Martin nailed the right mix of speed and sense under the current system. This is what champions do. And that brings us back to our leads in the 2024 run of *Pecco v Jorge*. Bagnaia, the analytical north Italian, was supposed to be the calm mathematician once again. Martin, the hothead from Spain’s teeming capital, was meant to be fast but fragile. But nobody told Martin that he had to stick to his established character. So he found himself a sports psychologist, Xero Gasol, to help him tweak his approach. He learned how to get the best out of himself, take his maturity up a notch and remember the joy of racing even in pressure situations – while trying to retain a sense of perspective. This was a championship won largely between the ears. At no point was it easy, however. All year long, Martin was far more open about his doubts and weaknesses than your average elite sportsman. Even more so after the job was done. “I was struggling with my mental health,” he confessed of the early part of the campaign. “Last season, even after being second, I was quite happy. But then I started to have a lot of fears. I was really scared I would never be champion in MotoGP. Thanks to my coach I improved a lot.

ROUND BY ROUND

Qatar GP

1 Bagnaia
2 Binder
3 Martin
Bagnaia shoots to the front from fifth on the grid to pass Martin on the opening lap and claim a lead he won’t lose. Binder follows sprint victor Martin home for what proves to be his first and last podium of the season. Acosta steals the show on his debut by cheekily passing Marc Marquez and running as high as fourth, but cooks his tyres in the process and ends up ninth.

Portuguese GP

1 Martin
2 Bastianini
3 Acosta
Martin leads sprint winner Vinales all the way... until a suspected gearbox issue strikes the Aprilia entering the final lap, causing Vinales to slow and then fall. This gifts Bastianini second. Acosta takes it to the elite once again by passing Marc Marquez and Bagnaia, who subsequently collide and fall. Vinales’s last-lap drama ensures a first podium for KTM rookie Acosta.

Americas GP

1 Vinales
2 Acosta
3 Bastianini
Vinales ignites hopes of a sustained Aprilia challenge by dominating the weekend in Texas. He takes pole, sprint, both fastest laps and the grand prix. A bad start on Sunday is the only blip, but he works his way from ninth to first for a comfortable win. Result proves another false alarm on an outlier circuit where Bagnaia and Martin both miss the podium.

Spanish GP

1 Bagnaia
2 M Marquez
3 Bezzecchi
Marc Marquez challenges for victory for the first time after taking his first Ducati pole. His late efforts to pass Bagnaia, largely played out in front of the packed hillsides at Jerez, are a highlight of the season. Martin misses chance to add to his sprint win by crashing out before half-distance while leading Bagnaia. The error allows Bezzecchi to claim VR46’s only podium of the year.

French GP

1 Martin
2 M Marquez
3 Bagnaia
Martin atones for Jerez in best possible style by converting pole into a hard-won victory over his biggest two Ducati rivals. Bagnaia leads much of the way before sprint winner Martin takes lead with six laps to go. Marc Marquez joins the party late after battling through from 13th on the grid, and snatches second from Bagnaia on the last lap. Top trio are covered by under a second at the flag.



Martin made real effort to improve mental strength...

“MARTIN WAS FAR MORE OPEN ABOUT HIS WEAKNESSES THAN YOUR AVERAGE ELITE SPORTSMAN”

I was more focused on the hope of winning than the fear of losing.” The mental strength Martin developed proved decisive in terms of the consistency that won him the crown. As the year went on, he understood the paradox that he was more likely to make a mistake if he eased off. As Bagnaia discovered, a rival who goes faster when he’s playing conservative is tough to haul in once you fall behind. The third time Bagnaia did so, at Motorland Aragon in September, would indeed be the last.

Martin’s progress on eliminating tumbles was notable – only one of his four came after the summer break. Most notably before the recess, he crashed leading the Spanish and German Grands Prix, the latter with just a lap remaining. He also fell off in the Mugello sprint. After the holidays? Just the crash at Mandalika. (Technically this >>



...and took the crown with the right mix of speed and good sense

Catalan GP

1 Bagnaia

2 Martin

3 M Marquez

Bagnaia returns French favour by beating Martin fair and square at Barcelona. Acosta hassles both before falling. Martin leads by over a second after the rookie’s crash, but it’s a ‘tyre race’ and Bagnaia excels, catching and passing Martin with five laps left. Aleix Espargaro can’t add to memorable pole and sprint win on what is meant to be his final home race, and Marc Marquez grabs third by a fraction.

Italian GP

1 Bagnaia

2 Bastianini

3 Martin

Bagnaia is masterful at Mugello, leading every lap for what is a convincing win despite close margins at the end. Martin takes pole with sprint winner Bagnaia fifth, but can only hold the lead for one corner before the world champion muscles through. Bastianini adds to Italy’s joy by putting on a late charge and mugging Martin with a memorable move to take second at the last corner of the race.

Dutch TT

1 Bagnaia

2 Martin

3 Bastianini

Another crushing Dutch display for Bagnaia, who completes a hat-trick of Assen grand prix wins. Pole, fastest lap and sprint success make it a truly perfect weekend: Bagnaia has now led every racing lap since late in the Catalan GP. Martin just about keeps him in sight to take the points for second. Bastianini notches up a second consecutive podium after once again working his way up the field.

German GP

1 Bagnaia

2 M Marquez

3 A Marquez

Bagnaia’s dream run continues with a fourth straight GP win sending him into the points lead for the first time since Qatar. This time he needs help from sprint winner Martin, who looks set to triumph before crashing on the penultimate lap. Alex shows he’s not the only Marquez with a taste for the Sachsenring, though brother Marc shoves him one step down the podium with two laps left.

British GP

1 Bastianini

2 Martin

3 Bagnaia

A new order briefly threatens after the summer break as Aleix Espargaro takes pole for Aprilia and Bastianini wins both sprint and grand prix. Sunday is a superbly managed ride in which he bides his time, running fourth for the first half before picking off Espargaro and Bagnaia. He then forces a mistake from Martin on penultimate lap. Martin returns to points lead after brief Bagnaia tenure.



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wasn't a DNF since he remounted, but the fall led to a zero score). There was also a tactical error when he overreacted to spots of rain at Misano, landing up with just one point after pitting.

Bagnaia made bloopers in the Barcelona, Silverstone and Sepang sprints, and his Emilia Romagna GP tumble was also his own doing. In terms of clear errors, it's a draw: each got it wrong four times. But while *all* Martin's mistakes were solo efforts, Bagnaia had additional incidents that were a little fuzzier. These could occupy what-if theorists for an entire winter.

The mystery technical issue that put Bagnaia out of the Le Mans sprint was clear enough. But then there were the three incidents that involved other riders. There was the first-corner accident in the Jerez sprint and a crash with Marc Marquez in Portugal. Lastly, that Aragon turning point hinged on Bagnaia's clash with Alex Marquez. Blame was debatable in all of them but, as Bagnaia admitted after the season, he could have "understood some situations better".

On that note, contrast Martin's defeat to Enea Bastianini at the Emilia Romagna GP. The factory Ducati bullied Martin off the road to take the lead on the last lap. Toughing it out or responding like the proverbial hothead could have meant a fall for Martin. Instead, he turned the other cheek and bagged 20 points on a day when Bagnaia got none.

Relations between the top two were never tested in Bastianini fashion. The relationship between Martin and Bagnaia continued to be courteous and sporting. Neither the media nor the promoters could find any chink in their genuine respect for each other. The same went for factory Ducati team manager Davide Tardozzi and his counterpart at Pramac, Gino Borsoi. Ducati allowed Pramac's challenge to play out without interference. That showed an admirable awareness of the bigger picture. After all, having eight bikes on the grid – particularly Pramac's GP24s – is part of the reason for the marque's dominance. Martin winning the riders' title for the independent squad could almost be seen as a reward for all that data that helped Bagnaia win in 2022 and 2023.

A final point on the duel: if you think champions should have

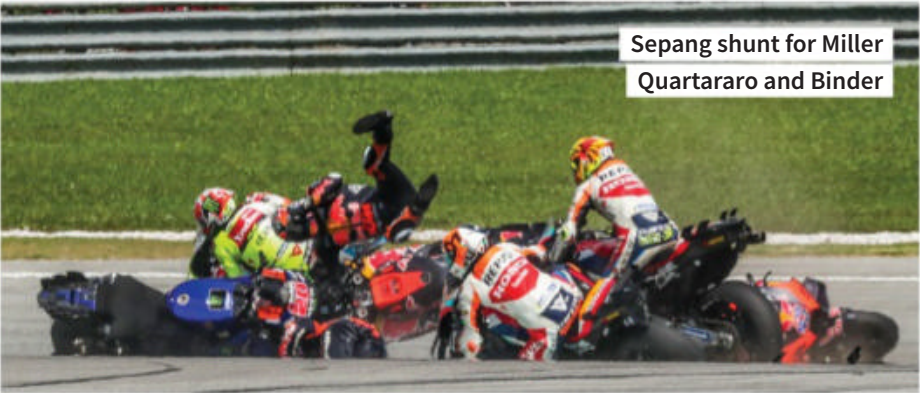


raw speed out of the box, Martin's your man. The second year of the sprint format again underlined that Bagnaia needs more practice time (and associated data from the Ducati hordes) to truly get going. Maybe that's fine – but qualifying effectively starting on Fridays makes things harder for him and had a knock-on effect in some sprints. He was also exposed when weather hit practice, as seen in Australia.

That this was a two-horse race from the outset did have its downsides. Keeping the hype around a polite duel for 20 weekends from March to November can be a tough task. Thankfully there were a couple of subplots. At the start of the season, the interplay between hyper-hyped rookie Pedro Acosta and reborn legend Marc Marquez was arguably *the* show. Acosta arrived in Qatar as reigning Moto2 champion and was touted as the next Marquez. The six-time MotoGP world champion, on the other hand, had a Ducati at last. Not a GP24, sure, but, after years fighting injury and recalcitrant Honda, 2024 felt like the start of a fresh – and probably final – chapter in his career.

Neither was expected to fight for the title. Acosta was a newbie on an independent Tech3 KTM and Marquez, vast experience notwithstanding, was on a year-old satellite Ducati fielded by Gresini. But would their genius overcome those handicaps? That was the question in Qatar.

When the 19-year-old dared to pass the 31-year-old at the opener, it was hard not to be gripped by the narrative around two remarkable talents at opposite ends of their racing lives, both battling their machinery while one tried to snatch the 'youngest premier class >>



Austrian GP

1 Bagnaia
2 Martin
3 Bastianini
MotoGP returns to normal as Bagnaia and Martin reassert their dominance in Styria. Martin has pole position and the early lead but Bagnaia passes him at the start of lap two. A short-lived counter aside, that is the end of the contest. With Bastianini enduring a lonely ride to third, this one is hardly a classic. Sprint win helps Bagnaia reclaim championship lead, but it's the last time he'll hold it.

Aragon GP

1 M Marquez
2 Martin
3 Acosta
Marc Marquez finds the perfect circuit for that long-awaited first win aboard a Ducati. He's simply the best at low-grip Motorland, taking the pole-win-fastest lap treble in both sprint and grand prix. The major action in a dull race is the crash between Bagnaia and Alex Marquez as they dispute third – which is gratefully received by Acosta. Bagnaia DNF is the decisive swing in the points race.

San Marino GP

1 M Marquez
2 Bagnaia
3 Bastianini
Light drizzle a few laps into the grand prix is another heaven-sent opportunity for Marc Marquez. While Martin misjudges the severity of the Misano rain and pits unnecessarily from second for a 'wet' bike, third-row qualifier Marquez moves swiftly to the front and passes Bagnaia for the lead on lap eight. Martin finishes a lap down but gets a point to go with his haul for another sprint win.

Emilia Romagna GP

1 Bastianini
2 Martin
3 M Marquez
MotoGP returns to Misano instead of visiting Kazakhstan as originally planned. Sprint winner Bagnaia leads first three laps but loses his rhythm, and Martin and then Bastianini pass. Bagnaia looks safe for decent points in third but crashes with six laps to go. Up ahead, Bastianini stalks Martin before bullying his way past in a questionable last-lap move that the stewards let slide.

Indonesian GP

1 Martin
2 Acosta
3 Bagnaia
Martin disappears from pole position as Bagnaia goes backwards from a modest fourth place on the grid. Acosta then briefly looks like a challenger for the win but settles for second, leaving Martin to claim only his third grand prix win of the season – his first since Le Mans in May. Bagnaia recovers to take the last spot on the podium, which pairs nicely with sprint win.

winner’ record from the other. They repeated their antics in Portugal, where Acosta inherited a first podium after the Marquez/Bagnaia clash. Acosta had another rostrum to his name – and Marquez none – by the time the circus arrived in Spain. But it was Marquez who stole the show at Jerez, very nearly toppling Bagnaia in a memorable battle.

Their paths diverged after that as the hype settled and the latest Ducatis stretched their advantage. Marquez eventually won three grands prix in favourable conditions, but Acosta would have to make do with five podiums and a pole at Motegi. But the efforts

“**MARTIN HAD EXTRA MOTIVATION AFTER BEING SNUBBED BY THE DUCATI FACTORY TEAM FOR A SECOND TIME**”

of these two ‘disadvantaged’ contenders complemented the title back and forth. Against this intriguing backdrop, each will step up to their respective factory teams in 2025 with yet another dollop of expectation.

Acosta came within a whisker of defeating works KTM rider Brad Binder to fifth in the championship. Both were a long way behind Bagnaia’s team-mate Bastianini, but that at least put them ahead of half of the Ducatis in the final reckoning. So KTM was the second-best manufacturer overall but underwhelming in its efforts to kick



on from 2023, when Binder had won a pair of sprint races. Though there was a degree of consistency, the Austrians gathered no victory at all this time around.

Aprilia mustered fewer points and generally battled, but was the only manufacturer to win anything apart from Ducati. Noale’s finest has always fancied Silverstone and Barcelona, and Aleix Espargaro duly delivered a pole in Britain and a sprint win on the June visit to Catalonia. Undisputed highlight, however, was Maverick Vinales sweeping the weekend at Austin.

That Americas GP win for Vinales was all that prevented full marks for Ducati on Sundays, but the marque’s dominance did indeed go up a notch from an already remarkable 17 out of 20 grand prix wins in 2023.

At the other end of the field, the Japanese manufacturers hit new lows. Honda had at least won a race in 2023, and Yamaha had snatched podiums. There was none of that this time, with Honda often propping up the grid as it got to grips with life after Marquez. But both showed signs of improvement later in the season, and concessions should help that trend continue.

Though it didn’t appear to sour relations, Martin had extra motivation after being snubbed by the Ducati factory team for a second time just after the Italian GP. He’d come close to a 2023 ride there before Bastianini got the nod. Then, this June, it dramatically dropped him from its 2025 plans in favour of Marc Marquez. Martin promptly signed with Aprilia for next year, meaning he raced more than half the season in the knowledge that this was likely to be his last title shot for a while. And with a point to prove. 🏆

Japanese GP

1 Bagnaia
2 Martin
3 M Marquez

Acosta’s run of form culminates in a first pole. The rookie seems poised for a breakthrough win as Martin and Bagnaia can’t afford risks. But he drops behind Bagnaia at the start and falls trying to cue up a move on lap three. From there it’s an ‘aero stalemate’ up front as Bagnaia leads Martin for the duration. Bagnaia and Acosta double up in sprint with a win and a fall respectively.

Australian GP

1 M Marquez
2 Martin
3 Bagnaia

Marc Marquez has to battle back from a bizarre mistake after throwing a tear-off under his tyre on the grid. Recovers from terrible getaway with a stellar first lap and is in a private battle with Martin by mid-distance. Needs a couple of stabs to pass the Spaniard a few laps from home but has him beaten by the chequer. Bagnaia not in the same league after weather nicks his practice time.

Thai GP

1 Bagnaia
2 Martin
3 Acosta

Bastianini breaks five-race Martin/Bagnaia sprint stranglehold before rain arrives on Sunday. Martin leads early in season’s only proper wet race, but a ragged moment lets Bagnaia and Marc Marquez past. Marquez challenges Bagnaia for several laps before falling. Acosta snatches third from Di Giannantonio on penultimate lap after running as low as eighth.

Malaysian GP

1 Bagnaia
2 Martin
3 Bastianini

Bagnaia and Martin deliver their most spectacular battle of the season as Martin spends the better part of four laps trying to grab lead at the start of the race. Eventually Bagnaia pulls clear and takes the win – but second is actually good enough for Martin’s title hopes. That’s thanks to a crash for Bagnaia in the Saturday sprint, which Martin wins to stretch out a 29-point lead.

Barcelona GP

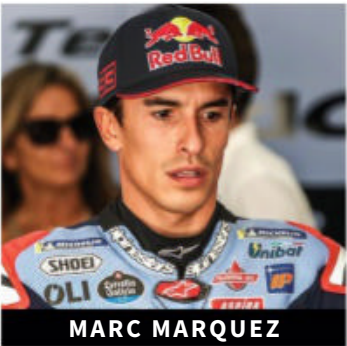
1 Bagnaia
2 M Marquez
3 Martin

Bagnaia does all he can to prolong his title defence by taking pole and leading every lap of both the sprint and the grand prix. Bagnaia’s Saturday win means Martin has to wait for the last day of the season to seal the championship, setting up a tense test for the Spaniard. But it proves as uneventful as Martin hopes and a safe ride brings him the crown.

AUTOSPORT’S TOP 10 RIDERS



1 Martin aboard the Ducati GP24 was the fastest package out of the box most weekends. GP mistakes while leading at Jerez and Sachsenring taught him that trying to manage races was not his thing. Going full throttle did the trick.



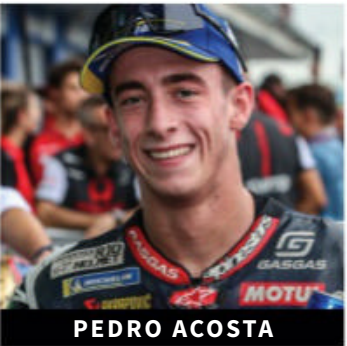
2 Overdue switch to a competitive bike confirmed the genius is still there. Took 20 of the 22 podiums for the year-old Ducati. Also won on it when conditions levelled playing field at Motorland Aragon, Misano and Phillip Island.



3 Unbeatable once he had the bike to his liking. But he led the championship thrice before letting Martin back with mistakes and incidents. Difficulty finding pace early in the weekend exposed him under current format.



4 Over double the points of the next rider in the unofficial ‘struggling Japanese manufacturer’ class. Yamaha deficiencies bugged him, but class showed on track. Regular top 10s from Misano onwards reflected non-stop effort.



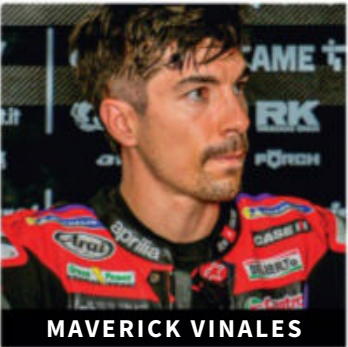
5 Not a finished product, but the rookie excelled. Showed no fear for big names and scored five podiums, one as early as Portugal. Fell more than anybody across all sessions, 28 times, but that helped him find the limits.



6 Had fine moments in Britain, Emilia Romagna and at the Thai sprint, but often anonymous in Bagnaia’s shadow. Defeating Marc Marquez’s independent Ducati for third in the championship should have been achievable.



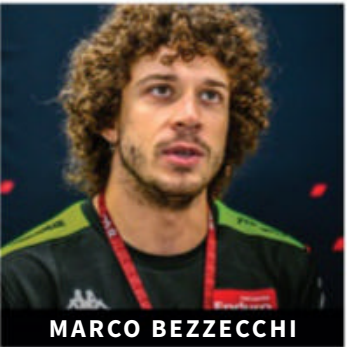
7 Second in Qatar promised much, but season drifted from there. Got far more out of a difficult bike than his teammate Jack Miller and finished as best non-Ducati a few times... but almost losing to KTM’s independent rookie Acosta is hard to overlook.



8 Made as many headlines for plummeting in races and dramas, including his Australia crash with Di Giannantonio, as he did for his seven front rows, two sprints and outstanding USA win. But he was only non-Ducati winner.



9 Came on strong late in the season to outscore Bezzecchi despite missing last two weekends to undergo surgery for injury picked up in Austria, where he also missed the races. Quietly impressed Ducati enough to earn himself a GP25 for next season.



10 A sobering return to earth after three wins in 2023. Got the only podium for VR46 and shone regularly in qualifying. But there were too many disaster weekends including no points in France, the Netherlands and Australia.

RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP																							
POS	RIDER	TEAM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	PTS
1	Jorge Martin (ESP)	PramacDucati	3	1	4	R	1	2	3	2	R	2	2	2	15	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	508
2	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	1	R	5	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	R	2	R	3	1	3	1	1	1	498
3	Marc Marquez (ESP)	GresiniDucati	4	16	R	2	2	3	4	10	2	4	4	1	1	3	R	3	1	11	12	2	392
4	Enea Bastianini (ITA)	Ducati	5	2	3	5	4	18	2	3	4	1	3	5	3	1	R	4	5	14	3	7	386
5	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	2	4	9	6	8	8	10	6	9	R	5	4	4	19	8	6	7	6	NS	6	217
6	Pedro Acosta (ESP)	Tech3KTM	9	3	2	10	R	13	5	R	7	9	13	3	17	R	2	R	NS	3	5	10	215
7	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Aprilia	10	R	1	9	5	12	8	5	12	13	7	R	16	6	6	R	8	7	7	15	190
8	Alex Marquez (ESP)	GresiniDucati	6	R	15	4	10	7	9	7	3	7	10	R	6	9	R	R	15	10	4	4	173
9	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	PramacDucati	18	18	R	R	7	R	6	9	5	10	8	6	R	5	4	5	6	R	14	8	173
10	Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA)	VR46Ducati	7	10	6	7	6	5	7	4	R	5	NS	8	9	14	R	8	4	4	-	-	165

11 Aleix Espargaro (Aprilia) 163; 12 Marco Bezzecchi (VR46Ducati) 153; 13 Fabio Quartararo (Yamaha) 113; 14 Jack Miller (KTM) 87; 15 Miguel Oliveira (TrackhouseAprilia) 75; 16 Raul Fernandez (TrackhouseAprilia) 66; 17 Johann Zarco (LCR Honda) 55; 18 Alex Rins (Yamaha) 31; 19 Takaaki Nakagami (LCR Honda) 31; 20 Augusto Fernandez (Tech3KTM) 27; 21 Joan Mir (Honda) 21; 22 Luca Marini (Honda) 14; 23 Pol Espargaro (KTM) 12; 24 Dani Pedrosa (KTM) 7; 25 Stefan Bradl (Honda) 2; 26 Remy Gardner (Yamaha) 0; 27 Andrea Iannone (VR46Ducati) 0; 28 Lorenzo Savadori (Aprilia/Trackhouse Aprilia) 0; 29 Michele Pirro (VR46Ducati) 0. **CONSTRUCTORS** 1 Ducati 722; 2 KTM 327; 3 Aprilia 302; 4 Yamaha 124; 5 Honda 75.

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

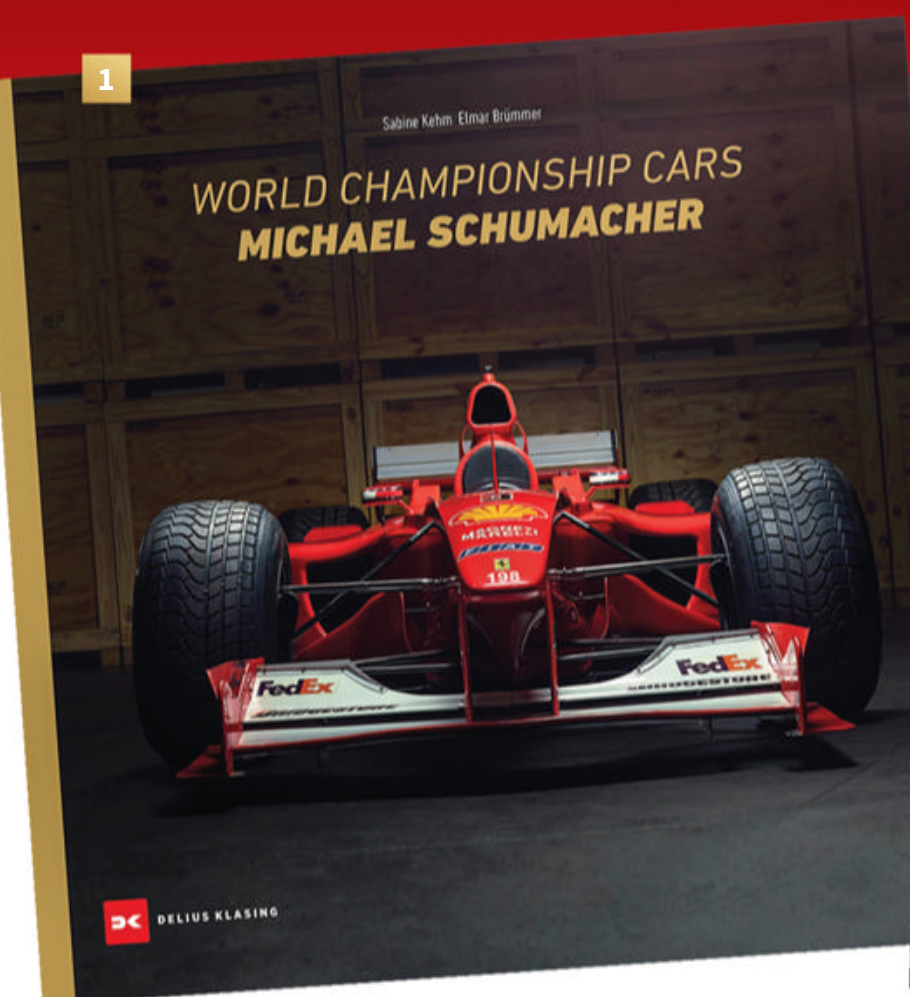
Autosport's top picks for what motorsport fans will want to find wrapped under the tree on the big day

BOOKS

This year has been particularly good for motorsport books, with options to suit all interest levels from the ultra-nerdy among us to those just beginning to find their passion. Strong options for newcomers are Will Buxton's *An Illustrated History of F1 Grand Prix* or Jennie Gow's *How to Read F1*, while *Formula 2: The Glory Years* takes it to the other extreme.

For something more visually stimulating, *World Championship Cars: Michael Schumacher* is a treat for those feeling nostalgic for the 1990s and early 2000s, showcasing some of the German's most iconic vehicles.

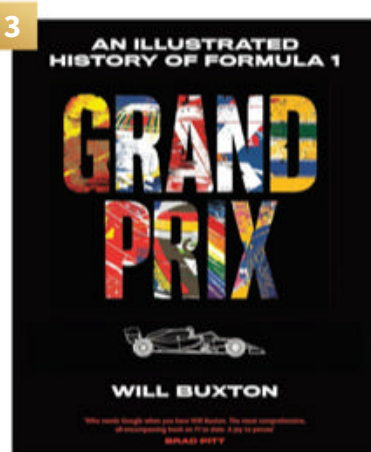
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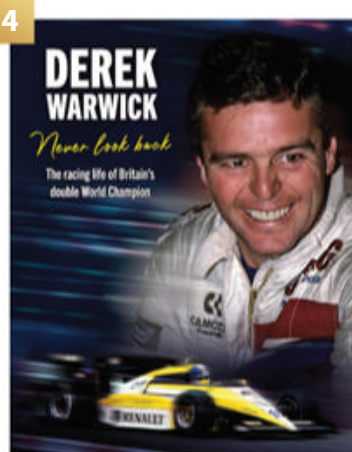
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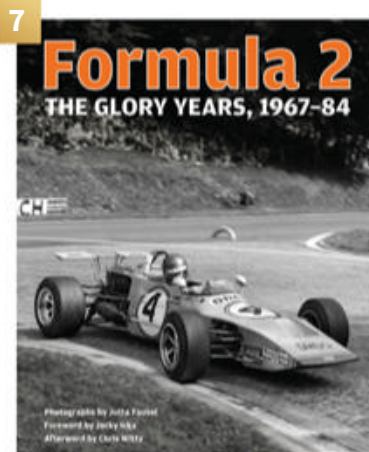
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1 World Championship Cars: Michael Schumacher Elmar Brummer & Sabine Kehm RRP £80; **2 How to read F1** Jennie Gow RRP £16.99;

3 An Illustrated History of F1: Grand Prix Will Buxton RRP £25; **4 Derek Warwick: Never Look Back** Derek Warwick RRP £60; **5 Guenther Steiner: Unfiltered** Guenther Steiner RRP £22; **6 Inside Mercedes F1: Life in the Fast Lane** Matt Whyman RRP £22; **7 Formula 2: The Glory Years 1967-84** Jutta Fausel RRP £95



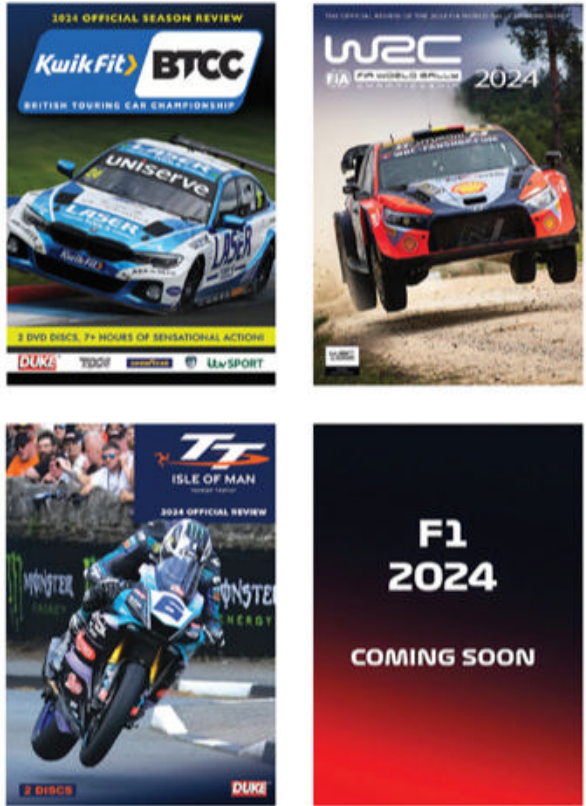
RETRO F1 STYLE CLOTHING

Everyone loves a bit of nostalgia, and vv10.store has you covered in the retro clothing department. With designs inspired by helmets and sponsors of years gone by, these are certain to go down well over the festive period.

- 1 Barcode Red T-Shirt £32;
- 2 Senna Sweatshirt £55;
- 2 Buzzin Hornets Cap £30

SEASON REVIEWS

Has 2024 left you wanting more? Recap all the action with these offerings from Duke Video.



- 1 BTCC DVD: £22.99; 2 WRC DVD: £22.99 (pre-order for 23 December release);
- 3 Isle of Man TT DVD: £22.99, Blu-ray: £25.99;
- 4 F1 DVD: £22.99, Blu-ray: £25.99 (pre-order for 20 January release)



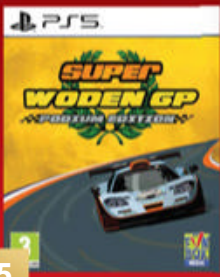
FORMULA 1 BRITISH GRAND PRIX

Gift a Silverstone hospitality package this Christmas
The 2025 British Grand Prix takes place from 4-6 July and Silverstone has a range of hospitality packages available to book now across six categories, from family fun to exclusive luxury experiences. This incredible present includes a novelty access pass and a branded lanyard contained in a gift box for under the tree.

GAMES

The Christmas break is a perfect opportunity for spending time on a virtual track, or special stage, and the usual suspects have you covered. Take in some grand prix racing on either two or four wheels with *F1 24* or *MotoGP 24*, or push your endurance to the limit with *Le Mans Ultimate*. *WRC 24* has your rallying cravings covered, while *Super Woden 2* is a strong independent offering, which banks heavily on the nostalgia factor.

1 F1 24 PS Store: £69.99, Xbox: £69.99; **2 MotoGP 24** PS Store: £59.99, Xbox: £59.99; **3 Le Mans Ultimate** PC Only: £28.99; **4 WRC 24** PS Store: £44.99, Xbox: £44.99; **5 Super Woden 2** PS Store: £9.99, Xbox: £10.74



WILLIAMS FW14B-JUNIOR

We like to cater for all budgets here – and this is the high-end option! HalfScale Cars has created a limited run of 25 75% scale FW14B-Juniors, featuring the iconic livery that Nigel Mansell took to the 1992 F1 drivers' title.

Capable of speeds of up to 45mph, these fully licenced electric cars were developed using 3D scans of the original vehicle.

While you may look at this and think it's a kids' toy, this is far from the case, with a carbon body, 1500V battery and a fully hand-painted livery. It's the ultimate collectable!

Williams FW14B-Junior £44,995



LEGO

Another Boxing Day winner is always Lego. For a quick build, and to get yourself ready for the new releases in March of all the 2024 cars, pick up the Speed Champions McLaren, or for a larger project, the Mercedes W14 Technic is the one for you.

- 1 Mercedes Technic £189.99;
- 2 McLaren Speed Champions £20.99



CALENDARS

SCALEXTRIC

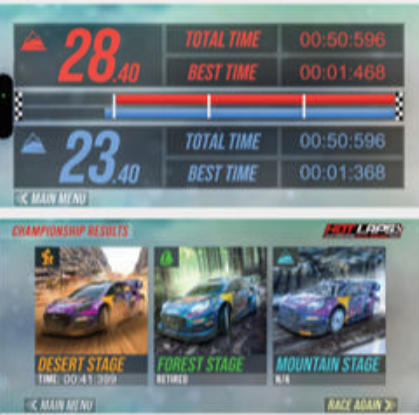


Want to enjoy fresh and striking motorsport images each month? You've got good options, with either the A3 BTCC offering from Jakob Ebrey Photography, or the 49x105cm Wider View McKlein Rally option.

- 1 JEP Touring Car Calendar 2025 £14.95;
- 2 McKlein Rally Calendar 2025 – The Wider View £45

Fun for all the ages, can anything beat a bit of Scalextric on Boxing Day? The Puma WRC Hot Laps set includes a brand-new timing system as well as a pair of nice-looking Ford Puma rally cars. Race solo using the single-player Hot Laps mode or go head-to-head with a rival in a battle to the finish.

Scalextric Puma WRC Hot Laps Race Set £159.99



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- Experience in the motorsport industry would be advantageous but is not essential.
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GCSE, High School Diploma or equivalent required. 2-3 years of previous experience in a similar mechanical role within Formula 1, World Sports Cars, or F2 is preferred – however consideration will be given to a candidate who can demonstrate professionalism and a sound record of service within the Motorsport Industry.

Specialized Knowledge and Skills:

- Strong communication skills, written and verbal.
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- Strong technical background in racing car.
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- You should have the ability to communicate effectively to all team members.

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- Simulation: Work with vehicle dynamics and simulation engineers closely to integrate tire performance insights and assist for proper correlation of the provided models.
- Track Characterization: Conduct track surface measurements and provide associated tire setup and performance strategies.
- Setup Recommendations: Provide car setup recommendations for test sessions, including camber, pressure, and toe specifications.
- Track Test Support: Manage tire sets, monitor wear patterns, and adjust tire pressure and temperature for optimal performance during development session.
- Performance Analysis: Analyze test data to identify improvement areas and ensure tire performance.

Qualifications and Experience:

- Bachelor's or Master's degree in Mechanical, Automotive Engineering, or a related field.
- Minimum of 5 years of experience in tire development, modeling and testing.
- Strong knowledge of tire dynamics, including mechanical and thermal behavior.
- Hands-on experience with vehicle and tire testing, and data acquisition tools.
- Proficiency in simulation tools (Matlab/Simulink and other simulation software.)
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- Preparing and maintaining trackside systems at Bedford Autodrome for Palmersport events, ensuring everything is operational and safe ahead of our standard-setting driving events.
- Developing, improving and refining hardware and software will be integral to the role.

Technical Expertise:

- You will demonstrate a thorough understanding of electrical engineering principles, with a basic understanding of the electrical and electronic equipment used in race circuit infrastructure, including microcontroller-based hardware and (ideally) software.
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How clubs battled tricky times in 2024

We take a look at some of the stories behind this year's entry numbers


50%
OF CLUB GRIDS
DECREASED
IN 2024



United FF1600 gets
Silverstone GP date



Rovanpera stars on
Killarney Historic



TCR promoter issues
stark warning

Warning to TCR drivers over unofficial series

TCR UK

The creator of the TCR touring car ruleset has issued a stark warning to UK owners of TCR machines that, if they race in British categories other than the official TCR UK championship, their cars will lose their homologation status.

WSC Ltd has composed the warning letter in the wake of last month's launch of the new Ultimate Racing Championship from Club Time Attack (see Autosport, 28 November), which is open to under two-litre turbocharged touring cars built since 2011, and therefore TCR cars are eligible.

Although the letter does not explicitly reference the URC, it makes it clear that legal action will be taken against what it considers to be "unofficial" series that make use of TCR cars, logos or branding in their promotional material.

"It has recently come to our attention that certain promoters of racing series in the UK have advertised their acceptance of TCR cars for participation in their events,



either explicitly or through the use of images depicting TCR cars," reads the letter. "These actions create the false impression that these series are in some way affiliated with or authorised by TCR, owned and promoted by World Sporting Consulting Ltd. Such representations are misleading and constitute unfair competition.

"WSC has granted exclusive rights to Maximum Motorsport Limited to promote the TCR series in the UK. This includes the use of the TCR brand and trademarks within the licensed territory, the organisation and management of TCR series, and the

production and commercialisation of merchandise bearing the TCR National name and logo. We hereby notify you that WSC will pursue legal action against any unauthorised series that misuse the TCR brand, trademarks, or intellectual property.

"Additionally, any TCR car participating in these unauthorised competitions will be blacklisted in our system, rendering it ineligible for future participation in any official TCR competitions. Such vehicles will also lose their TCR homologation status, consequentially not eligible to be sold anymore as TCR cars."

RICHARD STYLES

New FAT Karting League to help keep costs down



KARTING

Ex-Formula 1 engineer Rob Smedley has launched the FAT Karting League, an initiative that aims to create greater opportunities for aspiring young racing drivers while also keeping costs down.

Each championship

consists of nine rounds, with two categories – Regional and Pro – set to be held at UK outdoor circuits, with drivers using high-performance electric karts capable of 60mph.

A season of racing in the UK is estimated to cost £3800 for drivers from age six, while FKL's Junior Pro

Series is priced at £5300, considerably less than the current system.

Top drivers from each proposed global hub will tackle the World Finals, with the winner securing a fully funded British Formula 4 drive for 2026.

P59 GUEST COLUMN

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Five wins helped
Ninovic finish second
in British F4 this year



British F4 runner-up Ninovic and Emirates ace Al Azhari up to GB3

GB3

British Formula 4 runner-up Alex Ninovic will graduate to the GB3 Championship with Rodin Motorsport next season.

The Australian claimed five wins and a further 13 podiums with the team en route to finishing second in the F4 standings behind runaway champion Deagen Fairclough, who is also progressing to GB3. Ninovic also contested Spanish F4, again with Rodin, where he placed 10th in his first season of European racing in 2023.

"I am so pleased to be continuing the journey into 2025 with the awesome guys and girls that make up the Rodin Motorsport team," said Ninovic. "Next year will bring on a new challenge which is GB3 but I know that as a team we can achieve anything. As I always say: effort equals results."

GB3 team manager Ricky Taylor added:

"We are incredibly excited to see Alex continue his racing journey with Rodin Motorsport's GB3 team. He's well regarded by the team from the past couple of seasons with us and has always been a driver who adapts well to a new car.

"This has been evidenced through his testing programme with us so far. I'm looking forward to seeing what he can do with the new car in the new year."

Also joining the GB3 grid next season will be Keanu Al Azhari, who steps up after two seasons in the F4 ranks, which include finishing second in Spanish F4 and third in the UAE F4 championship.

The 17-year-old from Dubai, who will race with Hitech, said: "After two years in F4, I now feel ready for this next chapter in my single-seater career and I look forward to working with the team to help them enjoy another successful season in the series."

GINETTA ACES JEFF-HALL AND FERNANDEZ MOVE TO BRITISH F4

BRITISH F4

Ginetta Junior and OK World Karting champion Ethan Jeff-Hall will move into single-seaters with Argenti Motorsport in the British Formula 4 Championship in 2025.

The 16-year-old's impressive title double this season earned him Motorsport UK's Outstanding Achievement Award, following a Ginetta campaign that included six wins and a further eight podiums.

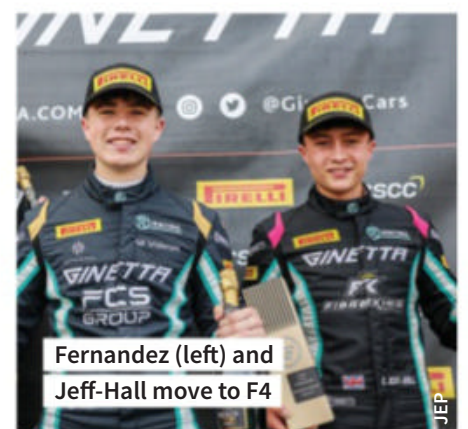
"Heading into the 2025 British F4 season with Argenti Motorsport, I'm excited and ready to face the challenge," he said. "Winning championships like Ginetta Juniors and the FIA World Karting title has taught me a lot about consistency, adaptability and handling pressure at the highest level.

"I know British F4 is a big step up, but I feel confident that my previous experiences will help me quickly adapt to the car and the competition. I'm eager to learn, push myself and aim for strong results from the start."

Jeff-Hall's chief Ginetta rival, Chase Fernandez, will also make the step up with Xcel Motorsport. Seven wins and a further nine podiums meant he finished 17 points behind Jeff-Hall.

"We're absolutely delighted to welcome Chase to the team," said Xcel boss Paul Hardy. "Chase is a natural talent, and we're confident he has what it takes to challenge at the front."

Fernandez's first outing with Xcel was in last weekend's opening Formula Middle East triple-header in Dubai, where he took a best finish of fourth.



Fernandez (left) and Jeff-Hall move to F4

Silverstone GP for Formula Ford cars

UNITED FF1600

Contemporary Formula Ford 1600 machinery is due to get a rare chance to race on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit next year with the United FF1600 Championship opener switching to the venue's longer layout.

The first round had originally been pencilled in on the National circuit, but a tweak to MotorSport Vision Racing's

calendar opened up the opportunity to race on the GP configuration on 6 April for the Jim Walsh Trophy contest. The United series caters for FFords of all ages, and coordinator James Beckett is therefore optimistic of attracting a large entry for the event.

"The Jim Walsh Trophy is actually a race I hosted for the first time just over 20 years ago on the GP circuit," said Beckett. "It's a good way to try to bring

the Formula Ford community together for a big showcase at the start of the year. It's very rare for contemporary FF1600 to have a chance to have a run-out on the GP circuit and it would be lovely if we could get towards 50 cars."

Other venues on the United FF1600 calendar include a first trip to Anglesey, while Lydden Hill remains after a visit this season proved popular.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



KALLE'S IRISH TRIP

Two-time World Rally champion Kalle Rovanpera tackled last weekend's Killarney Historic and said his "only plan was to be fast on Moll's Gap" after an electrical cut-out on the opening pass of one of Ireland's most celebrated stages. Driving a 2.5-litre BMV Motorsport Toyota Starlet, the Finn achieved the stage win before a fastest run over Caragh Lake took him to 15th with Jonne Halttunen.

Photo by William Neill

Griffiths wins again as Igoe given penalty

CIRCUIT RALLYING

John Griffiths and Emma Morrison made it two Circuit Rally Championship wins on the bounce at the Donington Rally last weekend.

The Citroen C3 Rally2 of reigning champions Michael Igoe and Will Atkins led the first two stages, but then picked up a 30-second penalty for missing a chicane. "We didn't hit it but, if I hadn't taken to the grass, we would have done," said Igoe.

Griffiths changed the set-up on his Skoda Fabia R5 after the opening stage and was now left with a lead to defend. By the end of the sixth and final stage Igoe had reduced the gap to 17s, but it was victory for Griffiths. "I was so cautious on the last stage, braking early



Two on the bounce for Skoda Fabia R5 crew

PETERSCHERER

and leaving plenty of room into the chicanes," he related.

Championship leaders John and Alex Stone were third from stage two in their Volkswagen Polo R5, after Chris West/Keith Hounslow (Peugeot 306 Maxi) were excluded for the wrong slot at a split on the second test.

Sean and Colin Quigley (Ford Fiesta Rally2) recovered from an off on the opening stage to take fourth, with

Mark Jasper/Don Whyatt (MG Metro 6R4) and Tony Robinson/Paul Spooner (Skoda Fabia R5) completing the top six.

The Darrian of Tony and Martin Davies was the first two-wheel-drive car home in eighth, after Josh Payton's Ford Escort Mk2 broke a driveshaft and Josh Davey (Darrian) broke the oil cooler.

The next round of the championship is at Brands Hatch on 18 January.

PETER SCHERER



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Breaking down motorsport's barriers

The ex-F1 engineer's latest initiative features a tie-up with FAT International in a bid to make karting more accessible

ROB SMEDLEY

Sobering. That's the word I'd use to describe what it's been like since I took the decision in 2019 to step away from working directly with Formula 1 teams and discover what it's like in the outside world. Back then, I didn't know what would come next, I just wanted to stop. Then I decided whatever I did, I wanted to give back to the community, to do something that was more purpose driven.

That was the ambition behind my Global Karting League, as I've described on this page before (21 March), to make motorsport more accessible and diverse by collapsing the price of entry, opening up the market and closing the loop to F1. And now we are taking the next step and scaling up with the launch of the FAT Karting League.

You might recognise the brand FAT International. It was the sponsor on Le Mans-winning Porsches in 1994 and 1997. But what used to be a logistics company is now a culture-driven entity dedicated to making motorsport more accessible, engaging and relevant for the next generation. It's owned by Ferdi Porsche, who just happens to be the great-grandson of Ferdinand Porsche. We met through a mutual friend who realised what we were trying to do independently directly overlaid with each other. We immediately clicked, started talking and we've now co-founded FKL.

"It's a potentially game-changing system that isn't reliant on an ultra-high net worth benefactor"

Next year, along with relaunching our UK hub, we are opening two more in the US with four more to follow the year after. In 2025 the three hubs will work in isolation as their own championships, but competitors will also build points towards a big event at the end of the year: the FAT World Finals.

From that, the best driver from the age-appropriate categories – we run racing series for children from six to 17 – will graduate through a prize drive to car racing in Formula 4. Our ambition is to push someone through F4, F3, F2 – and then you know what comes next. It's a potentially game-changing system that is totally sustainable and isn't reliant on an ultra-high net worth benefactor. We're approaching karting from a unique position of understanding motorsport from the pinnacle downwards and are therefore able to plot a sustainable and credible pathway.

So how are we breaking down the financial and complexity barriers that have traditionally made motorsport inaccessible? For all ages, we have created a season pass that includes nine championship events that make up the racing season. For the very youngest, aged five and six, an all-in fixed-cost season is around £3800, rising for the older classes to £4400 – so an average of around £4000. That's still a significant sum, but if the incumbent system costs around £125,000 for a season, that's 96% lower than comparable championships. In time, we hope to gain some buy-in from sponsors and bring the numbers down further. But, as a value proposition, I would say it's already pretty compelling.

As for our electric karts, there is a lot of capability in our business. Our team includes ex-F1 engineers, like myself, designing and building our karts. That's unique in our proposition and has allowed us to design something that feels like a conventional combustion kart. The EV powertrain is based on our knowledge of MGU-K systems in F1 cars and we have tuned them so you have to drive them in a conventional way, using momentum through the corners. You can't just use what used to be called the loud pedal to get you out of trouble. We've designed them to make it less of a leap to adapt to cars and they can be tuned easily for different levels of experience too. They are great fun to drive, kids love them and you build up the same skills as in conventional karts.

We are totally agnostic on who we hope to attract – everyone is welcome from all backgrounds. It really is open to all. But the ultimate proof of our plan will be for a female F1 driver to emerge from FKL. We already have more than 30% female representation in our UK hub. In comparison, the ratio in most conventional alternatives is in single digits. There's nothing preventing a female from racing in F1, but it's a pure numbers game: if only single-digit percentages of females are racing at the grassroots level, obviously there's a very small chance of one making it to F1 relative to the males. One in 20, in fact.

Everyone we have spoken to in motorsport is super-interested in what we are doing, but I haven't pushed it too hard with my F1 colleagues and friends. We run under the auspices of Motorsport UK here in Britain, for safety and regulation credibility that's the right thing to do. As a fellow entrepreneur, David Richards has been very supportive. We also have very good relations with the FIA, in terms of future homologation, and F1 has been interested from the start. But I've always said let me go away and get it running before anything else. That's where I wanted to get it to, and now with Ferdi and FKL we have a strong proposition. Better and genuine accessibility and diversity in motorsport is in our hands. 🏁

HOW CLUB RACING FACED A TRICKY 2024

There was an exact divide between categories that declined and those that did not this year as organisers battled to attract entries from a smaller pool of drivers

STEPHEN LICKORISH

The Christmas songs have already been heard for at least a month, the weather has turned cold and frosty, and another club racing season has drawn to a close. That can only mean one thing: Autosport has got its calculator out once again and produced our annual feature looking at club racing entries over the past year!

After poring over the data, the headline for 2024 has to be that it was a very mixed picture. Of the 128 English and Welsh series (we do not include Scottish, Irish or Northern Irish categories in this comparison since they have a far more limited pool of competitors to draw from), exactly half suffered a drop in their average grid size this season. And that is a clear

sign of the challenges many organisers faced in drumming up support this year. Of the other half, only 31% of series grew during 2024, while the remaining 19% stayed exactly the same.

Set against that backdrop, it is perhaps not surprising that the number of grids with an average of 10 cars or below increased from three to five this season. But it was far from all doom and gloom, and nine categories still enjoyed an incredible average of over 35 – that’s down by only one on the 2023 total.

Over the next eight pages, we examine the numbers in more detail and take a look at some of the best performers at each club as well as those that struggled a little more.

 **P69 OPINION**



MICK WALKER



750 Motor Club

The 750 Motor Club’s self-styled status as the ‘home of affordable motorsport’ has served it well during the years of turbulent financial fortunes recently endured in the UK. It has enjoyed the largest average grid size of all the major clubs in the past three seasons, but has *technically* been knocked off top spot this time.

Why technically? Well, the Classic Sports Car Club’s average is greater, but it opted to amalgamate a swathe of categories so its figure is, arguably, artificially higher. Among the organisers not introducing widespread grid sharing, the 750MC still leads the way.

“We were quite satisfied with our season,” states managing director Giles Groombridge. “Taking a holistic view of the club, it was slightly better than anticipated, which was pleasing. Some championships did better than expected and others didn’t do quite as well. It was interesting the total number of registered drivers was ever so slightly down on 2023 but that didn’t necessarily translate into lower grid numbers.”

Again sitting at the top of the 750MC tree is the 116 Trophy, which continued to average over 40 cars, even if its number did drop slightly compared to last year. The sister 116 Sprint Trophy also enjoyed a strong season and the low-cost, one-make endurance format is clearly still appealing. “With the Sprint series becoming a championship, that galvanised people to take part in both,” says Groombridge. “The cars are incredibly reliable and having three races over the course of a weekend doesn’t seem to trouble people, even those that are self-run, which



GARY HAWKINS

The 750MC's two BMW 116-based categories led the way

bodes well for next year.”

The 750MC category to enjoy the largest percentage increase was Historic 750 Formula, which was somewhat surprising to Groombridge. “Over time, since we’ve made more effort to ensure period correctness in terms of tyres and specifications of cars, it’s now being viewed more as an entry-level historic formula, and that’s led to cars being resurrected that have not been on circuit for 10-20-plus years,” he explains. “We’re seeing more cars emerging from the woodwork.”

Others with a boost by more than 20% include Formula Vee and the MX-5 Cup, two championships whose fortunes have yo-yoed around in recent years. “Formula Vee, by its high standards, 2023 was quite a poor year in terms of entry numbers and 2024 the commitment level of drivers was much, much greater, but there was no obvious explanation for that,” Groombridge admits.

“The MX-5 Cup promoter Alyn Robson retired and a couple of guys, Ben Hancy and Adrian Johnson, took it on. The only change they made was a switch of tyres with Avon

exiting motorsport and I don’t know if that was a factor. The [Massimo] tyre they picked was cheap and seemed to perform very well. They had a strong year. You do worry as the cars are getting older and the cost of donor cars and spares is rising as the Mk1 officially enters classic status. But the appetite for racing them still seems to be there.”

But as Groombridge has alluded to, it was far from a universally successful picture. Eleven series suffered a decline in numbers and sharpest among these was the Alfa Romeo Championship. Groombridge says plans are afoot to open this up to a wider range of Italian cars next year in an attempt to boost entries. “There’s things like Fiat 500 Abarths out there that might want to join in,” he says.

Also struggling a little was Clio Sport, which fell by a similar percentage to the Alfas. Groombridge says the club will aim to help find new homes for cars that have not been racing after drivers have graduated to other series, all in a bid to continue its position as being an organiser with some of the most bountiful grids in the country.



STEVE JONES

Clio Sport suffered decline in numbers

GRID SIZES		
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023
116 Trophy	41	-7%
Roadsports	38	0%
Armed Forces Race Challenge	35	-8%
116 Sprint Trophy & 120 Coupe Cup	34	+10%
Club Enduro	34	0%
MX-5 Cup	29	+26%
Formula Vee	28	+22%
Hot Hatch	28	0%
CALM All Porsche Trophy*	27	-4%
Toyota MR2	26	0%
Locost	25	-11%
Type R Trophy	24	-20%
Historic 750 Formula	23	+28%
BMW Car Club Racing	22	-8%
Ma7da	22	+10%
Sports 1000	22	-8%
Classic Stock Hatch	20	0%
Bikesports	18	+20%
F1000	18	0%
Sport Specials	18	-10%
750 Formula	17	-11%
Clio Sport	17	-26%
Alfa Romeo*	13	-28%
CLUB AVERAGE	25	-4%

Note *Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually

British Racing & Sports Car Club

The British Racing & Sports Car Club continues to be one of the best performing organisers when it comes to attracting large grids. In fact, it is the only club to boast six categories in its portfolio (C1 Endurance Series, Clubsport Trophy, Modified Fords, British GT, CityCar Cup and Supersport Endurance Cup) that enjoyed an average number of entries of 30 or above this year. Furthermore, all six of these top performers either enjoyed an increase compared to 2023 or stayed the same, underlining their genuine health. And the return of the C1 24 Hours at Silverstone next year is set to provide an additional boost.

But for all the success of these series, BRSCC chairman Peter Daly admits the overall picture is mixed after another year battling a “tough” climate. “We’ve benefited from some championships being more popular than we expected, but it’s been swings and roundabouts,” he acknowledges.

Overall, the club was still able to produce a surplus despite some individual struggles for particular series. Most notable among these is the Mazda MX-5 Supercup for Mk3 models of the sportscar. This was once one of the BRSCC’s most bountiful championships but declined by 35% this year, after dropping 6% in 2023. “I think the biggest disappointment has been our Mazdas,” admits Daly, who says MotorSport Vision Racing’s decision to launch a rival Miata Trophy last year continues to have an impact. “A lot of our regular drivers were attracted to race with MSVR. We’re looking at what we want to do with the Mazdas [moving forward].” It must be noted that Miata Trophy numbers also fell this year, so clearly other factors are also at play, including drivers/teams joining the BRSCC’s Audi TT Cup Racing category.

Daly describes the Audi situation as a “strange one”. On the surface, a huge



MX-5 Supercup grids were a “disappointment”

65% increase for its sophomore season (admittedly from a modest base) to an average grid of 28 cars sounds like a great success story. But the BRSCC was actually hoping for an even larger rise. “We’ve got a cracking car and we’ve sold many more cars than are appearing on the grid,” explains Daly. “There’s a lot of cars being used as trackday cars – that’s what we’ve discovered now.”

Another category to enjoy a sizeable increase this year is the Fiesta ST150 Challenge. “I think it’s the management of it and the platform we’re building for them,” says Daly. “There’s a good availability of low-cost cars and it’s not as aggressive as it used to be. It’s more of a clubbie-style than the big pro teams turning up.”

Meanwhile, the club is not standing still and continues to introduce new series. The Production Cup will essentially replicate the Clubsport Trophy in a shorter sprint race format, while ProSport Sprint will offer contests for more powerful sports/saloons. It has also developed the new DS3 Cup, the latest example of the BRSCC working alongside partner organisations to create a one-make racer. “When I took over as chairman, the club didn’t own a racing car, and we’ve now worked hard to develop these,” says Daly of the likes of the DS3, Audi TT and BMW 1 Series Supercup. “We’ve got an enthusiastic team of competitive people who are always looking at what we can offer.”

GRID SIZES				
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023		
C1 Endurance Series	41	+8%	MX-5 Supercup	22 -35%
Clubsport Trophy	39	0%	Compact Cup	21 0%
Modified Fords**	38	+9%	Fiesta ST240 Championship	20 +18%
British GT	36	0%	Super Classic Pre-'99	18 +13%
CityCar Cup	34	+13%	Formula Ford 1600	
Supersport Endurance Cup	30	0%	Evolution Trophy	17 -11%
Audi TT Cup Racing	28	+65%	Ginetta GT Academy	17 +13%
MX-5 Championship	27	-7%	Metro Cup	17 0%
MX-5 Clubman	27	-13%	TCR UK	14 -33%
Civic Cup	25	0%	Zeo Prototype Series	14 -18%
Fiesta ST150 Challenge	23	+28%	Ginetta GT	11 -31%
Fun Cup	23	+15%	CLUB AVERAGE	24 -4%
Ginetta Junior	23	+28%		
Fiesta Junior	22	-4%		

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds. ** Split over two or more different grids at some events



CityCar Cup was one of six series averaging over 30 cars



British Automobile Racing Club

All of the clubs included in this feature are different. They all have varying structures and specialities. For example, some also operate tracks and, for others, circuit racing is just a small element of their offering. Therefore, their business models are also different and that is an important factor to remember when comparing their relative performances.

The British Automobile Racing Club is a good example of this. Unlike many organisers, it only owns a couple of the championships that appear in its portfolio after taking a fresh approach for 2020. “In the past, the risk was all on the BARC,” says group CEO Ben Taylor. “We shelled out £1million a year and were then waiting and hoping that enough people would enter those events that entry fees would cover our outlay. And they didn’t.

“We then moved to a model which said to championships, ‘You’re in control, you know your competitors and it’s right that it should be in your interests to get more people on the grid.’ What we said was we will sell track time to you on a wholesale basis. If it’s £5000 for this race meeting, if you take in £4500 in entry fees, you need to make up the £500. But, conversely, if you take in £6500, then £1500 is yours. That’s good for us because I now know with a degree of certainty what’s coming into the BARC and people running strong

championships see the rewards of their hard work.”

This shift in model has enabled the BARC to invest far more in the service it provides, including ensuring paddock and event managers look after the finer details and by offering livestreaming. The differing approach is also important to consider when looking at entry numbers. Although it is in the BARC’s interests to have large grids to attract volunteers, it does not ultimately make a difference to the bottom line. Instead, the onus is on individual series to maximise their entries.

In terms of those sitting under the BARC’s umbrella, it was another strong season for the Classic Touring Car Racing Club, which celebrated its 50th birthday with a special event and barbecue at Thruxton. “They’re a really good example of giving your customers what they want,” says Taylor. “They don’t want frills and whistles, they want a nice atmosphere in the paddock and to be with like-minded people with cars that don’t get damaged too badly and to just enjoy it. Stuart Caie [CTCRC chairman] does a great job on that.”

But there have been some less successful stories. For example, Truck grids were down significantly on last year, but Taylor says some of that is due to an increase in entry fees.



GRID SIZES		
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023
Caterham Roadsport	35	+25%
Caterham Seven 270R	31	+35%
Classic Touring Cars: Pre-'93, Pre-'03 & Blue Oval Saloons**	31	-3%
Caterham Graduates: Sigma 135	30	+11%
CNC Heads Sports & Saloons	28	-15%
Classic Touring Cars: Classic Thunder*	27	+23%
Classic Touring Cars: Pre-'66*	26	N/A
Mini Challenge Trophy	25	-17%
Caterham Graduates: Sigma 150	24	-4%
Caterham Academy White	23	0%
Porsche Carrera Cup GB	23	0%
Porsche Sprint Challenge GB	23	+28%
Caterham Academy Green	22	-12%
Junior Saloon Cars	22	-19%
MG Owners' Club	22	0%
2CV	21	N/A
British Formula 4	21	0%
Mini Challenge Clubsport	21	-5%
Britcar Trophy	20	-17%
British Touring Car Championship	20	-26%
Caterham Seven 310R	20	-33%
Mini Challenge JCW	20	-5%
Track Action	20	+5%
Caterham Seven UK	18	-5%
Hyundai Coupe Cup	18	0%
Pickup Truck Racing	14	-26%
British Endurance	13	-31%
British Truck Racing	13	-32%
Classic Touring Cars: Pre-'83*	12	N/A
CLUB AVERAGE	22	-4%

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds and include series that had at least four race events.
* Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually. ** Split over two more or different grids at some rounds

2025. Taylor is optimistic of a strong season next year and describes Britcar boss Claire Hedley as being “inundated with enquiries” since the plans were revealed. An encouraging sign as the BARC seeks to continue supporting its hard-working series coordinators.



MotorSport Vision Racing

There is certainly a recurring theme among clubs this year of trying to do their best against a more challenging landscape than was predicted. And MotorSport Vision Racing is another good example of this. Its overall average grid size remained the same despite some notable increases and reductions among individual categories.

“I think all organisers found 2024 to be a slightly more challenging year than they expected, with a difficult financial climate,” says MSVR commercial and competitions manager Joe East. “This wasn’t helped by the dreadful weather in the first half of the year and all the uncertainty around the general election and autumn budget.”

One of the undoubted success stories continues to be the Bernie’s V8s category. The main series goes from strength to strength and, after last year’s special Corvette 70th anniversary contests, it introduced a Ford vs Chevy competition at American SpeedFest this season. “We’ve worked closely with Bernie’s sons, Adam and Simeon Chodosh, who have essentially relaunched the championship over the past three years,” explains East. “They focus on getting the small details right, working hard to make sure everyone feels welcome and to make each round a social event, with food and evening entertainment.”

The decision to offer standalone grids for the Porsche Boxster Cup is also now reaping rewards, with this developing into a strong

series in its own right. “This has been fantastic to see as Mandy Sear and Chris Pruden have listened closely to competitors’ feedback and decided to split the Porsche Club Championship grid to open capacity,” says East. “Doing this is always a risk, but it’s great to see it paying dividends.”

But, at the other end of the spectrum, there were six categories that averaged below 16 cars. The GT Cup was another sportscar series to really struggle, a 29% decline this year following a 28% drop in 2023. “I have no doubt GT Cup will turn its fortunes around – they are, unfortunately, a victim of the current financial climate,” says East, who adds organisers are working on “interesting plans” to boost grids next year. He is also optimistic that the introduction of the new 296 Challenge car will give Ferrari Challenge UK a lift, while Production GTI is set to be aided by the return of Mk2 models.

At the bottom of the pile is the new Clio Cup GB series that battled the late arrival of new cars from Europe as it got off to a faltering start. “We know the number of cars in the UK has doubled already, and we’re quietly confident for a much stronger season in 2025,” says East.

With new GB3 and GB4 machines generating a buzz around those categories and the introduction of Pickups to the MSVR portfolio, East is optimistic for a busy campaign as the club aims to fundamentally improve its weakest offerings.

GRID SIZES		
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023
Trackday Trophy	32	-3%
Trackday Championship	30	-12%
Bernie’s V8s*	29	+21%
EnduroKa	29	-17%
Sports 2000	28	N/A
7 Racing: 420R*	25	-11%
7 Racing: 310R & 270R*	25	+25%
Legends	25	-7%
Porsche Boxster Cup	22	+57%
Snetterton Saloons	22	-8%
GB3	21	-13%
Porsche Club	21	-13%
Clubmans Sports Prototype	20	-23%
Miata Trophy	20	-9%
Radical Cup UK**	20	-31%
United Formula Ford 1600	19	+36%
Focus Cup	17	+6%
GT Cup	15	-29%
GB4	14	0%
Production GTI	12	N/A
Ferrari Challenge UK	11	-35%
Allcomers	10	N/A
Clio Cup GB	6	N/A
CLUB AVERAGE	21	0%

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds and include series that had at least four race events. * Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually. ** Split over two or more different grids

Classic Sports Car Club

This was a momentous season for the Classic Sports Car Club. Having spent its first 20 years exclusively running series, it decided to expand into the world of championships for 2024 with a swathe of existing contests joining from other organisers. “It was a worry because we’ve never done it before – for good reason, series have worked well for us,” admits club director David Smitheram.

Yet he need not have been concerned – it turned out be a successful new frontier for the club. The Midget & Sprite Challenge was a particularly good fit as several existing CSCC drivers with eligible cars were able to join the fray, and the championship enjoyed its largest grid in over a decade at Anglesey



when 32 cars took part. “Before his passing, Mike [Parker, former coordinator] said how pleased he was,” says Smitheram.

The Ramair BMW Championship is also now being given standalone grids next year after an encouraging first term. “The one that pleasantly surprised me most and has been a real crowd-pleaser and

commentators have liked has been the Jaguars and MG Trophy,” adds Smitheram. “The racing has been really good. We had a couple of occasions where we had to take action with driving standards, but they were pretty isolated and the two championships have come together and worked well. It’s a symbiotic relationship.”

After a 2023 campaign that caused a sizeable black hole in the club’s finances, it opted for a more cautious approach this year and amalgamated many of its existing series. This worked well from an economic viewpoint, and the CSCC is set to return to having a substantial surplus it can invest back into the club, but it does make year-on-year comparisons tricky. Inevitably, the combining of grids also sent the overall average rocketing upwards and that must be considered when contrasting it with other organisers that did not pair up categories. Now, as the club opts to book more dates than ever before in 2025, the challenge will be to keep those averages as high as possible.

GRID SIZES				
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023		
Swinging Sixties**	47	-8%	Classic K & Mike Hawthorn Jaguars	26 N/A
Tin Tops*	34	+3%	Midget & Sprite Challenge	24 +20%
New Millennium & Turbo Tin Tops	33	N/A	Special Saloons & Modsports*	18 +6%
Ramair BMW Championship & Open Series*	32	N/A	Magnificent Sevens*	17 -20%
Modern Classics & Future Classics*	30	N/A	Slicks Series*	16 -27%
Jaguar Championship & MG Trophy**	27	N/A	CLUB AVERAGE	28 +17%

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds. * Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually. ** Split over two or more grids at some events

Castle Combe Racing Club

“A single-venue category is always difficult to keep fresh,” says Ken Davies, chairman of the Castle Combe Racing Club, which administers a suite of series based at the Wiltshire venue. Yet there was a fairly significant change for its Hot Hatch division this year – feedback from competitors resulted in it becoming a championship.

“I think it went very well,” adds Davies after entries rose to an impressive average of 29, having dipped a little the previous year. But there are further tweaks on the way. “For next season, we’ve dropped Class F, the Libre class with non-standard engines,” explains Davies, the move affecting the likes of regular frontrunner Shaun Goverd’s Citroen AX. “We’ve created a home for them in Saloons and they will drop in and don’t have to tweak the cars. With Hot Hatch, the intention is to get it into a

more production-based championship, and people with more modified cars can go into Saloons.”

Overall, Davies describes it as being “quite a successful year”, especially the popular two-day expansion of the Autumn Classic event. But numbers were down a little in the Formula Ford, Saloons and GT championships – the latter slipping to just 12 cars on average. “GTs were a bit thin but the quality was good,” he says. “Dylan Popovic with his super V8 Ginetta, Doug Watson in his Ferrari – we didn’t have quantity, but we certainly had quality. But nothing goes on forever and we’ve got to keep working to keep people’s interest.”

And Davies is certainly keen to attract as many drivers as possible next year, when Combe’s milestone 75th birthday is commemorated. “We will try to put some bells and whistles on to celebrate the anniversary,” he says, with details to be announced in due course.



GRID SIZES		
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023
Combe Hot Hatch	29	+12%
Super & Mighty Minis	21	+24%
Combe Formula Ford 1600	18	-14%
Combe Saloons	17	-23%
Combe GT*	12	-14%
CLUB AVERAGE	19	-5%

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds and include series that had at least four race events. * Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually

Historic Sports Car Club

The Historic Sports Car Club is another organiser that has amalgamated grids this year, which has helped boost its overall average and the bottom line of its accounts. Historic and 70s Road Sports have regularly paired up, sometimes also with a smattering of Historic Touring Cars, to enable the HSCC to then sell track time to guesting categories. While the individual championships have suffered in recent years, putting them on one grid has worked well.

“We’ve combined them at some events because you’ve got to have full grids,” says HSCC CEO Andy Dee-Crowne. “That’s what pays the bills. The club is well and we’re actually expanding and achieving our goals. We’ve had to revamp our offering, which has resulted in a positive break-even result.”

As for the fortunes of the Road Sports categories specifically, Dee-Crowne adds: “There’s so much competition in that arena. The championships have their own identities but, when we go to the more expensive circuits, you don’t want to have two grids of 15; you want a grid of 30.”

Elsewhere, there are other attempts to rejuvenate struggling areas of the club. The poorly supported Aurora Trophy was revamped into the Derek Bell Trophy this year and enticed back some Antipodean



Formula 5000 racers who had been absent since the pandemic. “We have to praise Mike Bainbridge and Frank Lyons, the championship chairs, for regenerating Derek Bell Trophy into what it should be,” says Dee-Crowne. “It’s really exciting and we’ve got more to come.”

Classic Formula Ford 1600 has also been faring well, with sponsor SDC helping subsidise entry fees, although the Historic division has been more disappointing.

“We’ve got a new championship chair, Chris Sharples, who has been working tirelessly to boost Historic FF1600,” explains Dee-Crowne. “We’re going to be looking at pricing and try to build forward with that.”

GRID SIZES

SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023
Historic Formula Junior**	33	+10%
70s Road Sports & Historic Road Sports**	31	N/A
Classic Formula Ford 1600	26	+8%
Derek Bell Trophy	22	+22%
Historic Formula Ford 2000	22	-21%
Historic Formula 3	22	0%
Historic Formula Ford 1600	18	-25%
Guards Trophy	17	0%
CLUB AVERAGE	24	+20%

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds and include series that had at least four race events. ** Split over two or more different grids at some rounds

Equipe Classic Racing

Equipe Classic Racing had a year of two distinctly different halves in 2024. “If I had to encapsulate this year, I would say tricky start, strong finish,” says Equipe partner Rob Cull. The organiser started on the back foot after Race Retro, an important event to launch its season, was cancelled amid flooding. Equipe then had modest grids at its March Brands Hatch opener before its Cadwell Park event had to be slimmed from two days to one because it could not fill the meeting,



causing financial headaches.

But its fortunes picked up with packed Equipe Libre grids at the GT World Challenge meeting on the Brands Grand Prix circuit. “That rejuvenated everybody – it was like the reboot the season needed,” says Cull.

From there, the Libre and GTS grids continued to be strong, and one of the highlights was the special Elan 26R 60th anniversary race at Silverstone. Another notable performer was the MG Cup. This transferred to Equipe during the off-season, after the MG Car Club exited the scene, and peaked at 26 cars. And that upward trajectory is set to continue in 2025 with Cull saying 50 drivers have already pre-registered.

A fellow former MGCC championship did not fare so well. BCV8 numbers continued to fall and these cars will become part of the 70s grid next year. Equipe’s first single-seater venture also got off to a shaky start with the F2 Atlantic offering now being expanded to a wider range of machinery.

Equipe has other bold plans for next year, including launching a six-hour historic race

GRID SIZES

SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023
Equipe Libre	30	0%
Equipe GTS	29	-3%
Equipe MG Cup	22	+16%
Equipe BCV8*	12	-29%
Equipe 70s*	10	N/A
Equipe F2 Atlantic	8	N/A
CLUB AVERAGE	19	N/A

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds and include series that had at least four race events. * Shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually

and moving into the prototype world by uniting the Zeo and Sports Prototype Cup series. “We’ve got some big ambitions and we’ve got to keep evolving, such as by adding the prototypes,” Cull says. “We’re also dropping our prices as we think next year is going to be tough for people.”

Vintage Sports-Car Club

This year was a hectic one for the Vintage Sports-Car Club as the organiser celebrated its landmark 90th birthday. A host of special events were held in August to ensure the moment was celebrated in style.

“We had 12 permitted events in eight days, including a pop-up event at the old home of Chateau Impney,” says club secretary Tania Brown. “On the Wednesday, it looked as it has done since the hotel closed – by Thursday night we had a hillclimb set up. We had something for everyone and have just got club of the year at the Historic Motoring Awards. It’s been a mad year, but it’s been a fantastic year and that was really the cherry on top.”

As part of the anniversary commemorations, its traditional Silverstone racing season-opener was held over two days instead of the usual one and there were plenty of well-supported grids. The VSCC does not run racing championships or series per se, making comparisons more challenging; instead it has a collection of one-off contests catering for a range of veteran machines. “It was a great start to our 90th year with two days,” Brown says of Silverstone. “We had a Hesketh there as well – you can’t complain when you rock up to Silverstone and get greeted by the noise of a Hesketh running round to commemorate 50 years since James Hunt won in it.”

Another special feature of this year was the Eldridge Cup race at Donington Park, which was for cars built before 1925, ensuring each was over 100 years old. “That was amazing and a really good race,” says Brown. “A lot of Edwardian cars turned up and some post-Edwardian cars as well.”

She says it is due to be repeated at Donington next year, while Brown adds that the VSCC is going to put a renewed focus on its championing of sustainable fuels – and other oils – in 2025. “It’s a nice juxtaposition with the oldest cars,” she notes. “The most sustainable thing you can do is keep old stuff going.” And, after celebrating its 90th in style, the VSCC is now looking forward to many more successful years to come.



Others

Alongside the main players, there were – as ever – a host of smaller organisers that ran series during 2024. And many of these continued to enjoy some very strong grids.

The Historic Racing Drivers Club attracts some of the largest entries in historic motorsport with its friendly paddocks for its series and, although numbers in its Jack Sears Trophy and Gerry Marshall Trophy tin-top contests dipped slightly, they were still a very strong 30 and 29 on average, respectively.

The Mini 7 Racing Club is another organiser that performed well this season, even if its Miglia and Se7en grids swapped in terms of which was largest. Elsewhere, Monoposto continued to attract a healthy mix of single-seaters, while the Darlington & District Motor Club-operated Northern Saloon & Sports Car Championship maintained a strong average of 30 cars and ran two

separate grids at some of its most popular events.

In contrast, numbers dipped a little for the Cockshoot Cup as, unlike other MG Car Club categories, it did not immediately align itself with another organising club. But it will be teaming up with the British Racing & Sports Car Club for next year, although drivers will still need to also be members of the MGCC.

The one category in this section that did enjoy a substantial change compared to 2023 is Club Time Attack’s Racing Hondas. Even so, there are two very big caveats that must be noted against its whopping 175% increase. First is the very low base from which it started: grids averaged just 12 cars during its inaugural campaign. And it must be considered that sponsor Tegiwa invested heavily in the series to enable all drivers to have their race entry fees for the year paid for. Given such a financial incentive, anything much less than its improved 33-car average would be considered a disappointment.

GRID SIZES					
SERIES	2024 AVERAGE	CHANGE FROM 2023			
Monoposto**	38	-7%	Ferrari Club Classic	23	+21%
HRDC Allstars & Classic Alfa Challenge	37	0%	500 Owners' Association Formula 3	22	N/A
Racing Hondas	33	+175%	Morgan Challenge*	18	+6%
HRDC Jack Sears Trophy	30	-12%	Cockshoot Cup	16	-20%
Northern Saloons & Sports Cars**	30	0%	CMMCS Intermarque Silhouettes*	13	-24%
HRDC Gerry Marshall Trophy	29	-9%	Welsh Sports & Saloons*	10	0%
Mini Miglia	29	+16%			
Mini Se7en	26	-10%			
CMMCS Super Saloons & Tin Tops*	23	-4%			

Note All figures only apply to UK rounds and include series that had at least four events.
* Shared a grid with another series at times, but figures are based on each individually.
** Split over two or more grids at some events

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Interpreting the statistics

There are always multiple ways of looking at the numbers, but it does seem clear that club racing faces challenging times

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Given the nature of the saying, it's perhaps ironic that the origins of the phrase 'there's lies, damned lies and statistics' are murky. Over the previous eight pages there are plenty of statistics about the club racing campaign that has just concluded, which can be interpreted in many different ways. Take the headline figure of 50% of series with comparable year-on-year data having a smaller average grid size this season than last. The impression that gives can depend on whether you are a glass-half-full or half-empty kind of person. If you are an optimist, you can spin that to say it's pretty impressive that half of all series grew or at least maintained their numbers in a tricky financial climate. Take the opposing view, and it's a fairly large percentage of categories that suffered a decline.

Delve a little deeper into the numbers and the more negative interpretation grows stronger. On the face of it, there seems little change compared with 2023. Last year 52% of series grew or stayed the same, so the percentage has only gone down by 2%. But it's worth noting that the proportion of series with static numbers has shot up from 11% in 2023 to 19% this year, meaning just 31% of categories actually grew this time around.

It's also worth considering that only once before in the five years in which Autosport has conducted this analysis has the number of championships growing/staying the same not been

“It feels like we’re at a point of market saturation and I don’t think that’s healthy”

larger than the figure for those decreasing. That was in 2022, when just 40% grew or remained constant in a year when Russia's invasion of Ukraine unexpectedly sent inflation soaring and created havoc in the economy. Although the financial waters are still muddy, they are undoubtedly less turbulent in 2024, and that makes the lack of grid size growth this year more significant.

But, if that's too many percentages for you, it's important to take a pause here before getting too bogged down in the numbers. Comparing grid sizes is a very blunt method of measuring the success of a series; after all, some of the more niche categories catering for a very specific type of car are highly unlikely to ever be overflowing with entries. And comparisons between clubs should have even more caveats given the vastly different ways in which organisers operate. Some principally

administer categories the club themselves own, others primarily look after championships that are run by external companies or individuals and therefore are not directly involved in getting cars onto the grids.

Another consideration is whether or not a club opts to amalgamate two or more series, since this can have a significant impact on the overall averages. Take the increase the Classic Sports Car Club enjoyed during 2024 when several of its categories were paired up. “Amalgamating grids is not universally popular,” says CSCC director David Smitheram. “The marshals and officials that give up their time want to see healthy grids and they had lots to look at and competitors had plenty of people to race.

“We’ve gone the other way for next year. I think we’ve got more dates than we’ve ever had before. From a financial point of view, it’s not the best thing to do but we’re trying to balance what’s right for the members. We’re constantly reacting to what’s in the present while trying to predict what’s happening in the future. If something happens outside of our control in the Middle East or Russia and oil prices go up, then I’m going to look foolish.”

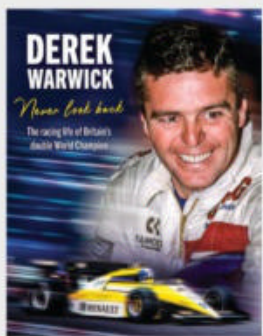
Despite all of these caveats, and the fact that they are far from a perfect metric, Autosport still feels grid sizes are a useful way of establishing general trends and reflecting on how club racing is faring. And, speaking of trends, ask any club chief how things are at the moment and the practically unanimous answer is that these are tricky times. “There’s a lot of challenges out there and I would say it’s as tough now as it was in the COVID times,” says British Racing & Sports Car Club chairman Peter Daly. “There’s too many race meetings in relation to the number of cars and drivers out there. We’ve reduced our number of meetings over the last five years – if all clubs decided they were only going to run five race meetings each, we would instantly fill those.”

It's a sentiment that 750 Motor Club managing director Giles Groombridge shares: “It’s difficult and there’s so many championships out there. There’s so much choice and, unless you’re someone really invested in competing for a championship, then people will just pick and choose events. It’s a big challenge and it feels like we’re at a point of market saturation and I don’t think that’s healthy.” Considering how the 750MC has regularly performed well in Autosport’s analysis, Groombridge’s comments are significant.

And this links nicely back to how the statistics are interpreted. By this time next year, we should know whether these worrying signs were really the start of a storm threatening to strike at the core of club racing, or if it was just a passing grey cloud that briefly appeared menacing. The real longer-term truth behind these numbers will only then be known. 🍀

FINISHING STRAIGHT

Long-awaited stories from one of motorsport's heroes



BOOK REVIEW
**DEREK WARWICK:
NEVER LOOK BACK**
Derek Warwick and
David Tremayne
RRP £60

Derek Warwick is a great storyteller and, over a career spanning more than half a century, he has a great many to tell. So it's pleasing that the 1992 world sportscar champion and former British Racing Drivers' Club president has teamed up with renowned motorsport journalist David Tremayne to produce his autobiography.

For the most part, *Derek Warwick: Never Look Back* (admittedly an ironic title for such a book) sticks to a chronological order, but this doesn't mean a dull plod through the early years. There are far too many interesting anecdotes and, frankly, crazy circumstances for that. Warwick's uncle Stan is the source of quite a few and, though some of his antics might be regarded as over the top with modern eyes, it's clear that those experiences mean a lot to Warwick and helped make him the person he is.

The importance of family in his life shines throughout, from his early days working for Warwick Trailers and pulling together his first forays in short ovals and Formula Ford. That makes the chapter on his younger brother Paul, killed in an F3000 accident at Oulton Park in 1991, all the more poignant. Derek's battle to decide whether or not to continue racing, the turmoil it caused the family, and heartfelt thanks to those who helped, including Richard Dean's efforts to aid Paul, make

for genuinely emotional reading.

One thing the book does underline is that Warwick was successful in just about every motorsport discipline he tried. From 1973 world champion in F2 Superstox through the junior single-seater ranks to international sportscars and Le Mans, Warwick starred in all. Only Formula 1 success eluded him, but he deserves to be remembered as much more than just one of the best drivers never to win a world championship grand prix.

For racing fans, there is plenty here, including views on cars and drivers, insights into teams, and the typical motorsport antics of the 1980s and 1990s. There's plenty of honesty too, from how Toleman F2 team-mate Brian Henton beat Warwick to the 1980 European F2 crown to his feelings of missing out on a Lotus F1 drive thanks to Ayrton Senna, via the 'cheat' that aided his memorable performance in the 1982 British GP. His well-known bravery also comes through, never more so than in climbing aboard his Lotus 102 following team-mate Martin Donnelly's horrendous accident at Jerez in 1990.

Warwick, now 70, has arguably had an even bigger impact outside of the cockpit. As well as the BRDC, Warwick has been involved in circuit safety, is a long-term race steward at grands prix and, as Autosport well knows, is a true driving force behind the Autosport BRDC Young Driver Award, today run in conjunction with Silverstone. For those who get frustrated at some of the stewarding decisions in F1, Warwick's explanation of the role is well worth a read.

But there's also plenty of interest for



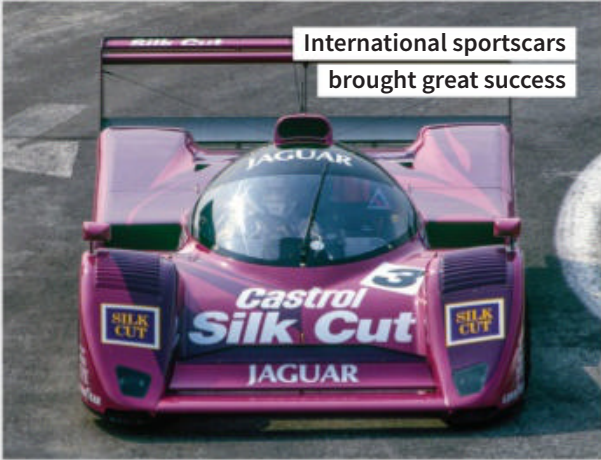
Grand prix victory proved ever elusive



Warwick faced struggle over whether to continue racing after brother Paul's death

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: MOTORSPORT IMAGES

SUTTON



International sportscars brought great success



En route to a point for sixth at Spa in 1989



Substantial contribution made to motorsport in non-racing roles

non-motorsport fans. The final chapters of the book include Warwick's incredible building exploits in Jersey, his efforts running a Honda dealership (and an unbelievable bluff involving Toyota), and his tough battle against cancer – or “a different kind of fight”, as he calls it. Interspersed throughout are accounts and thoughts from friends and family, which add depth, as do some of the personal and non-motorsport photographs. Criticisms? There is the odd snafu – we're sure Nigel Mansell wishes he had been driving a Williams-Honda in 1988 – and there is perhaps a tension at times, hinted at in the acknowledgements, that Tremayne would have liked to wield the editor's scissors a little more ruthlessly. But any repetition there is does not detract from the overall flow. Without boasting, Warwick shows how he has been successful at everything he's turned his hand to, and why he still plays such a role in the sport he loves. This book has passion, drive and enthusiasm, much like the man himself. Add it to your Christmas wish list.

KEVIN TURNER



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Autosport Podcast: Q&A

The Autosport team returns to field some of your most pressing questions from the past week of motorsport action. If you want to send in your questions for next week's episode, reach out to us on YouTube, Instagram or our callout post at Autosport.com.



Formula E season preview

Formula E reporter Stefan Mackley and driver-turned-commentator Karun Chandhok sit down to discuss the upcoming Formula E season, which begins this weekend in Brazil. There's lots to get up to speed on, including new faces and teams on the grid, plus the delayed debut of the 'Pit Boost' concept.



WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix
Formula 1 World Championship
Round 24/24
Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi
8 December
TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 1255
TV Highlights Sky Sports F1, Sun 1630, Channel 4, 1730
Sao Paulo ePrix
Formula E

Round 1/10
Sao Paulo, Brazil
7 December
TV Live TNT Sports 4, 1600
Livestream ITVX
Formula 2
Round 14/14
Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi
7-8 December
TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sat 1210, Sun 0920
F1 Academy
Round 7/7
Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi
7-8 December

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sat 1600, Sun 0720
Super GT
Round 8/8
Suzuka, Japan
8 December
Livestream Motorsport.tv, Sun 0325
Asian Le Mans Series
Round 1/3
Sepang, Malaysia
7-8 December
Livestream YouTube, Sat 0530, Sun 0530



FROM THE ARCHIVE

The fervent home fans of Spanish hero Carlos Sainz did not get the result they had hoped for when they flocked stage-side at Rally Catalunya in 1997 for round five of the world

championship. In the first two events Sainz had finished in second place, then a pair of retirements followed, and any chance of a bounceback was banjaxed from the off when his Ford Escort WRC, and that of team-mate

Armin Schwarz, suffered a rear braking imbalance and, by the time the issue was fixed, they were out of contention. Sainz managed to run in a frustrated fifth place before both Fords were struck with a propshaft

problem that forced Schwarz out and delayed Sainz further. Throwing caution to the wind post-repair he rewarded the crowds with a fastest stage time before the final insult of a puncture consigned him to 10th place.





Scott McLaughlin

Alex Premat hasn't been short of rapid team-mates during a varied career across the world. But above Nico Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton, the 2004 Macau Grand Prix winner picks out Scott McLaughlin as his favourite after six seasons together in Australian Supercars.

Premat was initially a full-season team-mate of McLaughlin's at Garry Rogers Motorsport in 2013, and became his co-driver for the endurance races at Sandown, Bathurst and Surfers Paradise in 2014-15 following GRM's switch from Holden to Volvo. They teamed up again from 2017-19 after the Kiwi joined DJR Team Penske, culminating in winning the 2019 Bathurst 1000, while Premat's input was vital in the first two of McLaughlin's three Supercars titles before his move to IndyCar for 2021.

The West Coast-domiciled Frenchman calls McLaughlin "an amazing guy" and recognised he was mature for his age, such that Premat reckons "that I improved a lot" by working closely with him. He also welcomed McLaughlin's vote of confidence, which allowed him to perform without pressure, "so I was coming just free".

"There was a true relationship," reflects Premat, who remains active in racing Lamborghini Super Trofeo machinery with gentleman clients in



North America. "The media was tough sometimes with me, especially when I was living in America. They used to say, 'Is Alex gonna be ready, what did he do this year, did he race?' And Scott said, 'Alex, we're in the best team, you are one of the best drivers, I have trust on you 100%'. There was no discussion about, 'Are you going to be OK?' He just gave me faith on his statement."

After spending the 2016 enduros with Shane van Gisbergen at Triple Eight, Premat says McLaughlin made it clear to Roger Penske that his shortlist for a co-driver had only one name on it: "We always kept a very good relationship." There was a first victory together at Surfers Paradise in 2017 and Premat, who remains friends with McLaughlin, reckons the Bathurst success two years later is "the hardest race win I got".

JAMES NEWBOLD



IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

F1's longest season is over

WHO EARNS WINTER BRAGGING RIGHTS IN ABU DHABI?



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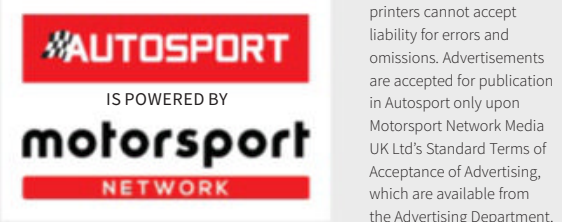
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Autosport, ISSN number 0269946X, is published weekly by Motorsport Network Media UK Ltd, 2 Stephen Street, London W1T 1AN, United Kingdom. Air freight and mailing in the USA by World Container Inc., 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. Subscription records maintained at Motorsport Network Media UK Ltd, 2 Stephen Street, London W1T 1AN. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent. Postmaster: Send address changes to Autosport, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc., 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

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2 East Poultry Avenue,
London, EC1A 9PT.
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7429 4000.
Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 28 Planetary Road, Willenhall, Wolverhampton WV13 3XT.
ISSN 0269-946X. Autosport is published weekly by Motorsport Network Media UK Ltd, 2 Stephen Street, London W1T 1AN.

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