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MATTHEW FIVEASH

There will be more to Formula 1 2021 than you might think

There has been so much talk about Formula 1's important new regulations for 2022 that it's been easy to overlook the fact that there are some changes for the teams to get their heads around this year.

As well as the obvious seat-swapping, there are technical rule tweaks, particularly to the floors, that are now giving F1 designers some challenges to overcome. Our technical editor Jake Boxall-Legge is your guide as we outline some of the key elements that will make 2021 more than simply a repeat of 2020 (page 18).

Amid the seemingly almost normal uncertainties we now live with, the Monte Carlo Rally *should* kick off the World Rally Championship this week. Elfyn Evans talks about his expectations for the campaign on p28, and we pick out the main things to look out for in 2021 (p32).

As well as being one of the main contenders in the WRC, Toyota is also busy with its new sportscar challenger as the World Endurance Championship starts a new, cheaper era. Gary Watkins investigates the thinking behind the new GR010 and reveals how it differs to the Le Mans-winning TS050 LMP1 car on p42.

Harry King was one of the undoubted stars of 2020 – you voted him National Driver of the Year in the Autosport Awards – and this week we speak to him about his brilliant Porsche Carrera Cup GB campaign and his hopes for the future (p36).





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NEXT WEEK
28 JANUARY
A new Williams era
What the change of ownership means for the iconic F1 team



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Matthew Fiveash

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FE is losing manufacturers, but new ones are waiting in the wings for the next generation

LOTUS AND ALPINE BEGIN FORMULA E APPRAISAL

FORMULA E

Lotus has put Formula E back among the positive headlines after revealing that it and fellow sportscar manufacturer Alpine are evaluating a collaboration to enter the series.

The Renault and Lotus groups have signed a memorandum of understanding to "study a number of areas of cooperation". This will be fronted by the co-development of a new electric road car in addition to assessing various motorsport categories, including the World Endurance Championship.

Although Lotus is working on the 2000bhp flagship Evija EV supercar and is expected to receive a £1.5billion investment from owner Geely, the Alpine name would likely lead a possible FE entry. Along with renaming the Renault Formula 1 team for 2021, it comes as part of a plan to "leverage Alpine's motorsport platform", according to a Lotus statement.

Autosport understands that any FE plans will be made around the prospect of buying out an existing franchise holder that already has infrastructure in place. Should Nissan stand by its recent commitment to the championship, it would also give the overarching Renault group two berths in the championship.

A Lotus spokesperson told Autosport: "[The study] is motorsport exploration, and it's exactly as described. Together we are exploring potential motorsport opportunities. This could lead to some very interesting opportunities but at this stage it is simply exploration."

With questions asked over the health of FE — namely the relevance of its technology and rising costs — this interest provides FE with a welcome shot in the arm ahead of the immediate 2021 season. As November turned into December last year, within 48 hours of one another, Audi then BMW announced they would quit the championship at the end of this term. This was shortly followed by the latest in a string of calendar setbacks, with the double-header Santiago season opener postponed owing to the detection of the rapidly spreading strain of COVID in the UK.

The potential for a tandem Alpine-and-Lotus attack follows news of McLaren Racing signing an agreement with FE that gives the squad the option of joining the championship for the advent of the Gen3 era beginning in 2022, led by a 120kg diet for the cars and a power hike to 470bhp. McLaren will also undertake an evaluation before committing to an entry, but its chief executive Zak Brown could extend a partnership his United Autosports team has formed in the heavily related Extreme E series.

In the nascent off-road SUV racing championship, for which the standard ODYSSEY 21 car will use a set-up essentially consisting of two FE powertrains, United has created a team in conjunction with Andretti Autosport. Andretti runs the BMW race team in FE and has confirmed to Autosport that it wants to remain in the championship beyond the manufacturer's exit. This could pave the way for a McLaren-Andretti alliance.

The interest in FE appears to back up the words of chief championship officer Alberto Longo. Only hours ahead of Audi going public with its decision to quit, he said prospective teams were "calling us on a daily basis". With BMW and Audi on their way, set to leave eight powertrain constructor teams, FE chief executive Jamie Reigle told Autosport that the loss of two leading makes





Alpine has also entered F1 via Renault rebrand. This is interim livery

may have made the series more appealing to newcomers.

Reigle said: "What's interesting is there's this narrative with Audi and BMW making decisions and what does that mean? We've been having conversations with other manufacturers who say, 'Hey, historically we might have faced a challenge coming into Formula E because of the level of investment required on the powertrain, the level of competition on the grid, the ability to cut through with the number of manufacturers already there'.

"Actually, the combination of there being a couple of slots and a little more of an assured voice available, and us — FE Operations, the FIA and the teams — being really serious about the cost cap and trying to put that in place, it changes the investment profile."

Reigle, who added that FE could remain successful with fewer manufacturers, reckoned a cost cap was one of his "top one or two priorities" amid widespread concern from participants about the quadrupling of team budgets over the six seasons of the championship.

Commenting that talks with teams about imposing spending limitations had commenced back in April, he said: "My view is there's no excuse [not to introduce a formal cost cap]. We need to do it, we should do it, it's healthy for the championship. It's very clear that some of that money that gets spent isn't particularly effective at making the car go faster or allowing the manufacturers and teams to differentiate from each other. It's those areas we need to address. That's happening anyway."

MATT KEW



Hubbert's plan paid off with Hakkinen's 1998 F1 title victory

Jurgen Hubbert 1939-2021

OBITUARY

A key player behind Mercedes' move into Formula 1, Jurgen Hubbert has died. He was 81.

It was on the watch of Mercedes executive Hubbert that the marque joined forces with McLaren, creating a partnership that would win two drivers' world championships with Mika Hakkinen in 1998 and 1999, and a third with Lewis Hamilton in 2008.

Born in 1939, Hubbert graduated in engineering from the University of Stuttgart in 1965, and joined Daimler-Benz that year. He moved through the ranks quickly, and by 1987 he had become a deputy member of the board of management of Mercedes cars.

On reviewing the state of the company, Hubbert decided that motorsport was the way forward. It became officially involved with the revamped DTM in 1988, in parallel with increasing support of Sauber's world sportscar championship team. That morphed into a full-works Silver Arrows effort, and brought the marque titles in 1989 and 1990, along with a Le Mans win in the former season.

With a return to F1 on the horizon, Hubbert hired former journalist Norbert Haug to head up the motorsport programmes. But the plan to move into F1 with Sauber, which would have involved Michael Schumacher, was shelved.

Mercedes still gave the Swiss team low-key support in 1993-94, before replacing Peugeot as McLaren's engine supplier in 1995.

Hubbert took on a more senior management role within Daimler while also becoming a powerful figure behind the scenes in F1. He was one of the key players behind the GPWC, the aborted attempt by the manufacturers to break away from Bernie Ecclestone.

He continued to be a big supporter of McLaren even after his retirement in 2004. Hubbert also found time to pursue an academic career, teaching engineering at the Technical University of Karlsruhe.

ADAM COOPER



GORIA/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Red Bull makes massive F1 support commitment...

FORMULA 2/3

Red Bull will have no fewer than eight of its proteges across the grand prix-supporting FIA Formula 2 and Formula 3 championships this season.

As has been widely tipped, Juri Vips and Liam Lawson will team up at Hitech Grand Prix in F2, while Jehan Daruvala will stay on for a second season at Carlin. Vips (above) impressed in a handful of F2 outings last season while standing in for the injured Sean Gelael at DAMS after his Super Formula programme bit the dust due to Japanese quarantine restrictions, while F3 race winner Lawson makes his debut in the category. Lawson remains with Silverstone-based Hitech for his step up, and it represents a return to the team for Vips, a race winner with Hitech during the 2019 F3 season.

Daruvala was overshadowed at Carlin last year by Red Bull stablemate Yuki Tsunoda, but ended the season with a victory and then topped the times in the post-season test.

As in F2, Hitech and Carlin are respectively running two and one Red Bull Juniors in F3. Britain's reigning German Formula 4 champion Jonny Edgar moves up with Carlin, while American Jak Crawford, who Edgar pipped to the F4 title in a thrilling finale, lines up at Hitech.

Crawford, who will not be 16 years old until the eve of the season, is joined at Hitech by Red Bull newcomer Ayumu Iwasa. The Japanese was last year among the first batch of Honda scholarship winners to be sent to compete in the French Formula 4 Championship rather than their domestic series, and he ended up dominating the contest from fellow Honda protege Ren Sato, who will head to Japan's Super Formula Lights series to drive for Toda Racing.

Edgar, Crawford and Iwasa join two more Red Bull-supported drivers (albeit not full Juniors), Dennis Hauger and Jack Doohan, on the F3 grid. While Doohan's team has not been announced, Hauger is already confirmed at Prema Racing. The Italian team, which had also previously named Charles Leclerc's brother Arthur for F3, has now completed its line-up with Brit Olli Caldwell, who returns to the squad with which he won in Italian F4 and Formula Regional after a rookie FIA F3 season at Trident.

Hitech, meanwhile, completes its FIA F3 squad with Roman Stanek, the Czech who was an eve-of-the-season addition to the 2020 grid at Charouz.

Daruvala and fellow FIA F2 race winner Guanyu Zhou, meanwhile, will be on the hunt for relatively easy superlicence points by contesting the Asian F3 series, which kicks off on the last weekend of January in Dubai.

Daruvala will join last year's British F3 runner-up Kush Maini at the new Indian-run Mumbai Falcons team, which has what is described as a data-sharing agreement with Prema.

Prema itself will run the Abu Dhabi Racing squad of four cars. This is spearheaded by Zhou, with Formula Renault Eurocup ace David Vidales and Swedish Ferrari junior Dino Beganovic, a winner with Prema in Italian F4 last season, warming up for their Formula Regional campaigns. The fourth car will be shared by F4 graduate Amna Al Qubaisi and her dad Khaled.

MARCUS SIMMONS

...and gives Albon a Ferrari

DTM

Red Bull Formula 1 reserve Alex Albon will be racing a Ferrari when he joins the new-look DTM this year under the flag of his employer.

The decision for the Red Bull-backed squad to run the Ferrari 488 GTE Evo has been made, Autosport has learned. But what isn't so clear is if the operation behind a two-car team that will also field Red Bull junior and FIA Formula 2 rookie Liam Lawson has been fixed.

Speculation suggests that Red Bull will go route one and place its cars with AF Corse, the team that runs the factory Ferraris entered in the World Endurance Championship. But AF has denied that it is about to join the DTM field.

"Never say never, but it would be very difficult because we are going to be very busy with our other programmes," said AF sporting director Batti Pregliasco in reference to its continued works participation in the GTE Pro class of the WEC and the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup.

Other teams with links to Red Bull in the single-seater ranks, such as DAMS, Motopark and Carlin, have all denied that they will be involved in the project.

What is clear is that Ferrari won't be involved officially. Should the AF deal come to fruition, it would run the Ferraris on a customer basis for Red Bull in the same way as it fields cars for clients in multiple series around the world.

"We would be very happy to see some of our GT3 cars in this championship, but not with an official or semi-official programme," said a spokesman. He ruled out factory drivers being loaned out to the new DTM operation.

GARY WATKINS



Interlagos GP in doubt again

FORMULA 1



The new contract for Formula 1 to stage a grand prix at Interlagos from 2021 has been suspended by a judge over the use of public funds for the race.

F1 had originally planned to move the Brazilian Grand Prix to Rio de Janeiro from 2021 after Interlagos staged the race for free in recent years thanks to a deal late in Bernie Ecclestone's tenure. But after the Rio project fell apart amid planning difficulties, F1 announced in November that it would be keeping the race at Interlagos after agreeing terms with a new promoter, who would run the event as the Sao Paulo Grand Prix.

The name change was intended to reflect the support offered by the city to the race, but the extent of that has now led to the contract being suspended.

It emerged that the city of Sao Paulo had agreed to pay £2.7million per year over five years for the race, prompting the deal to be challenged. The city had previously only contributed towards renovations and upkeep work at the Interlagos circuit and not to the hosting deal itself. "F1 is important for Sao Paulo and for Brazil – I'm a fan – but that does not authorise the city to enter into contracts without a bid, under secrecy and with a company without 'expertise' in the area, created a few days ago for this," said local councillor and lawyer Rubens Nunes.

A new company, Brazil Motorsport, was recently formed to act as promoter, enjoying support from the Abu Dhabi government via its Mubadala investment fund.

"The facts reveal without a doubt, at least at this stage, that the principles of publicity and transparency are being violated in an explicit manner," said Judge Emilio Migliano Neto. "For this reason also [absence of bidding], there is a need to suspend the execution of the contract, to assess whether there were effectively resources to cover the expenses detailed in the signed agreement."

LUKE SMITH AND GUILHERME LONGO

'Gimax' 1938-2021

OBITUARY

Best known for failing to qualify for the 1978 Italian Grand Prix, 'Gimax' (real name Carlo Franchi), who has died aged 83, was a highly capable Italian sportscar racer of the 1970s.

He began racing in Formula 3 in 1964, but under the name 'Gimax' (a combination of his sons Gigi and Max) he gained a reputation in endurance events of the 1970s. At the wheel of an Osella-BMW PA6, he became the champion of the two-litre class of the 1978 European Sports Car Championship. He usually drove solo, but combined with Giorgio Francia to win the round at Enna-Pergusa.

He then attempted to make his F1 debut at the age of 40 at Monza, replacing the injured Rupert Keegan at Surtees (below), but failed to make the grid. Undeterred, he joined up with his friend Giacomo Agostini to contest six Aurora British F1 rounds, plus the non-championship Imola race won by Niki Lauda, in the Williams FW06-equipped David Price Racing squad. He scored a best result of fourth at Monza in 1980.

'Gimax' hung up his helmet in 1984, but son Gigi raced as Gimax Jr in the British F3000 Championship in 1991, scoring one podium finish.

MARCUS SIMMONS





Sarrazin joins Chadwick in XE

EXTREME E

Veloce Racing will look to Stephane Sarrazin to combine his experience of three Formula E podiums and myriad World Rally outings for the inaugural Extreme E season.

The 45-year-old Frenchman, who contested the 1999 Brazilian Grand Prix for Minardi, completes the Veloce line-up with W Series champion Jamie Chadwick. It leaves Techeetah as the only one of the nine squads yet to reveal its drivers.

"This is a hugely appealing new series that has already attracted a lot of attention," said Sarrazin. "I've driven a lot of different types of car during my career, but the ODYSSEY 21 really is something special."

XE has pushed back its opening round in Saudi Arabia by a fortnight to 3-4 April in response to the pandemic.

MATT KEW



Vintage Arctic action. Stig Blomqvist was second, as part of Saab 1-2-3, in 1975

Arctic Rally becomes Finland's second WRC event

P28 WRC PREVIEW

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

The World Rally Championship will pay its first visit to the Arctic Circle at the end of next month. Arctic Rally Finland will run on 26-28 February as a direct replacement for Rally Sweden, which was cancelled last month due to troubling coronavirus case numbers in the Varmland region.

Based out of Rovaniemi, and taking place in temperatures that can dip to -30C, the event is almost guaranteed snow. Its inclusion means the WRC will visit Finland twice this season, with the traditional Rally Finland taking place on 29 July-1 August.

WRC Promoter managing director Jona Siebel revealed that his team had its work cut out finding a like-for-like replacement for Sweden in such a short space of time. "Since it was confirmed in December that Rally Sweden would not take place, we've been working hard with AKK Sports [a subsidiary of Finnish motorsport's governing body], the city of Rovaniemi and the enthusiasts there to try to make this event happen," explained Siebel.

"It's been a tough race against time and my thanks go to all involved. Winter rallies provide some of the sport's most spectacular action. A winter wonderland of full snow, and big snow banks lining the roads, are a driver's dream."

A traditional shakedown stage will take place on the Friday morning followed by the opening special stages that evening. This will be followed by two loops of three stages on Saturday ahead of Sunday's tests, which include the powerstage. In all, crews will tackle 260km. A decision on whether spectators will be allowed has yet to be taken.

JASON CRAIG

Andretti backs away from full-time racing

INDYCAR

The US's greatest racing dynasty looks to be winding down behind the wheel – for now anyway – with the decision of Marco Andretti to step back from full-time IndyCar competition.

Andretti, last year's Indy 500 polesitter, announced last week that he will attack this year's 500 in the #98 car run by father Michael's Andretti Autosport team, plus possibly some other races in order to remain "car fit". Other than that, he is keen to sample top-level sportscar racing, and spoke of his desire to share a car with second-cousin Jarett.

"I'll be looking into other sportscar opportunities as well in the coming months," he said. "Marquee events like the 24 Hours of Daytona, 12 Hours of Sebring and Le Mans would be on that list. I am excited for what the future holds in store for me both on and off the track."

The #98 car is run in conjunction with Bryan Herta Autosport, and Herta said it is undecided whether a new driver will replace Andretti. "It's not fully determined how many cars the team will run full-time," he said. "That's not to say the #98 will run all year, and it's not to say that it won't."

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Jota plans ELMS as LMP2 booms

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

The British Jota LMP2 squad is set to return to the European Le Mans Series for the first time since winning the title in 2016.

According to team boss Sam Hignett, Jota is closing on a deal to rejoin the series it won five years ago under the G-Drive Racing banner with Harry Tincknell, Giedo van der Garde and Simon Dolan at the wheel of a Gibson 015S. It is planning to run a solo ORECA-Gibson 07 alongside a continued two-car assault in the World Endurance Championship. "It looks like we will have a car in the ELMS again and we would want to run that car at the Le Mans 24 Hours," said Hignett. "Interest in P2 is up, which I put down to all the big news coming out on LMDh. We could have put a third car together for the WEC."

He explained that the move now made sense for the Kent-based team because the switch of the WEC to a 12-month calendar had "brought back the economies of scale for a team like us".

Jota will also provide engineering services to successful GT squad TF Sport, which is expanding into the prototype ranks in the ELMS this year under the flag of Racing Team Turkey. It will field an ORECA for Tincknell, Charlie Eastwood and Salih Yoluc.

Jota was a regular in the ELMS from 2012 with its 'mighty #38' Gibson chassis, which was originally known as a Zytek Z11SN. It won five races up to and including its championship year, as well as winning P2 at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2014, before switching to the WEC under the Jackie Chan DC Racing banner.

An unchanged line-up of Anthony Davidson, Antonio Felix da Costa and Roberto Gonzalez has also been confirmed for its #38 entry. The trio that finished third in the WEC P2 points last year (above) join Stoffel Vandoorne, Tom Blomqvist and Sean Gelael in Jota's two-car line-up.

Davidson said: "I can't wait to get back on track this year with Jota and to build on what we achieved last season. We managed to set the bar pretty high, but I have full confidence we can not only continue that but go on to achieve even greater things."

GARY WATKINS

SEBRING OPENER COMES UNDER COVID THREAT

WEC

The 2021 World Endurance Championship opener scheduled for Sebring in March appeared to be in doubt as Autosport closed for press.

The WEC admitted that it was considering the future of the 1000 Miles event on the undercard of the Sebring 12 Hours IMSA SportsCar round after Toyota raised its doubts about the 19 March fixture on the launch of its new GR010 HYBRID Le Mans Hypercar last week. Team director Rob Leupen described the race as looking "very uncertain".

A WEC spokeswoman stressed at the beginning of the week that no final decision had been made on Sebring in the face of the worsening coronavirus pandemic. She revealed that an announcement could come as early as Friday (tomorrow). "At the moment we are working on Sebring going ahead," she said. "A full decision will be made in the upcoming days."

Should the WEC race at Sebring fall over, it would be replaced by an event in Europe. Portugal's Algarve Circuit is understood to be lined up to host the WEC opener on the last weekend of March. The WEC spokeswoman confirmed that the venue is an option.

Leupen stressed that an early decision was required as the teams complete their final preparations for the new season. The freight for the US event, which included the majority of teams' cars, is due to leave Europe by sea on 4 February.

GARY WATKINS

P42 TOYOTA'S NEW GR010





Ingram joins BTCC Hyundai squad on long-term deal

BTCC

British Touring Car Championship star Tom Ingram will be racing a Hyundai this season at the start of "a multi-year agreement" with the Excelr8 Trade Price Cars team.

Ingram's departure from Toyota squad Speedworks Motorsport after seven years together was confirmed last month, and his destination was hotly tipped then to be Excelr8 Motorsport. The Suffolk squad entered the BTCC in 2019 with ageing MG6 machinery, before building its Hyundai i30 N contenders for 2020.

Chris Smiley and Senna Proctor each scored reversed-grid second places with the new car last year, but development was hampered by the COVID crisis. Excelr8 was also not helped by the absence from most races of top BTCC engineer Kevin Berry, who was involved in the design of the car but who had to quarantine himself due to his role looking after Lynk & Co's World Touring Car Cup champion Yann Ehrlacher.

Excelr8 has expanded from two to four cars for 2021 owing to its new tie-up with Trade Price Cars, whose two-year deal with AmD to run Audi S3s on its behalf ran out at the end of last season. Jack Butel was confirmed in one Hyundai last month, while Smiley was announced last week as remaining at the squad. Ingram's capture leaves one seat available.

"For me, Jason Plato has always been the blueprint in the BTCC," said Ingram. "The mentoring I received from him as part of the KX Akademy just under a decade ago transformed the way I approach my racing. In focusing on building his brand, he has proved how it's possible to forge a truly tangible, long-lasting career in British motorsport both on and off-track, and I would like to think I could see myself in his shoes another decade or two down the line.

"With that in mind, it's great to have the security of a multi-year agreement, especially in the current climate. This is a long-term commitment on both sides, which means we know where we stand and gives us the opportunity to really grow together and establish Excelr8 as a bona fide frontrunning team."

Ingram told Autosport that he did not expect his first run in the Hyundai to be before the end of next month, and that he is excited to have team-mates for the first time in the BTCC. "Chris and myself used to race each other when we were 12 years old in karts, and I won the British championship," he said. "I know that Chris's preference [on set-up] is very similar to mine. He can definitely hustle a result out of the car, and we'll have a good shot at the independents' championship as well as the overall."

Meanwhile, the season start has been put back five weeks as part of what series boss Alan Gow described as a "pre-emptive move" to run races in front of a crowd. It now kicks off at Thruxton on 9 May, followed by Snetterton (16 May), Brands Hatch (13 June), Oulton Park (1 August), Knockhill (15 August), Thruxton (29 August), Croft (19 September), Silverstone (26 September), Donington Park (10 October) and Brands GP (24 October).

MARCUS SIMMONS

Yamamoto in team switch

SUPER FORMULA/SUPER GT

A Super Formula team switch for three-time champion Naoki Yamamoto and a Super GT exit for Jann Mardenborough have become the two big developments of the off-season so far in Japan.

Honda star Yamamoto, who won his third SF title last year with Dandelion Racing, is moving across to Nakajima Racing in 2021 following his post-season test appearance with the squad at Fuji. He is swapping drives with his Super GT team-mate Tadasuke Makino, who recently left hospital after being struck by meningitis. Makino will partner Nirei Fukuzumi at Dandelion, while Toshiki Oyu stays on alongside Yamamoto at Nakajima.

Honda has maintained an almost unchanged Super GT line-up for 2021, with the only tweak being Oyu's promotion to a GT500 seat with Team Mugen at the expense of Hideki Mutoh. Oyu, who raced for Team Aguri in GT300 last year, will partner Ukyo Sasahara at the wheel of Mugen's Red Bull-liveried Honda NSX-GT, while ex-IndyCar racer Mutoh faces an uncertain future.

In a similar situation is long-time Nissan man Mardenborough, whose name was absent from the marque's unveiling of its 2021 GT500 roster. His seat at Kondo Racing alongside Mitsunori Takaboshi has been handed to Daiki Sasaki, who is in turn replaced at Team Impul by ex-GP2/F2 star Nobuharu Matsushita.

Talks between Nissan and Mardenborough about other programmes are understood to be ongoing, although it's unclear what the marque could offer the Welshman beyond a seat in GT300.

Matsushita will partner Kazuki Hiramine at Impul for his first full Super GT season, and is also in the frame to extend his stay in Super Formula with Honda-powered B-Max Racing.

JAMIE KLEIN




HOCH ZWEI

Audi lets its DTM veterans go

DTM/SPORTSCARS

Long-time Audi works drivers Loic Duval and Jamie Green have parted ways with the German manufacturer for 2021.

Their contracts with Audi have not been renewed after the end of its factory engagement in the DTM at the end of 2020. They have left Audi's employ along with fellow DTM refugee and Virgin Formula E driver Robin Frijns and three-time Le Mans 24 Hours winner Benoit Treluyer, who has had a reduced role with the marque since its withdrawal from LMP1 at the end of 2016.

No room has been found for them on Audi's roster of GT3 drivers, but out-going DTM racers Mike Rockenfeller and Nico Muller have been retained and are expected to race the Audi R8 LMS in 2021.

A spokesperson for Audi said that Duval, Green (above), Treluyer and Frijns "do not have the status of factory drivers but that does not mean they are off our radar".

Duval (right), who won Le Mans with Audi in 2013, admitted that he had decided to make a full-time return to sportscar racing this season. He will contest both the IMSA SportsCar Championship and the World Endurance Championship driving a Cadillac Daytona Prototype international and an ORECA 07 LMP2 for the JDC-Miller and the TDS-run Realteam squads respectively. "My contract stopped at the end of 2020 and Audi didn't have a lot for me to do," said the Frenchman. "It made no sense for me to try to stay when they couldn't offer me much."

No comment was available from Green, a veteran of eight DTM seasons with Audi.

Reigning GT World Challenge Europe Sprint Cup champion Charles Weerts and ADAC GT Masters regular Dennis Marschall have been added to the GT3 roster for the coming season.

GARY WATKINS


HOCH ZWEI / SUER

IN THE HEADLINES

SERRA'S FULL-TIME FERRARI

Daniel Serra, son of 1980s F1 driver Chico, will join Ferrari's factory assault on the GTE Pro class of the World Endurance Championship full time in 2021. The Brazilian will share one of the two AF Corse 488 GTE Evos with Miguel Molina in place of Davide Rigon, who will now be the third driver in the car for the Le Mans and Sebring long races. Rigon's main programme this year will be to lead Ferrari's and AF's bid to retain its GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup title. James Calado and Alessandro Pier Guidi will remain team-mates in the other car, but no replacement has been named for Serra as third driver.

TRULLI JR WINS ON F4 DEBUT

Enzo Trulli, the 15-year-old son of 2004 Monaco GP winner Jarno, won on his car racing debut last week in the UAE F4 Championship in Dubai. Trulli, driving for the Cram Durango team, won the first race, before Dilano van't Hoff took the next two and Kirill Smal the finale. Trulli will race in Spanish F4 this season.

DTM DROPS RUSSIAN ROUND

The DTM has dropped its planned season opener at new Russian track Igora Drive. The schedule has now dropped to eight rounds, and kicks off at Monza on 18-20 June.

CARLOS GASPAR 1943-2021

Carlos Gaspar, who died recently aged 78, had his finest hour on the fearsome Vila Real road circuit in 1973, when he charged from ninth to defeat Peter Gethin's Chevron to victory in a two-litre Lola T292. Gaspar, who had previously won races in a Lotus Elan and Ford GT40, was a key figure in a plan to launch a Portuguese F1 team in the early 1970s. He then raced a Cosworth DFV-engined Lola T280 backed by Banco Intercontinental Portugues and prepared by former Team Bonnier crew chief Heini Mader, before BIP fielded the two-car team of T292s.



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Mistakes Mercedes must avoid

How a team that's previously proved adept at dealing with regulation changes copes with 2021's potential stumbling blocks will be one of the season's key narratives

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

It's no surprise that Mercedes heads into the 2021 Formula 1 season as the overwhelming favourite. By winning the past seven world title doubles, the team has already shown that it can cope with major and minor regulation changes during that run. But there are pitfalls it must nevertheless avoid in 2021.

Of the four races it lost in 2020, two can be put down to operational mistakes, which set up the Italian and Sakhir Grand Prix thrillers. The other two, Max Verstappen's two wins for Red Bull at Silverstone and in the Abu Dhabi season finale, can be considered the team's only 'on merit' losses. In both of Verstappen's wins, tyre performance was the biggest single factor.

At the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix, the W11's high downforce peaks on a boiling summer day at a demanding track meant it rapidly chewed through the softer rubber being used than in the previous weekend's British GP, where Mercedes had dominated on the same circuit. This exacerbated its struggles to fend off Verstappen's superior starting-tyre strategy.

Then in Abu Dhabi, once the early safety car had put most of the pack on the same strategy, Verstappen was able to keep his tyres in better shape than the pursuing Valtteri Bottas could, as Mercedes finished the season with a sub-par weekend at a track where it had previously been supreme.

But tyre performance was also a major factor in Mercedes' overall success in 2020. When comparing the W11 to previous Mercedes machines, some of which have been called 'divas', chief designer John Owen told Autosport last year that "most of the vices that we've ever had are about tyres".

> **"Mercedes' relentless focus on learning from any losses will be an important asset"**

This is a significant consideration for 2021, because F1 is about to embark on a campaign with new tyre constructions for the first time since 2019. After the compounds initially earmarked for use last year were discarded following negative feedback from the drivers, criticism has taken a back seat with the 2021 rubber, because the changes have been made for safety reasons. As F1 cars reached a new speed peak in 2020, Pirelli had to act accordingly to try to eliminate the potential for the failures seen across last season, but most famously at the end of the British GP.

Lewis Hamilton voiced his feelings on the 2021 prototype rubber after the drivers initially sampled it in practice for last year's Bahrain GP. The reinforced compounds add 3kg to the cars, which the world champion said was "like a second worse per lap".

His criticism came from an understandable position. One of Hamilton's greatest strengths during his Mercedes title landslide has been his ability to get the best out of the fragile Pirellis over a race distance. But getting there is a new process whenever the tyre manufacturer implements new constructions.

As Owen points out, "you're kind of taking a bit your best guess" in terms of getting the knowledge the teams have accrued since 2011 to work best with new compounds. There's no guarantee it will work, and a driver who has built an advantage on a known quantity will naturally want to preserve it.

So, Mercedes must get to grips with the new rubber in 2021. Although it will enter the new campaign on the back of a comprehensive defeat to Red Bull in Abu Dhabi, the team's relentless focus on learning from any losses will be an important asset. So too will the extra running on the prototype 2021 tyres the team opted to complete in practice in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi.

Another potential snag for F1's top squad is the move to cut downforce levels by 10%, mainly with changes to floor design. There have been suggestions that this alone could have a dramatic influence on car performance, and although the non-homologated areas of the designs, such as aerodynamics, are open for development, overhauls to the homologated parts (for example, the chassis and suspension members) fall within the limited 2021 development token system. Alpine technical boss Pat Fry said that "you can't do a whole new car, but you can definitely do half a one".

Mercedes has excellent form in overcoming regulation tweaks in recent years, even when they are small, such as the front-wing-design changes required for 2019. But the adaptation allowances in the largely carried-over designs are tied to another potential pitfall it will need to avoid. F1's delayed rules revolution is again a year away, which means all the teams will soon be making a choice about when to fully divert their attention towards their 2022 challengers. In 2020, Mercedes did not add any performance updates to the W11 after the Belgian GP, and this contributed to Red Bull reducing what was once an overwhelming advantage.

This does not necessarily mean that Mercedes will be vulnerable at the start of the campaign. It just serves to highlight the delicate balance that must be struck, which is further complicated by the development token system reducing the chance for teams to fix anything they get wrong. Mercedes does not make a lot of mistakes. Part of its story for the upcoming campaign will be how it avoids the potential stumbling blocks that could trip up even F1's best.

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The image battle facing Norris

He's had his fingers burned by social media's keyboard warriors who have trouble appreciating that he's only human. Thankfully he's carrying on being himself

LUKE SMITH

After a hectic year for Formula 1, featuring 17 races in just over five months, most of the paddock felt in need of a holiday. Despite various travel restrictions, a number of drivers have managed to get away, incorporating some rest and recreation into their off-season preparations.

Charles Leclerc, Lando Norris and Pierre Gasly are three drivers to have got away, all recently spending time in Dubai. Travel from the UK is permitted on work grounds, meaning a training camp – which Norris was jetting away for – is technically an acceptable reason for leaving the country.

But Norris has spent a bit more time in Dubai than planned. A positive test for COVID-19 in early January, after he'd reported a loss of taste and smell, forced him to self-isolate for two weeks in a hotel.

Amid the majority of messages wishing Norris a speedy recovery, there was some criticism. "You should have known the risks when you jetted off to Dubai," said one Twitter user. A more scathing response read: "This should hopefully teach you a lesson to not go on holiday during a pandemic as England is suffering."

It's not the first time that Norris has faced blowback for his actions. The 'knives out' nature of social media, frequently fuelled by a cancel culture that waits for public figures to trip up, makes stars liable to criticism that's sometimes unfair. Comments can be twisted and made into bigger stories than they actually are.

"Unfiltered Lando is the Lando F1 needs. He's been a positive force ever since his debut"

In the case of Norris, it's felt more acutely. Not only is he the most active F1 driver across social media platforms, but he's also cultivated a 'good guy' image, reflecting his personality and demeanour away from the race track. It means that anything wavering from this immediately stands out and acts as perfect fodder for keyboard warriors.

Norris was forced to adjust his approach to social media through 2020. "When it was a difficult day in 2019, I always took it as a bit of a joke, or portrayed it as a joke with some of my comments on social media and things," he says. "People would love that, but some would also just think, 'Oh he's not doing any work, that's why he's not doing well enough, because he is just too jokey.'

"People then portray that differently and say that I'm working better and that I'm doing a better job this year. People paint two pictures of it."

The same applies to Norris's comments in the media, seen most acutely after the Portuguese Grand Prix last year. Following Lewis Hamilton's record-breaking 92nd grand prix victory, Norris was asked for his thoughts on his compatriot's success, and said: "He's in a car which should win every race basically. He has to beat one or two other drivers, that's it."

It was a flippant comment, but came after a frustrating race for Norris during which he clashed with Lance Stroll, who he hit out at, saying he "doesn't seem to learn with anything he does". But it resulted in a lot of heat aimed at the McLaren driver. Norris issued an apology for being "careless" with his comments, chiefly those about Hamilton.

"It was tricky," reflects Norris. "There's no one I probably respect more in the paddock than Lewis and what he's done. I feel like I'm a nice guy and I try to be a nice guy all of the time. But I also try to speak a bit of the truth sometimes, and sometimes people don't like that.

"I never mean something bad against anyone. It's always an emotion and an outburst, which every driver does. I've made mistakes now, and I'm sure I'm going to make them in the future."

The difficulty for Norris is that such mistakes go against the image many have built up of him. Had another driver said as much – say, Kimi Raikkonen – it would probably havebecome a viral video or meme.

Norris agrees. "I think if Kimi had said it, people would have loved it!" he exclaims. "There's nothing you can do about that, that's just how people portray you. I guess people have just never seen the bad side of me, or the angry side of me. Then when I have shown that, people just think I'm acting out in a bad way and I'm disrespecting everyone, which I don't. It's not something I can just change. It's just people's perceptions."

Norris's acceptance is important. The flak he faced after his Hamilton comments had an impact, but the maturity of his response, which many deemed to be an overreaction, puts him in good stead for the future. Accepting accountability for his actions is something many of his peers should take note of.

Although Norris has learned about the sometimes fickle nature of the F1 fan community, he won't lose his authenticity. "I still say what I say, I still laugh," he says. "I laugh at jokes because they're funny. I don't try and be someone fake and someone I'm not, because then I'm not living my life."

Unfiltered Lando is the Lando F1 needs. He's been a positive force ever since his debut. It's important we don't harangue him for slip-ups or mistakes that could cause that light to dim.

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PICTURES OF THE WEEK

P48 DAKAR RALLY REPORT



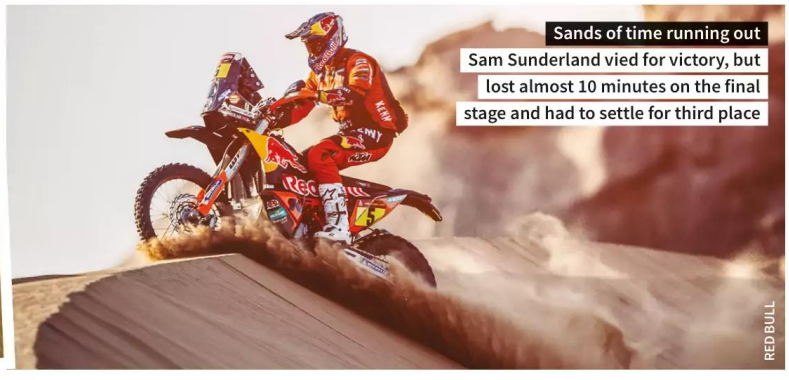
Between a rock and a hard place
Chilean Francisco 'Chaleco' Lopez's Can Am XRS racer is dwarfed by the stunningly brutal Saudi landscape

RED BULL



Dunes busting out all over
Sebastien Loeb's Prodrive-built BRX1 storms the desert before his Dakar retirement

RED BULL



Sands of time running out
Sam Sunderland vied for victory, but lost almost 10 minutes on the final stage and had to settle for third place

RED BULL

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WHAT'S NEW

Formula 1 won't get its big new regulations this year, but there are plenty of changes to keep track of. Here's our guide

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

3D ARTWORK **MATTHEW FIVEASH**

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES



FOR 2021?



Formula 1 should have been graced with an entirely new technical ruleset for 2021. The complex bargeboard packages and overreliance on external aerodynamics were set to be dropped for the venturi-effect underbody tunnels and simplified wings for the new year. But, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the delay of those regulations.

Instead, the 2021 cars will be largely the same as those used last year, barring aero tweaks and the structural changes to the chassis and suspension allowed by a token system. The retention of the regulations was largely a response to the hit that the teams took financially, as the first half of the year was laid to waste by the marauding virus around the world. Things only picked up in July, but the mandatory factory closures last year to preserve the future of the teams meant that the array of technical changes expected for this season was shuffled back a year to 2022.

With the expectation that Pirelli's tyres – originally designed for the 2019 season and carried over for 2020 after a different construction was vetoed by the teams – would be kept on for another year, the FIA has forced the teams to pare down their floor constructions to reduce overall downforce. This reduction is expected to be around 10%, although the designers will surely find ways to claw some of that back.



WHAT'S CHANGED

Firstly, the floor designs have had to be trimmed back. Between the back of the driver cell and the rear axle, the FIA has added a triangular exclusion zone into which no bodywork must enter.

The floors will therefore taper in towards the back, and be bereft of the various slots and cuts that perforated the edge. Those slots have historically been used to help the floor produce a barrier against oncoming turbulent airflow from entering the diffuser, so the diffuser will now be less effective at producing downforce as the messy air seeps in.

The diffuser itself has also endured a spell on the surgeon's table, losing 50mm from the length of the strakes within. Together, this offers less space for clean air to expand within, increasing the overall pressure and therefore limiting downforce.



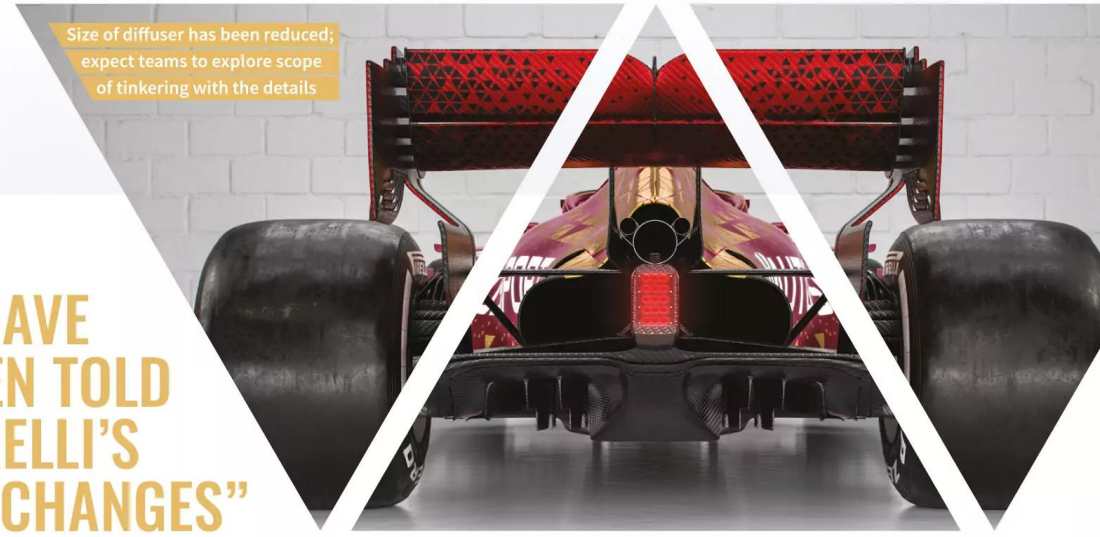
Floors will taper towards the rear, expected to reduce downforce by around 10%

As it happens, Pirelli has had to make changes anyway. The 2021 tyres are of a slightly different construction to ensure that they don't risk a repeat of the blowouts that they sustained during last summer's British Grand Prix, and as a result will add 3kg to the car. The drivers, having tested the new constructions in practice sessions, were not overwhelmingly happy with the changes, but have effectively been told to suck it up.

What else can teams change within the bounds of the regulations? The good news for the aerodynamicists is that bodywork, largely, remains open-season. Various aerodynamic appendages can be reworked as normal, giving teams the opportunity to explore some of 2020's trends if they had not previously embarked upon them. One such trend seemed to include the move to the Mercedes-style thinner noses, with which Red Bull, Racing Point and Renault began the year, and which McLaren adopted for the second half of the season. As the teams towards the rear of the field tend to be more reactive to changes at the front, it stands to reason that they'd at least explore that step to minimise the blockage to the floor.

But that also ties into the token system and, although the changes to nose bodywork and fairings would not require tokens, any modifications to the impact





Size of diffuser has been reduced; expect teams to explore scope of tinkering with the details

"THE DRIVERS HAVE EFFECTIVELY BEEN TOLD TO SUCK UP PIRELLI'S CONSTRUCTION CHANGES"

structure itself would. Changes to the survival cell, roll structure, suspension mountings and the like will require tokens, stopping the teams from making wholesale changes. Each team only has two tokens, so must spend them wisely.

Some indications have come from Ferrari that it will be using its tokens at the rear of the car. The Ferrari SF21 will take on a new power unit to overcome the shortfalls in the team's old one, and so the rear of the car will need a redesign to take any structural changes made. Meanwhile, McLaren will also need to rework the rear part of the car to accept its return to Mercedes engines, after ending its three-year link-up with Renault.

Overall, the 2021 cars will be a little slower than last year's owing to the floor changes, which should help to segue a little into the 2022 cars, which are also expected to be slower. There has been a collection of 2021-style floors tested in practice already, with some similar approaches already seen. Haas, Ferrari and Renault have trialled small curls on the trailing-edge corner of the floor, perhaps attempting to bring airflow in and around the rear tyre and work it internally. Ferrari also tried a variety of fins in Abu Dhabi to explore that effect further, taking the air that drifts outwards and turning it inside. With that, perhaps there's scope to run a vortex along the outer diffuser fences and create a seal – it's interesting not to see too much of a consensus in designs.

Renault technical chief Pat Fry called the changes "quite dramatic", while Williams head of vehicle performance Dave Robson has suggested that losing a chunk of the floor could potentially help the team by acting as a leveller. Although the 2020 formula is, largely, carried forward for yet another year, there's no reason to expect the teams to fall entirely in the same order. Even so, the key decision throughout the year will not be which designs to pursue but when to stop, as getting a head start for 2022 and beyond will be a more lucrative, longer-term strategy. »

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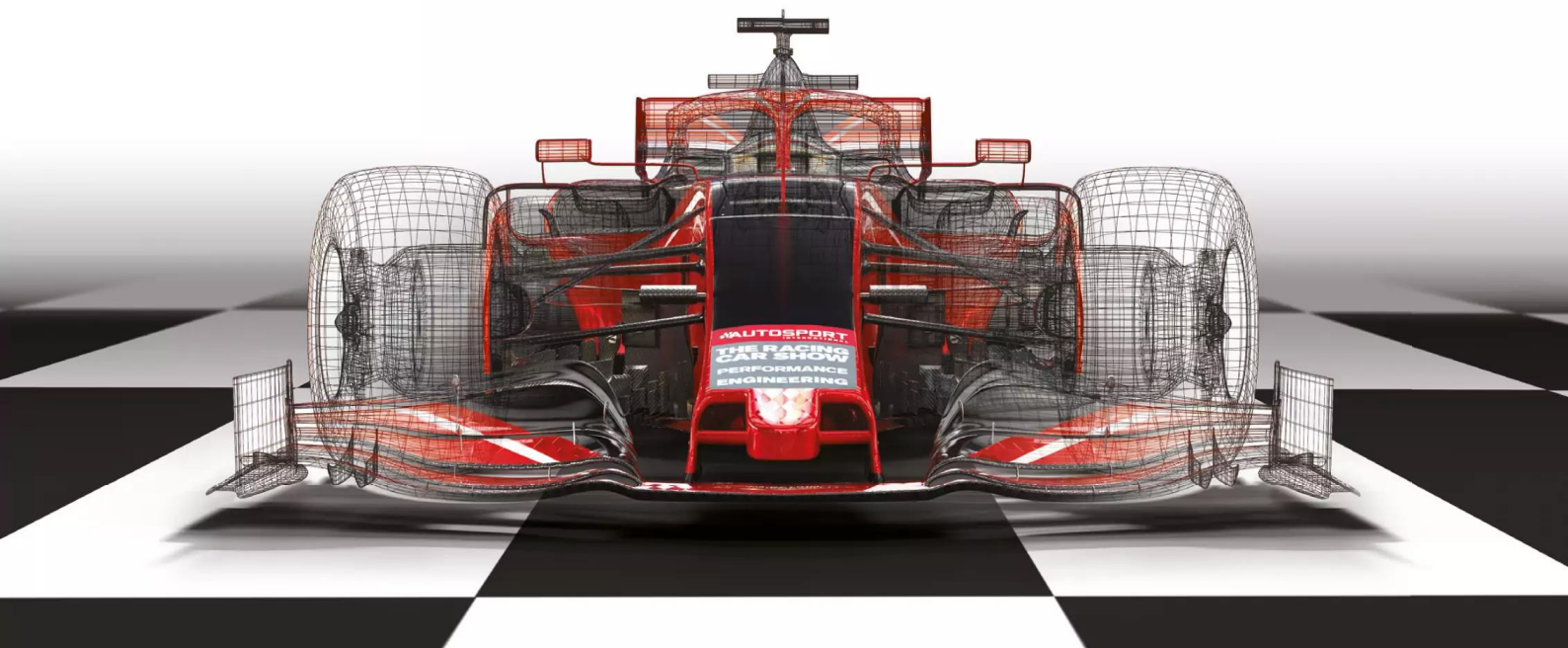
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More brand switching on the grid, as Renault becomes Alpine and Vettel joins the team now known as Aston Martin

EVEN MORE 'A' TEAMS

In recent years, the changes in nomenclature by Sauber and Toro Rosso to Alfa Romeo and AlphaTauri respectively have been accompanied by small moments of Alfa/Alpha confusion. Two more teams have also sought to front-load the phonebook over the off-season with their new identities, as Renault becomes Alpine and Racing Point becomes Aston Martin.

Both teams have undergone further changes as they look to continue or kickstart their progress into 2021, with Alpine shaking up its managerial structure in a bid to move up the order. Team principal Cyril Abiteboul has left the squad, as Laurent Rossi becomes Alpine's CEO across all its commercial and motorsport activities. Davide Brivio, the team principal of title-winning MotoGP manufacturer Suzuki, has joined the Alpine operation as its racing director.

Aston Martin has also signed a new title sponsor, joining forces with American IT conglomerate Cognizant ahead of a much-expected move to a British Racing Green livery, in place of ex-title sponsor BWT's idiosyncratic pink scheme. And, of course, there are the changes to the teams' respective driver line-ups...



NEW DRIVER LINE-UPS

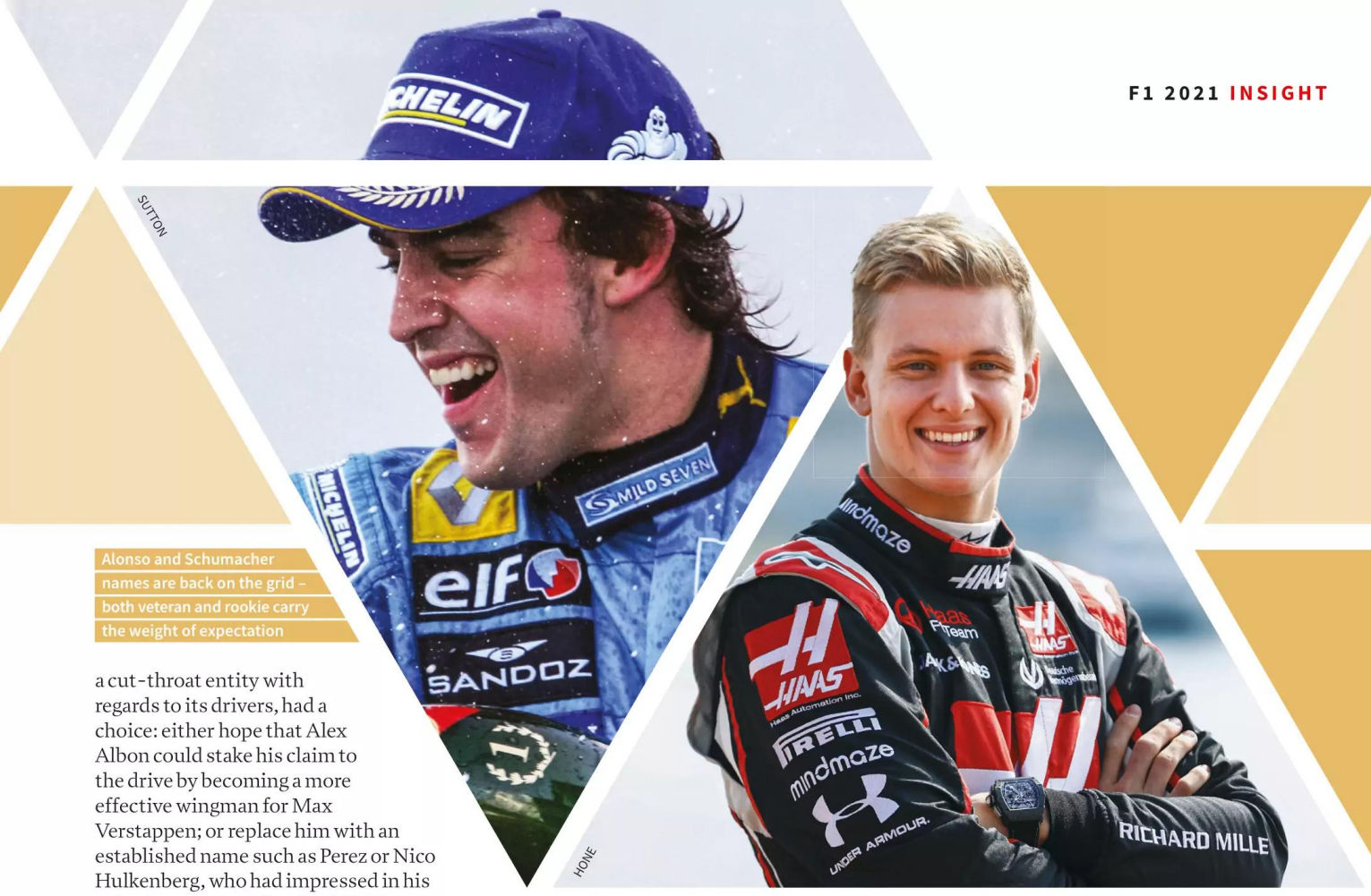
Even before the 2020 season belatedly got under way, the game of driver-market musical chairs was in full swing. First, the end of Sebastian Vettel's six-year tenure at Ferrari was announced to set the rumour mill into overdrive, followed up by Daniel Ricciardo's move from Renault to McLaren to partner Lando Norris, as Carlos Sainz Jr filled the now-vacant seat at the famous Italian team.

Sainz's move to partner Charles Leclerc cemented Ferrari's most youthful driver line-up in years, while Ricciardo had called time on his short-lived Renault adventure to join the upwardly mobile McLaren, sufficiently impressed by the Woking team's progress under Zak Brown and Andreas Seidl.

Vettel was then subject to one of the more protracted transfer sagas of the year, and being spotted climbing into Racing Point chief Otmar Szafnauer's car between the two Silverstone races did nothing to allay the rumours that he was to join the Aston Martin team for 2021. The team *has* signed him up for the first season with its new name, replacing the impressive Sergio Perez in a bittersweet move. Perez, for the longest time, looked to be without a drive for this year.

Then came the call from Red Bull. The team, perhaps aware of its reputation as »


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HONE

Alonso and Schumacher names are back on the grid – both veteran and rookie carry the weight of expectation

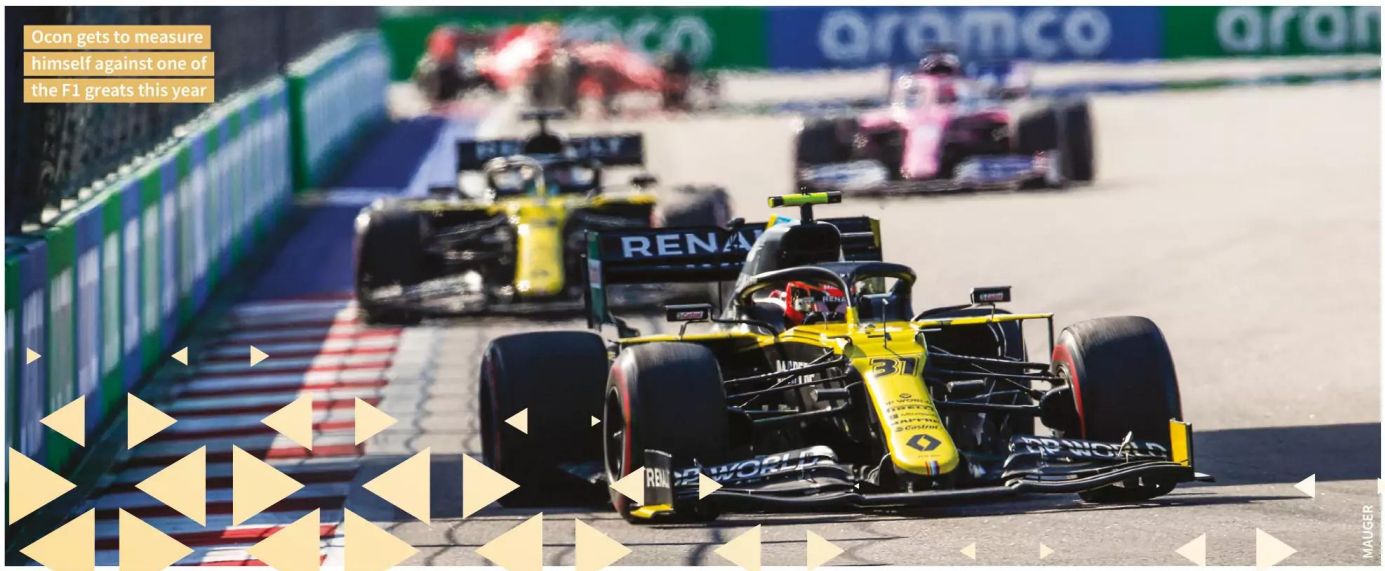
a cut-throat entity with regards to its drivers, had a choice: either hope that Alex Albon could stake his claim to the drive by becoming a more effective wingman for Max Verstappen; or replace him with an established name such as Perez or Nico Hulkenberg, who had impressed in his substitute outings for the COVID-affected Racing Point drivers.

Although Albon showed a glimmer of hope in his strong Abu Dhabi Grand Prix weekend, it proved to be too little, too late, and Perez got the nod. Red Bull is geared around Verstappen, and Perez will have to use his years of experience to become more than just an interloper in the driving line-up. He comes into the team as a race winner, thanks to his phenomenal display at the Sakhir GP, and has a good chance to add to that victory.

For the first time since 2006, the Alonso *and* Schumacher names will grace the F1 grid. One, a grizzled 39-year-old veteran with two world titles already in his pocket coming back for another bite at the F1 cherry; the other the son of one of F1's deities looking to make his own mark at motorsport's highest echelon.

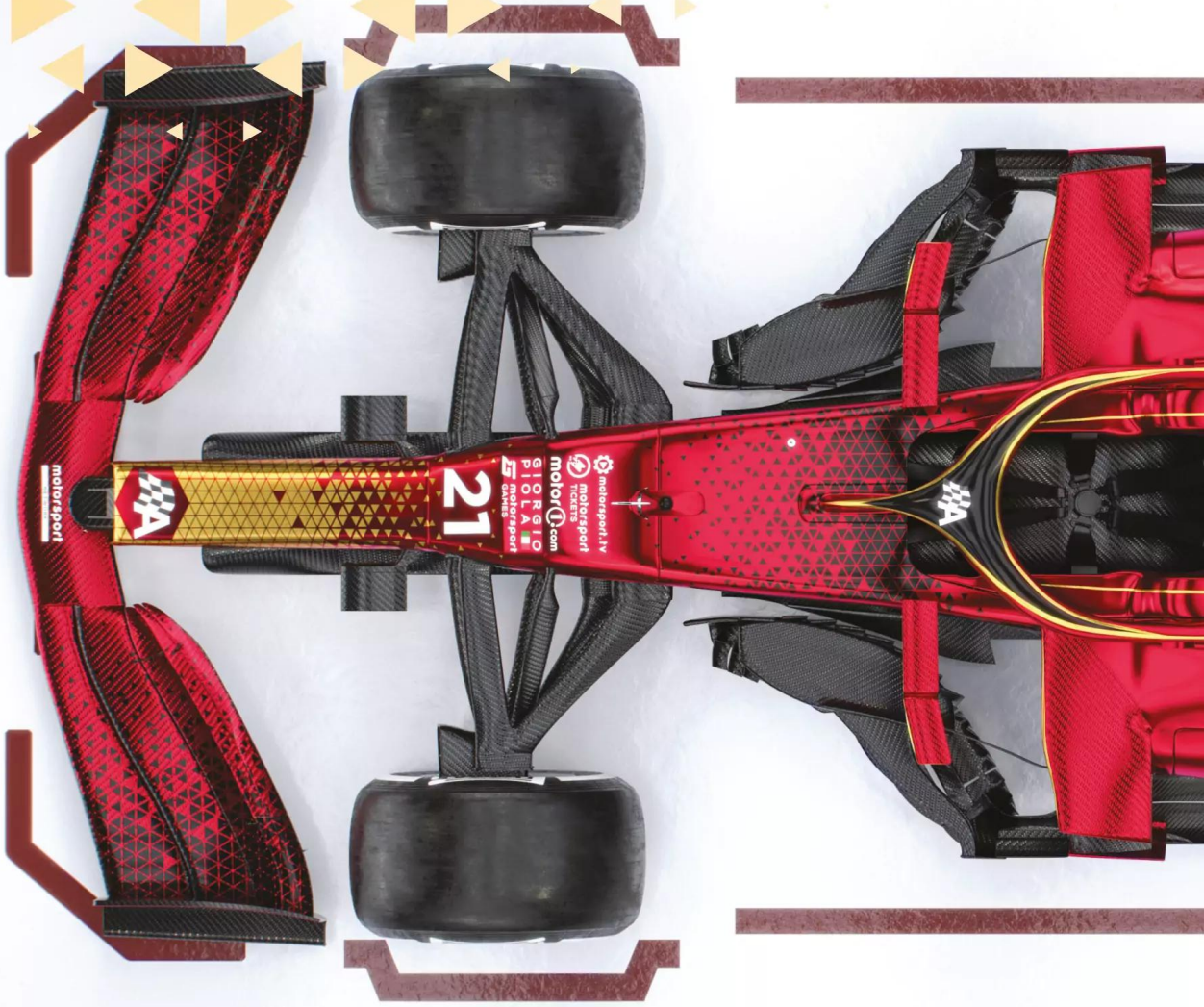
Fernando Alonso returns after two years away, bringing a close to his time spent making sporadic appearances across sportscars, the Indy 500 and the Dakar Rally, to head up Alpine's F1 line-up in place of Ricciardo. Alonso hence returns to the team with which he won his brace of championships, becoming the Enstone squad's driving force as it seeks to build on its run of podiums in 2020. Esteban Ocon remains at the team for a second season, having steadily improved his performances throughout last year following a season on the sidelines, and will have the perfect benchmark – assuming, of course, that Alonso has lost none of his prodigious pace during his time away from the paddock. »

"PEREZ WILL HAVE TO USE HIS YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TO BE MORE THAN JUST AN INTERLOPER AT RED BULL"



Ocon gets to measure himself against one of the F1 greats this year

MAUGER



"THE CALENDAR HAS AT LEAST RETAINED A SEMBLANCE OF NORMALITY COMPARED TO 2020"



Mick Schumacher joins Haas as the reigning Formula 2 champion, as the American-owned team chose not to retain Romain Grosjean or Kevin Magnussen for the new season. The German will come in with a huge amount of expectation placed upon his young shoulders, with the Schumacher name carrying so much weight. He will have to learn to deal with the expectation, but thankfully, Haas is of a stature where he can learn his trade without too much pressure. Fellow rookie Nikita Mazepin joins him at the team (and will need to keep his wandering hands firmly affixed to his steering wheel if he wishes to avoid further controversy).

At AlphaTauri, Daniil Kvyat walks out of the exit door as Japanese talent Yuki Tsunoda makes his way into F1, having enjoyed a remarkable rise through the junior categories. Tsunoda raced in Japanese Formula 4 in 2018, and has rapidly ascended through Formula 3 and F2 with support from Red Bull and Honda to make a well-deserved move into the top tier as Pierre Gasly's team-mate. In finishing third overall in F2, Tsunoda has shown the ability to adapt quickly to each step of the junior ladder and, although F1 will provide his sternest test yet, he is well-equipped to deal with its nuances.

Alfa Romeo and Williams remain unchanged, and Mercedes is expected to do so too, with champion Lewis Hamilton's contract presumed to be a formality. And yet even at this stage, it remains unsigned...

REVISED 2021 F1 CALENDAR

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	**Sakhir** (BHR)	28 March
2	**Imola** (ITA)	18 April
3	***Algarve Circuit**** (POR)	2 May
4	**Barcelona** (ESP)	9 May
5	**Monte Carlo** (MCO)	23 May
6	**Baku** (AZE)	6 June
7	**Montreal** (CAN)	13 June
8	**Paul Ricard** (FRA)	27 June
9	**Red Bull Ring** (AUT)	4 July
10	**Silverstone** (GBR)	18 July
11	**Hungaroring** (HUN)	1 August
12	**Spa** (BEL)	29 August
13	**Zandvoort** (NLD)	5 September
14	**Monza** (ITA)	12 September
15	**Sochi** (RUS)	26 September
16	**Marina Bay** (SGP)	3 October
17	**Suzuka** (JPN)	10 October
18	**Austin** (USA)	24 October
19	**Mexico City** (MEX)	31 October
20	**Interlagos** (BRA)	7 November
21	**Melbourne** (AUS)	21 November
22	**Jeddah** (SAU)	5 December
23	**Yas Marina** (ARE)	12 December

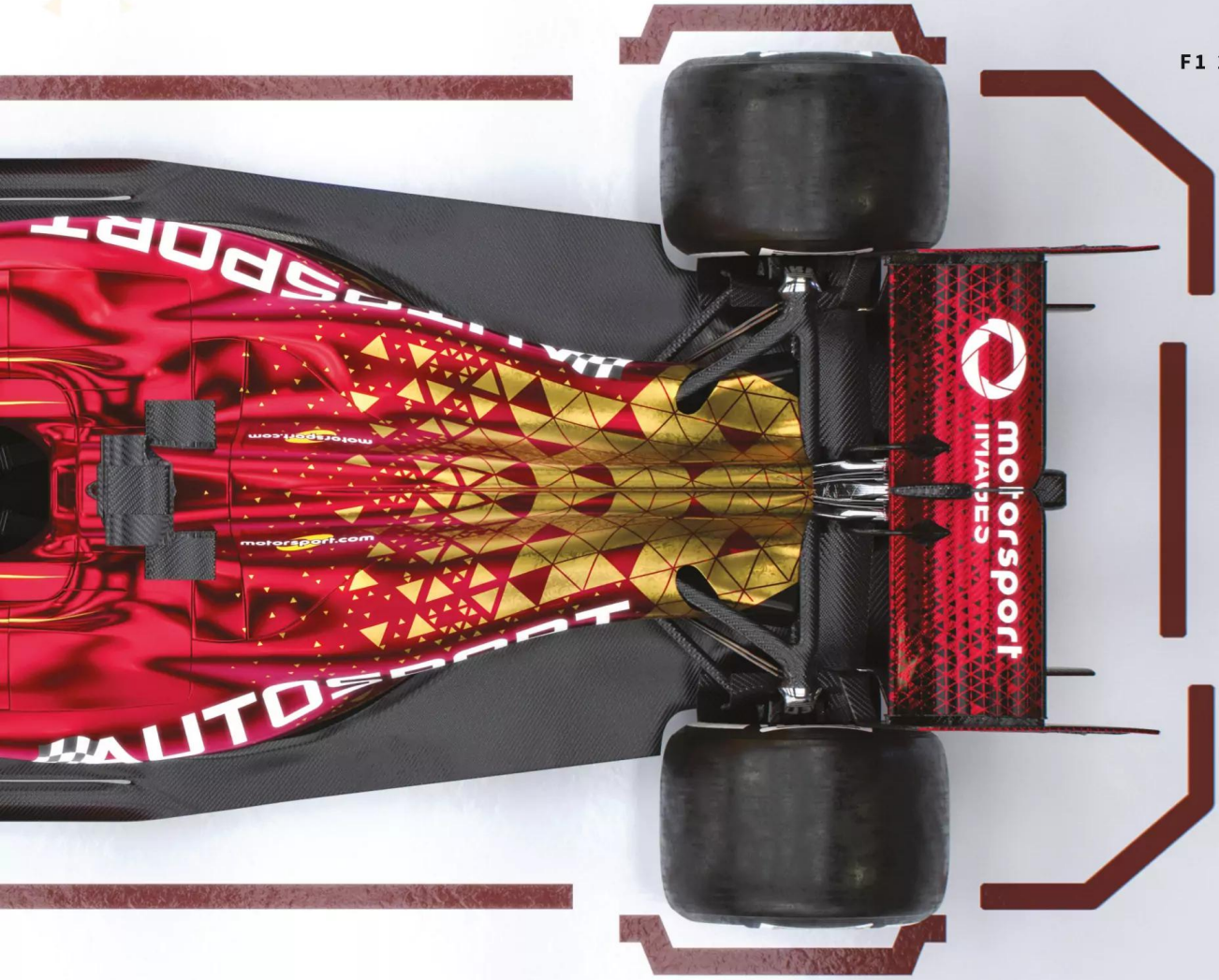
*Venue TBC, but currently expected to fill this slot

NEW DATES IN THE CALENDAR

Perhaps optimistically, the initial draft of the 2021 F1 calendar was expected to be a return to normality, with an Albert Park season opener leading into a bumper 23-race calendar.

But the Australian GP has been postponed until November due to COVID restrictions, and the lingering prevalence of the virus is still threatening to make a further indelible mark upon proceedings. Regardless, the FIA and F1 have put together a calendar in anticipation of any further coronavirus impact, and the season will now begin in Bahrain on 28 March, two weeks after pre-season testing takes place at the same Sakhir circuit.

Imola remains on the calendar too, with the Emilia Romagna GP reprised for another year and occupying the second race position, three weeks after Bahrain. The TBA slot for round three is expected to herald a race for the Algarve Circuit, as the Chinese GP is currently omitted from the schedule.





Imola is back on the calendar to fill China slot



Team personnel face long slog with three triple-headers planned

A new race has also been added in Saudi Arabia, thanks to F1's connections through sponsor Aramco, to mixed reviews – largely, due to concerns over the country's human-rights record. This will be a street race in Jeddah, expected to be a 'temporary' measure before the country's race is moved to a permanent home on a circuit built in Qiddiya in 2023.

F1's return to Zandvoort was delayed a year and is set to break its hiatus from the Dutch seaside circuit in 2021. But the race originally planned in Vietnam for 2020 does not appear after a key official in charge of the event was indicted for fraud, meaning that the Hanoi circuit seems likely to never host a Formula 1 race.

With three triple-headers following the summer break, the 2021 calendar looks to be an exhausting slog for the people on the road at every race, and the willingness to include GPs on three consecutive weekends doesn't seem to be entirely popular.

Regardless, the calendar has at least retained a semblance of normality in comparison to 2020's collection of one-off rounds at new venues for F1... for better, or for worse.

BUDGET CAPS AND SHORTER WEEKENDS

F1 has finally installed a long-awaited budget cap for teams, which are now limited to a budget of $145million per year, with that figure expected to reduce in subsequent seasons. This now brings the smaller teams on a level of parity with the big operations. The cap should work in tandem with windtunnel and CFD simulation limits placed on teams relative to their constructors' championship placings. The higher teams finish in the table, the more restricted they will be.

The weekends will also be shorter: both Friday practice sessions have been cut to an hour to increase the level of uncertainty across the rest of the event. Pre-season testing has also been cut to just three days, getting under way at Bahrain from 12-14 March.

WRC SEASON PREVIEW

EVANS ON THE 2021 WRC

He came close to the title last year, and now the Welshman helps guide us through what to expect from 2021 as the World Rally Championship prepares to kick off in Monte Carlo

NICK GARTON

PHOTOGRAPHY McKLEIN

Welcome to the start of the 2021 World Rally Championship... we hope. Last year the WRC came through the eye of the storm in the global coronavirus pandemic to deliver a fiercely competitive season that lifted the spirits of beleaguered fans around the world.

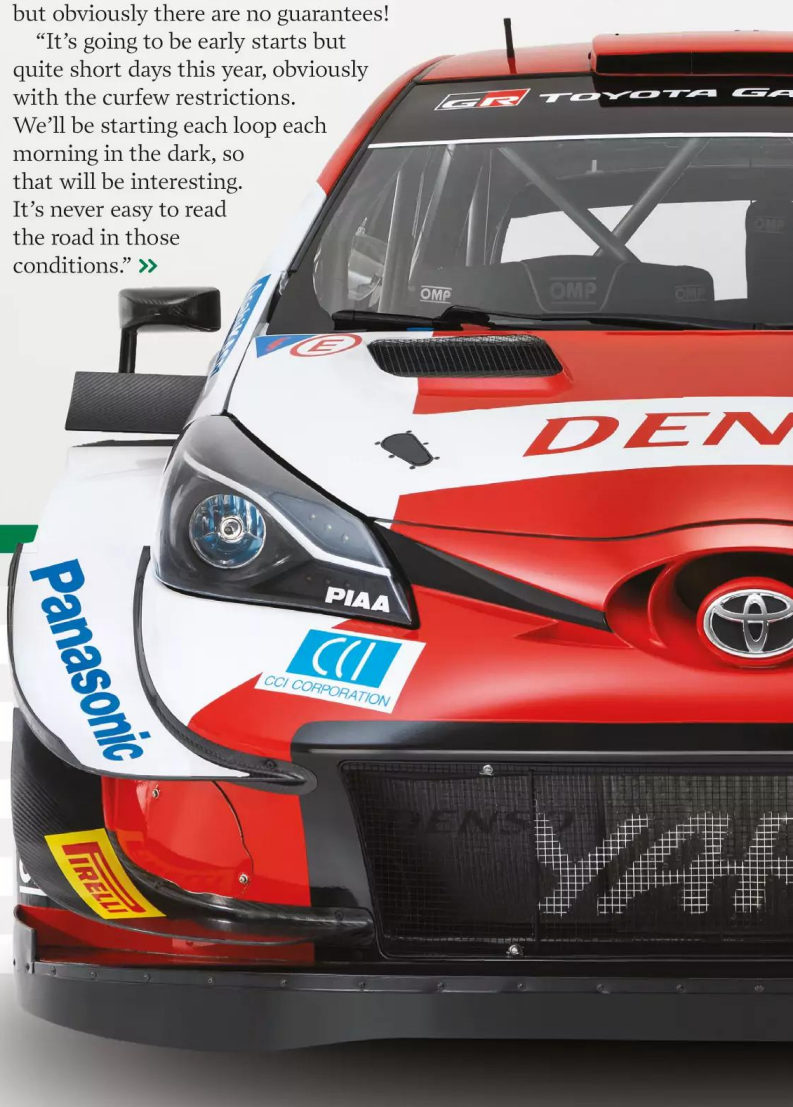
Barely six weeks after Sebastien Ogier claimed his seventh drivers' title, the WRC is ready to do it all again, including the uncertainty. At the time of writing, the Monte Carlo Rally was expected to usher in the start of the season today (21 January), but the odds were lengthening every day. What we *do* know about 2021 is that this will be the last year of running the hugely popular and astonishingly fast RC1 class of cars in the top category, before they give way to the delayed hybrid era in 2022.

The majority of the team and driver line-ups across the works teams of Toyota and Hyundai plus the privateer M-Sport Ford squad have also remained stable during the short weeks since Rally Monza last December. After that it's anyone's guess. To help us navigate the shifting sands of what we can expect in the months ahead, therefore, Autosport called in an expert.

Toyota's British star Elfyn Evans carried the hopes of the nation throughout the majority of 2020 at the front of the drivers' title race. Despite losing out in the cruellest fashion to his team-mate on the penultimate day of the season, Evans won a richly deserved Autosport Award as Rally Driver of the Year. He also took time out to share his thoughts on the key issues that confront the WRC, not least whether or not the Monte Carlo Rally will even start this week.

"I have no idea really," he says with admirable candour. "We're obviously preparing as normal. As we understand it's going ahead so we're not thinking about anything other than that for now, but obviously there are no guarantees!

"It's going to be early starts but quite short days this year, obviously with the curfew restrictions. We'll be starting each loop each morning in the dark, so that will be interesting. It's never easy to read the road in those conditions." »



ENTRY LIST MAIN RC1 RUNNERS

NO	DRIVER/CO-DRIVER	TEAM (CAR)
1	**Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia**	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT (Toyota Yaris WRC)
33	**Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin**	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT (Toyota Yaris WRC)
69	**Kalle Rovanpera/Jonne Halttunen**	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT (Toyota Yaris WRC)
3*	**Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula**	M-Sport Ford WRT (Ford Fiesta WRC)
44	**Gus Greensmith/Elliott Edmondson**	M-Sport Ford WRT (Ford Fiesta WRC)
TBC*	**Adrien Fourmaux/Renaud Jamoul**	M-Sport Ford WRT (Ford Fiesta WRC)
6*	**Dani Sordo/Borja Rozada**	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
8	**Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja**	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
11	**Thierry Neuville/Martin Wydaeghe**	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
TBC*	**Craig Breen/Paul Nagle**	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

*Will not contest all rounds, but eligible for manufacturer points.



WRC CALENDAR

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	**Monte Carlo Rally**	21-24 January
2	**Arctic Rally** (Finland)	26-28 February
3	**Croatia Rally**	22-25 April
4	**Rally Portugal**	20-23 May
5	**Rally Italy**	3-6 June
6	**Safari Rally** (Kenya)	24-27 June
7	**Rally Estonia**	15-18 July
8	**Rally Finland**	29 July-1 August
9	**Ypres Rally** (Belgium)	19-22 August
10	**Rally Chile**	9-12 September
11	**Rally Spain**	14-17 October
12	**Rally Japan**	11-14 November

The rest of the season schedule is also likely to change shape from that published weeks ago. Indeed, it already has. Only last week, Rally Sweden was replaced by a trip to Lapland for the Arctic Rally on 26-28 February. The host town of Rovaniemi, celebrated as the home of Santa Claus, will allow the WRC to compete within the Arctic Circle for the first time, in temperatures as low as -30C.

Many will be experiencing this event for the first time, but in 2020 the Arctic Rally provided an opportunity for Toyota's young star, Kalle Rovanpera, to gain experience. He duly dominated.

The pace and composure that 20-year-old Rovanpera showed throughout his rookie season in 2020 impressed many. Team-mate Evans declares he was 'blown away' by the young Finn's abilities: "Kalle is very young but probably way ahead of his age in terms of speed and even his understanding with the car as well, so the three of us are working quite well together. Of course, he's going to be very fast again this year; we saw how blisteringly fast he was on certain events and certain stages, so he's only going to get better because he has youth on his side and not so much experience."

The Arctic Rally provisionally joins Rally Croatia and Belgium Rally Ypres as all-new events in 2021, plus the delayed return of the Safari Rally in June and Rally Japan to provisionally end the season in November (see panel below).

This sort of unpredictability worked well for Evans's own campaign in 2020, but he will not be drawn on whether he can use the calendar to his advantage again in the season ahead.

"When the situation is like we had in Estonia last year, of course it didn't go in our favour to have an extra gravel rally thrown in," says the 32-year-old. "Myself and Seb were running 1-2 on the road and perhaps the Hyundai guys knew [the event] a little bit better.

"We were happy to be doing rallies at that point in the season when we'd been sat at home for the best part of four months or whatever it was, you know? It's probably going to be a similar situation in the first half of 2021 at least, the way things are looking at the moment."

A major landmark in the second half of the season has already fallen by the wayside following the news that Rally GB will be absent in what should have been its 89th anniversary year.



Greensmith and Suninen are joined at M-Sport by rising French talent Fourmaux

Coronavirus is being held responsible, at least officially, but a lack of political will to maintain the event has been evident. Evans is sore about missing out on one last chance to compete in front of his home fans on an event he won in 2017.

Back then, the local hero was driving for M-Sport, with a Ford featuring unique tyres designed purely for the Welsh forests. The opportunity to come back and win again on the same rubber as the rest of the field was a major goal.

"It's a massive disappointment as I felt a little like I still had a bit of unfinished business with the rally," he says. "Unfortunately it's not looking likely for at least the next few years."

Tyres will nevertheless remain a talking point through much of the season with the arrival of Pirelli as the sole supplier to the WRC, replacing Michelin. The Italian firm has long years of rally experience behind it, not to mention all those titles won with Lancia and Subaru, but in a pitched battle such as the WRC, tyres are likely



THE NEW RALLIES FOR 2021 (THAT WE KNOW OF...)



Evans likes the challenge of a blank-slate rally

An unprecedented number of new events will join (or rejoin) the World Rally calendar in the months ahead, with potential newcomers on standby in case events overtake any of those on the provisional schedule.

"It's always interesting to go to a new rally that you don't really know about or really know what to expect," says Elfyn Evans.

"I think Croatia is one that very few people will know anything about, so I'm interested to know what that's like. We don't have so many pure Tarmac rallies on the calendar these days, so that'll be interesting."

Arctic Rally

26-28 February

Held annually since 1966 in the hometown of Santa Claus, the Arctic Rally is a mainstay of the Finnish national championship, a former European championship round and was on the pre-WRC drivers' cup in 1977-78 (and Ari Vatanen won).

Rally Croatia

22-25 April

Held since 1974, under Communist rule, and a long-standing European asphalt round, the rally will be based in the capital city Zagreb and take place on roads in the north of the country, bordering Slovenia.



HARDWICK/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Wins and titles set to be fought out in a two-horse race between Hyundai…



…and Toyota, where Ogier returns for what will be his swansong season

to be the deciding factor at many events.

"The snow tyre works a bit different to the Michelin," confirms Evans. "With the Michelin we seemed to have good grip on the ice and snow; with the Pirelli it's a bit less perhaps, but then you end up with more performance on the cleaner Tarmac, and normally with studs in they should be a bit better as well."

It's likely that Evans's experience of developing tyres gained in his apprenticeship years at M-Sport will pay dividends in 2021, and he certainly has sympathy for any supplier in the role. "The challenge that all the manufacturers have is that we generally only have two tyres and they have to, within that window, deal with slimy zero degrees in Wales all the way up to 40 degrees and the rocks of Turkey," he says.

In 2020, M-Sport often made brave tyre calls that hoisted its drivers up the order, but Toyota appeared to have a consistent approach that paid dividends on the second loop of each day. Part of this success, Evans explains, was in the team being quick to acclimatise to unfamiliar conditions.

"Somewhere like Sardinia, we were running the first pass in the middle of the afternoon and it wasn't something that we'd had to deal with before, that level of temperature and also with that level of looseness," he explains. "Normally, when you see sort of the high ground temperatures, the road is also clean because it's in the afternoon. It's obviously a key decision and the guys seem to be doing a good job in supporting us in that."

Outright wins and both the drivers' and manufacturers' titles in 2021 would appear to be a straight fight between the Toyota and Hyundai squads, with Evans and Rovanpera being rejoined for one last season by defending champion Ogier.

After being paired with Ogier at M-Sport for two years, and enjoying a sporting battle with him for the drivers' title in 2020, Evans is delighted that he has another chance to take on one of the greatest in the sport's history.

"He's not the type of guy to come back for any sort of farewell tour," laughs Evans. "He's always difficult to beat, he's always very fast, so we have our work cut out that's for sure, but that's our target for the year."

Hyundai finished 2020 as the manufacturers' champion, and will see its two full-time cars driven by Thierry Neuville and Ott Tanak once again. One thing that Evans particularly enjoys about their battle is that it remains good-humoured between the teams, no matter its undoubted intensity. "I think it helps probably that we're fighting the watch essentially, not fighting each other," he says. "Generally there's a nice atmosphere between everybody – not too much winding up at least!"

In what is likely to be another trying year for motorsport fans around the world, the WRC has a logistical mountain to climb. But as in 2020, it is going to deliver extraordinary competition to savour… Bring on the Monte.

Safari Rally Kenya
24-27 June

The return of the WRC to Nairobi should have happened in 2020, and the planned route is only slightly changed as a result. No longer the marathon test seen in the 1950s-2000s, but at 500km of stages still the longest of the year.



MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Belgium Rally Ypres
19-22 August

Based in the historic market town, Rally Ypres has been a fixture of European rallying since 1965. It's a flat-out asphalt event; former WRC man Freddy Loix holds the wins record, but Thierry Neuville and Craig Breen have also won it.



HARDWICK/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Rally Chile
9-12 September

Abandoned prior to its debut in 2020 due to political unrest, Rally Chile will mark the first time that the WRC attempts to head to the Americas since Rally Mexico in March 2020. Described by Kris Meeke as 'a dry Rally GB'.



McKLEIN/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Rally Japan
11-14 November

The importance of the World Rally Championship returning to Japan for the first time since 2010 is paramount, with two Asian marques dominating the sport. An all-asphalt event based in Nagoya awaits.



McKLEIN/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

WRC SEASON PREVIEW

8 THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS SEASON

Aside from the obvious, there are plenty of other subplots to keep an eye on in 2021

NICK GARTON

PHOTOGRAPHY McKLEIN

1 Sebastien Ogier's final campaign

And now the end is near, and so he faces the final curtain. The world is looking down the barrel of its first Sebastien-free World Rally Championship of the century in 2022, so it would be as well to make sure that we all enjoy this last hurrah.

Don't think for a minute that Ogier will suddenly mutate into a different person as he prepares to step down from the role of 'defining talent of the era' that he has held since 2013. We won't see a relaxed, easy-going chap with a witty quip for every occasion. Let's hope that we do one day, when he is able to look back on his achievements and maybe share a little more of 'behind-the-scenes Seb'.



Ogier's got nothing to prove, but don't expect a drop in his competitive intensity

But for now it all means too much to him, and he keenly feels the burden of leadership that he carries for the sport as a whole. Witness his profound concern for the wellbeing of fans in Mexico, Monza and elsewhere during the pandemic as proof that Ogier just wants the sport to be the best it can in all things.

He will also not hesitate to fire up the big guns and take aim at the FIA at least once a year regarding road order. Ogier's rants about how unfair it all is to have to sweep the stages on gravel events are legendary. What he always manages to overlook is that he tends to win all the same, which is one of the truest barometers of his place in the all-time pantheon.

2 Tanak versus Neuville

For someone with his depth of knowledge about motorsport lore, it remains an intriguing decision for Hyundai principal Andrea Adamo to have paired Thierry Neuville, his team leader since 2014, with 2019 WRC drivers' champion Ott Tanak.

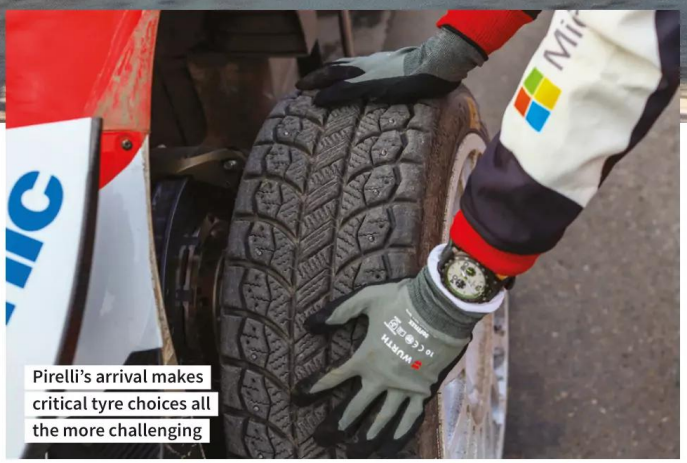
When was the last time a team won the WRC with two number-one drivers battling for the individual crown? The answer is 1995, when the pitched battle between Carlos Sainz and Colin McRae at Subaru ended with one of them choosing to leave, despite the Impreza's dominance.

For the past 20 years we've become used to top teams focusing their efforts around one incandescent talent (usually called Sebastien), with a reliable wingman on hand to scoop up manufacturer points, play the jokers on road order and experiment with tyre choices.

Due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, the anticipated battle for the throne in Alzenau did not materialise in 2020, although there were tantalising glimpses of it. Superspecial stages fizzed as opportunities for the two drivers to lay down a marker. Sardinia was a powder keg on which Adamo and the team were cheerfully perched, telling everyone



Pairing of superstars Neuville and Tanak bucks WRC trend



Pirelli's arrival makes critical tyre choices all the more challenging

that all was well and there was nothing to see.

Well, it's all or nothing for both Neuville and Tanak in 2021. There can be no excuses and each driver has every advantage at their disposal, with the added incentive of one last chance to best Toyota's Sebastien Ogier in a top car before he retires. It's going to be up to Adamo, Dani Sordo and Craig Breen to minimise any potential damage that their battle does to the team's collective score. It's a story that will be worth tuning in for on every rally of the year.

3 The current generation of cars

For fans, it will be important to savour every stage of the 2021 WRC, because next year will bring lower-cost cars with much more shared technology and fewer opportunities to wring performance out of the regulations. They will also most likely have a bolt-on hybrid component and all the weight that comes with that in order to reduce perceived tailpipe emissions on road sections.

The marketing types who fund rally programmes are also understood to be looking at their current hybrid 'urban crossover' models as the basis for their future WRC contenders. Effectively this means taller superminis, which can only add to the compromised dynamics of the next generation.

Hyundai has already worked up a rally-prepared Kona crossover, and word on the street is that M-Sport has been looking hard at the Ford Puma for 2022. Taller, heavier, less developed machines can still provide entertainment when running against each other. But while we await the first sightings of the new cars, we must also raise a salute to the spectacle that the highly evolved WRC cars have given us since 2017.

Just like the Group B cars that they were intended to emulate, we are unlikely to see their kind for some time to come.

4 Tyre strategies

Having an ability to pick the right tyres at the right moment is vital in a category as closely matched as the WRC. Richard Millener's M-Sport team repeatedly showed itself to be the master of the art in 2020, allowing its drivers to slingshot up the order. In the case of Teemu Suninen in Mexico, the strategy paid off with a podium.

Brave decisions such as those taken during Rally Monza will always keep M-Sport in the hunt, but between the Toyota and Hyundai teams it was sometimes the difference between winning and losing.

Often Toyota's crews made the better calls in 2020, particularly on gravel. The only fly in the ointment came in Estonia, when almost everyone came a cropper with delamination on rubber that was never designed for endless long, straight sections bouncing off the rev limiter at 120mph. Hyundai's pairing of Ott Tanak and Craig Breen knew the event well enough to adjust their pace accordingly, and thus finished a comfortable 1-2.

Having Pirelli on board rather than Michelin throws another unknown into the equation. The teams will test as often as budgets and COVID permit, but the full data that has been available to them in recent years will be absent. This will put a premium on the experience of the drivers and on their ability to pick the best mix of compounds and the right number of spares on each and every loop. »

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The WRC's talent pool looks set for a bout of musical chairs

5 Driver contracts

The line-ups among the WRC teams for 2021 are virtually unchanged from those that were fielded in 2020, but this will be a fast-and-furious season for contract negotiations.

Thierry Neuville's three-year deal at Hyundai ends in November, as does Ott Tanak's two-year contract, while both Dani Sordo and Craig Breen in the third car are hired on a year-by-year basis.

At Toyota, Sebastien Ogier is heading for retirement, while both Elfyn Evans and Kalle Rovanpera are out of contract at the end of this year. The manufacturer partners who chip in for the budget are also potentially at a time of renewal in their commitments.

M-Sport is less affected by horse trading because it does not have the luxury of a manufacturer's budget, and is dependent on being able to make a convincing case for well-backed drivers to spend their sponsorship funds with them.

Meanwhile, there's a logjam of talent waiting in the wings, from grizzled veterans such as Andreas Mikkelsen and Mads Ostberg to rising stars such as Oliver Solberg and Adrien Fourmaux. A shake-up is coming.

6 WRC2 contests

The support package of RC2 classes provided a mixed bag in 2020, in which the 'junior' WRC3 contenders were usually higher up the overall classification than the WRC2 runners. The same phenomenon is unlikely to occur in 2021, with fireworks expected as a deluge of drivers jostle for a shot at one of the works WRC seats that may become available in 2022.

Hyundai has dropped Russian Nikolay Gryazin in favour of the most-hyped youngster in WRC history, Oliver Solberg. What's more, Solberg has leapfrogged Hyundai's 2020 WRC3 champion, Jari Huttunen, to get his chance. Everything points to him being a special talent, but this will be his first season-long campaign since winning the Latvian national championship in 2019.

Reigning WRC2 champion Mads Ostberg may well return for Citroen after Monte Carlo, while the Toksport Skodas of WRC refugee Andreas Mikkelsen and Bolivian-Brit Marco Bulacia Wilkinson are going to be going all-out for glory.

M-Sport will also field a Ford Fiesta for Adrien Fourmaux after



Will Solberg Jr live up to all the hype? He's set to impress in WRC2



Absence of Rally GB is a blow. Hard yards need to be put in for revival

his impressive 2020 season, while the displaced Gryazin will compete in a privately entered Volkswagen Polo.

7 Rally GB's future

Gone (for now), but not forgotten, the absence of Rally GB in 2021 must be a priority for Motorsport UK and WRC Promoter to address. There is an obvious solution to be found in Northern Ireland, where Bobby Willis and a number of prominent local politicians have the drive to make an event happen and an 'oven ready' solution on the asphalt of the province. It will make for a very decent rally, too, with some mindblowing stages and a rich tradition for the sport on the Emerald Isle that will make it absurdly popular with fans and competitors alike.

But for millions around the world, Britain's rally still means misty forests, slippery mud and the magic of Wales, Scotland, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria. Even though it's almost a quarter of a century since such an event was staged, there has been some scuttlebutt about a return to a touring event format. Motorsport UK has apparently decided that the consumption of rallying today may be better suited to that than the current format of central servicing and repeated loops of stages, which were designed for TV broadcasters back when they were abundant.

Let's give it until Easter for the clear preference to be made and then spare no effort – including fan power, pestering politicians to take action – in order to show WRC Promoter that the 90th anniversary of the event in 2022 is all that matters. Britain has the stages and the wherewithal to make really special things happen. It also has Ford and Toyota as two of the biggest automotive employers in the country, and we have to believe that a creative solution that works for all can be conjured with which to hammer local, regional and national governments over the line.

8 The manufacturers

The automotive industry has been singled out as the embodiment of our unsustainable 20th century past by the EU. As a result, from 1 January 2021, an eye-watering new CO_2 levy has been imposed for every g/km above the target of 95g/km set on cars sold in the bloc. This is set to cost each manufacturer billions per year.

The EU's tailpipe tax comes on top of the cost of developing sustainable alternatives and now follows the impact of coronavirus losses in 2020. Factories are closing, jobs are being shed, savings are being sought. In this light, every single motorsport programme must justify its existence.

Not only must those savings be seen in the budget sheets of the manufacturers, but also in those of their OEM suppliers that sponsor the WRC teams. The FIA and the manufacturers will need to work closely to sustain the one branch of the professional sport in which competition cars mingle with regular traffic on the world's highways.

NEXT WEEK

MONTE CARLO RALLY
28 JANUARY ISSUE

The Monte marks the start of a last-hurrah season for the current WRC machinery. Keep everything crossed that the event goes ahead.

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The King and his adoring public

For Harry King to be voted Autosport's National Driver of the Year was a major achievement, and is the perfect recognition of his brilliant Porsche Carrera Cup GB season

STEPHEN LICKORISH

It takes a pretty special performance for someone other than a British Touring Car Championship racer to be voted as Autosport's National Driver of the Year. In the past decade, only two non-BTCC drivers have scooped the award – and, of them, one was Lando Norris after his Euro F3 title-winning season. Never has a driver competing in one of the BTCC's support series landed the prize. Therefore, for Porsche Carrera Cup GB star Harry King to win shows how special his season was.

There have been some dominant performances in the Carrera Cup GB in recent years – Dan Cammish (twice) and Dan Harper completely trounced the opposition during their title-winning campaigns. But King took that domination to a whole new level. While Cammish's and Harper's best pole percentages were 81% and 75%, King's was 88%, and he was only 0.002 seconds away from that figure being 100%. He also ranks highly in win percentages, too – 75%, the same as Cammish's best, while Harper's was 50%. But even more impressive than that was the fact that King never



There have been some dominant recent Carrera Cup champions, but few scored as many trophies as King

PORSCHE


PORSCHE

King would usually be found at the head of the Carrera Cup field

finished a race outside the top two, despite the second race of a weekend featuring a partially reversed grid and the Carrera Cup not exactly renowned for overtaking being easy.

King had shown flashes of brilliance in his career (see page 41) before last season's apparent steamrollering of the Carrera Cup. He was a winner in his rookie Ginetta Junior campaign in 2016 with the Elite Motorsport squad, which back then was far from being an established frontrunner. He claimed the Ginetta GT4 Supercup title in 2019, and arguably could have won that more comfortably without a driveshaft issue at Thruxton and a few jumped-start penalties. But last year was the first time King had delivered that blistering speed at every single round, starting with the opening event at Donington Park.

Often, it takes drivers a little bit of time to get to grips with the Porsche machine and master how to extract the highest levels of performance from it. There was no such trouble for King. Pole by 0.255s, over three tenths faster than 2014 champion and team-mate Josh Webster, proved that. »

"I certainly didn't expect to pole it [at Donington] and neither did I think I would be winning at the first race"

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King scorched his way to double victory at Brands Hatch in August

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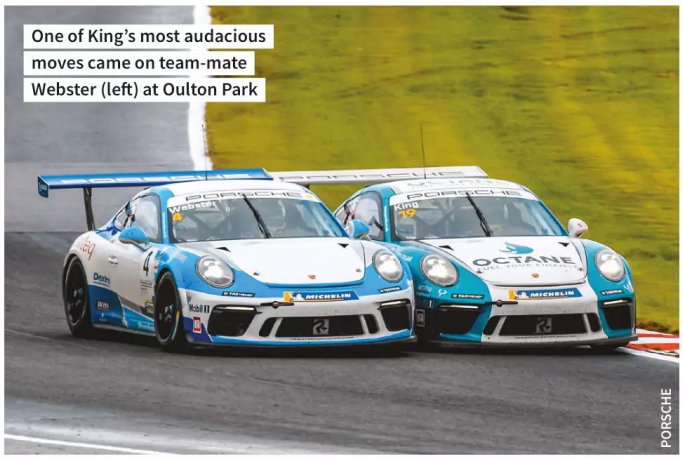
"I knew how competitive Carrera Cup is, and I knew how strong Josh my team-mate was, and throughout winter testing we were on par with him," says 20-year-old King. "It was a really good dynamic we had in the team, but I certainly didn't expect to pole it and neither did I think I would be winning at the first race."

King missed out on victory in the opener after striking a Recticel tyre stack at the chicane, which hobbled his car and left him second (his worst finish of the season), but there was no such trouble in race two, as he stormed from third on the grid to win.

"I had expectations of maybe being in the top three — I would've walked away from a top-three weekend and been pretty happy with it — but to finish second in the first race and be pretty frustrated with it, I found myself taking a step back and thinking, 'Second's fine, Harry!'" King continues. "And then obviously in race two, we went and won it.

"But, after that weekend, my expectations for the championship completely changed. Instead of being a top-three, it was, 'Right, OK, we could be in for a championship here and we've got to drive it like a championship-winning driver should do and be smart with it.' And we did just that and it obviously worked out."

Such an impressive opening round certainly caught the attention of 1992 British Touring Car champion Tim Harvey, who, as a two-time Carrera Cup title winner, knows a thing or two about Porsches. "It was impressive — normally it takes people a little bit of time to learn the nuances of driving these cars," he says. "He just jumped in and was quick from the off. When I first saw him, I thought he's either going to crash, make a lot of mistakes or calm down during the year."



One of King's most audacious moves came on team-mate Webster (left) at Oulton Park

PORSCHE

"After that first weekend, my expectations for the championship completely changed"

And Harvey admits he thought that race-one error was "a portent of what's to come". Instead, it was one of the few mistakes King made all season. Bold moves on team-mate Webster at Brands Hatch and Oulton Park netted him double wins and caught the imagination of fans on TV, unable to witness King's brilliance in person due to coronavirus restrictions. Even an engine problem at Knockhill and two Thruxton punctures failed to dethrone King's bid — he still wrapped up the crown with two races to spare.

Such dominance looks straightforward on paper, but King insists there was a lot more to it than meets the eye. "A lot of people obviously said, 'You're making it look easy', but it certainly wasn't," says King. "A lot of work went in on the build-up to a race weekend on Friday and in qualifying from Team Parker Racing and myself, and I think that's what helped to bridge the gap."

Moments like those Thruxton punctures, which both struck while he was leading, proved it certainly was not all plain sailing. And King believes they were very useful learning experiences. "There was a lot of pressure and high-temper moments and you just have to sort of tone yourself down and you live to fight another day and bounce back from it," he says. "Thruxton was a big one — trying to remain cool after that second puncture. I think anybody would've been pretty frustrated at that point!

"To come back like we did the next weekend [at Silverstone] with pole position and two wins is all part of building the character and building yourself as a driver. Without those sorts of situations, you never learn. I wouldn't have liked them to happen, but they have probably made me a better person and a better driver, not just in the car but outside of the car as well."

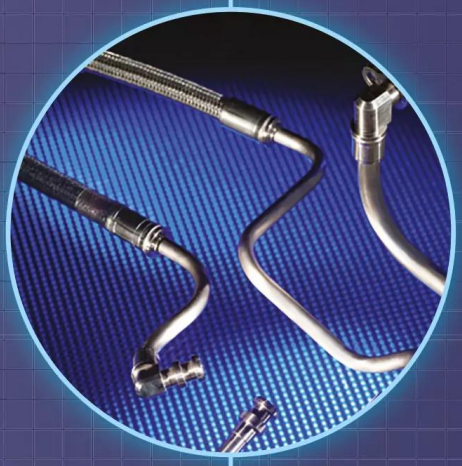
King also highlights the condensed nature of the 2020 season as playing a part in his success. With the COVID-19 pandemic meaning the entire campaign was packed into just over three months, there was no time to dwell on disappointments such as what happened at Thruxton, and also plenty of opportunity to build title-winning momentum with back-to-back triumphs.

Perhaps one of King's less obvious traits is that he is incredibly self-critical. Take his disappointment at missing out on the win in »

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that very first Donington race or the fact that he was gutted to lose his clean sweep of poles at the Brands finale. When asked if there were many lessons he learned from the season, King says: "There's a lot! I'm quite self-critical out of the car. Even after a race win, I always know there's something I could've done better. In qualifying, we have been very strong but we didn't get eight of eight [poles]."

King says he "despises" the term 'learning year', and was eager to demonstrate his ability right from the start of his two seasons as the Porsche GB Junior. And one of the ways he did that was with his overtaking prowess and dramatic style behind the wheel.

"I think it's a natural touch with the car, I get on very well with it when it's on cold tyres, I think that's when we really do come into our own," says King about his passing ability. "After safety cars, for example, I feel like I've got a real advantage then.

"It was like you put Gilles Villeneuve in a Cup car! I've never seen a Cup car driven in that manner"

"The racing was probably some of the best I've ever had in five years of car racing, and I think that's possibly the reason why people voted for me for National Driver of the Year, for those sort of overtakes, so it's nice to gain recognition for that."

He received plenty of recognition in the paddock, too. Harvey was left amazed by King's performances, saying "his sheer ability to drive the car at eleven or twelve tenths all the time without crashing or losing control" was the most impressive aspect. "He absolutely wrung the car's neck," Harvey continues. "It was like you put Gilles Villeneuve in a Cup car! I've seen some great Porsche Carrera Cup drives from Nick Tandy and Dan Cammish, and I've never seen a Cup car driven in that manner. It was spectacular and fast."

But Harvey does have one slight note of caution about King's overtaking. "He has this talent for literally going for every gap, a bit Ash Sutton-like," he says. "As we saw with Sutton at Croft [when he went for a risky move at the hairpin, which caused a puncture], it can't work for you every single time and the quality of driver will be better and better [as King progresses up the ladder] and they're not going to jump out the way – he's got to pick his opportunities."

Speaking of the future, King has a clear target in mind of where he would like to race, given the chance. His Porsche GB Junior stint is a two-year programme so, as well as racing in the Carrera Cup GB, he would like to tackle the Formula 1-supporting Supercup. "Of course, I've got another year of Carrera Cup GB, which I'm thoroughly looking forward to and I'm looking to put in twice as much work as I did last year to remain that competitive in the series," King says. "There could be a new driver who comes in and makes my life hell and a lot more difficult but, as for the future, as well as Carrera Cup GB, the natural progression as a Porsche Junior driver is the Porsche Supercup. It's really competitive, has lots of different nationalities of drivers, and it's something I really fancy doing. But, of course, the finances for that are pretty big."

Harvey has no doubt that King has the potential to make it to the very top of the sport: "He's got the talent – he's clearly exceptional. He's not just good or very good or good on his day, and there are very few drivers who are exceptional. He is self-critical, he listens and he's a very complete racing driver for his age and experience. It will just depend on the opportunities he gets."

And that's just more high praise for a driver who gave those watching at home something to smile about during a very difficult 2020. The National Driver of the Year Award win is proof of that.



King's impressive 2020 ended with him sealing the title with a weekend to spare

PORSCHE

HOW HARRY ROSE FROM GINETTA PRINCE TO PORSCHE KING

2016 King (right) makes his car racing debut in Ginetta Junior and has an impressive first season, finishing eighth in the standings. The highlight is a maiden triumph at Snetterton, also a first win for his small Elite Motorsport team.



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

2017 Given his promise from the previous season, a title bid is expected from King. But in a strong field, which also includes fellow future sportscar aces Dan Harper and Seb Priaulx and McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner-to-be Tom Gamble, King struggles to take a step forward, finishing the year sixth.

2018 King continues with Elite as he makes the step to senior racing in the Ginetta GT4 Supercup. He shows flashes of speed across the season, triumphing three times, but bad luck means he is never really a title contender.



2019 A second season in the GT4 Supercup yields King the title. An impressive double win in the Brands finale nets him the crown, as he delivers when it really matters, but without disappointments like a Thruxton puncture (although, this time, after contact), he could have beaten Will Burns more convincingly. Eight front-row qualifying starts from nine highlights his one-lap pace.



RIP IT UP AND START AGAIN

Toyota's new GR010 contender for the World Endurance Championship has almost nothing in common with the TS050 that preceded it. The new Hypercar rules, which replace LMP1, have seen to that

GARY WATKINS

VOLMEVER.COM



New Toyota designed to blend looks of a racer and extreme road car

It looks like a Toyota, and to the untrained eye it could be an LMP1. Yet the machine that will carry the Japanese manufacturer's hopes in a brave new era for the World Endurance Championship starting this year is a very different beast to the line of prototypes that preceded it. The Toyota GR010 HYBRID developed to the new Le Mans Hypercar regulations is all new, save for the odd switch and sensor.

It had to be, because there's a new ruleset with a new philosophy. The aero rules are different, and so are those governing the technology that has been the selling point of the top class of the WEC since the rebirth of the series in 2012. The GR010 couldn't retain much from its predecessor, the TS050 HYBRID LMP1 car that won the Le Mans 24 Hours three times and the WEC twice, such has been the "magnitude of the regulation change", explains Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe technical director Pascal Vasselon. "The only parts that we could carry over were sensors, switches and buttons," he says.

NEW AERO THINKING

The LMH aerodynamic regulations are not prescriptive in the traditional sense of 'you can do this and you can't do that'. Rather, they set a maximum figure for downforce and a minimum figure for drag. The figures are relatively modest, not only to keep costs under control, but also to ensure that the windtunnel and computer don't determine the look of the car. The intention is for a manufacturer to incorporate its styling signatures into its car or give it the look of a road-going super-sportscar, and still hit those targets. Hence the 'hypercar' moniker of the new category.

"There has been not only a regulation change, but a regulation principle change," explains Vasselon. "In LMH, what is specified is a performance target. We are told you can do what you want, but you have to fit in a very precise performance window. This gives freedom, and with this freedom we can integrate some styling elements of road cars. This is why these cars will look great and different."

Vasselon describes the look of the GR010 as a "good mix between a real race car and an extreme road-going car". It takes its inspiration from the GR Super Sport, which was first shown in concept form three years ago and then appeared in running form at Le Mans last September. The unveiling of the Super Sport in January 2018 was part of the launch of a new Toyota sporting sub-brand called Gazoo Racing, or simply GR as per the prefix to the new car's type number. The rules have enabled Toyota to "incorporate some styling cues that will be seen in future GR road cars", according to Vasselon. Asked to be specific on the virtual launch of the car from Motorland Aragon in Spain last week, he pointed to the nose, the tail and the wheel arches.

It should be noted that the GR010 is a pure-bred prototype, even if its styling tips its hat to a machine that will eventually spawn a road car. That new super-sportscar — calling it a hypercar only creates confusion — is being developed in parallel with the GR010 with input from TGRE. The car is also bigger than its predecessor. The rules allow an LMH to be 250mm longer, 25mm wider and 100mm longer than an LMP1 to help the designers give the cars that road-car look. The increase in roof height is also linked to a new cockpit safety standard that defines a more upright seating position. Just one aero package is allowed, rather than the two in LMP1 in the final set of regulations (it was free until the end of the 2015 season). The only adjustable element is the rear wing.

The GR010 is heavier than the TS050 too. The base weight of the outgoing P1 hybrid was 878kg, although it raced at 932kg for the majority of last season, whereas the new car hits the scales on the new 1040kg limit. The dramatic increase in minimum weight is part of the cost-cutting drive instigated when it was realised that LMP1 was dead in the water after Porsche announced its withdrawal from the top class of the WEC in July 2017.

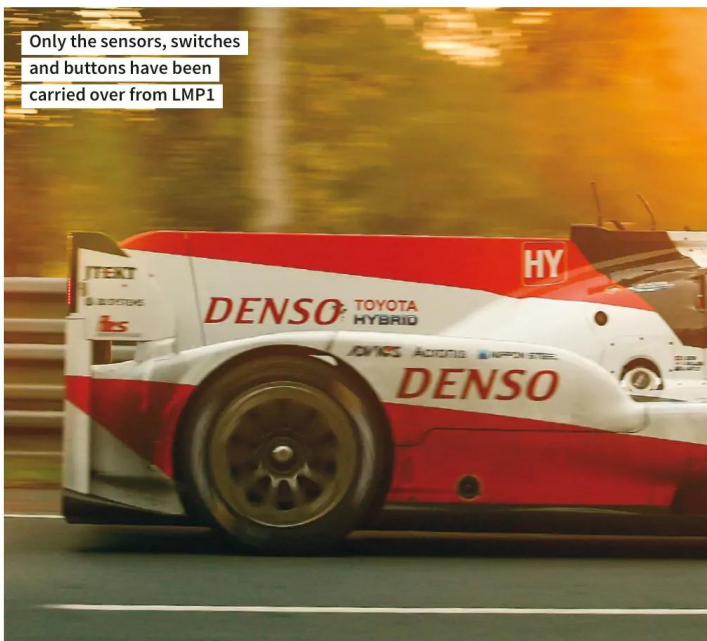
The advanced FRIC-type suspension that linked the front and rear of the TS050 to improve stability of the aero platform has disappeared. It has been outlawed, also in the name of cost reduction.

NEW POWERTRAIN

The LMH rules allow for a single energy-retrieval unit — a kinetic system on the front axles, rather than the two systems permitted in







Only the sensors, switches and buttons have been carried over from LMP1



GR Super Sport (here during Le Mans demo last year) provided inspiration



New Toyota is reckoned to be 10s a lap down on its predecessor at Le Mans



TOYOTA

P1. It is not mandatory, as it was in the original rules published as long ago as December 2018, but a marque that races in the WEC to improve as well as promote its hybrid technology was always going to choose this route.

Switching from a twin-hybrid system, with a motor generator unit on each axle, to only front-axle energy retrieval and boosting, says Vasselon, "creates many differences and challenges". Brake-by-wire at the rear has now been outlawed and replaced by a conventional fully hydraulic system and, with no MGU at the back, the GR010 now has a traditional starter motor. It will leave the pits under the power of its internal combustion engine rather than the electric motor.

Yet the changes to the LMH powertrain regulations are much more fundamental than just doing away with rear hybrid systems. Power was controlled in the final years of LMP1 from 2014 by allowing each car a set amount of energy, both from its internal combustion engine and its hybrid systems. Now maximum power is set by the regulations. It is a combined figure, so that the boost from a front-axle KERS system replaces power from the conventional engine in the back of the car rather than adding to it.

That explains an all-new engine significantly bigger in displacement than the 2.4-litre twin-turbo direct-injection V6 that came on stream with the TS050 in 2016. The latest engine is also a V6 – TGRE team president Hisatake Murata, the architect of Toyota's hybrid programme, admits that he is a fan of six-cylinder vees – but it is a 3.5-litre unit. The maths behind the increase in capacity of the unit developed at Toyota's Higashi-Fuji technical centre is quite simple, according to Vasselon.

"The demand on the combustion engine is now very different," explains the Frenchman. "In LMP1 considering the level of energy we were given, the power target was around 380-390kW [or just over 500bhp]. Here the power target is 500kW [670bhp]. Starting with our 2.4-litre LMP1 engine, if you add 30% you end up at 3.2 litres. Considering that the category is giving a bit more margin in terms of weight, there was really no point to be challenging a small, light engine. So we took a punch to the margin just for reliability. And then you end up at 3.5 litres."

So to put it simply, power from the ICE has gone up dramatically because it has to be able to push out the full 500kW when the hybrid system is not boosting. Power from the single hybrid system has gone the other way. It is now limited to 200kW or 268bhp, whereas on the TS050 full boost gave the car a kick of approaching 500bhp. The car was said to have a total power output of just under 1000bhp, although

"THERE WAS NO POINT CHALLENGING A SMALL, LIGHT ENGINE. SO WE ENDED UP AT 3.5 LITRES"

this was slightly reduced for Le Mans. There was a 300kW [402bhp] limit on hybrid discharge at the Circuit de la Sarthe. "In LMP1 we were able to boost as much as we could at corner exit," explains Vasselon. "Now we have a set maximum power that we have to respect at any time. All of the cars will have to respect the same power curve [whether hybrid or not], so definitely no more push to pass."

The reduced power from the hybrid system cannot be used at speeds under 120km/h, equivalent to 74.5mph. This rule was introduced at the behest of Aston Martin when it was planning to join the WEC with a racer based on the Valkyrie road car. In fact, it made it a condition of its commitment to expanding into the top class of the WEC with what would have been a non-hybrid machine, had it made it to the track.

A higher figure will be in place when the track is wet, which is defined by when a car is running on either full rain tyres or intermediates. It will be in the range of 140-160km/h, but has yet to be set in stone despite the season-opening Sebring 1000 Miles being less than two months away on 19 March.

Another condition of Aston's proposed WEC entry was the introduction of the Balance of Performance. This was inevitable once »



You can really feel the new car's extra weight, says Hartley, but it's still a pleasure to drive

the rules shifted to allow road-based and non-hybrid machinery. Since then, of course, the WEC has been opened up to another type of car in the forthcoming breed of LMP2-based LMDh machinery that will also race in the IMSA SportsCar Championship in North America. They will have a spec rear-axle hybrid system from a common supplier.

Vasselon concedes that Toyota would have preferred it if there was no artificial balancing, as originally intended under the LMH rules. The idea was that the reduced costs involved would bring the field together. "We are not fans of the BoP," he says, "but we have to accept it because we need competition."

PROLONGED GESTATION

The GR010 has been in the works for more than two years, or longer. Don't forget that Toyota was one of the prime movers in the creation of the LMH regulations. The rules have shifted significantly since their first publication, and the maximum power output and minimum weight have bounced up and down ever since. (The latter has even shifted slightly from the 1030kg in the rules published late last year.)

On the other hand, the timeline for development of the new breed of WEC racers was extended after the COVID-19 pandemic struck and the final races of the 2019-20 WEC were delayed, which in turn forced the abandonment of the so-called winter-series schedule. The debut of the new Toyota and its competitors was originally set for Silverstone last September. That would have meant having the car up and running in July of last year, straight after the scheduled climax of the 2019-20 WEC season at Le Mans.

"It's true that the story of the regulations process has been a rollercoaster and a challenge, but nothing that we could not overcome," says Vasselon. "In terms of schedule, I think we can see here one of the



very few positives of the COVID pandemic. We were on a schedule that was a bit unrealistic originally."

SLOWER CARS

The intention of the new regulations was to slash budgets from the heady days of LMP1 and the three-way fight between Toyota, Porsche and Audi. Vassleon is always saying that "performance costs money".

The lap time target for the new regulations is 3m30s at Le Mans, and Toyota suggests that the GR010 will be approximately 10s per lap slower than its predecessor around the eight and a half miles of the Circuit de la Sarthe. The 100-lap average for the fastest TS050 last year was 3m20s and the year before, with a slightly lighter car, 3m17s. A time loss of four to five seconds is expected over a regular five-kilometre WEC circuit.

The GR010 loses time to the TS050 "everywhere", says Vasselon. "We lose time as a consequence in cornering speed, for two reasons: the car is heavier, and the aero efficiency is set at a lower level to what we were able to achieve in LMP1," he explains. "Then we are losing in acceleration for two reasons: mass, again, and the fact that the combined power of the hybrid system and combustion engine is now lower."

DRIVING THE GR010

All six Toyota race drivers, plus test and reserve pilot Nyck de Vries, concur that the new car is still very much a prototype and drives like one, even if it is slower.

"I wouldn't say it's lazy," says Brendon Hartley, who will again share the #8 Toyota with Sebastien Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima. "We've all commented on how much front end we've had at low speed. But definitely at high speed you feel the weight; you feel it when you are hitting the brake pedal. It's a heavier car, but





Conway says GR010 heralds a more traditional kind of driving with loss of the boost button

that hasn't taken away from the pleasure of driving it."

The new regulations will change the way the two Toyota crews go about racing in the WEC. The hybrid system will no longer be a tool to zap past traffic, while the fuel-cuts and lift-and-coasting that were part of driving under the old rules will all be things of the past. "It will definitely change the dynamic of the racing because you don't have that nice boost button to press to get by cars," explains Mike Conway, who will be aiming to repeat his 2019-20 WEC title in the #7 Toyota with co-champions Kamui Kobayashi and Jose Maria Lopez. "We'll be going back to a more traditional kind of driving."

"You can stay flat and brake as late as you want," adds Buemi. "That gives you a feel of being back in pure racing.

TESTING SO FAR

Toyota got its new-season contender out on track before the end of the delayed 2019-20 campaign: it ran for the first time at Paul Ricard in October ahead of the Bahrain finale the following month. It ran again at the Algarve Circuit in Portugal in December for another three days. The bad news was that test number three at Motorland Aragon last week was snowed off. That was a setback, but Toyota will now be extending its next test, also at Motorland, due to take place in early February.

"The biggest issue we have is that we are missing mileage," says TGRE team director Rob Leupen. "Every test is important to get mileage on the car and mileage on the team, in the sense of the mechanics and engineers understanding the car better. That's why we are looking for additional time. Before Sebring, it will get very tight to catch up on everything, but we will normally be able to do this."

Testing has been encouraging, according to Toyota. Not only have the drivers liked the GR010, but "the car lost very little time" to glitches, minor or otherwise, says Vasselon.

TOYOTA'S HOPES

Toyota has grand aspirations for the GR010, and understandably so given that it appears to have a clear run at retaining the big prizes on which it has had a monopoly since Porsche quit LMP1.

It won't face opposition from a major manufacturer until Peugeot returns to the top flight of sportscar racing some time in 2022 in a class that will be known simply as Hypercar. Until then, the Japanese manufacturer will have to beat boutique marque Glickenhaus and series stalwart ByKolles, as well as the Signatech Alpine with a grandfathered LMP1 design raced as a Rebellion over the past two seasons.

"It's the same, predictable," says Leupen of Toyota's ambitions for the GR010 HYBRID at the start of a renewed five-year commitment to the WEC. "Le Mans, one; and two, the world championship."



Peterhansel scored 14th event win, extending his record, 30 years after his first

MARAGNI/RED BULL

Record-setter Peterhansel wins as buggies crawl under Toyota's skin

DAKAR RALLY
JEDDAH (SAU)
3-15 JANUARY

There were renewed calls from the Toyota camp to address the performance gap between rear-driven buggies and the 4x4s in the T1 class after the 2021 Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia. But that didn't overshadow another fine showing by the most-celebrated driver in cross-country rallying.

Competing for the X-raid Mini buggy team for the third year in a row, Stephane Peterhansel fought off the four-wheel-drive Toyota Hilux of Nasser Al-Attiyah to clinch a record-extending 14th title in the world's most prestigious rally raid, 30 years after his first triumph in the motorbike class.

Peterhansel won only a single stage after 12 days of running, his lowest tally since 2015 when he drew a blank while leading Peugeot's return to the Dakar. However, this time around he made up for a lack of outright stage wins with rock-solid consistency, finishing inside the top three on all but one occasion. That meant his advantage over Al-Attiyah barely dipped under four minutes and he eventually took the win with a margin of almost 14 minutes.

While Peterhansel enjoyed a mostly trouble-free run during Dakar's second visit to the Gulf nation, taking the lead after the second stage and never relinquishing first place thereafter, the same couldn't be said about Al-Attiyah.

The Qatari driver was on the back foot, having conceded 12 minutes to his rivals after opening the first stage. To his credit, he managed to cut the deficit by more than half over the next seven routes, but three punctures and navigational troubles the following day set him back once again and sealed the deal in Peterhansel's favour.

Following his second defeat in as many years, Al-Attiyah, who remains the only driver to win aboard a 4x4 in the past six years, voiced his concern over the apparent advantage enjoyed by the buggies.

Although the FIA limited the top speed of both vehicle types to 180km/h (112mph) for 2021, the result of lobbying from Toyota, buggies retain a greater wheel width and greater suspension travel. Al-Attiyah said the rules are "too much in their favour" and he is "not interested" in returning next year unless organisers take action.

The FIA's World Rally safety director, Jutta Kleinschmidt, conceded: "We are well aware of the big disadvantage between the 4x4 and buggies. We want fair regulations, and this topic is already on the table."

Although Al-Attiyah was powerless to stop Peterhansel from winning, he did prevent a Mini 1-2 by beating Carlos Sainz Sr. The Spaniard won the first stage but hit a series of issues soon after and was never quite able to recover enough to join the victory fight, finishing an hour adrift.

The Bahrain Raid Xtreme team's debut must go down as a success considering Nani Roma finished fifth. However, a troubled run for star signing Sebastien Loeb, which ended in retirement, and the big deficit in performance to Toyota and Mini suggested the Prodrive-run squad has a lot of work to do to close the gap.

RACHIT THUKRAL



Al-Attiyah reckons he won't return in 2022 unless speed concessions are made

DUHAMEL/RED BULL

RESULTS

1 Stephane Peterhansel/Edouard Boulanger (Mini JCW Buggy) 44h28m11s; 2 Nasser Al-Attiyah/Matthieu Baumel (Toyota Hilux) +13m51s; 3 Carlos Sainz Sr/Lucas Cruz (Mini JCW Buggy); 4 Jakub Przygonski/Timo Gottschalk (Toyota Hilux); 5 Nani Roma/Alexandre Winocq (BRX Hunter); 6 Vladimir Vasilyev/Dmitro Tsyro (Mini JCW Rally); 7 Khalid Al Qassimi/Xavier Panseri (Peugeot 3008 DKR); 8 Giniel de Villiers/Alex Haro Bravo (Toyota Hilux); 9 Martin Prokop/Viktor Chytka (Ford Raptor RS CC); 10 Cyril Despres/Michael Horn (Peugeot 3008 DKR).

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GPX snares glory on its doorstep

24 HOUR SERIES
DUBAI 24 HOURS (UAE)
15-16 JANUARY
ROUND 1/8


Five-driver GPX squad won home race a lap clear of chasing rivals

GPX Racing, a team based on the business park that nestles within the confines of the Dubai Autodrome, scored Porsche its record sixth victory in the Dubai 24 Hours. The two factory drivers Mathieu Jaminet and Julien Andlauer, young hotshot Axcil Jefferies, and the two French stalwarts Frederic Fatien and Alain Ferte led for some 522 of the 600 tours, claiming the spoils with a one-lap advantage over the Belgian WRT squad's Audi R8.

The 16th running of the Dubai 24 Hours, the season opener of the 24H Series organised by Dutch agency Creventic, was a sharp contrast to the race in 2020. Last year, torrential rain stopped the action after seven hours, but this time around, conditions were fine as the field of 51 cars – a respectable number in the current difficult times – took the start.

GPX Racing enjoyed fortunes that were also the total opposite to its 2020 outing, when the team's 911 GT3-R crashed out on only lap four. This time around, the Porsche moved up into the lead at the end of the fifth hour and stayed there until the chequered flag.

That allowed 65-year-old Ferte, a single-seater star in the 1970s and a 14-time Le Mans veteran after stints with Peugeot, Jaguar and Mercedes, to become the first driver to win the United Arab Emirates enduro with two different brands, following his success with the WRT Audi team in 2016.

Porsche set the pace in qualifying, with four 911s present in the top five, but ultimately the GPX machine was the only one still competitive at the end.

German team Herberth Motorsport had its top entry, put on pole by Sven Muller with a new qualifying record of 1m56.553s, retire with suspension failure while the sister car, polesitter in the GT3-Am class, was out of the race due to collision damage. Gearbox issues, meanwhile, sidelined the Porsche of the Italian Dinamic squad, which had been second-fastest in qualifying but ended up fifth on the grid after receiving a penalty for overtaking during code-60 conditions in night practice.

While the GPX Porsche dominated proceedings, the battle for second was only decided in the final hour. Somewhat surprisingly, the Haupt Racing Team's Mercedes AMG came in for a driver change with 40 minutes remaining, a move that handed the runner-up spot to the WRT cohort of Dries Vanthoor, Kelvin van der Linde, Louis Machiels, Benjamin Goethe and Frankie Bird.

The Mercedes finished third, with the GRT Grasser Lamborghini one lap back in fourth, followed by the second HRT Mercedes as the winner of the GT3-Am category. The best-placed British team was Inception Racing by Optimum, 10th overall and fifth in GT3-Am. It also bagged a moment of glory in the opening hour when the team's McLaren 720S became the only non-German car to lead the race outright.

The touring car division brought victory for Swiss outfit TopCar Sport, which had opted to use its trusted Cupra TCR rather than the new Leon. In a Swiss podium lock-out, the Autorama team came home second and third with two of its three Volkswagen Golfs.

RENE DE BOER


GPX Racing team celebrates impressive sixth Porsche success

WEEKEND WINNERS

24 HOUR SERIES
DUBAI 24 HOURS (UAE)
Axcil Jefferies/Frederic Fatien/Mathieu Jaminet/Julien Andlauer/Alain Ferte
GPX Racing (Porsche 911 GT3-R)

SUPER TC200
PARANA (ARG)
Matias Rossi
Toyota Gazoo Racing (Toyota Corolla)

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Oulton Park will no longer host the British GT opener as start of season is delayed by seven weeks

BRITISH GT, BRSCC JOIN TOCA IN DELAYING SEASON

CORONAVIRUS

British GT has joined the British Touring Car Championship in delaying the start of its 2021 season amid the continuing impact of the coronavirus pandemic, while the British Racing & Sports Car Club has become the first club to cancel March events.

BTCC organiser TOCA revealed last week that it was pushing back the start of its campaign by five weeks and announced a heavily revised schedule, which begins at Thruxton on 8-9 May and concludes at Brands Hatch on 23-24 October, in a bid to try to enable fans to attend as many events as possible.

British GT has now followed suit and, instead of beginning with its traditional Easter event at Oulton Park, the season is now set to start at Brands Hatch on 22-23 May, seven weeks later. It has shuffled its calendar around slightly, with Oulton taking the original September season-finale date, the April Snetterton round moving to August and the Donington Park season closer pushed back to October.

BTCC support series have welcomed TOCA's decision to delay and praised the timing of the announcement. It means that just two — British Formula 4 and Ginetta Junior — of the five regular support categories are due to appear at the new opener, while the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB, Ginetta GT5 Challenge and Mini Challenge Trophy are set to also feature at the Thruxton event.

"I think it makes a lot of sense," said Porsche GB motorsport manager James MacNaughton. "By shifting some of the events to later in the year, it gives more opportunity — hopefully — for some of the public to attend and hopefully some kind of hospitality for more events than we would've had.

"I also really like the fact that all the rounds are in a different order. Starting at Snetterton is good because it's got a long lap, so those new to the championship won't be troubled by the guys at the front of the field like they would at Brands Indy. A slightly later start also means people have got more opportunity to get budgets together, so there's lots of benefits. It's a very sensible move and is welcomed by us."

Ginetta motorsport manager Ash Gallagher added: "I think it makes a lot of sense given the situation as it stands today. Doing it now, with as much time as we've got to plan accordingly, is a good call. There's still no guarantee but things should be looking better."

Meanwhile, the BRSCC has elected to cancel its 20 March Oulton Park and 20-21 March Silverstone events, which were due to begin the club racing season, amid the current uncertainty about when the situation will improve in the UK.

"We've been in talks all week with venues and some of the professional championships and, as a result, we believe it's too early to start racing," said chairman Peter Daly, who added that the lost meetings were "put in to get our calendar from seven to eight rounds", so could easily be cancelled. "We had designed the calendar so we knew we could drop a couple of rounds without having to revamp the whole calendar."

The changes to the BTCC schedule mean the BRSCC has also had to move the Formula Ford Festival back a week to 30-31 October.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

British F4 to feature fully reversed grids

BRITISH FORMULA 4

British Formula 4 will introduce a full-reversed-grid race this season – the first major format change for the series since FIA F4 rules were adopted in 2015.

Instead of the grid for its second race of a weekend being determined by 50% of the race-one finishers being inverted, now the entire grid's fastest qualifying times will be reversed. As a result, the number of points on offer for this race has been reduced from 25 to 15, and they will only be scored by drivers finishing in the top eight instead of the top 10.

The series has also decided to introduce a point for fastest lap in each of its three races per event.

Championship promoter Sam Roach says the change to a fully-reversed grid was pushed for by teams. "They were all very keen on the idea," he said. "We thought it's interesting and is a part of driver development. The fast people need to have their overtaking game on point and it gives other people a chance to be at the front of races, which is great for everyone.


Fewer points now on offer in reversed-grid races
JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

"We're all quite excited about it, and it will be interesting to see the difference between the fast drivers and how they work their way through the grid."

Roach explained that drivers will need to complete at least three laps in qualifying in order to have their position reversed, and drivers' laps must also be within 107% of the pole time to benefit. He added that the decision to base the reversal on qualifying times rather than the race-one result was so "there's no chance of sandbagging" in the opening race.

STEPHEN LICKORISH


Final Continental GT3 British GT win for TPR was at Donington Park
JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

No GT3 Bentley for Team Parker

BRITISH GT

Team Parker Racing will no longer run a Bentley Continental in British GT this season, following the conclusion of the manufacturer's factory GT3 programme.

The squad, which powered Seb Morris and Rick Parfitt to the 2017 title at the wheel of a Bentley, has instead decided to switch to new machinery for this year. Last season it fielded Scott Malvern and Nick Jones in the Bentley, with the pair taking a victory in the hour-long race at Donington Park.

In a statement, the team said: "Our entry for the 2021 British GT season is in and we are awaiting delivery of our new car. The Bentley was a fan favourite, but we are confident that our new car will have a lot of appeal when we unveil it soon."

The team first ran the Continental in 2016, fielding examples in the Blancpain GT Series as well as British GT. TPR's final race with the car was the Gulf 12 Hours earlier this month.

R RACING UNVEILS STRONG GINETTA JUNIOR LINE-UP

GINETTA JUNIOR

Leading Ginetta Junior squad R Racing has assembled a strong six-car line-up for this season, which includes promising 2020 rookies Josh Miller and Tom Edgar.

Both race winner Miller, who was 11th in the final standings, and Edgar, who was sixth, showed impressive speed as last season progressed. They have moved to R Racing from Elite Motorsport and TCR respectively.

They join Freddie Tomlinson (below) and Aston Millar, who are continuing with the team for a second season after being regular frontrunners last year. The line-up is completed by rookies Callum Voisin – the 14-year-old brother of 2020 title contender Bailey – and Mexican karter Ian Aguilera.

"Each year, our aim is to become stronger, and picking our line-up for 2021 took lots of consideration," said team boss Jamie Ross. "We wanted drivers and families that would gel with the team and make the awning an enjoyable place to be. I feel we have a good mix of existing drivers and new faces to keep pushing the team forward."

- Former Fun Cup champion Henry Dawes will move into the Ginetta GT4 Supercup for 2021 with Century Motorsport. He contested a one-off GT Cup race in a G55 last year, which encouraged him to make the jump. "After getting behind the wheel of the G55, I knew I had to race it at the top level – the combination of the GT4 Supercup and the expertise of Century Motorsport were the perfect fit," he said.


JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Knockhill and Lydden Hill visits planned for Pickups



Registrations for Pickups look strong despite not running in 2020

PICKUPS

Pickup Truck Racing Championship organisers have revealed a provisional calendar that features rare trips to Knockhill and Lydden Hill, and are encouraged by the amount of new interest in the series for this year, despite it not running during 2020.

Organiser Sonny Howard took the decision to run just one event last year due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, but that one meeting – due to be at Brands Hatch in November – was cancelled.

A full 10-event schedule has been revealed for this season and, alongside the Knockhill and Lydden rounds, it also includes two visits to the Mallory Park oval. Howard says a number of trucks have changed hands in recent months, leading to a high number of series registrations.

"Knockhill was there a few times before and the opportunity arose and we thought it would end up making it [the calendar] slightly different," said Howard. "The Lydden Hill one is with a custom car event and we're working with Lydden on that.

"We're still positive and are keeping positive – several pickups have changed hands and there's a couple of trucks we're trying to find a home for as well. Those that were parked up and nothing was being done with them, people have released them now and it's brought different people out.

"We've got about seven rookies – it's not just people coming from short ovals, but from a spectrum of motorsport. We've put a lot of effort in, even though we weren't racing."

Meanwhile, Howard says his SHP concern has relinquished the rights to operate the Super Silhouettes series, which also did not run in 2020. SHP took control of the championship after the British Automobile Racing Club South East Centre was closed at the end of 2018.

"It's frustrating – we thought it had turned the corner, but we weren't able to see it through," said Howard, who says there were a number of factors behind the decision.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Motus One joins Touring Car Trophy with Civics

TCR UK

GT squad Motus One will contest the Touring Car Trophy for the first time this season with three Honda Civic TCR machines.

Motus One managing director Will Powell, saloon racing stalwart Dave Scaramanga and newcomer Danny Krywyj will compete with the squad over the scheduled 14 races.

"We've made no secret of our ambition to add touring cars to the team's activities and the Goodyear Touring Car Trophy has made that viable for us in 2021," said Powell.

"Our strong relationship with Goodyear – who I've raced for and we work closely with on our Brabham BT62 programme [Powell won on the car's debut at the 2019 Britcar Into the Night Race at Brands Hatch] – along with the plans to promote and grow the TCR package in the UK, makes this a great fit for us.



Civics will compete in the TCR UK element of TCT

"Our aim is to win races but respect the calibre of teams we're up against. It'll be a year of learning and fighting for everything we can."

TCT boss Stewart Lines added: "I'm delighted to welcome Motus One, having been impressed by their fast rise in GT racing and notably running the official Brabham BT62 programme.

"Their three-car TCR UK entry represents another significant step forward for our series, as we continue to attract new teams and drivers."

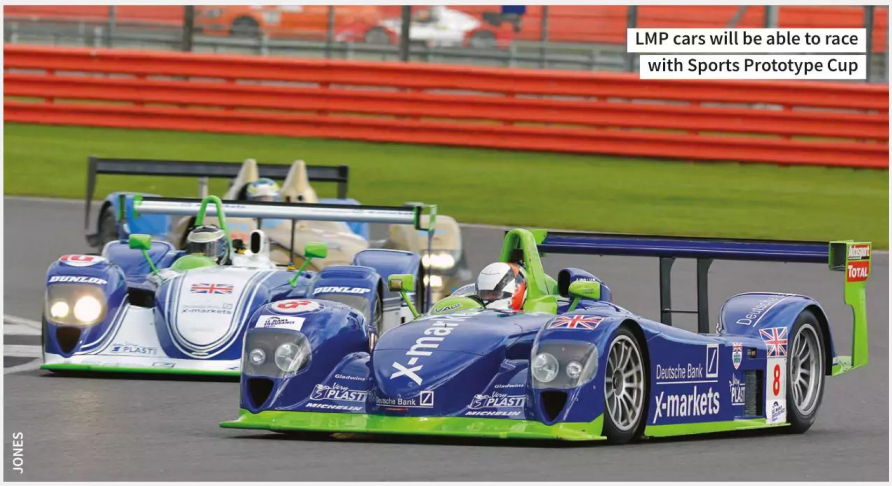
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Le Mans prototypes welcome to compete at Silverstone event

SPORTS PROTOTYPE CUP

Le Mans prototypes will be allowed to compete in the Sports Prototype Cup's double-header on the Silverstone Grand Prix layout later this season.

The event, scheduled for 29 May, will consist of two 30-minute races and will be open to a plethora of machines, including historic LMP cars, Ginetta G58s and LMP3s. The Unlimited class will also be open to cars such as Jades, Junos, Clubmans, other Radical models and Sports 2000-type cars, which will race alongside the category's regular Revolution A-Ones and Radical SR3s.

With no rounds of the World Endurance Championship or European Le Mans Series scheduled to take place at Silverstone in 2021, the Silverstone Open will be one of the few times this year when powerful, high-downforce endurance racing cars can race at the circuit. Solo or two-driver line-ups will be permitted, with each driver doing one 30-minute race for the latter.

Sports Prototype Cup promoter James Bailey said: "Silverstone Grand Prix circuit is the perfect venue for high-downforce prototype cars.

"In 2018, the Open Sportscar Series ran a Silverstone GP event attracting 41 cars representing 12 different manufacturers. Since the demise of that series, we have been lobbied by competitors to recreate that event, and we are delighted to be able to provide an hour of racing with our double-header format."

John Aley 1930-2021

OBITUARY

Countless motorsport competitors the world over will owe a debt of gratitude to 'rollbar' pioneer John Aley, who has died a week short of his 91st birthday. Flipping his DKW at Oulton Park focused Aley, who designed Aleybars kits for under £10.

Aley raced an Austin A35, then Minis internationally with help from ace tuner Don Moore, winning the 1000cc class of the 1965 European Touring Car Challenge. Prior to that, in 1962, he shared a Cooper S with up-and-coming Kiwi and future Formula 1 champion Denny Hulme at Brands Hatch.

When his race car broke in practice for the 1965 Nurburgring Six Hours, Aley competed in his bog-standard Mini Traveller tow car instead, unknowingly starting a trend that Volvo would follow three decades later.

Having raced hydroplanes, managed Snetterton circuit, driven for Abarth and coordinated the ETCC, Aley's last job in racing was helping Renault start its series for the 5 models in the 1970s.

MARCUS PYE

IN THE HEADLINES

PETER BLOND 1929-2021

A Jaguar racer throughout the 1950s, Peter Blond, who died on 10 January, graduated from an XK120 to the C-type that placed fourth at the 1953 Le Mans 24 Hours, finishing second to Captain Michael Head's similar car first time out at Goodwood in 1955. Blond won in a new D-type bought from Bernie Ecclestone, and achieved a win in a works HWM-Jaguar at Brands Hatch when he pressured Graham Hill into a last-lap spin. Blond shared the works Tojeiro with Tommy Bridger at Le Mans in 1958.

F4 DRIVERS MOVE TO F3

British Formula 4 graduates Christian Mansell and Frederick Lubin are the latest drivers to be announced as competing in BRDC British F3 this year. Both will continue to drive for their respective F4 teams: Carlin and Arden. Carlin has also revealed karting graduate Kai Askey as its first F4 driver for 2021.

BRC HIT BY CANCELLATIONS

The popular Jim Clark Rally has been cancelled for a second season in a row due to the coronavirus pandemic. The event was originally scheduled for 28-30 May and was due to be the third British Rally Championship round. It is also understood that April's BRC-opening Circuit of Ireland Rally was poised to be called off as Autosport closed for press. The last BRC event to successfully run was the Cambrian in February 2020.

SANTA POD CALENDAR

Santa Pod has revealed a full provisional calendar of events for 2021, after the pandemic limited the drag strip to running small events in the second half of last year. Alongside the opening and closing rounds of the FIA/FIM European Drag Racing championships, the Motorsport UK British Drag Racing schedule has also been unveiled. This is due to begin on the Easter weekend in April, and the final of the six rounds is set to be held in late September.



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10th Jul: Oulton Park | 7th Aug: Silverstone National | 18th Sep: Donington GP

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ECURIE ECOSSE'S BLAST FROM THE PAST Seven modernised examples of the Jaguar C-type sportscar will be built by Ecurie Ecosse to mirror the seven chassis raced in period by the famed Scottish team. Ecurie Ecosse, most celebrated for its 1956 and 1957 Le Mans 24 Hours victories with the D-type, has openly developed the new C-type, unlike some exact-copy continuation cars. The new models feature a wider and stiffer laser-cut steel spaceframe chassis than the originals, while the engine, gearbox, suspension and brakes have all been uprated. **Photographs by Ecurie Ecosse**

Age limit dropped for Castle Combe Saloons

COMBE SALOONS

The Castle Combe Saloon Car Championship has changed its class structure ahead of the 2021 season, meaning cars of any age will now be able to compete in the category.

All four classes of the two-wheel drive production saloon series, which range in engine size from 1500cc to 3400cc, previously only allowed cars from 2000 onwards. But that rule has been scrapped, meaning that, as long as the machine still fits into the technical regulations, it can compete regardless of age.

Castle Combe Racing Club competitions director Steve Weston says the decision has already generated greater interest in the series.

"The regulation was to try and stop old cars that were rustbuckets from racing – that was the premise of it," he said. "Those days are gone; you don't get as many badly prepared cars.

"Saloon [grid numbers] had dropped off, mainly because of COVID, but even before they weren't great. What we want is to have 42-car grids.

"There are a lot of classic saloons out there. What we would like to say is, if you have a race car, you can come and race it with us."

Eight rounds of the series are scheduled for 2021.

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A familiar story

Cancellations and postponements were commonplace during 2020, and those dreaded words are back again. But the season beginning a few weeks later is a small price to pay

STEPHEN LICKORISH

For a year that seemed to carry a lot of hope, 2021 has not got off to the most encouraging of starts. After words like 'cancelled', 'postponed' and 'revised' became horribly common in our vocabulary during 2020, it's worrying that they are starting to return in a motorsport context.

Really, it should be no surprise. The coronavirus pandemic is now at a vicious new peak in the UK, with the numbers of hospitalisations and deaths far surpassing the figures reached when the virus first took hold here last March and April. Yes, new cases are on the decline, but they are still at a very high level. Yes, vaccines are – at the moment – being rolled out at impressively quick speed, but it will still take many months for enough people to be immunised for that to have a significant impact.

Therefore it's very clear that there are tough weeks and months to come. The current English national lockdown is due to last until mid-February at least, and the possibility of that being extended further is very real. Against that difficult backdrop, it's no wonder 'cancelled', 'postponed' and 'revised' are making an unwelcome comeback.

Championship bosses and organising clubs took the approach that it was better to prepare for a normal 2021 and adapt, than not plan a full schedule and be caught out by a better-than-expected situation. And we are now firmly in that 'adapt' phase.

"The crowd is an integral part of BTCC events. It's not the same with empty spectator banks"

First to do so was British Touring Car Championship organiser TOCA. It's in a different position from much of national motorsport in the sense that its events are classed as 'elite sport'. Even during this current terrible period for COVID-19 infections, elite sport has continued and it was therefore reasonable to expect, as many have pointed out, that the opener at Brands Hatch on the first weekend in April would have gone ahead. Instead, the decision to delay the season by five weeks gives a better chance of fans being present. If not for the new opener at Thruxton (the result of a jumbled-up calendar, which has gone down a treat with many), there is at least the potential for a greater percentage of events to have many more people in attendance.

And that's important. The crowd is an integral part of BTCC events. Being at meetings last year with empty stands and spectator banks was not the same, and drivers in all categories noticed it. It's not just the public attendance that's significant, but hospitality guests too. Given the crucial part this plays in some sponsorship deals – and not just in the BTCC – being able to have commercial partners in attendance is a huge benefit. But rearranging the calendar was not easy, particularly from a TV perspective, and that's why it was necessary that the decision to alter the schedule was taken now – something the support series have welcomed, as it gives plenty of chance to make new plans. It's a similar situation with British GT, also delayed to May, where organiser Stephane Ratel Organisation has to avoid clashes with its other European categories.

These issues of spectators, hospitality and TV are not major factors for club racing organisers. But that has not stopped the cancellations from coming. The British Racing & Sports Car Club is one of two clubs that was due to get its 2021 season under way on 20-21 March. It had two events planned that weekend but, in the face of the present situation, has elected to cancel them and instead plans to start on the second weekend of April. Club chairman Peter Daly explains there was a number of factors behind the decision, including terms surrounding cancellation with the venues themselves, but also says the threat of regional lockdowns played a part. He wants to avoid a situation where "some could race and some not, so it wouldn't be fair".

That's an important point. We have seen throughout the pandemic that different areas have been worse affected at different points – we have also seen it with the differing speed of vaccine rollout across the country – and therefore the chance of regional lockdowns, especially in March, has to be high. There is no elite sport safety net for these club organisers, either. And it would therefore not be at all surprising if other clubs follow the BRSCC's lead and cancel proposed March events.

The MG Car Club is also due to return to racing on that 20 March weekend, and says a decision on whether its Silverstone fixture will go ahead will be taken at the end of this month. It has had an encouraging amount of competitor interest, which bodes well from that viewpoint at least. But the situation is far more dire for the British Rally Championship, which still has not held an event since last February. Cancellations of rounds one and three from a wildly ambitious 2021 calendar, considering the added complexities of the nomadic discipline, are unlikely to be the last.

It can all be very depressing hearing talk of cancellations and postponements this early in the year, and the spectre of mutant variations of the virus wreaking fresh damage lingers. But waiting a few extra weeks for seasons to start is a small price to pay amid such a devastating pandemic.

WHY PRAGA IS CZECHING INTO UK MOTORSPORT

At a time when many manufacturers are reducing their racing involvement, Praga is expanding its programme and believes the UK is the perfect shop window for its new R1 model

STEPHEN LICKORISH

PHOTOGRAPHY **PRAGA**





Martinek says new R1 features huge upgrade



BOW

Harrison (left) and Randall have bold plans for Praga



When a new model from a car manufacturer with a 114-year history begins racing in the UK, you would expect that the company would be a well-known marque. But that was not the case when Praga's R1 began competing on these shores in 2019. And there's a simple reason why: communism.

Praga was very successful during the 1930s, at a time when there were dozens of car manufacturers in Czechoslovakia. It dwarfed Skoda, for example, and didn't just build road cars, but also trucks, buses, tanks, tractors and more. But that all changed after the Second World War.

"Communism came to Czechoslovakia and there was a political decision made that Praga will stop manufacturing cars, that will shift to Skoda, and Praga will concentrate on buses and trucks," explains Praga engineering director Jan Martinek. By the time communism fell in 1989, Praga had faded into obscurity around the rest of the world, Martinek saying that "it wasn't easy to stand up to the competition from established countries".

"You can't start mass-producing cars again out of nothing, so [first] it was the go-karts," he continues. "Praga started building go-karts and Praga is one of the largest go-kart manufacturers in the world." And that's pretty useful if you have aspirations to build a successful car racing programme, Williams Formula 1 ace George Russell being one of the early Praga karters.

But the aspiration was always a return to car manufacturing, and that was realised with the Praga R4S in 2011. A couple of years later, the initial version of the R1 came along and this soon caught the eye of Vincent Randall, boss of UK club racing squad VR Motorsport.

"COMMUNISM CAME AND THERE WAS A POLITICAL DECISION THAT PRAGA WILL STOP BUILDING CARS"

"I saw the prototype R1 at the Autosport Show," he says. "We were racing in clubs like 750 Motor Club Bikesports at the time and I looked at it and thought, 'You know what? If I was going to build a race car, it would look a bit like that.' I pondered the possibility of selling up out of club racing and trying to do something a bit more serious and we actually bought the first R1 sold to the UK in 2016."

But there was a fairly fundamental problem – the R1 was not actually eligible to race in the UK. "It's a full carbon monocoque chassis, so it's extremely strong but, in the UK, you have to have a steel rollhoop, which it didn't have," explains Randall.

There started a long period of discussion with governing body Motorsport UK, while Randall began running the car in the Dutch Supercar Challenge, and eventually a compromise was found, the R1 making its UK debut in 2019 in the Britcar Endurance Championship. The car was instantly successful and won its class, but a few reliability issues prevented it from taking the overall crown. There were no such problems last year as teenagers Danny Harrison and Jem Hepworth – one of three Praga pairings – stormed to the title as Pragas won all but two of the races.

And Praga's presence in the UK is set to move to the next level this season. A dedicated category for the Czech cars will form part of the Britcar series, and between 10 and 12 cars are expected to take part. "That's a fifty-fifty mix of cars that are provided by Praga, in essence as factory cars, to an interesting group of novice racing drivers and current expert professional drivers, who will raise our profile significantly in the UK, and also paying customers – people who are buying the cars or racing via buying the seats," says ex-BMW and McLaren man Mark Harrison (no relation to Danny), who joined Praga last year as managing director of a new UK division.

Despite the uncertainties created by Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic, it's reassuring to see a manufacturer investing in the »

British motorsport scene. And the decision to target the UK market is a very deliberate ploy as part of the company's expansion.

"Praga's a very engineering-driven organisation and a lot of mine and Vincent's plans are about how you raise the brand, and that's why we're focusing on the UK a lot," says Harrison. "If we can build a solid foundation in the UK, raise the profile of the brand and the racing car in the UK, that gives you an immediate step into Europe, into the Middle East, into North America, into Asia. As great as the factory is in Slovakia and the headquarters are in Prague, they're not necessarily great stepping stones towards the more mature motor racing markets, so that's the logic of why the company is investing in developing the presence and profile of the programme in the UK."

And, if the class within Britcar is successful this year, then a full-blown standalone one-make series is on the cards, with Praga one of the companies attempting to fill the gap in the UK market left after the LMP3 Cup flopped. "Earlier last year, we had ambitions to have a one-make series because 20-odd R1s racing together would be quite a sight and quite an experience for drivers," says Harrison. "But we were realistic to think that could be in 2023 or 2024, because these things take time and there's lots of people who've tried one-make series that have never happened. But, actually, there's a very good chance that could be accelerated through the conversations we are already having.

"So, there's some grand ambitions but also a really good foundation that gives us good reason to believe those ambitions are not foolish or out of this world. Those foundations are the strength of the karting business globally, and also the work Vincent has put in over the past two or three years to really put the R1 where it is in the UK now. We've reaped the rewards of that last season in Britcar and that's given the momentum for this year."

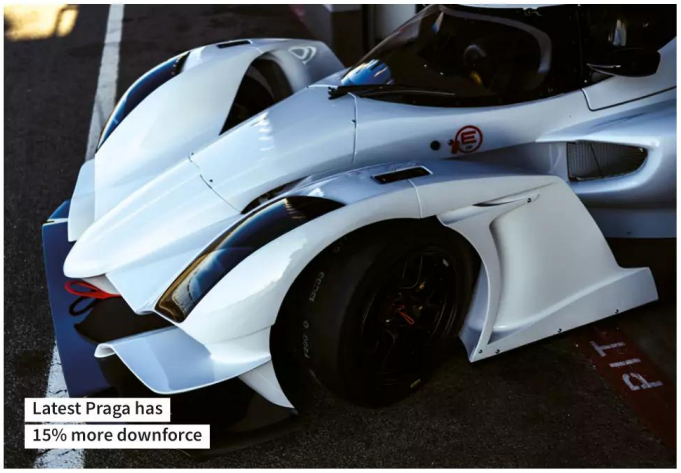
Randall always believed the R1 was destined to form the basis of its own series. "It's almost the perfect car for a one-make series, because it's easy to drive for people who are not that experienced, it's easy to maintain but it's got the performance of an LMP3 car," he says. "And it's safe as well – it's a very safe car because it's got a full carbon monocoque. It's an excellent piece of kit."

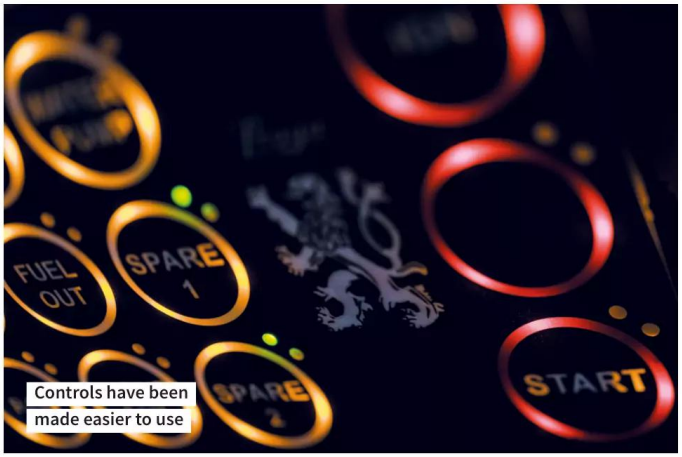
As well as the one-make series, Randall and Harrison also have some very noble aspirations. Randall wants to demonstrate that it's possible for successful club racing teams to take that next step and operate faster cars at a higher level. At the same time, he is trying to encourage mechanics and engineers from a diverse range of backgrounds, who perhaps would not ordinarily have had the opportunity to get involved in motorsport, to become part of his team. Meanwhile, Harrison says educating the next generation is very important and intends to use Praga's karting operation to give youngsters plenty of unique chances, such as working with Romain Grosjean – the former F1 racer is an ambassador of Praga.

But a central pillar for many of these ambitions is the latest iteration of the R1, which was unveiled earlier this week. Martinek says there have been four previous generations of the car, but this latest upgrade is by far the most significant – "by the scale of 20!" he says. This new version may look very similar to previous R1s,


Pragas could often be found leading the Britcar field in 2020

WALKER


Latest Praga has 15% more downforce



Controls have been made easier to use

but do not be fooled. Just about every part of it is different. New moulds have been used and even the two-litre Renault engine, which has stayed the same and produces 365bhp, has a much more advanced ECU. Martinek says that its power curve is now much smoother, despite being a turbo.

"What we have now is basically a new car," he adds. "We have improved the aero. That was one of the major things we wanted to look at because since 2011, when the development started, we now have much more sophisticated tools. We are looking at roughly 15% more downforce, while we reduce the drag by about 5%, which we take as a significant accomplishment. There's a front splitter, the main floor, the rear diffuser and the main wing, and so this all combined allowed us to increase the downforce and lower the drag."

Another key improvement is in the safety features. The survival cell has been strengthened, while Zylon panels have been added to the side of the car in a bid to make it as safe as possible.

"We then looked at the other details on the car and what we've learned over the past seven years, throughout the generations," Martinek continues. "We listened to our customers and we listened to the race mechanics, so we learned a lot about how to improve the electronics, where to put a connector and where not to, how to make access to the clutch easier, how to insulate the starter motor better, etc. We made an endless amount of modifications and changes to improve working on the car. You can't really see that when you look at the car but, when you're a mechanic on the car, you will definitely know the differences."

The list of improvements is seemingly endless. There is a 50% larger fuel tank, along with the addition of a second main pump and four scavenging pumps. Then there are far superior front lights – one of the most visible changes. The operating panel has been made easier to use, for example some of the switches have been made larger. More sensors have been added to the car too. Then there is improved cooling around the engine and turbo.



"I ALWAYS SAY, IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR AN IRON CURTAIN, THEY WOULD BE A FERRARI OR LAMBORGHINI"

New R1 features better engine software, is safer and has larger fuel tank

In summary, Martinek says: "There's plenty of small, sophisticated changes underneath the skin, which will make this a hopefully much better beast than the R1 was before."

But there's one very important factor that is certainly staying the same: enjoyment. "Out of hundreds of people, they always climb out of the car with a big grin on their face," says Martinek. "Then you know that you've got the right car, because that's why you do it at the end of the day. This is not about winning world titles, this is not F1, this is about having fun. And, in terms of having fun, we know we've got the right car."

That message is now starting to spread, and the Praga factories are facing the kind of demand they have not enjoyed for decades. Harrison says this is a "nice problem to have", while Martinek adds that some elements of production are switching from its Slovakia factory – which is handily positioned just over the road from the Slovakia Ring – to the Czech Republic.

Randall is delighted that the company is finally getting the recognition it deserves and says, had history taken a different course, Praga might have already reached far greater heights. "I always say when people ask me about Praga, because no one's ever heard of them – or until relatively recently, nobody had ever heard of them – 'they're 114 years old and if it hadn't been for building an iron curtain, they would be a Ferrari or Lamborghini, you would be hearing Praga along with those names'," he says.

Harrison looks at it another way and describes Praga's car-building renaissance as being like "the world's oldest start-up". As for Martinek, he is just pleased that the R1's potential is finally being reached. "Since 2013, when I joined the company, I always dreamed of seeing 24 cars on the grid battling each other, so hopefully in 2022 I will," he says.

It may be 114 years old, but it seems this really is just the start of Praga's motorsport journey.



HAWKINS

Teenagers Harrison and Hepworth were artful en route to Britcar crown



MEMORIES TELL THE STORY OF SHY



BOOK REVIEW
TOM PRYCE: MEMORIES OF A WELSH F1 STAR BY THOSE WHO KNEW HIM
RRP £35

The tale of Tom Pryce, like those of his fellow taken-too-soon 1970s contemporaries Tony Brise and Roger Williamson, is one that prompts misty-eyed reverie among those who saw him race. And his story is perhaps even more romantic, as he came from a humble background in the wilds of North Wales to make his way in the sport.

It's also a tale that's been told before. The definitive biography of Pryce, intertwined with those of Williamson and Brise, has already been written in the form of David Tremayne's fantastic *The Lost Generation*. Therefore it was a wise idea by superfan-turned-writer Darren Banks and co-author Kevin Guthrie to tackle a project on Pryce from a completely different angle. *Tom Pryce: Memories Of A Welsh F1 Star By Those Who Knew Him* is, as a result, a collection of reminiscences from childhood friends and motorsport people of the hard-charging, modest mega-talent who enthralled spectators with his sideways style in those gorgeous black mid-1970s Shadows. It was an even wiser idea for Banks and Guthrie to welcome the assistance of Tremayne, who has also provided the introduction for this book.

Banks is an author who has been reviewed in these pages before. His previous work *Stephen South: The Way It Was* went into the most minute detail of the career of another 1970s talent, who only fleetingly made it to F1 when he failed to qualify a McLaren for the 1980 Long Beach Grand Prix, but who clearly had the talent to go a whole lot further.

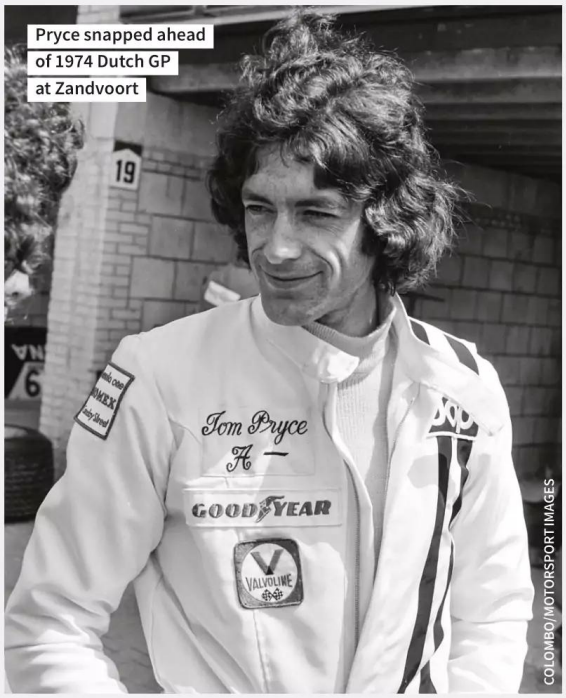
As such, Banks has gone a bit more 'mainstream' – if ever a book on Pryce can be described thus – with this offering. The bite-size format makes this a book you can dip in and out of, as there's no continuing narrative, and the ordering of those who have contributed their thoughts on Pryce doesn't seem to follow any rhyme or reason either, which somehow adds to its charm. If anything, this illustrates that the memories of Denbighshire folk who knew him before he even learned to speak English (his mother tongue was Welsh) are just as important as those from the hoity-toity world of F1 – and actually would have been more meaningful to Pryce, who never left behind his lifelong friends.

The book also has the blessing of Pryce's widow Nella, who provides the foreword. Tom met Nella, a far more gregarious girl than her desperately shy future husband, when he was lodging with other drivers just outside Brands Hatch, with the no-nonsense cockney Red Webb as their landlady ("I have never eaten so much beans on toast, which was a little tough," recalls Danny Sullivan). One of the charming asides from this book is that Tom only moved out of Webb's house and into his new home with Nella on their wedding day – a far cry from what would be considered normal today. Pryce, indeed, seems naive and unworldly in most aspects of life, other than the business of driving and getting to the top of his sport.

Banks and Guthrie have done a terrific job to track down so many figures from Pryce's life, including the recently departed Brian Jones and Tony Vlassopulos plus 1970s racers such as Ted Wentz. Some, including Shadow boss Jackie Oliver, are fascinating. The best tale in this reviewer's eyes, though, comes from Jorge



WELSH HERO



Pryce snapped ahead of 1974 Dutch GP at Zandvoort

Koechlin. He wasn't the fastest driver ever to sit in a racing car, but his story of arriving at Webb's digs from Lima – via a one-way air ticket, asking anyone he met for directions to Brands in his Peruvian accent while staying in a B&B in Central London, and a green Number 19 bus – illustrate what an adventure life was in those glorious, unorchestrated days, in which his friend Pryce shone so brightly.

MARCUS SIMMONS

YouTube youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Autosport, with the aid of some slick graphics, compares the orchestrated pitstop procedures used in all of the major motorsport series. Covering the likes of Formula 1, IndyCar, NASCAR, MotoGP, endurance racing and touring cars, this video runs through how pitcrews directly impact what happens at the chequered flag. **Go to bit.ly/racingpitstops**

AUTOSPORT PLUS bit.ly/SennaV12

The V12 experiment that yielded Senna's final F1 title

Formula 1 fans remember V12 engines fondly but only one has powered a driver to the world title. Autosport recalls McLaren's MP4/6, with which Ayrton Senna secured the 1991 crown 30 years ago

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Monte Carlo Rally
World Rally Championship
Round 1/12
Monaco/Gap, France
21-24 January
TV **Live**
BT Sport 1, Thurs 1300, BT Sport 3, Fri 1230, BT Sport ESPN, Sat 1100, BT Sport 2, Sun 0900, 1100
TV **Highlights**
BT Sport 3, Sat 0030, 2230, BT Sport 2, Sun 1915, Red Bull TV, Fri 2100, Sat 2100, Sun 2100
Livestream on Red Bull TV
Live coverage on wrc.com
All live service via WRC+



Toyota Racing Series
Round 1/3
Hampton Downs, New Zealand
23-24 January

AUTOSPORT

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THE PRIZE

A pair of Puma race gloves signed by Lewis Hamilton in a frame, worth more than £1000

QUESTION

Lewis Hamilton matched Michael Schumacher's remarkable record of seven Formula 1 world drivers' titles in 2020. In which race did he clinch the crown?

A) The Eifel Grand Prix

B) The Portuguese Grand Prix

C) The Turkish Grand Prix



TO ENTER

choose the correct answer and go to **autosport.com/competition** or use the QR code below

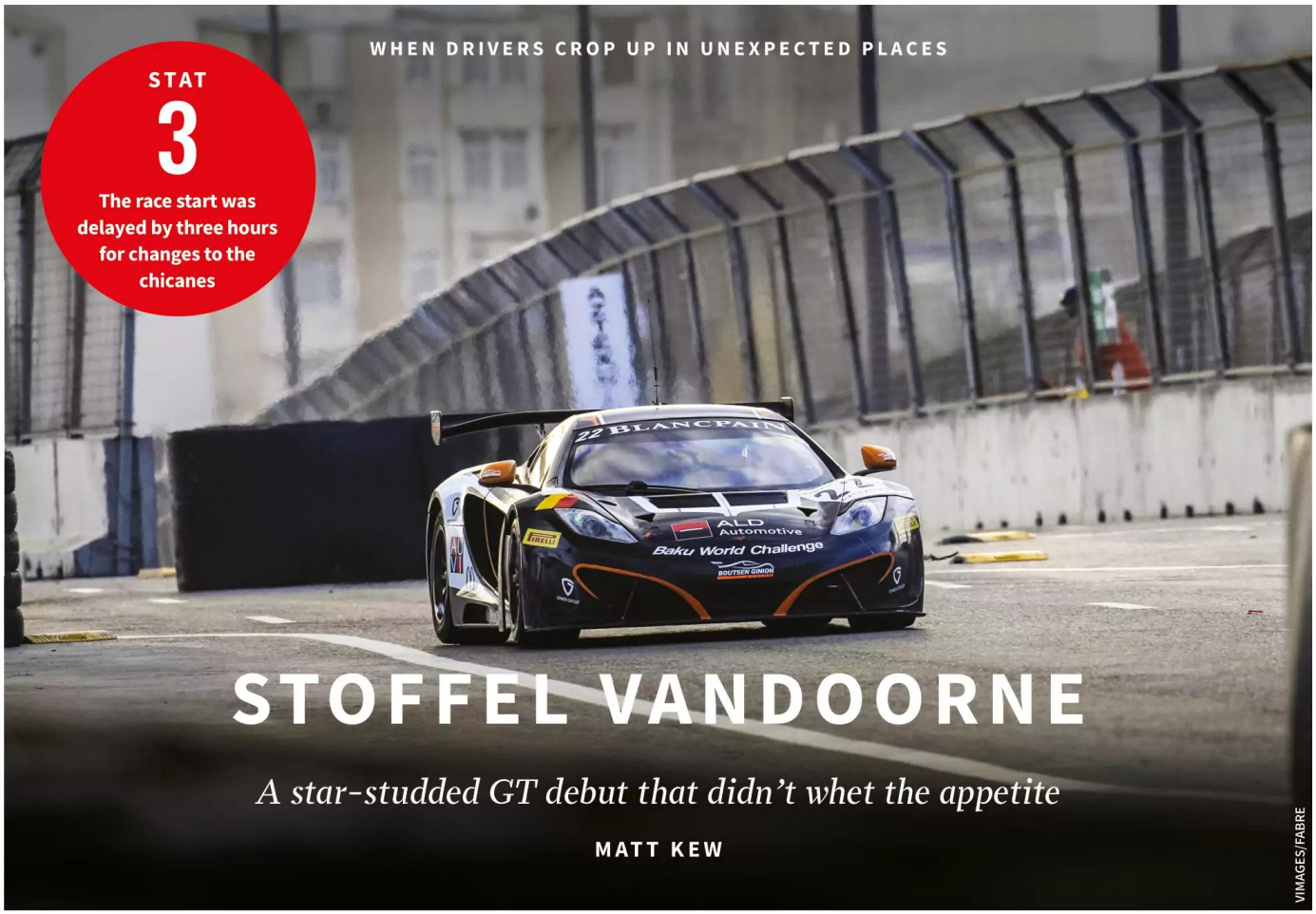
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HAVE-A-GO HERO

WHEN DRIVERS CROP UP IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

STAT 3

The race start was delayed by three hours for changes to the chicanes



VIMAGES/FABRE

STOFFEL VANDOORNE

A star-studded GT debut that didn't whet the appetite

MATT KEW

Stephane Ratel declared the entry list for the 2013 World Challenge FIA GT Series finale around the streets of Baku as "the best GT sprint grid since the days of the FIA GT1 World Championship". He was "bang on with his assessment", wrote Autosport at the time. Sebastien Loeb and Ricardo Zonta counted among the high-profile names. Laurens Vanthoor, Kevin Estre and Rene Rast were among those bound for international success in the coming years.

For its one-off outing in the series that season, the Boutsen Ginion Racing squad – founded by Olivier Laine, brother-in-law of three-time Formula 1 race winner Thierry Boutsen – had played its part in packing the grid with talent. One of its McLaren MP4-12C GT3s was shared between Alexander Sims and Stef Dusseldorp. The other consisted of a Belgian hotshot double act.

To partner Frederic Vervisch, the team called up new McLaren junior Stoffel Vandoorne to make his closed-cockpit debut. Aged 21, the young charger had just scored four wins to finish runner-up in the Formula Renault 3.5 standings to champion Kevin Magnussen.

The duo lined up 11th for the main race but were soon pinged by the stewards after Vervisch straight-lined the first of four chicanes. That earned a drivethrough, but the car had led in the opening half of the one-hour event. Further problems arose when the radio, then the power steering, failed. The alternator cable had snapped and killed power to such an extent that eventual victor Stephane Ortelli ended up pushing the McLaren down the pitlane in his Audi R8 to not lose too much time.

With Vervisch out only 11 laps into the one-hour contest, Vandoorne's GT chance had to be savoured with the run in the preceding qualifying race.

Little wonder he tells Autosport: "It wasn't a great experience because the car failed while we were leading. A shame."

Down on seat time, Vandoorne's biggest takeaway remains his experience of swapping a single-seater for a race car that, owing to Balance of Performance measures, was a whopping 126bhp down on its road-going 12C counterpart.

"It was quite weird because at the time I was racing in World Series and it was my first experience in GT cars," says Vandoorne. "I just remember the whole movement of the car, you feel the car rolling a lot. The braking as well, the car was moving a lot. It was quite strange."

Perhaps that's why Vandoorne – now Mercedes' Formula E driver and F1 reserve – rates his "long term" prospects of returning to GTs as a "maybe".



TEE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

"I JUST REMEMBER THE WHOLE MOVEMENT OF THE CAR, YOU FEEL IT ROLLING A LOT"



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Harry Schell (#16 BRM P25) and Juan Manuel Fangio (#34 Maserati 250F) are pursued by Stirling Moss (#8 Vanwall VW10) in the 1958 French Grand Prix at Reims. American racer Schell surprised himself with his pace in practice, started third on the grid behind the Ferrari Dino 246s of Mike Hawthorn and Luigi Musso, then led briefly on the first lap before Hawthorn took control of the race. Schell retired with an overheating engine; Fangio was fourth on his swansong; Moss finished in second place; and Musso died from injuries sustained when he crashed.

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IN DEFENCE OF...

1966 MONTE CARLO RALLY

The 1966 Monte Carlo Rally is probably the most debated result in rallying history: an Anglo-French contretemps to rival Hastings, Agincourt and Trafalgar. Possibly.

The traditional view in the UK is to assert that the British Motor Corporation was denied victory in Monte Carlo by Gallic skulduggery. Yet motorsport is a French invention, its laws sanctioned on the Champs Elysees. The foundations of success in every discipline rely on teams finding and exploiting every regulatory loophole. Here, Britain has a fine tradition.

In the early 1960s, Stuart Turner brought a new era of management style to BMC, matching rigorous intellect with a poacher's eye. Thus did his team rise to supremacy with that most unlikely of supercars: the Mini. With an array of specifications, including six different engines, a blizzard of paperwork was created through which the Mini emerged to conquer the Acropolis, the RAC, the 1000 Lakes, the Swedish, the Circuit of Ireland and back-to-back Monte wins in 1964-65.

"It wasn't so much cheating as creativity, and involved such things as making sure photographs of camshafts were taken from the right angle so key features were highlighted [or hidden]," Turner said. "And an awful lot of special bits were listed for African markets, but whether any manufacturer ever sold any cars there to fit them on is another matter."

The 1966 Monte was only open to Group 1 'showroom' cars. Turner immediately wrote a wish-list of components to be fitted to 5000 homologation models, including inboard driveshaft couplings, 4½in wheel rims, lightweight interiors, twin fuel tanks, new carbs, camshafts, gearing and oil coolers.

The Minis finished 1-2-3, but then officials produced a pre-event bulletin, written in French, insisting headlights should be the same as those on the production model. The British teams all missed this detail. So it was Citroen's star man, Pauli Toivonen, left looking rather bewildered as he held the winner's trophy. But wasn't it merely fighting fire with fire?

NICK GARTON



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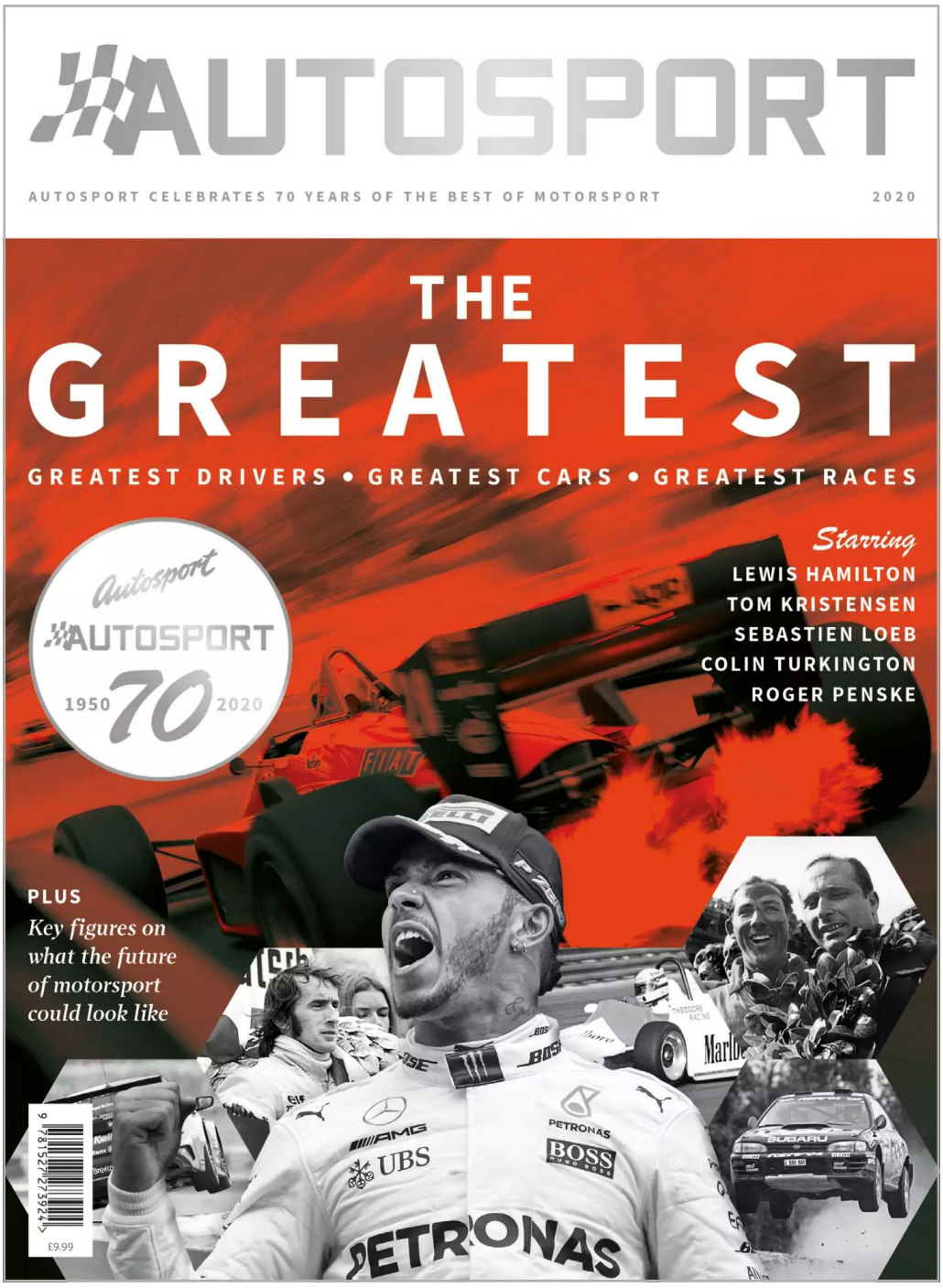
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