

116-PAGE F1 2018 SPECIAL

AUTOSPORT

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F1 2018

GUIDE





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MERCEDES AND HAMILTON REMAIN THE ONES TO BEAT

Can Lewis Hamilton win a fifth Formula 1 world title in 2018? The strength of his Mercedes W09 in pre-season testing and the extraordinary form Hamilton was in last season suggest he could match the great Juan Manuel Fangio's tally this year.

But for fans wanting a proper championship fight, there are still reasons for hope. Red Bull's RB14 looks potent, and if Renault can bring further engine developments Max Verstappen and Daniel Ricciardo could be right in the game. Despite its headline-grabbing lap times in Spain, Ferrari's true pace is unclear, but it arguably has more potential having adjusted its design philosophy this season.

We assess the chances of the Big Three and all the other teams in our bumper F1 preview issue this week, with the help of experienced F1 figures Gary Anderson and Karun Chandhok.

It's not just the F1 cars that are new. Autosport has made some tweaks for 2018 too, aimed at improving the look of the magazine, as well as helping us focus on the best stories motorsport has to offer. We'll continue to cover all the major championships and speak to the key figures, but will also delve further below the surface to bring you the whys and hows of the sport.

That will include expert opinion pieces, so for those looking for Nigel Roebuck's column, fear not. He has moved from his small weekly slot to a bigger monthly one, bringing his usual mix of straight-talking insight and historical knowledge.

● Autosport would like to thank all who have sent messages of support concerning the sudden death of former staffer and Autosport International stage host Henry Hope-Frost. His passion, enthusiasm and knowledge were remarkable, and provided a reminder of why we all love the sport. Thank you, Henry. #fever



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COVER IMAGES

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Red Bull Content Pool

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HOW HAS THE NEW AERO

INDYCAR

The short answer to this crucial question has been answered in spades by the repeated errors from veterans as well as rookies over the course of the opening weekend of the IndyCar season in St Petersburg. And they weren't necessarily huge errors, either: there were time-losing fumbles under braking, and too-vigorous applications of throttle, and they sent the standard grid order into a tombola drum.

Yes, seven-time St Pete polesitter Will Power was on the front row, and there were a couple of rookies at the back, but in between — and just ahead of Power — were surprises galore.

As discussed on page 87, Robert Wickens is no ordinary rookie. In fact the Schmidt Peterson Motorsports driver has a more-varied résumé than most of his new-found rivals in the IndyCar Series. But no-one can decry his stunning qualifying and race day performances; who could have predicted such speed and composure from a rookie? Usually it's one or the other.

But the shock of seeing debutants Matheus Leist and Jordan King not just get through to the Firestone Fast Six but star regularly throughout practice prompted questions. Questions such as: did the radical downforce slash (about

1200lb at St Pete) flatter rookies compared with their veteran rivals because the vets had so much to unlearn?

"With the new 2018 aero kit coming in, as a rookie, it's just one less disadvantage that you have," said Wickens. "Everyone has to learn this aero kit together. You have to learn the Firestone tyres, the tracks, you have to learn how a race weekend works. If this was 2017, you'd [also] have to learn the car that everybody else has been driving for a while."

Although many expected the car to separate the talents more by being more demanding and requiring more finesse, Power disagreed. "I think it will be a way more competitive championship just because everyone has exactly the same car," he said of the elimination of the manufacturer aero kits. "I don't think you'll see the same guys in the Fast Six week in, week out, in qualifying. I think it's going to be very mixed up. It's going to be one of those sort of years."

"THE CHICANE USED TO BE FLAT. GOING FLAT NOW IS A GUN TO THE HEAD"



'Bump Day' returns for Indy 500

INDIANAPOLIS 500

The traditional Indianapolis 500 qualifying 'Bump Day' will return in 2018, with 35 cars expected to enter the famous event in May.

If the customary 33-car field is oversubscribed, there will be drivers failing to qualify for the first time since Buddy Lazier missed out on the grid in 2015, although true Bump Day excitement had been missing for several years before then.

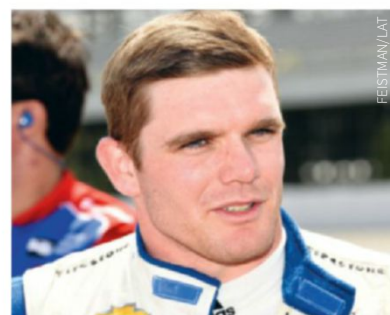
Debate on the return of Bump Day was prominent at the season-opening St Petersburg race last weekend, with drivers and manufacturers largely keen to preserve the tradition.

"I think bumping is important because it's always been such a big part of the 500, the story, how many people failed, how many people made it at the last second," said three-time CART champion Bobby Rahal. "It adds certainly to the drama. I think it absolutely adds to the folklore of the 500. They write about the 500, the race itself, but clearly over the years the whole qualifying process has been just as dynamic a story as the race."

Honda Performance Developments chief Art St Cyr added: "That's part of the tradition. There should be some stress and hard work that requires you to actually get into that race."

The talk around Bump Day's return was heightened last week by Oriol Servia announcing an Indy 500 drive in a partnership between Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing and IMSA SportsCar team Scuderia Corsa. Conor Daly (below), who was dropped from AJ Foyt Racing for 2018, will enter the Indy 500 in a third entry from Dale Coyne Racing. That brings the current total of confirmed entries to 31 cars.

TOM ERRINGTON



KIT AFFECTED INDYCAR?

Power added that the greater feel provided to the driver, plus moving more weight forward, made it a more driver-friendly car. "A good driver is a good driver because he's adaptable," said the 2014 champion. "I don't think it's going to separate the competition all that much. Simply because of what they did with the weight, they've turned it into a more nimble race car, which is easier to drive and predict, a lot more fun to drive. When it gets loose, it's easier to catch."

The cars' acceleration out of the final hairpin onto the runway straight was visibly greater than in years past, having not only shed the drag-inducing appendages of the aero kit but also coming from a slightly lower apex speed. Despite needing to hit the brakes sooner for Turn 1 due to reduced downforce, the cars were already 10mph faster than last year — 178mph compared with 168mph.

The more finely tuned judgement demands are increased further at St Pete's Turn 1 by the excessive runway marker paint. "You can't see from the cockpit exactly where the paint is," said one driver, "and even if you could, the stripes are close enough that when you turn in at least one side of wheels has to be on the paint."

That particular problem was accentuated in the damp conditions in qualifying. Even

Scott Dixon lost it and therefore didn't make the Fast Six, while Simon Pagenaud spun three times in eight minutes!

But it was the other areas of the track that are more indicative of what the drivers will find at the three other street courses on the schedule (Long Beach, Detroit and Toronto). "You definitely feel like you're hauling the mail, going down into all the big braking zones — Turns 1, 4, 10," said James Hinchcliffe. "I almost kind of was hoping we could talk to the track about adding some signboards down in Turn 4 because there's only 3, 2, 1. We used to brake after 3, now it's a good chunk before it. It's hard to judge. That's how much it's changed. We literally need new brake markers because we're going so much faster and have so much less downforce."

Ryan Hunter-Reay said all fast corners had suddenly become a lot more demanding, having been "no-brainers" in last year's car: "You're using up every inch of track. You feel like it could step out and smack the wall at any point. The chicane down here, fifth gear, used to be flat... Flat is now a gun-to-the-head feeling."

The best will respond, of course. They always do. But it's going to get tougher because now the best rookies may learn as fast as the veterans are relearning.

DAVID MALSHER



New museum can inspire engineering youth, says Brawn

SILVERSTONE

Formula 1 technical head honcho Ross Brawn believes that the new Silverstone Experience museum can play a role in safeguarding the UK's pre-eminent position in the world of motorsport.

Speaking at the official 'green-light' ceremony for the £19.3million attraction, which is targeted to attract over 500,000 visitors per year, Brawn said the UK needs to find a way to inspire the next generation of engineers to get involved in the sport.

"There has never been a more crucial time to inspire people to take up engineering and become the next generation of engineers," he said.

Although the Silverstone Experience will celebrate the history of the track, and British motorsport in general, it will also look to the future and work closely with the Silverstone University Technical College, where students aged 14-18 get hands-on experience of working in a motorsport environment.

"If Great Britain is to retain our position as world leaders we need to influence the younger generation to get involved," Brawn added. "But it's not just the younger generation, it's the people who influence the younger generation — the parents, their carers, their teachers — because our failure to do so will mean our place as

world leaders will be at risk. Motorsport has a vital role to play in inspiring young people to get involved in engineering. It has an immediacy that's appealing. The other great thing about motorsport is that it's a very level playing field; you are judged totally on your ability."

Prince Harry, who is the official patron, was on hand to switch the lights to green and put the wheels in motion for the project's construction, which has received a £9.1m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and is based inside a former Wellington bomber hangar within the grounds of the track.

"The Silverstone Experience will be an exhilarating attraction, based here at the home of British motorsport, and I'm sure it will help to engage children in engineering by making that all-important connection between their textbooks and the excitement and thrills of motorsport," said the prince.

The project has been seven years in the planning, but the team — led by chief executive Sally Reynolds — has set the ambitious target of opening in spring 2019. As well as static displays, much of which have come from Silverstone's own archive that will be relocated into the new venue, it will use modern-day technology that allows visitors a 360-degree experience of the track.

ANDREW VAN DE BURGT

New F3 supports F1 as GP3 axed

FORMULA 3

Now it's official — the FIA's World Motor Sport Council last Friday gave the green light for the new-for-2019 single-spec Formula 3 to come under the promotional umbrella of the Formula 1 group of companies, and that means it will race on the grand prix support bill.

Long-time GP2/GP3 promoter Bruno Michel — whose company is part of the bundle taken over by F1 owner Liberty at the end of 2016 — will therefore be in charge of the new F3, just as he is of the renamed Formula 2. As a result, GP3 will bow out after nine seasons at the end of this year, but it can arguably be said that — with the new-look F3 running to the same philosophy as GP3 — Michel has won the war against F3 that his 'baby' category instigated when it was born in 2010.

Michel calls it a "merger between GP3 and F3, and the new championship will be called F3. So I don't know if you can call it the last year of GP3, but that's what will happen — there will be a change of name for sure. It will be a single-make category, so that will also match more the principles of GP3 than what F3 is at the moment."

The FIA statement made reference to 'an exclusive grid of no more than 30 cars', and that nine or 10 events will be held, with two races at each. Michel added that it will retain the same format as GP3, with one of the races at each event from a reversed grid. "It will look very much like the GP3 format — absolutely," he confirmed.

So what's going to happen to the current FIA-rules F3 cars? The Japanese look certain to stick with theirs for at least a couple of years, and noises initially made last summer by DTM chairman Gerhard Berger that he would revive the F3 Euro Series for the existing machinery have risen back to prominence. According to sources, the ITR, which promotes the DTM and will lose its similar role with FIA F3 at the end of this year, was meeting earlier this week to discuss exactly that.

There has also been progress in the FIA's new Regional F3 concept, intended to slot in between Formula 4 and the new-look F3. French constructor Mygale has released pictures (below) of a new car it hopes to get on track by May and has been talking to prospective promoters. The new Asian F3, meanwhile, will use Tatuus chassis and engines provided by Autotecnica, which builds the Abarth F4 powerplant.

MARCUS SIMMONS AND ALEX KALINAUCKAS





WORLD ENDURANCE Rebellion Racing released the first images of its 2018-19 World Endurance Championship LMP1 challenger at the Geneva International Motor Show last week. The new Rebellion-Gibson R-13, designed and built by French constructor ORECA, is still some way from hitting the race track — the first car isn't scheduled to run until the days ahead of the official Paul Ricard WEC test in early April.

Full Monaco to be used for Formula E

FORMULA E

Formula E's anticipated move to the full Monaco Grand Prix circuit has been hailed as "important" and "mega" news for the series.

FE will finally switch to the Formula 1 layout for the 2018-19 season after two races on an adapted, shorter design. And 2015-16 champion Sebastien Buemi, who a year ago was part of the call for the full track to be used, said it was necessary as the current layout is too small.

"It's amazing, it's important — it shows a strong message," he said. "It shows we're able to go longer and we're strong. It [the current track] was so small that next year you'd go below 50 seconds — it might be 22 cars next year and 24 the year after. It's impossible."

Felix Rosenqvist, who is second in the FE points, has never raced on the Monaco GP circuit. He reckons racing will be good there because it is wider than some of the tight makeshift circuits that feature on the FE calendar, and called it "mega" and "cool".

"I actually thought I would never race at [the full] Monaco — I'd done all the big street circuits except Monaco — and it was

always a dream as I'm a passionate street racer," said Rosenqvist (below right).

"Monaco is a bit like an autobahn compared to some of our tracks. It will be wide enough, for sure, as some tracks we go to are ridiculously narrow, like New York.

"The tunnel will be quite difficult, probably not be flat. Then obviously the last part we already know, and the first section with the sweeping left-hander [Massenet]."

FE drivers will have to use two power modes in races next season. The FIA's World Motor Sport Council has now confirmed the mandatory use of two power levels, as the loss of mid-race car swaps will rid the category of what was deemed an important strategic element. The FIA has stated that the high-power level in the race will result in "a performance gain of approximately one second per lap while activated". It remains to be seen what the two settings will be.

A point will no longer be awarded for the driver who sets the fastest lap, and will be replaced with a "new energy-management parameter" to award a point to the most efficient driver instead.

SCOTT MITCHELL



SEAT to run electric Cupra in open TCR competition



ELECTRIC TCR

SEAT will be at the forefront of another development in touring car racing after its new performance brand Cupra revealed the electric 'e-Racer', developed to 'E TCR' rules.

Cupra claims the car is the first "100%" electric touring car, and is weighing up entering the e-Racer, which was displayed at the Geneva motor show last week, in selected TCR events this year to evaluate its performance compared to its petrol-powered counterpart.

It is predicted that the e-Racer will be capable of reaching speeds of up to 270km/h, (170mph) and accelerate from 0-100km/h in 3.2 seconds. It will have a peak power level of 500kW – 680bhp – at 12,000rpm, close to double the power offered by the regular car. Cupra suggests that the car, which has four motors located over its rear axle, will be 400kg heavier than the regular model.

E TCR regulations have been developed by TCR boss Marcello Lotti's WSC Technology company. E TCR cars will feature a single-gear, rear-wheel-drive transmission, and a common supply package of motor, gearbox and inverters, as well as a 65kWh battery pack, which will be distributed by WSC Technology.

Promotional E TCR events are planned for this year, ahead of the anticipated launch of a championship for 2019.

JACK COZENS

TOP 3

SEAT TIN-TOP REVOLUTIONS

The Spanish manufacturer has a history of breaking new ground in touring car competition. Here are some of its best ideas of the 21st century – so far



#1 CUPRA CHAMPIONSHIP

This was a one-make series with a prize the likes of which had not been seen before: a free factory seat for the following year's BTCC to the champion. The inaugural season was 2003, and it was Rob Huff (above) who beat Gordon Shedden to the title. James Pickford won the '04 crown, and then the works-contract deal was cancelled for the rest of the series' life.



#2 TURBODIESEL LEON

The World Touring Car Championship had been run to Super 2000 rules since its inception in 2005, but no-one had fielded a car to the Diesel 2000 option – until SEAT brought a pair of Leon TDIs to the Anderstorp round in late July '07. Yvan Muller scored points on its debut, and claimed the title in '08 (above). The model also carried Jason Plato to third in that year's BTCC.



#3 THE CATALYST FOR TCR

The SEAT Leon Racer from the marque's one-make Eurocup formed the basis for Marcello Lotti's new TCR concept in 2015 – from which the new World Touring Car Cup and a worldwide tin-top phenomenon have evolved. Nine of the 17 cars on the grid for the first race were Leon Racers, and they took the top three spots in the points at the Macau finale (above).



Norris tops Ricard testing

FORMULA 2

British motorsport golden boy Lando Norris topped the times during the first pre-season test of the brand-new Formula 2 car at Paul Ricard last week as category returnee Carlin finished one-two.

McLaren Formula 1 reserve Norris (above) set his time on the second morning of the three days, with team-mate Sergio Sette Camara finishing 0.161 seconds adrift. Norris, the reigning Formula 3 European champion, topped the first three of the six sessions over the test.

ART Grand Prix pair George Russell and Jack Aitken made it three F2 rookies in the top five overall, with Alexander Albon splitting the duo for DAMS. Albon (twice) and Russell also topped sessions.

Aitken had one of the more dramatic moments of the test, as his car caught fire on the first morning. "After the first run there was a dramatic fire in the garage but luckily no-one was hurt," he explained. "The team were well drilled and one positive is that I demonstrated the halo is no impediment to a rapid exit when your car is on fire. The damage from that was limited mainly to the electronics, and the loom had to be changed.

"It's so difficult to judge how everyone is doing, because you have to guess what fuel loads they're on," Aitken continued. "But the pace at the end of my runs seemed pretty good."

Louis Deletraz set the sixth fastest time ahead of Trident's Haas F1 junior Arjun Maini – the Indian completed the highest laps of any driver across the three days, with a total of 233.

Nyck de Vries was the top Prema Racing driver in eighth, with Oliver Rowland ninth for DAMS. Rowland drove for the French squad on the opening two days in place of Nicholas Latifi, who is expected to race for DAMS for a third consecutive season but had to skip the trip to Paul Ricard as he recovers from the infection that prevented him from driving for Force India in the opening F1 pre-season test last month. Latifi's car was driven by 2017 Macau Grand Prix winner Dan Ticktum on the final day, and the Briton, who will race in the Formula 3 European Championship this year, was fourth in the afternoon.

Israeli Formula V8 3.5 graduate Roy Nissany brought up the rear of the field for Campos Racing. The Spanish squad is yet to announce who will partner Luca Ghiotto (11th overall in the test) during the season.

The second and final pre-season F2 test takes place in Bahrain March 21-23.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

TOP 10 TIMES

POS	DRIVER (TEAM)	TIME
1	Lando Norris (Carlin)	1m42.226s
2	Sergio Sette Camara (Carlin)	1m42.387s
3	George Russell (ART)	1m42.396s
4	Alexander Albon (DAMS)	1m42.406s
5	Jack Aitken (ART)	1m42.566s
6	Louis Deletraz (Charouz)	1m42.698s
7	Arjun Maini (Trident)	1m42.700s
8	Nyck de Vries (Prema)	1m42.701s
9	Oliver Rowland (DAMS)	1m42.840s
10	Nirei Fukuzumi (Arden)	1m43.081s

IN THE HEADLINES

OGIER PENALTY APPEAL

World Rally Championship leader Sebastien Ogier's M-Sport team says it will appeal the penalty that cost him four points on the powerstage on last weekend's Rally Mexico. Ogier, who won the rally, was hit with a 10-second penalty for clipping the barrier in a chicane, dropping him from second place on the powerstage to outside the points-paying top-five. Even FIA safety delegate Michele Mouton weighed in. "As a driver, I think 10 seconds is too much," she said.

CALDERON'S F1 UPGRADE

GP3 Series racer Tatiana Calderon has been upgraded from development driver to test driver by the Sauber Formula 1 team. The Colombian, who majored on simulator work with the team last year, is expected to get some test mileage in a non-current F1 car.

WURZ BACK IN TOYOTA

Ex-Formula 1 racer and Le Mans 24 Hours winner Alexander Wurz will return to the cockpit with Toyota's World Endurance Championship team at the official Paul Ricard test on April 6-7. The Austrian has been called up because Toyota regular Fernando Alonso will be busy racing in the Bahrain Grand Prix, and Kazuki Nakajima and Kamui Kobayashi are 'cup-tied' by the Super GT opener at Okayama.

SARRAZIN'S SMP LMP1

Prototype veteran Stephane Sarrazin has joined SMP Racing's LMP1 WEC squad after six seasons with Toyota. The Frenchman links up with Mikhail Aleshin and Vitaly Petrov in SMP's Dallara-built BR1-AER. Also joining the BR1 ranks this year is reigning Formula V8 3.5 champion and new IndyCar part-timer Pietro Fittipaldi. Emerson's grandson will join Ben Hanley and Henrik Hedman in the DragonSpeed car at Spa and Fuji because Renger van der Zande has clashing IMSA SportsCar commitments.

ARDEN'S KARTING CHAMP

European karting champion Sami Taoufik has joined Arden International to contest the Formula Renault Eurocup. The 16-year-old Moroccan, who contested some UAE Formula 4 races over the winter, joins British F4 runner-up Oscar Piastri and second-year FR2.0 racer Alex Vartanyan at the team.

OLSBERGS BACK TO WRX

Swedish rallycross team Olsbergs MSE has returned to World Rallycross for this season after previously concentrating on the US-based Global series. Kevin Eriksson (son of team boss Andreas) and Robin Larsson, who are both WRX round winners, will pilot the squad's Ford Fiesta Supercars.



EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

NIO Formula E driver Oliver Turvey has emerged as a contender for a return to the LMP2 ranks in 2018.

The class winner at the 2014 Le Mans 24 Hours has been tested by the United Autosports squad ahead of a possible European Le Mans Series drive. Turvey would take the vacant seat in one of United's Ligier-Gibson JSP217s alongside Hugo de Sadeleir and Will Owen, although team boss Richard Dean has admitted that there is still some way to go before the deal comes to fruition.

"We tested Oliver because I've always rated him and wanted to give him a run," said Dean of the outing at Motorland Aragon last week. "I'd like to get him in for the ELMS, but there is still a lot of work to do on my side to make it happen."

"He hasn't been in a P2 car for a while, so it made sense to give him some miles so that if the pieces of the jigsaw do fall into place, he's ready to go."

Giuliano Alesi, son of former Ferrari Formula 1 driver Jean Alesi, could also race a P2 in the ELMS this season. The GP3 driver was tested by G-Drive Racing at Aragon last week as the team looks to reshuffle its

driver line-up after agreeing to drop its controversial request to run an all-pro line-up in the pro-am category.

G-Drive, whose ORECA-Gibson 07 is run in conjunction with TDS Racing, is looking for a driver to share with Jean-Eric Vergne and Roman Rusinov after deciding to drop Matthieu Vaxiviere. The team said that it was dropping its bid to circumvent the rule demanding at least one amateur driver in each line-up, for the "good of the championship".

The G-Drive team also tested ELMS regular Andrea Pizzitola.

GARY WATKINS

Brit GT celeb goes Blancpain dating

BLANCPAIN GT

Reigning British GT champion Seb Morris will graduate to the Blancpain GT Endurance Cup in 2018.

The 22-year-old will drive a first-generation Bentley Continental GT3 in the pro-am class for Team Parker Racing, with which he took the British title (right). His team-mates will be Derek Pierce, who raced for Parker in BGTS in 2016,

and another gentleman driver, Ade Barwick.

"I now feel ready to leave British GT and use all the experience learned there over the past two years to mount a championship challenge," said Morris.

Ex-Formula 1 driver Vitaly Petrov will dovetail his World Endurance LMP1 assault on SMP Racing with a campaign in the BGTS enduros in the Russian entrant's colours. He will

drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 run by Auto Sport Promotion alongside ASP regular Michael Meadows and sometimes Formula Renault racer Denis Bulatov.

A works-backed second pro car from ASP will be driven by new Merc factory driver Raffaele Marciello and Tristan Vautier. Daniel Juncadella will be their team-mate in the three rounds he is available for.

GARY WATKINS





HENRY HOPE-FROST

1970-2018

The depth of a special person's influence on their peers is, sadly, never totally appreciated until they are gone. That is true of Henry Hope-Frost, who lived at full-throttle and packed more into 47 years – the past 18 with wife Charlotte as 'co-driver', joined later by the equally adored "three-man Junior Team" – than most only dream of.

Earning a living was never 'work' for Henry, especially as HHF Media Ltd thrived. As a "motoring writer, broadcaster, event host and consultant with an incurable and debilitating fever", he viewed every day as an adventure, meeting sporting icons and driving wonderful cars. Then told the world with authority and boundless enthusiasm, engaging fans globally on social media and in print.

Brought up in racing – father Tim competed in a BMW CSL – 'Hank', as I called him, was not the only petrolhead to be expelled from swanky Stowe School for attending extracurricular activities at Silverstone, on the estate's doorstep, which fuelled his passion. But of course he found his way into the professional motorsport fold, never to look back.

He joined Autosport in 1993, a classified advertisement salesman, in a post with notoriously high staff turnover. Henry's knowledge and energy earned promotion to selling display ads, then, unusually, a switch – on youthful editor Bruce Jones's watch – to editorial in September '95. Our careers overlapped there for 18 months before I went freelance after 20 years.

He had an encyclopaedic memory for international racing, rallying and motorcycle sport, and his scarily lifelike

engine impressions – from shrill V12s to off-kilter five-cylinder Audi Quattros, chattering turbo wastegates akimbo – had sufficient gravitas to make those in adjoining offices peer incredulously over partitions or take cover.

Henry was the voice of Autosport International (grilling stellar casts in marathon four-day stints on stage) and Race Retro, and a prolific MC. He knew everybody and they loved and respected him, producing brilliant material with Sir Stirling Moss, John Surtees, Nigel Mansell among many.

Supremely confident, with a laid-back delivery, he developed into a fine colour commentator, particularly at Goodwood, where he had worked on the day of his death in a motorcycle accident. To Bruce Jones and I fall the split-second Revival and Members' Meeting race-reading, but Hank was our vital pits and paddock prowler, gridwalk guru and podium greeter, adding topical human interest stories with the right words while uploading countless images to social media – even from McLaren and Lola Can-Am cars post-race!

As anchor of Radio Goodwood, Henry was mischievous interlocutor, master statistician and clown prince. His scything wit and unexpected tangential diversions were priceless, bringing tears of joy and mirth. If that extraordinary dynamic, a team bond, is subdued this weekend it is because it was unique and is irreplaceable, like the man who habitually changed the name on his Starbucks' coffee cups to reflect racing heroes' birthdays... RIP Fevermeister, mate.

MARCUS PYE

TRIBUTES

JENSON BUTTON

So sad that such a great man lost his life. U could always tell how passionate Henry Hope-Frost was about motorsport when he interviewed you, it felt so natural like you were having a good old chinwag with ur closest mate. Sending love to his family.

DAMON HILL

Shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden loss of the lovely Henry Hope-Frost. Our thoughts are for his family at this terrible time.

NIGEL MANSELL

Sad sad day for all. Henry Hope-Frost extraordinary loss to the world. Our condolences and love to his family. Just so shocked to hear the news. RIP

DEREK WARWICK

This is the 100th time trying to find the right words for Henry Hope-Frost. Gentleman, funny, committed, passion, professional, caring, his love for everything that had engine was absorbing. I will miss u my friend. RIP & LOVE to all your family

JASON PLATO

My god mate, I'm so gunna miss you. But right now my thoughts are with your loved ones of which there are many. Sleep well my friend.

EMANUELE PIRRO

So shocked to hear about Henry Hope-Frost accident. His passion, his competence, his style and his humor were second to none and will be always missed! Historic racing will not be the same without him... his wife and children should be proud of him and to them I send my sympathy.

MARK GILLIES

The Revival is going to feel strange without Henry's presence. I don't know how he did it, but he could poke a microphone in your face just before the parade lap and it never felt intrusive. And his knowledge was amazing, even to a trainspotter/serious anorak like me.

GOODWOOD TRIBUTE

A tribute to Henry Hope-Frost will be held before this Saturday's Formula 5000 demo at the Goodwood Members' Meeting. Engines will fire up for a 'Minute of Fever'. Friends of Goodwood has created a run of stickers, in the old black-and-gold Lotus livery, sporting the HHF logo and #FEVER.

JUSTGIVING PAGE

A justgiving page was launched by friends of the Hope-Frosts to help the family: www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/friendsofhenryhope-frost



LONG ROAD AHEAD

The dominance of Mercedes serves to highlight the scale of the task faced by Renault in its intention to be a championship contender

EDD STRAW

Mercedes was first to hit the track in pre-season testing at Jerez at the start of the V6-turbo-hybrid Formula 1 era in 2014; it has remained one step ahead since. Pre-season testing suggests that a fifth consecutive drivers' and constructors' championship double, which would elevate it to the same level as the Ferrari supremacy of 2000-04, is achievable.

Excellence breeds contempt, in sport at least, because it's so easy to take for granted. It shouldn't be, given how difficult it is to stay on top, especially through the major aerodynamic rule changes of 2017. But a glance at another team holds up a mirror to Mercedes that reflects the astonishing level the German manufacturer has reached — and that team is Renault.

That's not to deride Renault, far from it. This is season three of the five-year plan to turn itself into a championship contender, and the size of the mountain it's climbing is a monument to Mercedes' excellence.

Hysteresis is, in crude terms, the lag between the effect of an input and its effect. In Formula 1, you most often hear it used technically in terms of the suspension behaviour, or the lag between, say, closing the DRS and the airflow

“RENAULT IS INVESTING IN ENSTONE, BUT THE EFFECT WON'T BE FELT IN TERMS OF FIGHTING FOR TITLES FOR YEARS”

reattaching to the wing surface. Renault is making big inputs to Enstone in the form of large-scale investment, but the effect of that, realistically, won't be felt in terms of contending for championships for some years. Financial hysteresis, you might say.

This underlines why Formula 1 is in an invidious position. It's not only the business model of F1 itself that has become distorted, but the nature of the teams. Most are sustained by shareholder investment, be it from a manufacturer or the independent owners. There's only a small cadre of teams doing F1 in what could be called the 'traditional' way, of relying on sponsors and prize money to sustain themselves.

Renault is reliant on investment from its owner. By the end of this season, its Enstone base is set to expand to contain

around 700 staff. That's an increase of about 13% from the same point last year and represents an annual spend of several million pounds in salaries alone. Even so, that leaves Enstone just over 150 short of what Mercedes had at Brackley at the end of 2017.

There was a time when building up an F1 squad could be done relatively quickly and easily. But the size and scale means a modern team is an edifice that must be painstakingly constructed. And to justify further cash injections, it must climb to a clear fourth overall.

“Until we can do that, and demonstrate in particular to Renault that we're capable of doing that, they are not going to start writing cheques for a lot more people or resources,” says Renault Sport F1 chief technical officer Bob Bell. “We have to prove ourselves every step of the way.”

On track, Renault looks promising. The car is decent, but seems it could be behind natural enemy McLaren-Renault on pace. That's still enough for it to be in the mix for fourth in the constructors' championship, and at least the fifth place that would represent a step forward from last year. But it's a congested part of the field, and failure this year could further delay its rise.

The Renault RS18 doesn't look revolutionary compared to its predecessor, but under the skin significant work has been done. And with initiatives such as the blown rear wing and the revised front wing introduced during the second test, it's clear it has upped its game.

On the engine side, there are still problems at Viry. The MGU-K, developed in-house, which was originally supposed to be used last season, remains unreliable and on the test bench. Although Renault says it is now part of a more comprehensive ERS upgrade, the timeline for its introduction is vague. Realistically, it may not be before June — and it could be much later. How much progress will AMG Mercedes High Performance Powertrains at Brixworth have made in that time?

It is testament to Mercedes that it's in such a strong position — nobody can or should attempt to take that away from anyone involved. But it's also testament to how far F1 has drifted from where it once was. And fixing it isn't going to be easy. After all, you can't just wave a magic wand and make things dramatically cheaper — doubly so given the implications of putting a four-figure number of people out of work.

All we can do is hope that Enstone does indeed rise again. It retains some of the magic that has made it something of an F1 giantkiller in the past, so the odds are it will do. But this time, to slay F1's giant, it has to become a Goliath in its own right. 🍀

YOUR SAY

I'm not a fan of the halo, but surely F1 has a far bigger style problem, that of design diversity, or lack of – all the cars look the same!

GUY WRENCH

A man who lived and breathed motorsport

Say the word 'fever' in motorsport company and the chances are you were talking with, or about, Henry Hope-Frost, who lost his life last week. Henry certainly had 'the fever'. Despite interviewing a wide range of motorsport personalities, many of whom were his heroes, Henry never lost that boyish enthusiasm for all things motorsport. His vocal impressions of engines, notably a Group B Audi Quattro on the limit [*we raise you Matra V12 – ed*], livened up many editorial days at Autosport.

His brain was like a sponge, soaking up facts and trivia for which he had almost total recall. Henry will be sadly missed by all who knew him and my thoughts go to Charlotte and the kids he absolutely adored.

Keith Oswin

Brentford, Middlesex

Why didn't F1 carry out more screen tests?

The article about Richard Lloyd (Autosport Engineering, March 1) was fascinating, but what caught my eye was the Pininfarina Sigma, in particular the wrap-around 'windscreen', a far more attractive solution than the halo.

A screen was tested by IndyCar with positive results, but as I recall a similar design was only tested once by Sebastian Vettel in a Ferrari when he complained of poor vision. This was the opinion of a single driver in a very short test; it is surprising further tests weren't carried out using different designs. There seems to be plenty of money to research ever more powerful levels of the dreaded downforce, but nobody spent time on the windscreen solution!

There are surely weight savings to be gained by a screen rather than the halo – all the teams have commented on the difficulties inherent in fitting a heavy object on top of the car.

Neil Davey

Newport, South Wales

Recalling the days of design diversity

I'm not a fan of the halo, but surely F1 has a far bigger style problem, that of design diversity, or lack of – all the cars



look the same! Hideous front wings; flat, box-like cockpits; plus weird fins, wings, venturis, gills and vanes all over. It's daft and, while technically stimulating, these features are outrageously expensive and, ironically, harm the racing half of motor racing.

Those of a certain age will remember fondly the Lotus 72 wedge, the Brabham BT34 lobster claw, the Ligier JS5 teapot (above) and the Eifelland March 721 periscope to name but a few. How about Autosport stimulating our visual senses with features on a few of these extraordinary machines?

Guy Wrench

By email

When snow failed to stop play

I enjoyed Nigel Roebuck's column on racing in the snow (March 8). Some years ago, A1GP came to Laguna Seca in March, which should have been fine weather; but it snowed. I remember a young driver in his first professional race, at a track his father had excelled at. Graham Rahal led the race until he spun out in the river flowing over Turn 3. His family were still pleased in the paddock after the race.

Bruce Merchant

By email

HAVE YOUR SAY, GET IN TOUCH

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F1 PREVIEW 2018



**TEST WAR
ALL THE CARS
ALL THE DRIVERS**





How far has Mercedes moved the goalposts?

Red Bull and Ferrari have shown promise in testing, but there's something ominous about the way the Silver Arrows have gone about their business

EDD STRAW

EVOLUTION HAS BEATEN REVOLUTION IN THE 2018 Formula 1 pre-season. The Mercedes W09 is not a dramatic change from its predecessor, but it is a clear step forward and shares one thing in common with its four ancestors in the V6-turbo-hybrid era of grand prix racing: it has raised the bar. And it is seriously fast.

What's more, it's reliable too. For the fifth consecutive year, Mercedes completed more miles than any other team in testing. We've become so accustomed to the latest Silver Arrow hitting the track, running reliably and working well that it's easy to forget just how remarkable a job this team is doing.

"We think we have learned that we are starting on a solid footing," says Mercedes technical director James Allison. "It has been reliable, it has been predictable, it doesn't overheat, it has been pretty well-balanced, and it seems like it is fast enough to compete at the sharp end of the grid in Melbourne."

A glance at the car shows that the word 'evolution' does not necessarily imply any lack of work or attention. It's refined in every area, and showed no evidence of sharing the 'diva' characteristics of the 2017 car, caused partially by occasional difficulties in keeping the Pirelli in the optimum temperature window. Look at the rear end, and the tightness of the packing is remarkable, with the slim sidepods reckoned by Allison to be worth a quarter of a second

per lap. It's a measure of how secure the Mercedes team is in what it's done that he is happy to make that proclamation.

Those who have looked only at the headline lap times might find the assertion that Mercedes is on top to be a curious one. After all, the fastest lap produced by Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes was 1.218s off the unofficial-record testing pace of Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel (see page 18 and test data on page 20). The step in pace of 1.4s since last year's pre-season is down to a combination of a track that is faster thanks to resurfacing work that has evened out the bumps, the inexorable increase in downforce, and Pirelli's softer range of tyres compared to 2017.

Both drivers used the hypersoft rubber, Pirelli's new softest compound, to set their best times, but there's no doubt that the Mercedes would be well into the 1m16s bracket on an equivalent fuel load to the Ferrari.

Looking at the fastest times set by each car over the course of the eight days of testing paints a misleading picture. This does not factor in fuel loads, which will have varied, and there are some dissenters from the majority that set their quickest times using the hypersoft. For reference, the average step from soft to supersoft according to Pirelli was 0.4s, then a further 0.6s to ultrasoft, and then 0.7-0.8s to the hypersoft – although these numbers varied from team to team. >>



PORTLOCK/LAT

GARY ANDERSON'S TEST-PACE ANALYSIS

THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF people who will disagree with this analysis of the competitive order based on pre-season testing. And I hope I am wrong.

To make any sense of these two pre-season tests is pretty difficult. But over the days a trend emerges, and that points to Mercedes having once again done an exceptional

job. Performance, reliability and tyre degradation all look to be under control with the W09. The only little fly in the ointment may just be that Mercedes won't be as good as others when push comes to shove using softer tyres for qualifying.

Mercedes has shedloads of data on the medium and probably the soft

tyres, but less than other teams on the super, ultra and hypersoft versions.

I'm not going to get into what fuel loads different teams were running, because I would only be guessing. Suffice to say that normally the smaller teams would go for a glory run more often than the bigger teams. Fuel weight is a fairly straight delta to

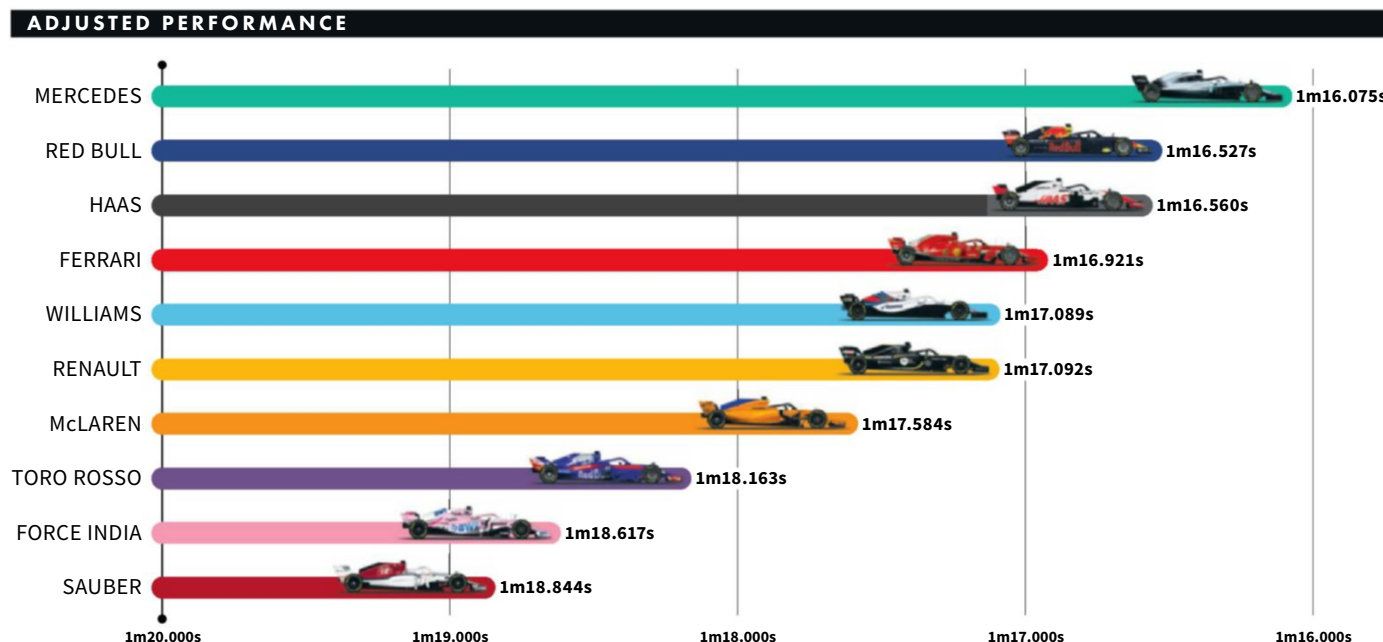
the lap time, so they can just apply that to know where they really stand.

I'm using the following differences in pace between compounds, based on what we've seen from the lap times rather than Pirelli's averages: Medium to soft **0.2s**
Soft to supersoft **0.4s**
Supersoft to ultrasoft **0.6s**
Ultrasoft to hypersoft **0.8s**

Add to that a fuel effect of 0.05s per lap for the fuel-load reduction on the run that the time was set on, and we can create an adjusted ranking.

Pirelli reckons that the medium to soft-tyre delta should be 0.8s. But if you use that the Merc isn't just ahead – it's miles ahead. And I don't agree, anyway.

GARY ANDERSON



THE MIDFIELD BATTLE

AS IN THE PAST FOUR seasons, Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari ended testing with a clear pace advantage over the rest. You can make a case for a number of teams leading the chasing pack, but despite embarrassing reliability problems McLaren looks well-placed to take up this position.

Fernando Alonso set the third-fastest time of pre-season testing overall, behind only the two Ferrari drivers, during a qualifying simulation in the closing stages of the final day. On track the car looks relatively strong, although into the few low-speed corners the rear end was a little unstable. With a major upgrade planned for the Australian Grand Prix, after McLaren ran with what it claimed was a relatively conservative specification for testing, this could further close a large gap to the front. But more importantly, it could allow McLaren to be best of the rest in Australia.

"The feeling in the car is very positive," says McLaren driver Stoffel Vandoorne. "We've had a very positive feeling in the car since the start of testing. Obviously, there are a few areas we have to work on. Our car in Melbourne will be quite different; there will be a lot of updates coming."

But reliability is a big worry given the litany of problems that meant no team completed fewer

laps than McLaren. In the battle with Renault, McLaren looks to have the edge on single-lap pace and, based on race runs, an advantage of about 0.4s per lap. Renault looked strong early in testing, but did struggle at times over the bumps.

"We have designed the suspension so we can tune it more this year," says Renault technical director Nick Chester. "The kerbs aren't fierce and the track is really smooth, so we haven't got much of a judgement on ride yet. I think we will have a bit of work to do when we get to Melbourne and we get all the bumpy braking areas and the big kerbs, and we are going to have to play with set-up there."

Haas and Force India look closely matched but, with the latter bringing an upgrade that is hoped to be worth 0.5s to the Australian Grand Prix, that could change dramatically. Haas too has some upgrades scheduled, and both teams will be in contention for Q3. It underlines why Haas needs to make hay early in the year with a car that looks basic compared to some, but that clearly works.

The Haas ran strongly and was well-balanced from the start of testing, and Kevin Magnussen showed that the team does have good single-lap pace. It does not have as substantial an upgrade as Force India plans for Australia, but it will be a

serious points threat in Melbourne. And the race-simulation pace of both Haas and Force India suggests it's not out of the question that they could challenge for best of the rest, even if single-lap pace is less conclusive – depending on what fuel correction you apply for the Haas team.

Williams had a troubled test, spending much of the time working on aero experiments with its dramatically revised car, but Sergey Sirotkin's pace on ultrasofts on the final day hinted that it may have got on top of its troubles with

"McLAREN COULD BE BEST OF THE REST IN AUSTRALIA"

turn-in stability and getting the tyres to work. That's encouraging for Williams, which could therefore spring a surprise in Australia.

Sauber looks to be at the back based on testing and, while the Toro Rosso had some eye-catching moments in its first pre-season with Honda power, it looks to be a little bit behind the contenders for best of the rest.

Whatever happens, it's likely that the difference in pace between the final spots in Q3 and those that miss out won't be big.



Haas has decent pace, but needs to make hay early before rivals upgrade

RAW PACE

Fastest lap set in testing by team

POS	TEAM	TIME	TYRE
1	Ferrari	1m17.182s	hypersoft
2	McLaren	1m17.784s	hypersoft
3	Red Bull	1m18.047s	hypersoft
4	Renault	1m18.092s	hypersoft
5	Haas	1m18.360s	supersoft
6	Toro Rosso	1m18.363s	hypersoft
7	Mercedes	1m18.400s	ultrasoft
8	Force India	1m18.967s	hypersoft
9	Sauber	1m19.118s	hypersoft
10	Williams	1m19.189s	soft



Ferrari turned up the wick in the final couple of days to lay claim to be Merc's closest challenger

The confidence in Mercedes is instead rooted in its race-simulation times, which suggest that over the course of a Spanish Grand Prix race distance it has a good 0.4s per lap in hand over the rest. If that's an accurate read, and it is based on very similar race simulations by both Hamilton and team-mate Valtteri Bottas, it supports the suggestion that the Mercedes single-lap pace would be in the 1m16s bracket. And well into it. That's bad news for the rest. And despite Mercedes downplaying its speed and pointing out a lack of running on the softer tyre compounds, the team won't have any serious doubts about this.

"The long runs and race simulation was very positive," says Bottas. "We don't think we're any way near one second ahead of everyone — that's not the case. [But] it was positive.

"It's nice to get some race simulation under my belt and feel the tyres and the car in the long run.

"There's so much more time in testing to try different things in the car and get comfortable in there. Lewis is pretty much

doing the same. I have to say the pure one-lap pace is unknown, but I guess we'll find out in a couple of weeks."

But while the identity of the pacesetter team is clear, the naming of its closest challenger is open to debate. Over the course of last season, Ferrari filled that role, but pre-season testing hints that Red Bull will be leading the charge. This is despite a comparison of race simulations, even adjusting for anomalies and tyre differences, suggesting Ferrari may have a slender advantage. But a combination of trackside observations, adjusted single-lap pace and the impressions of rival teams indicate Red Bull could be the bigger threat despite the 40-50bhp power deficit.

"The ultimate goal is that we hopefully have more teams fighting for the championship," says Hamilton. "That's only good for the sport. I think Red Bull could be a real challenge this year. Their car looks great and I've not seen anything of the Ferrari, but I'm sure that's good as well. It's really exciting."

But the picture was muddled by Ferrari's form over the final »



two days of testing, which suggested it had made some progress in getting on top of its high-rake car. While the tea tray under the front of the monocoque was still scraping the ground in faster corners, Vettel's race simulation last Thursday was the best of any non-Mercedes.

"Ferrari turned it up the last couple of days, they had very good pace," said Red Bull driver Daniel Ricciardo after the final day of running. "It's hard to say [what the order is]. And then you see some other teams throw in some quick times.

"I don't think we're the quickest, so I think we still do have lap time to find. But I do believe we're in the ballpark. We're there or thereabouts."

The Ferrari improvement Ricciardo refers to does suggest the Italian team has made some progress with getting on top of its problems. As per its policy last season, the insecurity of the Ferrari team and its leadership continues to be reflected by its fear of the media, so on-record comment was hard to come by. But there's enough evidence to mean that come the Australian Grand Prix the biggest area of interest is whether it will be Red Bull or Ferrari that's the closest challenger to Mercedes. On the balance of testing, you'd say Red Bull, but Ferrari may well have found a new level.

"We'll see in two weeks," said Kimi Raikkonen of Ferrari's prospects after the final day of testing. "I'm sure if we want to go faster, we can, but it doesn't mean anything here. Until then, we are only guessing like we were before testing started.

"Overall it's a strong package. Obviously, there are always things to improve, and that's normal with any car, even if you win races. But it's very reliable; it seems to work in a pretty easy way."

Red Bull also delivered on its ambition of running more reliably during testing, notching up 3645km. This is an encouraging sign for a team that suffered serious reliability problems during pre-season testing and the races last year.

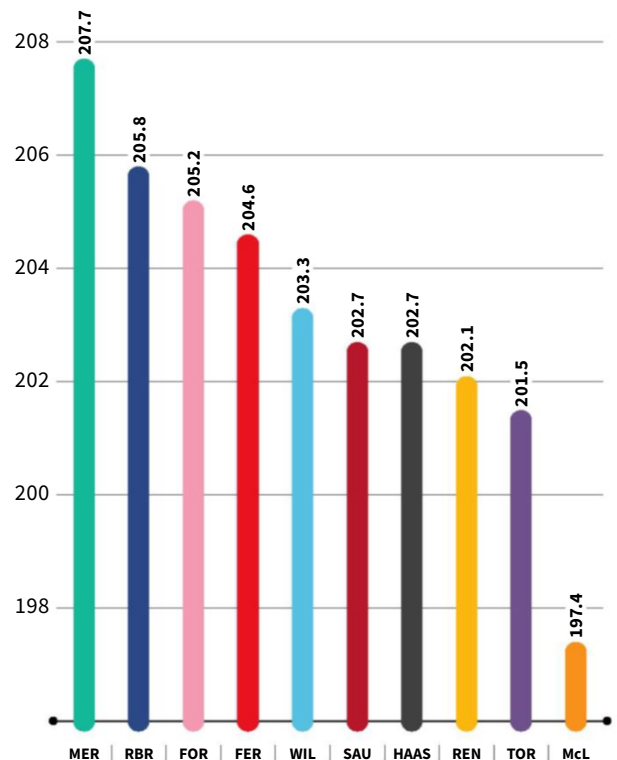
"We're certainly more ready than we were last year — and probably every year before that since I've been with the team," says Ricciardo. "We did a lot of laps, I think the pace of the car is not bad. We still have some things to improve, [but] it's normal.

"But going to the [first] race and having confidence to push the car on the limit and push the engine a little bit, I think we have much more confidence now."

As always in testing, this situation could change come the start of the season. All three leading teams will introduce further upgrades in Australia, after all. But what you can be absolutely sure of is that you should not be betting against Mercedes.

Testing-pace analysis is inevitably cloudy and it won't be until qualifying in Melbourne a week on Saturday that we see where everyone really stands. But on current evidence, Ferrari's record of five consecutive drivers'/constructors' championship titles is under serious threat of being equalled by Mercedes this year. ❦

SPEED TRAP MPH (TEST 2)



BARCELONA TEST TIMES MARCH 6-9 (TEST 2)

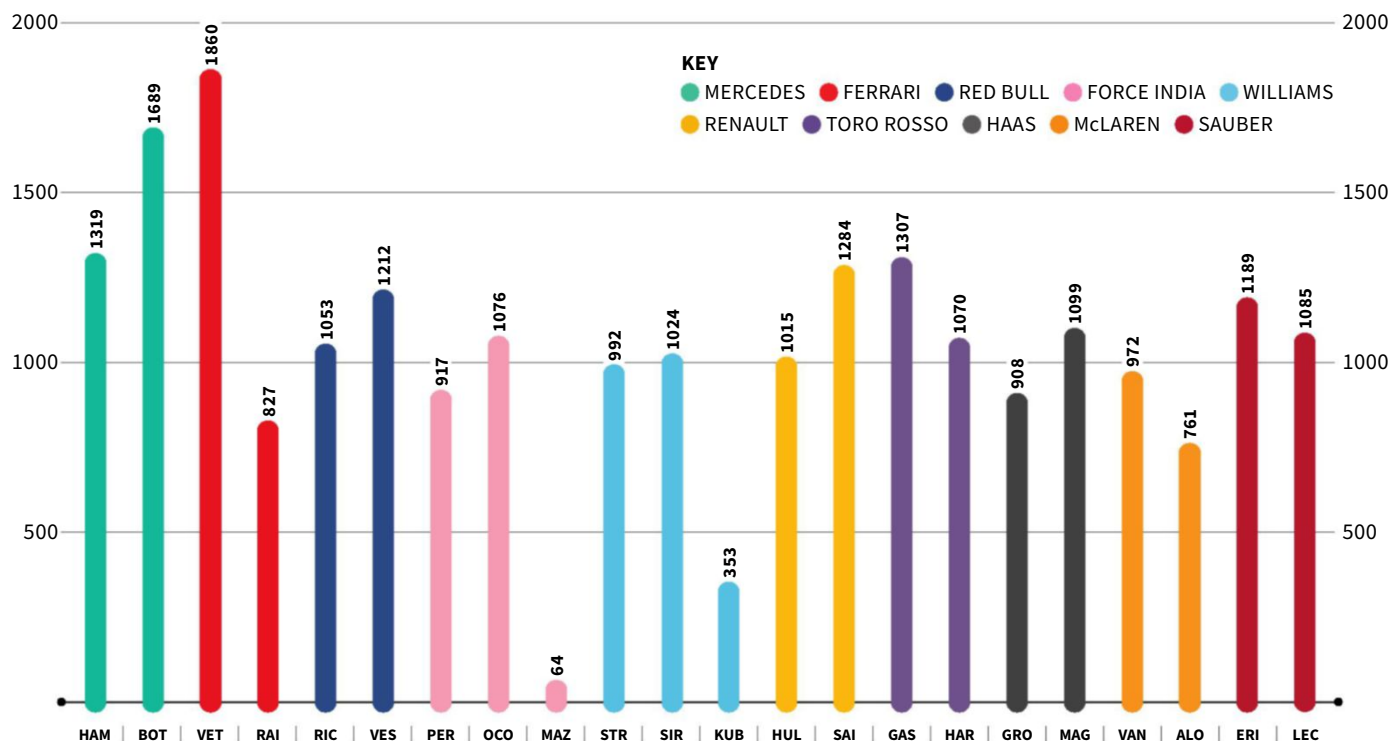
POS	DRIVER	CAR	TUESDAY
1	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari SF71H	1m20.396s
2	Kimi Raikkonen	Ferrari SF71H	-
3	Fernando Alonso	McLaren-Renault MCL33	-
4	Daniel Ricciardo	Red Bull-Renault RB14	-
5	Carlos Sainz	Renault RS18	1m21.455s
6	Kevin Magnussen	Haas-Ferrari VF-18	1m21.298s
7	Pierre Gasly	Toro Rosso-Honda STR13	1m20.973s
8	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes F1 W09	1m20.808s
9	Romain Grosjean	Haas-Ferrari VF-18	-
10	Valtteri Bottas	Mercedes F1 W09	1m20.596s
11	Nico Hulkenberg	Renault RS18	1m21.432s
12	Stoffel Vandoorne	McLaren-Renault MCL33	1m21.946s
13	Brendon Hartley	Toro Rosso-Honda STR13	-
14	Esteban Ocon	Force India-Mercedes VJM11	-
15	Charles Leclerc	Sauber-Ferrari C37	-
16	Sergey Sirotkin	Williams-Mercedes FW41	1m21.588s
17	Marcus Ericsson	Sauber-Ferrari C37	1m21.706s
18	Robert Kubica	Williams-Mercedes FW41	-
19	Sergio Perez	Force India-Mercedes VJM11	1m21.643s
20	Max Verstappen	Red Bull-Renault RB14	1m20.649s
21	Lance Stroll	Williams-Mercedes FW41	1m22.937s

The fastest time for each driver is marked in bold, with fastest time of the day in red.

TESTING DATA

TOTAL LAPS COMPLETED 7978 RED FLAGS 13

MILES COMPLETED BY DRIVER (TESTS 1 AND 2 COMBINED)



OVERALL BEST TIMES (TESTS 1 AND 2 COMBINED)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	TIME	LAPS
1	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari	1m17.182s	643
2	Kimi Raikkonen	Ferrari	1m17.221s	286
3	Fernando Alonso	McLaren	1m17.784s	263
4	Daniel Ricciardo	Red Bull	1m18.047s	364
5	Carlos Sainz	Renault	1m18.092s	444
6	Kevin Magnussen	Haas	1m18.360s	380
7	Pierre Gasly	Toro Rosso	1m18.363s	452
8	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	1m18.400s	456
9	Romain Grosjean	Haas	1m18.412s	314
10	Valtteri Bottas	Mercedes	1m18.560s	584
11	Nico Hulkenberg	Renault	1m18.675s	351
12	Stoffel Vandoorne	McLaren	1m18.855s	336
13	Brendon Hartley	Toro Rosso	1m18.949s	370
14	Esteban Ocon	Force India	1m18.967s	372
15	Charles Leclerc	Sauber	1m19.118s	375
16	Sergey Sirotkin	Williams	1m19.189s	354
17	Marcus Ericsson	Sauber	1m19.244s	411
18	Robert Kubica	Williams	1m19.629s	122
19	Sergio Perez	Force India	1m19.634s	317
20	Max Verstappen	Red Bull	1m19.842s	419
21	Lance Stroll	Williams	1m19.954s	343
22	Nikita Mazepin	Force India	1m25.628s	22

MILES BY TEAM (COMBINED)

POS	TEAM	MILES
1	Mercedes	3008
2	Ferrari	2687
3	Toro Rosso	2377
4	Williams	2369
5	Renault	2299
6	Sauber	2274
7	Red Bull	2265
8	Force India	2057
9	Haas	2007
10	McLaren	1733

MILES BY ENGINE (COMBINED)

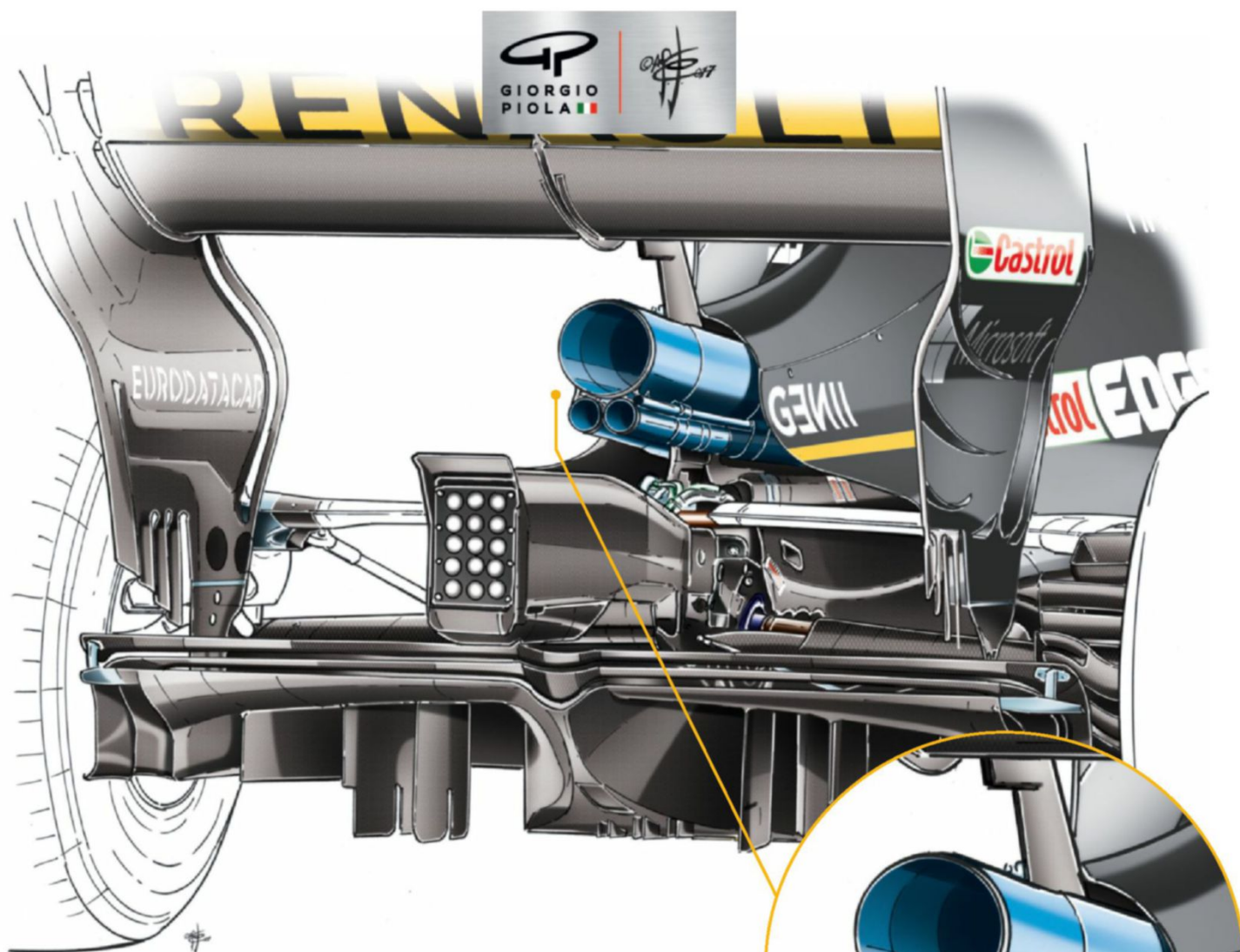
POS	ENGINE	MILES
1	Mercedes	7434
2	Ferrari	6968
3	Renault	6297
4	Honda	2377



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TECHNICAL FOCUS

GARY ANDERSON AND GIORGIO PIOLA



RENAULT BLOWN REAR WING

Exhaust-blown aerodynamic components are nothing new. As I always say, you should never forget what you have learned.

For the V6-turbo era, the exhaust-exit size and position were defined in the regulations, meaning it was more or less in the middle of nowhere and had little effect other than to help energise the airflow on what was called the saddle wing (also known as a “monkey seat”). This was a small aerodynamic section placed just above the

exhaust exit. This in turn helped the performance of the rear wing.

For 2018, regulation changes meant the saddle wing was eliminated and in regulation 5.8 the exhaust-exit location was tightened up, with the intention of eliminating any potential for exhaust blowing on the rear wing.

As you can see from Renault's efforts, it has placed the exhaust exit as high as possible and angled up at five degrees, which is the maximum. There is still a little benefit to be

generated from this higher airspeed as it leaves the exhaust and wastegate exits. The effect will be small, but it will still be something.

The negatives are the heat on the rear-wing surfaces, but with modern carbonfibre resin technologies this shouldn't be a problem.

Also, since you are shutting the throttle at the end of the straight, which reduces the flow at the same time as you are closing the DRS, it

could encounter some rear-wing airflow-reattachment problems entering the braking area.

When I was watching trackside, I didn't see any real problems with this, but it could be a different matter when the ambient temperatures increase. GA

RED BULL EXHAUST COMPARISON

The Renault works team is the first to push the limits on exhaust-outlet placement by putting it as high as possible in an attempt to improve the performance of the rear wing. Nobody else has done it yet; in comparison, the Renault-engined Red Bull has its exhaust outlet lower and just above the rear crash structure, reducing the effect of the exhaust gases on the rear wing.

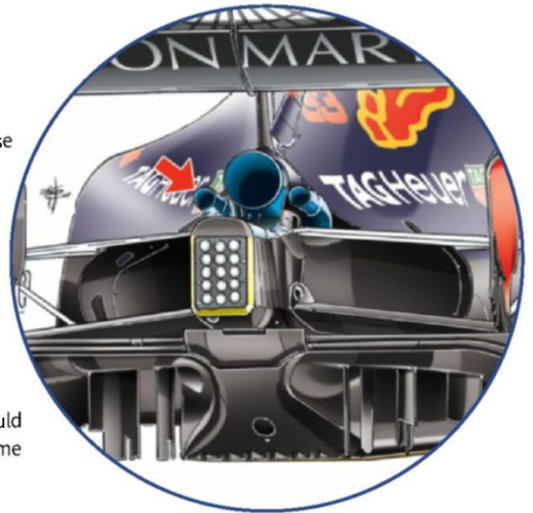
A few years ago, when we had exhaust-blown diffusers, it was

critical that the drivers could get back on the throttle early to set those exhaust gases flowing and improve the diffuser's performance to increase underfloor grip levels.

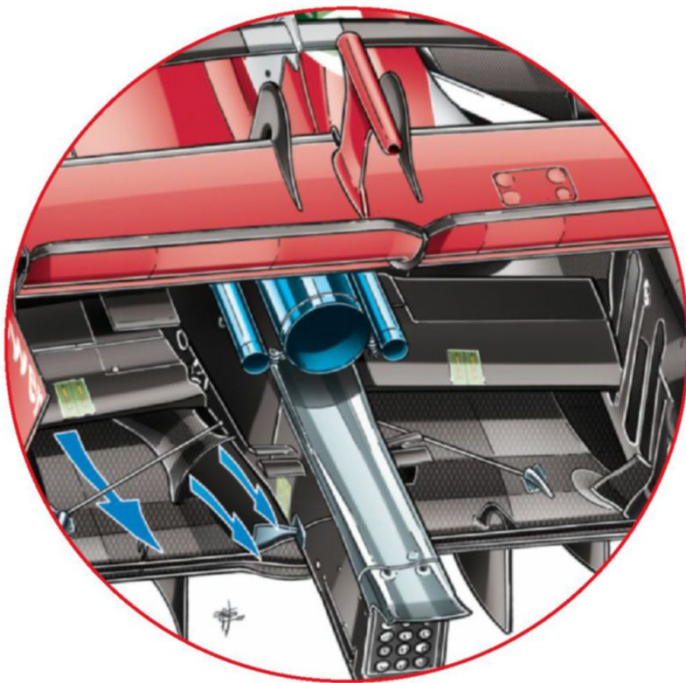
Any effect from the current system will all be rear-wing improvement. This means there will be a bigger balance change from on to off throttle. Yes, it will give more rear grip when you get on the throttle on corner exit, yielding better traction, but on corner entry when you are off

the throttle you will lose rear grip – and rear grip on corner entry is normally what these drivers are scrabbling for.

On this one the jury is still out. Is it a big enough advantage to justify the balance change? Some cars could probably use it and some just don't need it. **GA**



FERRARI COOLING DUCTS



The current generation of cars have very high cooling requirements, means that inlet and outlet cooling ducts appear in some very strange places.

You have to cool engine water, engine oil, gearbox oil, hydraulic oil, battery-pack cooling fluid, the ERS control unit, the engine air-inlet charge, the MGU-K and the MGU-H. That's not to mention the general airflow required to move hot air from the engine bay so it doesn't create hot spots that melt anything in the vicinity.

To get some cooling flow, you need to find a position that has high pressure for the inlet and an area that has low pressure for the outlet. Open these up and stick something like a radiator in the

middle of the ducting and you have cooling potential.

Ferrari has done that on its underfloor. I'm not sure what it's cooling, but there are two outlets on the top surface of the floor. These are in close to the sides of the gearbox and they are ducted forward along the sides of the engine. They may just be creating some airflow along the sides of the engine to help cool the MGU-K, but I suspect that they may cool the battery and ERS control unit.

Ferrari had something similar last year. The airflow in this area is fairly stagnant, so this means that Ferrari is probably getting some degree of cooling for a very small deficit in the overall airflow over the car's surfaces. **GA**

RENAULT FRONT WING

Renault introduced a front-wing assembly during the second test that was described as a "different concept" and which will be used in Melbourne. While it may be a different concept for Renault, there's nothing new under the sun.

Starting with the front, the upper outer turning vanes are a little more simple. Visually, they do what you'd expect them to do – turn the airflow over the top of the front-wing endplate and around the outside of the front tyre. It's very similar to Ferrari in this area.

The front element of the main wing is very low to ground, so it will work in ground-effect most of the time. A little higher and it would go out of ground-effect, which changes the loads on the front wing fairly dramatically,

and this is not really what the driver wants to feel.

The flaps are interesting, since the slot gaps vary in size as they come inboard. At the inner end, the third-element slot gap opens up significantly and the gap between the third and fourth element also varies in size just before the inner ends of the flap.

All the slot gaps increase near the inner end, reducing any vortices that would normally be created in this area when an aerodynamic component with different pressures ends suddenly.

The area of the flap section is very important to the airflow to the bargeboard and underfloor leading edge, which are the major aerodynamic components behind the front wing. **GA**



Trackside verdict

Ex-Formula 1 racer and TV pundit on what he made of the cars in testing

KARUN CHANDHOK

EVERY YEAR I TRY TO PICK THE SAME SPOTS AROUND the Circuit de Catalunya at Barcelona to watch the pre-season tests. It's a great track to walk around and watch at close quarters because you can see a whole range of corners and areas where cars show their strengths and weaknesses. Fast corners, slow corners, changes of direction, braking and traction – they can all be judged by your eyes and ears and, pretty much every year, my list matches up with the lap times because there's nowhere to hide.



Has Mercedes swapped diva for dominance?

LAST YEAR FERRARI LOOKED LIKE it was a real match for Mercedes in pre-season testing, and when we got to Melbourne that proved to be the case. This year, however, the Brackley squad seems to have taken another good step forward.

Visually the car is a logical update on 2017's championship winner, but it's obviously had all the right changes to make it much more user-friendly. Watching Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas out on track, they are able to metronomically hit the same line lap after lap with remarkable consistency. And speed.

Mercedes has been very smart about not showing its hand with the faster tyres, but make no mistake, a quick look at the race runs shows very clearly that the W09 is a step ahead of the pack. I reckon the gap

is about 0.4 seconds at the moment. Unless Mercedes has some dramatic chassis imbalance when the softer tyres get bolted on – highly unlikely – it is unquestionably on top.

Watching at the very fast Turn 9 right-hander, Bottas carried an unbelievable amount of speed through the apex on the medium tyres, with fuel on board. In contrast, when watching either the Ferrari or

the Red Bull on the long run, they just didn't have the grip to carry the same speed through.

The change of direction with the front end seemed to be a good step forward from last year. When you watch either Mercedes driver between Turns 2 and 3 or further around the lap in the final sector, they are able to change direction incredibly sharply when they have

a sequence of corners. This allows them to just open up the line to the second part of a sequence and carry more apex speed than anyone else.

This is particularly worrying for the opposition as the opportunities they had last year were on slower, twistier circuits. Clearly that area of weakness has been focused on and dealt with.

From a power-unit standpoint, the driveability seems extraordinary. Not once do you hear of the drivers struggling for traction, despite trying to put an estimated 1000bhp onto the ground. Mercedes continues to be the gold standard in reliability terms, with an incredible 201 laps on the final day of testing to just drive the point home.

For the sake of Formula 1 and the show, I really hope that Bottas can take the fight to Hamilton this year.





Ferrari versus Red Bull

THE HEADLINES FROM THE LAST week of testing show that Ferrari and Red Bull shared the quickest times across the four days. But come qualifying in Melbourne, I think the entire paddock will be pretty shocked if anything other than a Mercedes is on pole position.

Watching the Ferrari out on track, it's clearly a fast car. Last year in pre-season testing, it looked like an easier car to drive than the Mercedes, but this time around, every time the drivers try to lean on it a bit more and extract some more speed, it just doesn't seem to be there.

At Turn 4, for example, Kimi Raikkonen would charge in and try to get the nose to bite, but it just doesn't dig in and pivot in the same way the Mercedes does. The rotation that they need mid-corner to get the car

to turn while carrying the apex speed they want isn't there in the medium and slow-speed corners. Watching at T11 and T12 showed the stark difference between the lazier Ferrari and the sharper Mercedes in changes of direction.

Red Bull looks like it has carried on its progression from the end of 2017, when the chassis was working brilliantly. It's hard to fault the RB14 in the slow and medium-speed corners, and the braking stability into T1 and T10 looked excellent.

But in the faster corners the Mercedes still looks like it's got a bit of an advantage. When I looked at T9 on the race runs, I noticed Daniel Ricciardo had a much bigger lift than Bottas and, every time he would have a go at just a bit more apex speed, he would just run out of road.



Red Bull's main weakness could still be in the power department. Renault seems to have made good progress on the reliability front, with some good testing mileage being banked by Red Bull and the works Enstone team. I hope that this means the power can be turned up a bit more in qualifying, but insiders still

reckon Renault is going to be about 40bhp down on the Mercedes.

On the whole, I would say that Red Bull and Ferrari are very evenly matched. They even did race runs at similar times of the day, which helped us see that they were close. Both need a big step forward with updates to catch Mercedes.

Is Red Bull in McLaren's sights?

MCLAREN HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST talking point of the pre-season tests. All through the winter, Formula 1 fans around the world were praying that the switch to Renault power would allow Fernando Alonso and the team to be fighting at the sharp end once again.

McLaren had a catalogue of reliability woes and, when the car was running, the team chose a strategy of testing with softer tyres than anyone else for most of the time, which made it hard to draw any conclusions about the MCL33's true pace.

On the last couple of days we

saw some long runs from Stoffel Vandoorne and some decent medium and short runs from Alonso, which confirmed that, on pace, McLaren certainly has the potential to be the fourth-best team.

Is that enough for the Woking squad? That's a question that a lot of people in the paddock are asking. At the end of the day, it now has the same power unit as the Red Bull and has spent the past few years claiming it had the best chassis on the grid. The world should probably cut McLaren some slack for the first four flyaways, until it starts to gel properly with Renault. But from the Spanish

Grand Prix (round five, in May) onwards, McLaren really needs to be matching Red Bull.

At the moment, unless the team sorts out the reliability gremlins that have hurt it over the past two weeks, it isn't going to be racking up the points or getting the crucial running it needs on a race weekend to get the car set up right. What's been worrying for the team is that it's not just had the same issue again and again, but instead a whole variety of problems. There are clearly some installation issues, which are different from what the works Renault and Red Bull teams have – burned bodywork and

holes cut into the engine cover were clear giveaways that all isn't well.

Out on track, the car does look balanced and confidence-inspiring. Alonso certainly wasn't shy of throwing it around straight out of the box, and the car seemed to respond well. The front end tucked into the apex of the medium-speed corners such as Turn 7 very well and, while it didn't look as comfortable over the kerbs as the Mercedes (which was frankly like a limousine on a bed of air), it still looks like it has the potential to be fourth best.

Is it a Red Bull-beater? I wouldn't put money on it yet.



How much progress has Renault made?

THE WORKS RENAULT TEAM LOOKS like a proper factory squad for the first time in years. It has two hotshots in the cockpit, solid funding and good people on board. The car looks balanced out on track and, apart from a gearbox glitch on the final day, generally has very good reliability.

It's been a very impressive turnaround in the past 18 months –

who can forget the woeful qualifying in Baku 2016 when the yellow cars were on the back row of the grid?

Renault looks like it's at the sharp end of the battle for fourth with McLaren, and about half a second behind Ferrari and Red Bull. That's a good starting point for a team that's rebuilding, and I'm really interested to see how it progresses in this fight with its orange customer.



Battle of the Mercedes customers

FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, FORCE India and Williams have locked out the 'best-of-the-rest' territory behind the top three teams. This could be a tricky ask for the two Mercedes customers this year, as Renault,

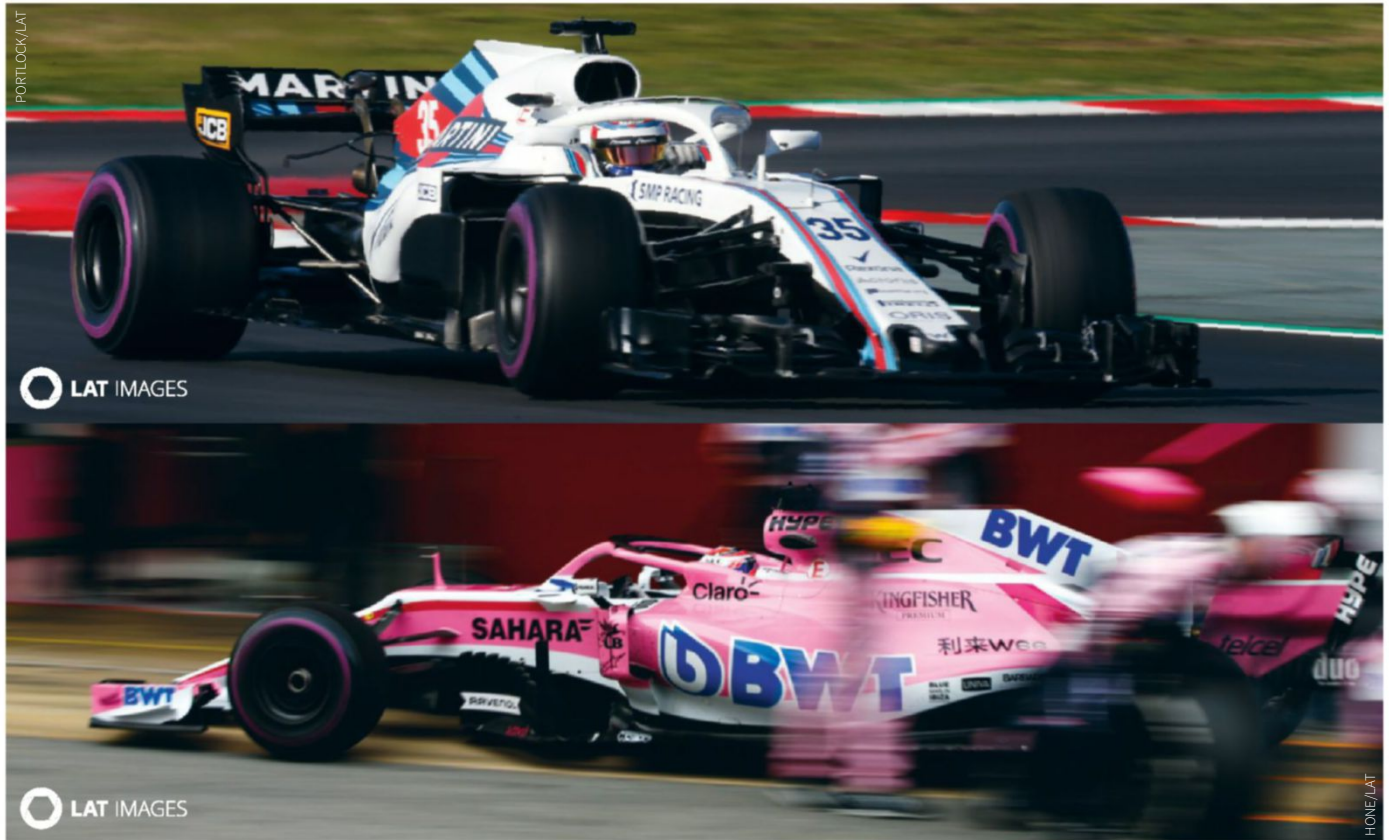
McLaren and Haas all seem to be more competitive than in 2017.

When watching trackside, the Williams looked unpredictable on corner entry, which is just confidence-sapping for the drivers.

Sergey Sirotkin did look like he had a bit more consistency on the final afternoon before handing over to Lance Stroll, but the team has had a big design change and it looks like it needs a bit more time to understand

how to get the most from the FW41.

The Force India also looked very tricky to drive, but the team is counting on a big update for Melbourne so we're probably better off reserving judgement.



Are there any surprises in the midfield?

ON THE PENULTIMATE DAY OF testing, Kevin Magnussen produced a lap on supersoft tyres that made the entire paddock sit up and take note. When you applied the tyre offsets, the Haas suddenly seemed like the fourth-fastest car out there, which had the other midfield teams scrambling for the long-run sheets to gauge where the team really is.

Out on track, the Haas did look like a very good and balanced car, so it could well throw a curveball to Renault and McLaren.

Toro Rosso's Honda reliability has been the other big surprise. The team completed the third-highest number of laps, and out on track the front end of the STR13, particularly at medium and slow speeds, looked like it was working very well. I'm really interested to see where Toro Rosso is in the pecking order when engines are turned up for qualifying!



THE RIVALS

**Why Hamilton and Vettel are
on a collision course with
greatness (and each other)**

BEN ANDERSON



AS MUCH AS WE ALL MAY LONG FOR AN EPIC FOUR-WAY title battle between Mercedes, Ferrari, Red Bull and McLaren in Formula 1 this year, the endlessly iterative nature of the beast under stable regulations, combined with the cautious approach to engine development Renault has elected to take into the early part of the new season, means the world championship is most likely to be a resumption of last year's battle between Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel.

There is much at stake. To the winner will go not just the spoils, but a decisive move ahead of the other along the statistical path to greatness. Fangio awaits. Schumacher is not too much further down the road – his seven titles tantalisingly and realistically within reach, perhaps surpassable.

Vettel, keen student that he is, will be keenly aware of the historical significance. Hamilton has often seemed less preoccupied with numbers, beyond that single-minded obsession with Ayrton Senna's triplicate – now achieved for himself, then bettered.

Now he is a four-time champion you sense that the scales have fallen from Hamilton's eyes. Suddenly, as in Abu Dhabi last year, there are references to Fangio's achievements. Now Schumacher's pole record belongs to Hamilton, suddenly the seven titles and 91 grand prix wins claimed by the great German no longer look as

though they belong in another world. If you want to be remembered as the greatest of all, better the greatest of all. Simple.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. First there is the small matter of the fifth. Hamilton must start the season as the overwhelming favourite, not only because he is the reigning champion, but also because of the way he and his Mercedes team rose so majestically above last season's adversity to get there.

The Wo8 was overweight, lazy and hard on its tyres to begin with, but Hamilton usually found a way to get the job done regardless. Six pole positions and four wins from the first 11 races were enough to keep him in touch with Vettel, before he and the team found ways to unlock better performance more consistently from the car after the August break. Technical director James Allison admits Mercedes "had to ignore a lot of what we thought were the standard ways of race engineering a car and go off in pretty much the opposite direction" with its 2017 car, which makes Hamilton's 11 poles and nine wins even more remarkable.

He got his elbows out when necessary, dominated where possible, but also played the percentages effectively in unfavourable circumstances. Hamilton reckons he finished last season in the form of his life, calling his run from Spa to the title-clincher in Mexico his best yet in F1. ➤➤



SUTTON



It's difficult to disagree with that self-assessment. Hamilton has always been a phenomenal driver, quicker than probably anyone else, but perhaps not as adept at refining the extra minor details. He is not in the extreme of the Kimi Raikkonen camp, but the naturals naturally don't need to cover so many bases.

But new team-mate Valtteri Bottas saw for himself how far Hamilton has evolved. Hamilton doesn't just outdrive the opposition, now he tries to outwork them too. Extra effort outside the car will make his life easier inside it, leaving him even more headspace to focus on what he does best — outdriving and outracing his rivals. Critics will chime this is easy when you have the fastest car and the best engine at your disposal. But that car was difficult to drive last season. It never really got easier. In fact, Bottas reckons the best set-ups for the car required certain driving acrobatics he'd never seen before. But Hamilton found a way to make it work, to mitigate some of the problems and drive around the rest.

Shorn of the expectations and pressure of his McLaren youth, and of the recent internecine warfare of the Rosberg years at Mercedes, Hamilton appears to have risen to an almost zen state of being in Formula 1. He is doing things on his own terms now, whether it be his vegan diet, his training and business schedule, or how much

time he took off over the winter. Mercedes is swallowing some corporate pride and rolling with it, realising a happy Hamilton is a more productive one, and that Hamilton at his most productive is the most devastating weapon on the current F1 grid. Both are reaping the reward. The sky is well and truly the limit.

"Honestly, when we left Abu Dhabi there were some days following where you're in the factory and around people who are quite hyped about the fact you've won the championship, but then you forget about it," Hamilton says.

"When I was with my family, through Colorado and Japan, I didn't think a single thought of motor racing. Fortunately, I had nobody reminding me I was a four-time world champion — you kind of forget about it and go back to normality.

"As you enter the new year and start training and start to figure out your goals, it's kind of a discovery thing — you have to really try to figure out where you're going to find the determination and the drive to accomplish those goals.

"I saw something about being up there, potentially, with Fangio — that is quite an exciting prospect. I feel like I'm in the best shape I've been. There were areas last year that were great, but I want to improve on those. Consistency was great, so if I can take those



ingredients from last year and add a couple of spices in this year, I can have a better year.”

The questions with all great champions, once they have conquered their sport multiple times, is what next? How long do they want or need to go on for? When does the depth of motivation and desire needed to summon the necessary will and commitment to operate at that level year in, year out, begin its inevitable decline? Hamilton asks himself these questions every winter. He did so again ahead of this season. Ultimately, it’s all a question of hunger, and Hamilton says his appetite is still as fierce as ever.

“You have the downtime and you’ve had a successful year – how can you get better and what’s next? Are you still hungry? Do you still want to go back and do these interviews? Do you still want to win races, do you want to do qualifying, do you still enjoy driving the car, can you be better, what areas can you be better?” Hamilton explains in the form of a series of rhetorical questions. “There are other passions I have that I’m as passionate about as I am about racing – at what point do they take priority?”

“All these different things you have decision-wise, and it’s not a case of ‘I’ve got to go to the gym’ so you sulk on your way to the gym. I don’t force it, so I take my time and eventually >>



PARTY OF FIVE

HOW F1’S BEST OF THE BEST STACK UP

Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel are part of a rare club of drivers to have won four or more F1 world championships.

Here’s how they all stack up statistically, including each driver’s ‘strike rate’ (expressed as a percentage) based on achievements versus number of seasons and races completed in F1.

Michael Schumacher sets the gold standard in all categories except pole positions – in which Hamilton surpassed him – but Juan Manuel Fangio’s efficiency may never be bettered.



MICHAEL SCHUMACHER

Titles 7 (36.8%)
Wins 91 (29.7%)
Podiums 155 (50.7%)
Poles 68 (22.2%)
Starts 306



JUAN MANUEL FANGIO

Titles 5 (62.5%)
Wins 24 (47.1%)
Podiums 35 (68.6%)
Poles 29 (56.9%)
Starts 51



ALAIN PROST

Titles 4 (30.8%)
Wins 51 (25.6%)
Podiums 106 (53.3%)
Poles 33 (16.6%)
Starts 199



SEBASTIAN VETTEL

Titles 4 (36.4%)
Wins 47 (23.7%)
Podiums 99 (50.0%)
Poles 50 (25.3%)
Starts 198



LEWIS HAMILTON

Titles 4 (36.4%)
Wins 62 (29.8%)
Podiums 117 (56.3%)
Poles 72 (34.6%)
Starts 208

I miss going for a run or working out. I'm looking forward to going back to it. And then, as you start getting through that training process, you discover your goals.

"It's quite simple. I want to be better than I was last year, and last year I think was the best year I had performance-wise. How can I top that? How can I improve? It was a very strong year, but there are lots of areas actually. Even my relationship with my team is constantly growing; how I interact with the team is growing.

"There's new people that come in, but how do I utilise them, use their genius to help me achieve my goal? And how do I interact with them to help them get what they want? Ultimately, utilising them to get my goal helps them get theirs and that's the priority."

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff describes his driver as "the personification of hunger" coming into 2018. Hamilton is clearly revelling in his time at Mercedes – easily the most successful period of his 11-year F1 career. It will be down to Vettel and Ferrari to find a way to upset this harmonious equilibrium. But first they must better harmonise their own.

To be fair, there is not much more to be done. Vettel led the championship until the 13th race of last season at Monza. Ferrari produced arguably the best chassis on the grid initially, before Red Bull got going and Hamilton found ways to better bend the Mercedes to his will. The Ferrari engine still lacked for some power and fuel efficiency compared with Mercedes, but, even so, Vettel could have finished the year champion but for a couple of key mistakes and freak reliability failures.

Ferrari will undoubtedly have worked hard to rectify its weaknesses over the winter, evolving its quality-control procedures to make its engine more robust, while refining the chassis to make it more potent on a greater proportion of circuits. The move to a longer, Mercedes-inspired wheelbase is a big part of that.

Technical director Mattia Binotto confirms Ferrari's attempts to "retain the strengths" of 2017 on the new SF71H – particularly on low-speed circuits – while developing the concept further "to be strong and performant on the high-speed circuits".

Ferrari has also gone for tighter engine packaging and "even more aggressive, more innovative" sidepods and radiator ducts with the 2018 car, to avoid giving up air to cooling and drag that could otherwise be producing useful downforce. It will be down to Vettel to make best use of this new tool. He has his critics, but

The two rivals say they're on friendly terms, but they're fiercely competitive



New Ferrari aims to retain virtues that served 2017 car well

PORTLOCK/LAT

he also has a killer instinct as keen as anyone's. If the car is right, he will be relentlessly and devastatingly fast. What was lacking from him last year was simply maintenance of personal composure at key moments under pressure.

What he did at Baku was a moment of pure road rage, and it cost him a vital victory. He argues, with some credence, that Singapore was a different matter altogether. But knowing some of the unknowns is part of being an elite driver, and Vettel knows as well as anyone what's likely to happen when Max Verstappen gets a sniff of victory. A calmer driver, feeling less pressure, would have played the percentages and lived to fight another day.

It's a complex conundrum of personality and mentality that still vexes Vettel's team. "I don't know if it's a problem of weakness or personality," said Ferrari president Sergio Marchionne at the Scuderia's annual winter media gathering at Maranello before Christmas. "I don't see weakness in his anger expressions. Vettel has something like a guy from the south of Italy. He showed that a couple of times, but he learned from these situations.

"I continue to say we have the obligation to give our drivers a car that allows them to fight for victory. In 2016 we didn't succeed, but in 2017 we gave them a great car. From now, he has his own responsibility, but he knows it."

Hamilton feels Vettel will learn from his mistakes and come out fighting this year. It's the least you expect from great champions; they never lie down and roll over. Hamilton also expects tension between the two of them to rise in tandem, but reckons he is better equipped mentally to deal with this, no doubt



hardened by those tough experiences he endured when paired alongside his former nemesis Rosberg.

"You would have to expect that it could be worse," says Hamilton of potential tensions with Vettel. "Always expect the worst and hopefully it will be better. This year, the fact it's going to be a closer season, we have no idea what we're going to face.

"What I can say is last year was a positive year in respect of handling the different situations I've faced. Over the past few years I've not been too bad at it. I'll be even better this year, so it shouldn't be an issue either way.

"The focus for me is to ensure I'm performing at my best, because I am sure there will be issues, because they [Ferrari and Vettel] will be upset about it."

Does he expect to have to engage in mind games to maintain that edge over Vettel? "I don't play mind games. I just drive faster. Simple."

Thus was launched the first verbal salvo in F1's 2018 title battle, between the two chief protagonists in a rivalry that is not quite yet fully formed. It lacks the pure animosity and intensity of Senna and Prost – or even Hamilton and Rosberg, for that matter.

There is an almost bygone cordiality to their battle so far – mutual respect for what each has achieved just about outweighing those flashpoints of controversy. Each knows they now both belong to a rare club of drivers to win this thing four times over. Chances are, this year one of them will attain even more rarefied heights.

Only Fangio and Schumacher know what it is to breathe that intoxicating air and where it may lead. For Hamilton, or Vettel, the path to further greatness awaits. ❧

HAMILTON: I'VE NEVER CONTACTED A RIVAL TEAM WHILE WITH MERCEDES

Until he puts pen to paper and announces the deal, speculation will continue to swirl about Lewis Hamilton's next move when his current contract with Mercedes runs out at the close of the 2018 season.

Both parties say it's only a matter of time before they reach agreement, telling reporters gathered at the pre-season launch of their new car at Silverstone that they hoped to have something finalised before the Australian Grand Prix.

So we can presume Hamilton will shortly extend his immediate F1 future with his current employer. They have enjoyed such impressive sustained success together, why change?

"I'm really excited about extending with the team and staying here," Hamilton says. "Toto [Wolff] and I have been talking for a while. Obviously, once I left in December I was away – it's not something I like to do over the phone, and I didn't get back until February, but we spoke very often.

"We were constantly talking to each other about how we are committed to each other. Toto knows that. I know there's no one better, so he's not going to be looking anywhere else, and he knows

that I know there's nowhere else better, so I'm not going to be looking anywhere else.

"We're comfortable and we're committed to each other. It's just always about the details. Hopefully we'll have something done before the beginning of the season, before the start of the first race.

"But there's no reason to rush anything – there's no panic, I'm not feeling under any pressure with other drivers, and Mercedes has no reason to feel I'm talking to anybody else. In the whole six

"HOPEFULLY WE'LL HAVE SOMETHING BEFORE THE FIRST RACE"

(sic) years I've been here, I've not spoken to another team once, and I think that really shows my commitment.

"I know the team have been contacted by other drivers in the past, and probably still do. That's inevitable. We always made it clear at the beginning that if I was to engage and look at my options I was to inform them. I've not needed to, because I haven't."



UNDER PR

Why these F1 stars need to raise their games in 2018

BEN ANDERSON

Valtteri Bottas

VALTTERI BOTTAS WAS A YOUNG star at Williams, a driver that the team felt was good enough to build around. He is clearly highly capable, but there is a difference in the upper tiers of F1 between the excellent and the exceptional. As good as he undoubtedly is, Bottas is now in Lewis Hamilton's long shadow.

Bottas did a fine job in his first season with Mercedes. He took four poles, won three races and finished third in the world championship. He was in title contention until F1's August break and helped Mercedes win a fourth consecutive constructors' crown.

What's the problem, you ask? Well, the problem is Mercedes expects more. With only a touch more composure and reliability, Sebastian Vettel and Ferrari could have stolen the championship away from Hamilton last season. Bottas needs to be beating Vettel, not just be better than Kimi Raikkonen.

This season, Bottas needs to raise his own level to put Hamilton under



pressure consistently, avoiding the dips that dumped him out of the 2017 title race through the Spa-Monza-Singapore-Sepang leg of the last campaign. "Not being the rookie in this team, for sure the team is expecting more from me," Bottas concedes. "So am I – I'm aiming for a better season than last year. Last year, going into the season, there was more

pressure than now. Still I have all the targets ahead of me, and I'm still hungry for all the wins and success, so definitely less pressure than last year."

The extra experience and familiarity gained from a year spent inside the team will undoubtedly give Bottas the opportunity to start this new season on the front foot. As he says, he now has a much better understanding of his environment, the people, how to set up the car, how to drive it better, and he finished 2017 strongly by putting many of those lessons into practice.

But his comments about decreasing pressure seem misplaced. A late deal to join a new team in 2017 naturally afforded him some slack while he got up to speed. That leeway will not be there this year. What's more, Mercedes only gave him a one-year contract extension last summer, so there is extra pressure to perform to secure his long-term future.

With Esteban Ocon making serious waves at customer team Force India, and the likes of Daniel Ricciardo potentially coming onto the market too, that future beyond 2018 is by no means guaranteed. Bottas needs to do more, or else his big chance could go to waste.

"In F1, in any season, any case, if you don't perform your seat is always in danger," Bottas says. "Especially a seat like this. The ball is in my hand and I need to make the most out of the year ahead. I'm confident I can."



Bottas spent too much time behind Hamilton in 2017

ESSURE

AFTER WRAPPING UP HIS FOURTH WORLD TITLE IN 2017, Lewis Hamilton identified championship rival Sebastian Vettel, McLaren star Fernando Alonso and Red Bull prodigy Max Verstappen as his three strongest opponents in Formula 1.

To an extent, this statement is self-evident. These four drivers all race for F1's current biggest teams, and all gained the measure

of their respective team-mates in the first season under F1's new bigger-and-meaner aerodynamic regulations.

The intra-team battle is the first one you need to win in motor racing. Defeat piles on the pressure, which is amplified when you know your seat is coveted by other promising drivers, searching for their big grand prix break.

Valtteri Bottas, Kimi Raikkonen, Daniel Ricciardo and Stoffel Vandoorne all tasted defeat in that battle

last season, although Ricciardo did outscore Verstappen.

Each knows, and proved on occasion last year, that they can beat the best in the business. But reputations are hard-won and easily lost in F1, and they are more easily lost if you cannot consistently better your team-mate. That's why each of these four drivers heads into 2018 under pressure to raise their respective games.

Kimi Raikkonen

THAT FERRARI PERSISTS IN employing Kimi Raikkonen befuddles many, given that he appears such a shadow of the driver that wowed at McLaren, then won the championship for Maranello in 2007 – the last of that great team's drivers to do so, in fact.

Raikkonen's honesty, sensitivity and standing within the team are very useful for developing the car. He also works very well with Sebastian Vettel without threatening him, which creates the sort of internal harmony Mercedes has so enjoyed recently with Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas.

Raikkonen can still get it done on the circuit too, as his 2017 Monaco pole showed. Trouble is, those kinds of performances are now rare. Raikkonen finished just five points clear of Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo in last year's standings, and 100 points behind Bottas. That simply isn't good enough at this level.

A lack of suitable (and inexpensive) alternatives has surely



played its part in prolonging Raikkonen's career, but he clearly remains on borrowed time. Ferrari president Sergio Marchionne called Raikkonen out for not performing well enough on more than one occasion last season, and suggested this year could be Raikkonen's last chance to lift his game, especially with Charles Leclerc graduating to F1 with Alfa Romeo-

backed Sauber, while clearly being groomed for a future at Maranello.

"My personal opinion is that if we find the right key, Raikkonen drives like a God," was Marchionne's verdict at the end of last season. "When things go right, it's a pleasure to see him driving. In other moments, it seems like he takes a break. He needs more consistency, but it's important to find the right key to make him driving like in Monaco also on other circuits.

"Probably this is the last season to find the right key and we must do it. It would be a shame if he would leave F1 without showing his real potential. We see Leclerc, [Max] Verstappen and [Antonio] Giovinazzi – drivers with great skills, who can deliver a big change in the driver market. I'm still happy to have chosen Leclerc. I think if we cannot find the right key for Raikkonen, the choice will fall on a young driver."

Raikkonen's possible salvation may lie in Pirelli's new range of tyre compounds for 2018. All the tyres will be significantly softer this year, and Pirelli has also tried to adjust the working-temperature ranges to make them easier to use.

This will be music to the ears of a driver who routinely struggles when the front tyres in particular are hard and require a great deal of energy to get working properly. Raikkonen certainly felt his weaker 2017 moments were down to tyre temperature. This year, he will not have that excuse. Time for him to put up or ship out at last.





Daniel Ricciardo

DANIEL RICCIARDO HAS EVOLVED into a genuine star of F1 in the V6-hybrid era – race winner, ace qualifier, master overtaker. Twice in the past four seasons he's been Autosport's top-ranked driver. Beating Sebastian Vettel as a Red Bull newcomer in 2014 became the foundation for Ricciardo to forge a reputation as a true top-liner.

That reputation remains intact, but it took a severe beating from the Max Verstappen hurricane in 2017. Ricciardo finished ahead in the championship standings, but knows as well as anyone that doesn't reflect how comprehensively

outperformed he was by his younger team-mate.

This is a new experience for the Australian; the first time he has been properly challenged by a team-mate. Last year, Verstappen began to do to Ricciardo what Ricciardo did to Vettel. Ricciardo says he overdrove trying to keep up – hence those uncharacteristic qualifying crashes at Melbourne and Baku – and also



wasted energy chasing car set-up instead of simply getting on with driving what he had in hand. Previously, Ricciardo could make mistakes and get away with them. Now, he is mercilessly punished for every error.

This is a big season for Ricciardo's career. He is in the final year of his current Red Bull contract, Red Bull has already re-signed Verstappen until the end of 2020,

and there is a feeling that the team may gravitate towards its younger superstar in the years ahead.

Ricciardo turns 29 in the summer. His next move could define his career. Does he stick with Red Bull in the hope it becomes a title challenger again and he can somehow find a way to see off Verstappen? Or does he try to engineer a switch elsewhere, most probably Mercedes, and pit his wits against Lewis Hamilton in a bid to turn the five grand prix wins he's amassed so far into the championship crowns he craves?

Whatever he does next, Ricciardo will need to first bounce back from a difficult 2017 season to ensure he remains in F1's elite bracket, and thus a hot property on the market.

"Both Max and myself are established and expected to do well," says Ricciardo. "Certainly, now Max – he's no longer an unknown. He's proven he's got not only the speed but the racecraft and the tyre management and all that. We both know what we can do and what needs to be done now, and it's just who can execute it."

"Obviously I'm aware I'll have a challenge from him, and I'm sure other drivers on the grid, but I certainly feel I've learned from last year. I think I've picked up a few things and changed some things I feel I can improve. I'm set for a good year. For sure, it's going to be a challenge, but I'm preparing the best way I can and confident I can have a really good 2018."



Can Ricciardo keep team on side in face of Verstappen's rise?



Stoffel Vandoorne

STOFFEL VANDOORNE FREELY admits his early races as a fully fledged Formula 1 driver were simply not good enough. For a driver so decorated in junior single-seaters, who wowed on his F1 debut for McLaren in Bahrain in 2016, the first part of last season was seriously underwhelming.

Failing to escape Q1 at any of the first five races, while team-mate Fernando Alonso starred, raised serious questions about Vandoorne's performances. But once he settled down after a nightmare pre-season, stopped trying to emulate his hero on the

other side of the garage, started homing in on exactly what he needed from the car to be quick himself, and forged a proper working relationship with his engineers, Vandoorne began to find his feet. A bit of extra coaching from resident Autosport expert Rob Wilson didn't do any harm either!

From Australia to Austria, Vandoorne was 0.620% slower than



Alonso on average in qualifying, but from Silverstone onwards he was twice genuinely faster than the double world champion, and narrowed the deficit to 0.197% over those 11 races.

That's clearly a marked improvement, and a potentially disastrous season was salvaged. The challenge this year, with troublesome Honda engine ditched for Renault propulsion, is for

Vandoorne to kick on and show McLaren he has what it takes to be the consistently outstanding driver in Formula 1 that he was in the junior series.

"Stoffel had a difficult start to the season last year," concedes McLaren racing director Eric Boullier. "The second part of the season was actually quite OK. There's the confidence he needs to build based on driving more, experience, and starting the season with the right mindset."

As a resounding champion of GP2, and a race winner in every other single-seater category he's raced in, Vandoorne has the grounding to evolve into a true star of grand prix racing. But first he must gain the measure of one of the very best drivers to grace Formula 1 in the past 20 years.

"Now I feel like it's business as usual," says Vandoorne. "I have a good relationship with the engineers and we know what the working points are. It's clear that our approach has changed a lot compared to last year. There's no surprises now, which is positive."

With British super-talent and Formula 2 racer Lando Norris waiting eagerly in McLaren's wings, this is a big season for Vandoorne. If the Belgian can stack up well against Alonso that will surely secure his immediate future. If not, and Alonso decides to stay put for 2019, Vandoorne will probably have to make way for someone else to have a stab. *W*



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OCON



 LAT IMAGES



Pretty in pink, beautiful in silver?

*Esteban Ocon isn't going to win the world title with Force India this season.
But by performing well, he could put himself in position
to become a champion with Mercedes*

SCOTT MITCHELL

ESTEBAN OCON GETS STRAIGHT TO THE POINT. "I THINK it's one of the most important years of my career," he says. "After learning a lot last year everybody is waiting for me to confirm this year. It's what my bosses are looking at."

The affable 21-year-old grins, and continues: "But I'm quite relaxed. We've had a good preparation over the winter, just fixing the details I thought were not great last year. I feel more than ready to start the year. With the experience coming in I should be starting stronger."

Ocon is indeed facing a very important second full season in Formula 1. There is nothing promised at the end – very little is in F1 – but the Frenchman knows he is auditioning for the seat every driver wants: one in a Mercedes. His ducks are lining up for 2018: a full campaign in F1 under his belt; familiarity with his surroundings as he prepares for a second year with Force India; and the knowledge that there is at least one Mercedes drive on the table if he delivers.

"My career's managed by Mercedes, so my bosses set me some targets for this year and I have to respect them," he says. "I feel like if I do a strong job here, there will always be plenty of opportunities, but at the moment I'm fully focused on Force India."

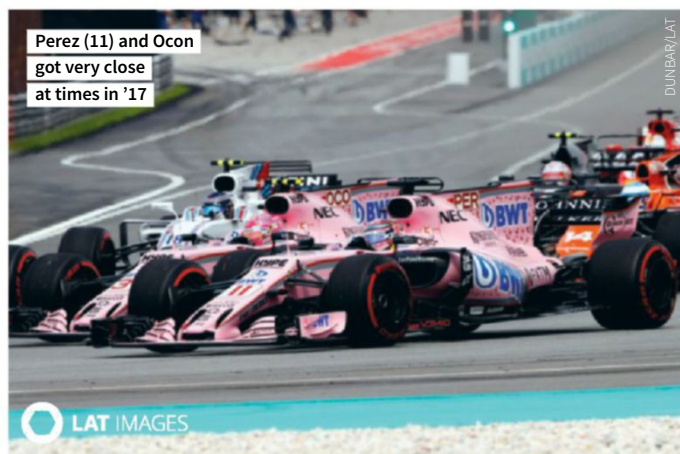
Exactly what Mercedes wants him to deliver, only the German marque and Ocon know. But expectations are probably high. Gone is the key disadvantage of 2017: Ocon knows all the tracks now, after racing on the circuits in Australia, China, Russia, Monaco, Canada and Azerbaijan for the first time last season.

This suggests expectations need to be high for a driver who has beaten Max Verstappen in battle (during the epic 2014 Formula 3 European Championship) and that he should be considered in the bracket of drivers that could dominate the sport over the next decade: Verstappen, Carlos Sainz Jr, Stoffel Vandoorne, Charles Leclerc etc.

"The targets are the same as last year," offers Ocon. "We want to get closer to the top three teams and of course on my side I want to score podiums. I've been chasing that. I think we have as much chance as previous years, or more. Force India has been scoring podiums every year, and it was only last year we didn't score, but last year we were more competitive than the year before. So, I didn't think it [the lack of podiums] really meant anything. It's more about the conditions and what happens in the race. I think we have our chances to score and I will be chasing it!"

Winning the European F3 title, against Verstappen, brought ex-Lotus F1 junior Ocon to Mercedes' attention, and he has been a protege of the German manufacturer for a couple of years now. Mercedes backed him during his GP3-winning season of 2015, >>

Ocon will be hoping the
VJM11 can propel him
towards a Mercedes seat



found him a DTM race seat for '16, and then coaxed Manor into giving him his grand prix debut in the middle of that year to replace Rio Haryanto.

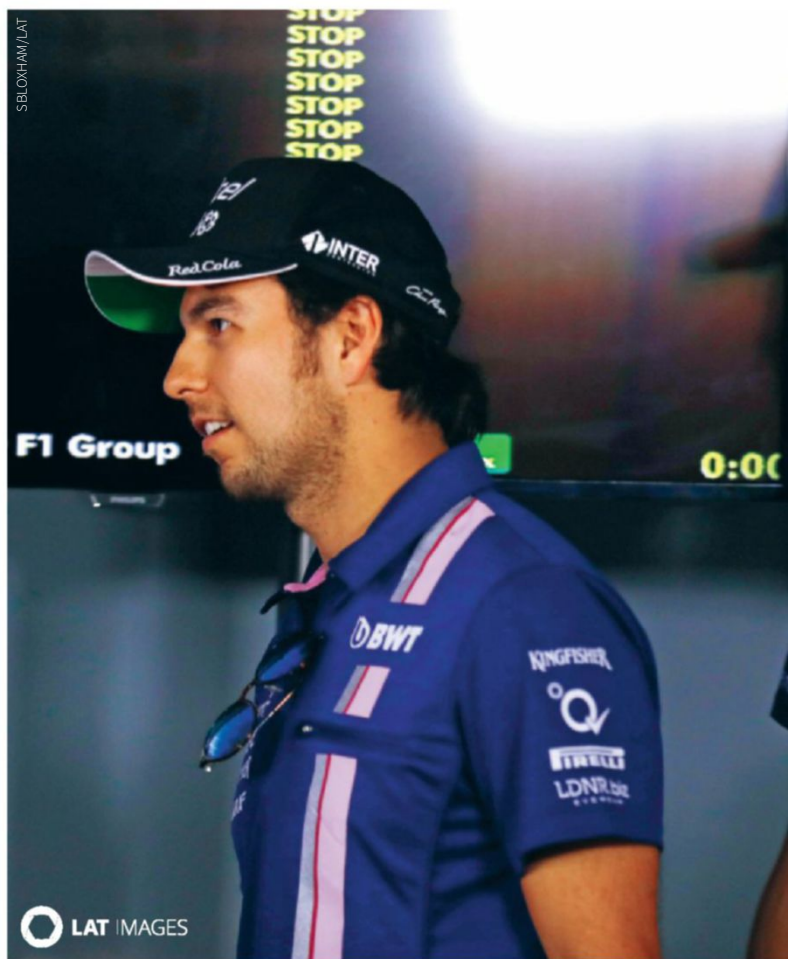
Ocon's trajectory in F1 has generally been upwards. He slotted in well mid-season at Manor, especially as fellow Mercedes junior Pascal Wehrlein was on the other side of the garage and had been there all season. But it was Ocon who sufficiently impressed Force India, Mercedes' considerably more impressive customer team, to land a race drive there for 2017, with Wehrlein sentenced to a year at Sauber. As the German's star waned, temporarily at least, Ocon's continued to rise.

Ocon scored points in the first five grands prix of 2017, including what stands as a joint-career-best fifth in Spain, and went on to finish in the top 10 in all but two of the races over the course of the season. He was eighth in the drivers' championship, just 13 points behind experienced team-mate Sergio Perez, and his tally alone was enough to secure Force India fourth in the teams' contest.

It was impressive by almost every measure. But Ocon knows it's not enough. He talks about filling in some "confidential" missing blanks, only elaborating to say: "It's my own personal development, my physical strengths and the weakness I felt I had. All that is fixed now. That's the important thing."

On-track, Ocon should be about to get even more impressive. He started behind Perez in nine of the first 10 races of 2017, but turned the tables in the qualifying battle in the second half of the season, which he 'won' 6-4, and banked some impressive Saturday performances such as third in the wet in Italy and fifth in the dry in Japan. "I felt that all through the year I was fast through the race but I was lacking a bit of qualifying pace, especially in the beginning of the year," he says. "That was gone by the end – in the end I was feeling better and stronger in qualifying. I felt easier going through the year, it was more normal and coming to me. I was getting to know the team better and all that."

The trend is in Ocon's favour. Translate that into a complete



"FIGHTING WITH MAX WAS INTENSE. I'M SURE WE'LL MEET AGAIN IN THE FUTURE"

season in which he defeats one of F1's best midfield drivers, and he will put himself in the best position to take the next step. If he takes that next step – to Mercedes – he'll have the chance to replicate his 2014 success over Verstappen in F1. The prospect of a title fight with his once arch-rival, who has been in Ocon's scope since they were karting rivals, is tantalising.

"In 2011 he won the world title in karting and I finished second," remembers Ocon. "I took my revenge in Euro F3. We were not friends at all. It was a very intense fight; it came out a bit too much at some points. Now we have no problem at all, we speak well together and he is a cool guy. Back in the day it was very intense. If there is a championship at the end of that fight I'd sign straight away, there's no problem there. Charles, Max, those drivers are very, very strong. I've been racing with them since the very beginning. I know how good they are and I'm sure we'll meet again in the future."

Finally getting that chance in top machinery would be reward for Ocon's patience. Whereas he moved into GP3 as the reigning Euro F3 champion, trusting in Mercedes' judgement, Verstappen was immediately propelled into F1 with Toro Rosso after his maiden F3 season. Little over a year after his grand prix debut, Verstappen had his first win, hot on the heels of another shock promotion to the Red Bull senior team, while at that time Ocon was a DTM backmarker after following Mercedes' recommendation of a holding year in the tin-top category.



"For sure it was hard to swallow," Ocon says of Verstappen's meteoric rise. "I saw myself winning the title, with one weekend to spare, and he went to Formula 1. That was quite hard. I knew with the right people I had around me, the work I was putting in, that if I was winning the titles, my time was going to come. That's what happened."

For the big time to come, Ocon needs to focus on the now, and that means beating Perez. He faces a tricky balancing act here, because the two drivers are going to need to be very careful in combat this season. Force India's 2017 threatened to implode into civil war at one stage after an incident in Canada, and contact in Azerbaijan and Belgium that ruined Perez's race both times. It led to team orders and a strict ban on wheel-to-wheel fighting, something that the two drivers now have permission to return to. Ocon knows Mercedes expects him to establish himself over Perez this season, but was also unimpressed by the amount of contact last year. It will be tough to tread the line between aggression and disaster, or patience and too much hesitancy, when he is going up against a feisty, wily driver.

"For sure you have to race with your team-mate," says Ocon. "That's what everyone's going to look at. I have to beat him, and that's what I want — it will be my target as well. We had a clear talk with the team, with him. We can race on track, but we have to not touch. We have to stay away from each other and from trouble."

Ocon clearly thinks highly of Perez — "I rate him as one of the best" — but he will also be confident of continuing his good form from the second half of 2017. Perhaps the key variable in their relationship will be where Force India fits into the competitive order (see right), and what's at stake. "The season will be a very close one already between us, McLaren, Renault, Williams," reckons Ocon. "That's going to be a very close fight in the midfield and we want to keep fourth in the championship. That's our main target — we can't lose any points like that [crashing into each other]."

FORCE INDIA'S BIG FIGHT TO LEAD THE MIDFIELD PACK

IT'S GOING TO BE AN immense battle for Esteban Ocon to achieve his stated aim of a podium finish this season, and for Force India to defeat the odds and retain fourth in the constructors' championship.

The little team that could has been F1's best performer over the past two seasons, maximising its smaller resources to outperform teams like McLaren, Renault and Williams. However, with Renault's works team building ever stronger and McLaren finally ridding itself of a troubled Honda engine, Force India's challenge will be like none before.

Force India opted not to bring developments to testing to try to focus on the "DNA" of the car, as technical director Andrew Green put it. Ocon reckons it has achieved that.

"We know the way to improve the car," he says. "We took a way of improving the car, a direction, and that's what we're on at the moment. To see where the problems are at and where the strong points are, that's the easiest part. Now you have to solve those

problems. That's the learning curve we are on."

Force India has traditionally been strong at identifying weak points and acting on them, so what its hopes really hinge on is a significant upgrade package, which is being introduced in time for the Australian Grand Prix, delivering on a promise of half a second. Making sure that correlates on track is crucial, because McLaren has its own series of significant upgrades to bring and Renault

"AS SOON AS WE BRING UPGRADES, WE MAKE A MASSIVE STEP"

evaluated a new front wing in testing. Rivals never stand still, but Ocon is unconcerned.

"That's what happened last year already a bit," he says. "I fully trust the team. Last year as soon as they were bringing updates, we were making a massive step. I have no worries in what the team is doing."

Ideally, Ocon will elevate himself sufficiently clear of Perez not to have to worry about any of that. It could be an unwelcome complication in an already critical year. That said, Ocon's done well to make the most out of less-than-ideal situations so far: the half-season in the DTM; the half-season with the slowest car on the F1 grid; having to establish himself in the midfield.

He laughs: "I mean, if you gave me a car and I can fight at the front, I'd take it! To be starting with Manor was a really good experience. I've been learning so much, it really helped me in my second season. I was a lot stronger in the second half of the season with Force India. The more cars you can drive, the better you are when the title comes to you."

That, right at the end, is the main point. If Ocon proves himself worthy of a Mercedes seat, he will have a vast arsenal of tools, ranging from experience working in multiple teams with different engineers, to coping with the varied pressures that have come from the scenarios in which he has found himself. Everything Ocon has done so far suggests he's treading a path to a golden — or should that be silver? — gate. As he says, all he must do now is confirm it. 

McLAREN

Faster...



PORTLOCK/LAT

 LAT IMAGES

The team in orange seems quicker with Renault instead of Honda power, but there has been unreliability in testing. So what's really happening at McLaren?

EDD STRAW

McLAREN HAS RISKED SETTING ITSELF UP FOR A FALL in 2018. After three years spent blaming Honda for all its ills and talking up the merits of its chassis, it now has a race-winning Renault engine package in the back of the new MCL33. Results are a must.

Given the enormous financial implications of getting rid of a free engine supplier — and backer — to bolt a Renault into the rear of a car whose papaya colouring can't cover up a shortfall in sponsors, McLaren must at least be best of the rest outside the big three this year. If not, those who have invested so heavily in this change will want answers. Heads could roll.

So when pre-season testing started off with Fernando Alonso spinning into the gravel with three wheels on his wagon, followed a day after by what was described as a £2 failure caused by an exhaust problem, things didn't look good. There were genuine

signs of reasonable promise from the car in terms of its pace, but the problems didn't stop. Aside from the penultimate day of running, when Stoffel Vandoorne completed a full race simulation, those reliability problems kept coming.

Then came the final 20 minutes of running, when Alonso banged in a 1m17.784s lap during a qualifying simulation. There was astonishment when, on the same run, he posted a 1m16.720s. This turned out to be an illusion, the consequence of missing the chicane to get around Charles Leclerc's Sauber, but that run proved McLaren isn't in a big hole pace-wise.

The temptation was to contrast McLaren's difficulties with reliable Honda-powered Toro Rosso, which completed fewer miles only than Mercedes and Ferrari, and paint McLaren as a team in crisis. But this speed shows the car is perfectly capable of fighting for fourth in the championship as a starting point. And if the



upgrade promised for next week's Melbourne opener — described by aero chief Peter Prodromou as “decent” — works, then perhaps the big gap to the leading teams can be closed. Doubly so, given that ‘decent’ is understood to be an understatement considering what it's hoped the upgrade will deliver.

But there are problems, less so with pace, which is at least adequate (though still falling short so far of the stated aim of challenging fellow Renault team Red Bull), than with reliability. During testing, McLaren completed just 599 laps, worst of all the teams and almost 100 short of second-worst Haas. Pre-season, engineering director Matt Morris set a target of 500km per day. Even discounting the first test's Wednesday washout, this is just over 100km short of that objective. That's not good enough.

The McLaren should have the pace to be in Q3 in Melbourne, subject to the upgrade working. It's hoped that this package will also dial out the rear-end instability into slow corners that the team struggled with in testing, so that could compound the performance gain. If McLaren fails to do that, then this season could start to unravel.

But even if it does make Q3, there's no guarantee it will be able to finish the race. No team had more problems in testing, with holes having to be cut in the engine cover to tackle heat

pockets caused by the exhaust, and visible burn marks. And there were hydraulic leaks, oil leaks and turbo problems.

Significantly, the other Renault-powered teams didn't have these problems and it raises the question of whether McLaren played a big part in Honda's troubles. Following the ‘size-zero’ farrago of 2015, when overly aggressive packaging caused big problems, perhaps McLaren has been too ambitious for a first year with a new engine supplier?

“We want to be competitive and we are ambitious,” says racing director Eric Boullier. “We have an ambitious design around the car and you can see that it is a little bit different from the other Renault-engined cars. So far we had minor issues, but I think that was because we didn't do a good enough job to prepare the car.

“We were a little bit stretched in terms of lead time and delay — but these are our issues. Very quickly we are going to get back to normal. If you want to be competitive you have to be a bit aggressive and ambitious. Is it too much? I don't think so. We just have to make sure we, in this strategy, leave enough time to do everything. That's the only point, I would say.”

Boullier admits that this is a complex car, and it's hard to ignore the comparison with Toro Rosso, which has opted to focus on reliability for the start of its Honda era. The reliability problems >>

do need to be fixed, but McLaren can perhaps be given a little leeway in the early races provided the pace really is there.

"This is a new relationship with Renault, so there are a few things we are discovering," says Boullier. "The glitches we have had so far are not very important, but they are stopping us running. The car is also quite complicated, so every time you have an issue you spend hours to strip everything off, fix it, and rebuild the car."

"The car is new so the mechanics are not used to going fast. Generally, between testing and the European season, you change an engine in six hours and by Barcelona [the Spanish GP in May] you do it in two and a half hours, so that's how much you can progress in working on the car. We are at the beginning now."

The team remains bullish about its chances, although there is a subtle change in its messaging from last year, when the suggestion was it had a race-winning car being let down by the engine, to a more realistic one where being best of the rest is acceptable.

If McLaren is to achieve its ambitions, being over a second off on adjusted pace in testing needs to be improved upon fast. That's where we need to see proof that the technical side of the team, shorn of the Honda excuse, can deliver. Remember, last time McLaren had the best engine, in 2014, it was the third-best of the four teams using it. This year will be a test of whether that really has been fixed. McLaren doesn't have to beat Red Bull in year one with Renault, but it needs to get closer — and expects to.

What McLaren is most pleased with is the correlation between the expectations for the car and how it performs on track. That is critical to validating the development direction.

The team is remaining tight-lipped about its development plans, but with a new engine supplier it's sensible to be a little conservative with the test car and then pile on performance when you know you are on firm ground.

There's also the fact that McLaren has tried to make itself operate more sharply during the Honda years. After being left



behind by Red Bull in terms of parts turnaround, this is an area where McLaren has improved. And if it's made those steps, as Boullier claims, that bodes well for progress in the season. Provided, of course, the sharpness of the at-track operation hasn't been blunted by three years of easy excuses.

"We worked for three years to improve our efficiency as a parts maker, which means from design to release to hitting the track — and the key is correlation," says Boullier. "The correlation looks good because the car looks as per map, as the engineers say."

"The development could be good because you know what's coming now in the next three races. And if it correlates, it's good performance. But I can't tell you if it's good enough to beat Red Bull or Renault or whoever — it's too early."

And what of old partner Honda, whose new team Toro Rosso did a good job of racking up the testing miles? Boullier isn't letting that concern him, especially given that the Renault engine package has shown itself to be capable of winning: "You know you have a race-winning engine in the back of the car, so you might not be the best in the pitlane but it's still good

ALONSO'S NEW MOTIVATION

Has a racing driver who's spent so long achieving so little ever been the source of such fascination as Fernando Alonso has been in recent years? The 36-year-old former double world champion's last three seasons have generated vast amounts of coverage, entirely out of proportion with a recent CV comprising five top-six finishes in Formula 1, a DNF in the Indianapolis 500 and 38th place in the Daytona 24 Hours. It's a measure of his greatness that he's still such a big story despite such paltry results.

This year he needs McLaren to deliver on its expectations. At the very least he'll expect to pick up some podium finishes. The hope for most F1 fans

is that we'll see him able to fight higher up the grid.

He's certainly enjoying the change of engines. "This year driveability is probably the strongest point of the engine," he says of a Renault powerplant that's still

"WATCH HIM, IT'S A DIFFERENT FERNANDO THIS YEAR"

40-50bhp down on Mercedes. "I feel out of the corners, driveability was spot on, so I'm very happy with that."

"Power-wise, it's very difficult to know because we don't know what engine modes everyone

is running. We have an engine that won races last year, so I don't see any reasons why we won't have a top engine."

Alonso was enthusiastic during testing and clearly revelling in having an improved package under him. While he won't be delighted with the unreliability, there are no signs of any impatience.

"Fernando will not miss any opportunity to tell us where we're going wrong," said racing director Eric Boullier on the first day of the second test. "Watch him, it's a different Fernando here this year. He's here before lunchtime when it's not his day to run. I remember last year he was coming at 7pm... He's interested in what's going on on-track."





The McLaren's pace has shown real potential, and Melbourne upgrade promises more

LAT IMAGES

"CLEARLY, THERE IS A BIG BOOST IN TERMS OF MORALE FOR THE TEAM, A BIT OF EXCITEMENT"

enough to fight for podiums and race wins.

"Clearly, there is a big boost in terms of morale for the team, a bit of excitement. I was impressed in the past three years with McLaren keeping the motivation, trying to be the best race car, and this change is a massive boost.

"We had to reset the mindset a little bit to move into finding performance in the car, in the race team, in the operation of the team. There was a momentum on this – it's good."

Realistically, the minimum McLaren needs to deliver this year, assuming the Renault power-unit package is up to it, is fourth place in the constructors' championship. That would be a good return, even if it's still behind Red Bull – and that would also require it to beat the works Renault team.

The proof of the pudding, to paraphrase, is in the results. And right now, even amid some problems, the car seems to have the potential to be in that position.

"There are two rules in racing: don't overpromise and underdeliver, do the inverse; and the second is just show on the track your results," says Boullier. "I'm confident to say, 'Let's meet again in Australia.'"

And right there is a statement by which Boullier and McLaren can be judged by the settling of the dust after the last weekend of March. The cloud has lifted from the team, but the flipside is that it no longer has any excuses. It's time for McLaren to show us what it can really do.

Many jumped onto the 'McLaren-in-crisis' narrative in testing, which was never the real story. What it must do now is prove it can deliver the best-of-the-rest pace that testing suggested was there with reliability, then show it can close on Renault benchmark Red Bull. That's what McLaren must do to regain its credibility after the wilderness years with Honda. ❦



Boullier is impressed with how the team has kept its motivation

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CARLOS SAINZ

The former Toro Rosso star has a big opportunity this year at a Renault team that seems to be on the up

ADAM COOPER

FOR CARLOS SAINZ, LAST YEAR'S move to Renault was the ideal opportunity to further his career after three seasons at Toro Rosso. The French team is on the rise and the combination of Sainz and Nico Hulkenberg should be a formidable one.

But Sainz is still contracted to Red Bull – and he could be called back for 2019 if he's needed.

ADAM COOPER How important was it for you to get a head start with Renault at the end of last year?

CARLOS SAINZ It was very important for me. I never did an actual test in the car in the whole four races, but at least I could race it, I could qualify in it, and I could feel it. And at the end of the year we had a meeting all together in the factory, and I started to discuss the things I really liked from the car, the things that I would like to change, the things that I think are marginal improvements, also from my experience in other teams. And because of that I think I'm a lot more settled into the team, and the 2018 car is a lot more done for me.

"I'M HAPPY TO BE WORKING WITH NICO – HE'S PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE FASTEST OUT THERE"

AC It's much better than driving in February and saying, 'I don't like this button, I don't like the seat...'

CS Exactly. Little things, but in the end all those little details can end up making a big difference. Now with the winter testing, if I hadn't done those races, imagine – those first four days I would have been biting my nails because

I couldn't run, I couldn't test the car, then not enough mileage in the second week, arrive in Australia in a rush, then maybe the first four races are already compromised because of that... So now I'm in a better position.

AC Renault is still a new project, and the team is growing. Is it exciting to be part of that, knowing that they wanted you, and saw that you could bring something?

CS It's a huge honour, the way they fought to get me. That's why I'm going to give this team everything I have to bring them right and help them to keep progressing through the year. As I've said many times, I'm acting like I'm still going to be here for many years. They deserve all my attention, they deserve all my commitment. My future is something that doesn't really worry me.

AC This is a team that has won world championships, and there's still a core of people who worked with Fernando Alonso and even Michael Schumacher. Can you feel that?

CS That's why I'm not worried. I think we have the right amount of people and the correct people in the team, with a lot of capability. I've had a good chat with [technical director] Nick Chester and [chief technical officer] Bob Bell, and they are both incredible guys, with incredible ambitions. For me it's just a great honour to be part of this project, and I can assure you that I am going to be pushing hard.

AC Do you feel that you can work well with Nico – two strong guys driving each other on?

CS I'm happy to be working with a guy that has very good value in F1, and I think he's proved year after year to be one of the fastest out there, especially on one timed lap. We can form a very strong pairing, and we can really make sure that we keep giving the team the direction that it wants, and that one of us is always





performing at the best of the car. I've always had very fast team-mates, but team-mates with little experience, even if they were maybe as fast as Nico. You can already see it, that extra experience, whenever he talks about the car, about the team, and the way he approaches the weekends. He's been here for a while now, and there are things to learn from that.

"IT WOULD BE STUPID FOR ME TO BE CONCERNED NOW WITH WHAT RED BULL WANTS TO DO"

AC What about the competition? Is fourth place in the constructors' championship the target?

CS It's good to have it as a target, but we must not get obsessed with it. I think as a team a good year would be to cut the gap back to Mercedes and Ferrari. If that takes us to P4, or to P5 in the championship, I'm not worried. I'm just here to see how the team is getting closer to the benchmark. If we manage to do that, it would already be a very positive year, because it means our period of evolution is faster than the guys at the front. And that would be extremely important.

AC You said that you are going into this season as if you are staying for a long time. Is there a little bit of uncertainty in your mind, in that you have to wait and see what Red Bull wants to do?

CS No, because I think it will be stupid for me to be concerned about that. With such

an important year, and such a fun year that I think is ahead of me, to start worrying is I think worthless. I think I have a great chance to be successful in a team like Renault, who are pushing flat-out every time to get closer to the front. At the same time I think they deserve my mind fully committed to them. I cannot allow my mind to go elsewhere.

AC Is there a deadline in a contract when you know that you're staying?

CS For sure there are deadlines in contracts and all that, but that can change very quickly during the year.

AC We saw that with you in 2017.

CS Exactly! F1 contracts are a piece of paper, and in the end teams do what they want, they start negotiating, and contracts can change very quickly. I'm happy for Red Bull, I hope they can get back to the top this year. I think it will be a great story for F1. But at the moment it doesn't depend on me.

AC You are obviously happy at Renault, and enjoying being part of building something up. But if you are called away, you are potentially going to a team that's winning races.

CS That's why it's not worth worrying about it! At the same time that possibility can disappear very quickly if you don't keep focused. It's a great situation for me, but that's why I need to give full focus. First of all I need to do a good year, and a good year will hopefully take me to good places. I need to focus on the present and make sure I prepare my car well for the season. If I keep that mentality then I think things will start developing in the same way that last year started developing, in a very positive trend. 🏆



TORO ROSSO

Honda's chance for redemption

After three years of pain with McLaren, Honda is starting afresh with Toro Rosso and has high hopes for its new partnership with the team

LAWRENCE BARRETTO

WHEN McLAREN AND HONDA PARTED WAYS AT THE END of last season, then-Honda Formula 1 project leader Yusuke Hasegawa said it was a “relief”. The Japanese manufacturer had started its relationship with McLaren with dreams of returning to the glory days of the late 1980s and early '90s, but its new-era partnership with McLaren was a disaster.

Unreliability and poor power characterised their three years

together, with McLaren finally losing patience and cutting ties. Honda could have left F1 licking its wounds but, fuelled by its ‘racing spirit’, it has chosen to stay and fight.

It's now linked up with Toro Rosso – with an eye on a future tie-up with sister team Red Bull if it delivers results – and has regrouped and set its sights on rebuilding its reputation over the course of its new three-year deal.

Gasly gets to grips
at Barcelona with the
Toro Rosso-Honda



LAT IMAGES

One of the first moves it made was to overhaul its management structure. Hasegawa was moved off the F1 project, having faced growing pressure surrounding his future in the role following a year of repeated failures. Honda also conceded that Hasegawa's role was too much for one person.

"It's a fresh start with Toro Rosso, so it was good timing to make changes in the operation," Honda motorsport chief Masashi Yamamoto tells Autosport in the Toro Rosso motorhome, following a morning of meetings. "We've learned in the last three years that the current F1 operation is really complex.

"When we came back to F1, we had a head of F1 project — Hasegawa and [before that, Yasuhisa] Arai. One person was looking after trackside operations and the development side. As F1 is really complex, we felt after three years that it doesn't really work, so we decided to divide the role between two people."

Toyoharu Tanabe, who worked as an engineer for Gerhard Berger at McLaren and chief engineer for Jenson Button at BAR and then Honda, has taken on the role of F1 technical director and will focus on the racing and testing operation at the circuit. Yasuaki Asaki takes the position of operating officer at Honda's Sakura base in charge of F1 engine development.

Honda had the option of allowing Hasegawa to stay on in one of the new roles, but the board ultimately felt it was time for a change of approach and management style. "It is not something to do with Hasegawa personally," says Yamamoto. "We didn't have any problem with him. He contributed so much for the past two years to construct a good organisation. But as this is a fresh start with Toro Rosso, we decided to reset everything rather than have someone who had been with McLaren. Hasegawa and Tanabe have two different styles of management. We don't say which is better. They are just different. Tanabe's style is more hands-on. He sits in on briefings and listens to the discussions. We think Tanabe's style is more suited to our situation."

As Honda battled to save its McLaren partnership last year, it took an aggressive approach to development that involved bringing small updates in quick succession and subsequently taking a series of penalties. In hindsight, Honda feels trying to do too much too quickly was a mistake as it affected quality.

"Asaki has experience of F1 from the 1980s and '90s," says Yamamoto. "I think he can make the right choices. What happened last year, it was a really difficult situation. We wanted to add power somehow and we did so many things at the same time, »



Hartley and Gasly:
the 'experienced
inexperienced' duo

THE DRIVERS

ARE TORO ROSSO'S 'ALMOST-ROOKIES' UP TO THE TASK?

Toro Rosso enters this season with the least-experienced driver line-up on the grid. Pierre Gasly and Brendon Hartley have at least made a rolling start to their Formula 1 careers, thanks to late-season cameos with the team last year, but they have not yet started 10 GPs between them.

Such inexperience is nothing new for a team that's used to running rookie line-ups. In 2015, Max Verstappen and Carlos Sainz Jr had started zero F1 races coming into the season, and they didn't turn out badly... But the crucial difference then was that Toro Rosso had more space to focus on driver development. This year, it must contend with inexperienced drivers, a completely new engine, an untested works partnership with Honda, plus winter upheaval within its own aerodynamic department.

So far, the Honda relationship appears to be running smoothly, while the drivers are not quite as raw as they appear on paper. Double World Endurance champion and Le Mans 24 Hours winner Hartley brings a wealth of experience with him from Porsche's defunct LMP1 sportscar programme, so should not be fazed by this unexpected switch to the

pinnacle of single-seater racing. Gasly spent last season in Japan and nearly won Super Formula. He arrives a more-rounded proposition, with vital experience of working with Honda, than when he took the GP2 crown in 2016.

But there are still question marks over this line-up. Toro Rosso will likely be engaged in a tight midfield scrap with Force India, Williams, Haas and Sauber, as it aims to deliver on team boss Franz Tost's perennial target of a top-five finish in the constructors' championship. Can either of these drivers immediately match the metronomic consistency Sainz achieved last year, in battling for Q3 and regularly scoring points?

Gasly is a proven winner elsewhere in single-seaters, but still needs to force his way into Red Bull's longer-term thinking – no easy task when Verstappen, Daniel Ricciardo and Sainz sit ahead of you in the queue. Hartley's F1 career resurrection is a heartwarming tale, but he cannot stand on sentiment. Both have much to prove and need to step up quickly to ensure the Toro Rosso-Honda partnership gains the results to match its accentuated ambition.

BEN ANDERSON

we didn't really concentrate on one thing. We didn't really complete one thing. This year, we should focus on one thing."

Last year, Honda opted for a complete revamp of its engine concept over the winter, abandoning its size-zero architecture and following the Mercedes concept of attaching the turbine and compressor at opposite ends of the engine block via an elongated connecting shaft. But that left Honda with too much to do and not enough time. Problems at the fire-up were just the start. An oil-tank-design issue followed. When the car hit the track, severe vibrations from the engine and transmission caused repeated breakdowns. The drivers felt it was less driveable and not as powerful as the previous season. This year, Honda has opted to stick with the same concept and develop it.

While Asaki did not formally start his development role until January 1, he has been involved in the project since last September. Yamamoto says he was involved in the decision-making surrounding the direction of the 2018 engine and felt that this was the right way to continue. "Asaki has got his own ideas, which can't be implemented before the season because of timings," says Yamamoto. "But they will come later in the season, in the form of performance improvements."

Yamamoto concedes that Honda remains adrift of the other engine manufacturers – and its plan means it's likely to stay there initially. "We are still fourth in the pecking order," he adds. "Our approach this year is to be first focused on reliability at the beginning of the season."

So far it seems that Honda is taking a sensible approach to the second era of its latest return, having learned the lessons from its time with McLaren. Its partnership with Toro Rosso has started off on the right foot too. "We've been preparing so hard with Toro

"WE HAVE TO HAVE A BETTER REPUTATION AND WE CAN DO THAT TOGETHER WITH TORO ROSSO"

Rosso," says Yamamoto. "The relationship is really good. Everyone is really happy and has a positive feeling ahead of the season."

In Toro Rosso, it has a team that is keen to make this partnership work, and has already put steps in place to learn from the mistakes made by Honda's previous partner. Toro Rosso boss Franz Tost has made a big effort to make Honda and its staff feel welcome. "We have a real fantastic working relationship with Honda," says Tost. "We had very busy months in November, December, January and February. There were no problems



Yamamoto: happy
with his reshuffle
of management



from the communication side. We at Toro Rosso started to prepare ourselves for this cooperation.

"We had some lessons in Faenza focused on how to communicate with Japanese companies. I think this was useful to get an idea of the way of thinking because it's a completely different culture. These seminars had a really positive result. We have a really good relationship with Honda. We are kind of a works team. We're the only team working with Honda."

The other thing in Honda's favour is that it retains full support from the board. Privately, the board members felt the brand was being damaged by consistently poor performances during its time with McLaren. Yamamoto had to work hard to convince it that staying in F1 with Toro Rosso was the best option. Ultimately, he succeeded. But he was aided by CEO Takahiro Hachigo's support and commitment to the F1 project and Honda's success in MotoGP, as well as the turnaround of Honda Jet's fortunes (the aviation arm of the business selling business jets, which topped its category in 2017), which gives the company hope that its brand is not only protected, but can be enhanced by improvements in F1. "The board members support us," confirms Yamamoto. "It was a difficult three years but we have learned something that will help us make progress with Toro Rosso."

"We have to have a better reputation and we can do that together with Toro Rosso. Honda Jet have a long history and have struggled. At one stage, they almost stopped development inside Honda. But Honda stuck with the project, it kept pushing and last year was full of success. Honda Jet is now having good PR. In MotoGP, we have won for the last two years. So maybe

we can have a better period for F1."

The early reliability and performance signs are encouraging too. The first fire-up in the factory was completed a day ahead of schedule and the filming day ran smoothly. Pre-season testing was also solid, with the team clocking up 822 laps over the eight days of testing at Barcelona. That was in contrast to the 599 laps its former partner McLaren managed.

The charm offensive continues at Toro Rosso, with Tost backing his new works partner to deliver. "I am convinced Honda has the capacity and the knowhow to develop the engine on a level that we all expect to be," he says. "I see it very, very positively because Honda made a lot of progress in the last months from the reliability side and from the performance side and we are all looking forward to this season."

When the Toro Rosso-Honda project was launched, Honda chief officer of brand and communications operations Katsuhide Moriyama boldly said "next year our goal is to fight the top three at the front of the grid". It's an ambitious goal and one that will be difficult to achieve.

When asked the same question, Yamamoto is more realistic and steers clear of making bold predictions: "We're in a different situation compared to last year. McLaren has very experienced drivers; Toro Rosso has very young drivers. We have to move forward and we have to make progress."

Its performance and reliability in pre-season testing suggest that Honda is on its way to achieving Yamamoto's goal and, if it continues on that trajectory, maybe Moriyama's target will not seem so ambitious. *///*



Can Alfa Romeo boost a revival?

Sauber has had some tough times of late, but a number of key deals should help it to eventually get back into the midfield battle

ADAM COOPER

AROUND 18 MONTHS AGO SAUBER WAS DEAD ON ITS FEET, teetering towards a potential financial collapse, with no obvious route to recovery. Now the Swiss team is heading into the 2018 season with full technical support from Ferrari, sponsorship from premium road-car brand Alfa Romeo, and, in Charles Leclerc, one of the hottest young prospects of recent times in the cockpit.

It's been a dramatic turnaround, one that began with the sale in late 2016 to a consortium led by Swedish Tetra Pak billionaire Finn Rausing, also the main backer of driver Marcus Ericsson.

Last summer the new owners parted company with long-time boss Monisha Kaltenborn, who had saddled the team with an uncompetitive 2016 Ferrari power unit, and had been pursuing a future with Honda.

In her place came Frederic Vasseur, hugely successful with his ASM/ART teams in the junior categories, and up to speed with F1 after an educational if unhappy year at Renault. Virtually the first thing the Frenchman did was cancel the Honda plans and reboot the Ferrari deal for 2018 and beyond.

"The Honda decision was official two or three days after I joined, just after the British Grand Prix [in July]," Vasseur recalls. "I don't remember exactly the date, but for sure it was one of the first topics that we had to deal with. I was convinced. The deal with Ferrari was announced in Budapest, two weeks after."

There was a much bigger picture than the supply of a competitive engine and, after months of discussion, the Alfa title sponsorship was finally confirmed. Why did it take so long?

"Because it's a long-term project, and an important project, for Alfa Romeo to come back into F1," says Vasseur. "It was not an easy decision, and you can't do a deal like this in two weeks. We started the discussion at the beginning of September, and we did the announcement in the first week of December. If you compare that with other manufacturers who came back to F1, it went pretty fast."

"Alfa Romeo won the first two [drivers'] championships, it's an iconic brand in F1, and as they are pushing like hell on the road cars it makes sense for them to come back into competition."

So what level of support does Ferrari now offer, given that company president Sergio Marchionne is keen not just for the Alfa name to have a high profile, but for protege Leclerc to shine? "It's difficult for me to judge, because I was not there before," says Vasseur. "It's not a matter of promises, I just know that they will be fully committed, and will push like hell, because it's also in their own interests. I think it will be a perfect cooperation."

"We can extend the parameters of the collaboration, on some other parts. With Alfa Romeo too, not only on the sponsorship side, but we could try to collaborate between the two engineering teams. It will take time, but we have to get used to working together."



This is very much a building year, underlined by the fact that the C37 has not impressed in pre-season testing. The head count at Hinwil – a top facility that has been underused since the withdrawal of BMW almost a decade ago – has already risen from 320 to 400, and it will hit 450 in the coming months, with the aero department the main focus. Vasseur went through a similar process at Renault, and he learned a few lessons.

"I hope so, because if I didn't learn something it means that I'm stupid!" he says. "The difference was that Enstone was a bit bigger when I joined, and the team was owned by the car manufacturer. But the process was the same – you know that if you have a mid-term project, you have to restructure the team."

"It's not easy. The most important thing is to do it step by step, to integrate people into the company, and do it consistently, and not try to work too fast."

Sauber finished a distant 10th for the past two years, but Vasseur doesn't want to put a number on any expected improvement. "I haven't said, 'No targets; I've said that we won't have a target like P9, P7, P6... The target for me is to be much better tomorrow than today, and to improve. When you have a mid-term project, or a long-term project, the most important thing is to consistently improve, not to say, 'I want to be P7 or P8.'"

Marchionne is not known for accepting second best, and there will be huge pressure on Sauber from a man who is so ambitious, especially for the resurgent Alfa brand. "He is ambitious, and for sure when you are running a company like Alfa Romeo, and you decide to come back to F1, you have to be ambitious," agrees Vasseur. "And as Sauber, when we decided to commit to Alfa Romeo, we have to be ambitious. Everybody on the grid is ambitious, everybody is pushing. If you look at Red Bull, from when they decided to join F1, five years later they were world champions. They were right to be ambitious."

"But it is a lot of pressure, like you said. Mr Marchionne has a huge expectation, but we know it, we know we have to deliver. Not only for Mr Marchionne, but for us, for Alfa Romeo, for Sauber, for the shareholders of Sauber, for all the guys involved in the company, because they are pushing like hell. We will have to get results and improve." ❀

CHARLES LECLERC

SAUBER'S OTHER NEW WEAPON FOR 2018

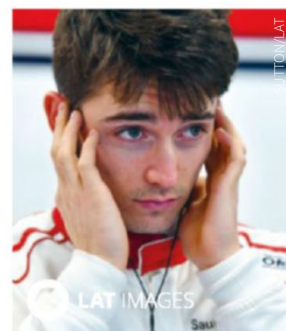
Charles Leclerc is one of those young drivers who just oozes star quality and, once he was picked up by Ferrari's academy, it was somehow inevitable that the Monegasque would make it to the top.

His stellar junior record includes winning the GP3 and Formula 2 titles in the past two seasons, and in so doing he has leapfrogged Antonio Giovinazzi in Maranello's affections, relegating the more experienced Italian to a reserve role at Sauber. Frederic Vasseur also rates Leclerc highly.

"You know it's always difficult to compare someone in 2018 with someone who drove for you in, say, 2012," says the Sauber boss. "I have a very good feeling with him because I know him from a couple of years. He did karts with me, and we won GP3 together."

"I know perfectly that he's fast, but the most important thing for me is to have someone charismatic in the team, able to motivate the guys, to bring the team with him, and to be pushy when he has to be pushy, and try to calm down everybody when he has to."

The extra dimension to the story is Leclerc's close relationship with the late Jules Bianchi. Leclerc has followed a parallel path, with similar Ferrari support, his career steered by the same manager in Nicolas Todt, and Vasseur's ART team



"THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT HE MOTIVATES THE TEAM"

figuring strongly on his CV. And now he's at Sauber – the team that Bianchi was set to drive for in 2015.

"He was my 'godfather,'" Leclerc explains. "And actually my father and his father were best friends, and my brother and Jules were childhood best friends. Our families were very, very close, and still are now."

He prefers to play down the similarities in their career trajectories: "It's the same philosophy of career, because we've had the same manager that is taking the big decisions for us. But I'm really focusing on myself, and trying to take the best path for myself."

"I'm definitely not trying to do exactly the same path as him, I'm just trying to do my own path, and trying to do it the best way I can."



KUBICA

TEE/LAT





Can he get back in a race seat?

The remarkable Pole just missed out on a Williams drive for 2018, but he is still playing a key role at the team in the hope of getting back on the grid

EDD STRAW

ROBERT KUBICA PAYS LITTLE HEED TO THE HUMAN INTEREST story of his return to a full-time Formula 1 role. Neither do the technical staff of the Williams team that passed him over for a race seat and signed him as reserve and development driver.

Seven years on from the rally crash that changed his life, Kubica can unquestionably drive a grand prix car effectively and is keen to secure a race seat. The question is, can he find those last fractions of a per cent that make the difference between an also-ran and a top driver — especially since the onboard footage recently revealed by Williams shows the steering wheel resting in the palm of his damaged right hand rather than being gripped by it?

Outside of filming mileage, Kubica has done 122 laps in Barcelona testing, and has Friday practice outings in Spain, Austria and Abu Dhabi to look forward to — plus in-season test running. So what can the 33-year old do to persuade a team to pick him up, considering he has so few opportunities to show what he can do?

“Whatever will be asked of me from the [Williams] team, I will do it, because it’s part of the job,” he says in answer to this question. “If I decide to do it, it means I think I’m able to prepare and use the opportunity to get me closer. Then, if I have the chance, I will be more prepared than I was a couple of months ago.”

“Every day you can learn something new and at the end of the year I will be better, because when I’m jumping in the car I have different priorities, so it’s not about fine-tuning and small details. My job is more about getting the global picture and feedback, trying to find weaker points of the car, give suggestions and ideas to improve the car. It’s not just about pure speed or pace, but it’s a good opportunity to learn new things and to be in the car.”

“The regulations are quite restrictive on testing. But still, I will have a chance, and it will give me an opportunity to drive the car while we are developing it. So understanding the development rate, and the route we are going, will be important.”

Kubica accepts pace is only part of the equation. When he was attempting to land a race seat with Williams for this year (only to lose out to Sergey Sirotkin after an Abu Dhabi test that was expected to be a comeback coronation turned into a shootout for the ride), he had a strong commercial package behind him. That should continue to be in his favour. But much as critics of the choice Williams made point to Sirotkin’s bigger pot as the principal reason for him getting the nod over Kubica, the reality is that the Russian rookie really was the better option, based on both financial contribution and his testing performance. So Kubica needs to show

he can build from his current decent level to something closer to the remarkable performances he was capable of in his pre-accident pomp with BMW Sauber and Renault.

What he does have is a genuine part to play with Williams. These kinds of roles, be they test, reserve or third driver, can vary dramatically, but what Kubica is doing is far more than just loitering around in a team jacket wearing headphones.

“No, and we configured it that way,” says Williams chief technical officer Paddy Lowe on this point. “What we didn’t want was a guy that just sat on the bench and didn’t really play an active part. It’s fantastic to see we’ve achieved the vision that we had in mind.”

“He’s a fully active member of the team. He comes in at 7am and leaves at 11 at night whether he’s driving or not — and most days he’s not. He’s playing a really active part in what we’re doing.”

Kubica, of course, has used such a role to land a race seat before. In 2006 he spent much of the season as BMW Sauber’s test driver and parlayed that into a proper drive in place of Jacques Villeneuve for the final six races of the season. The big difference is that he had driven in Friday practice on all 12 race weekends before his promotion that year, on top of 25 test days in the ’06 car. His ’18 mileage is pathetic by comparison.

But what Kubica’s role with Williams does offer him is the chance to contribute like the superstar test drivers of 10 to 15 years ago did. He’s a pseudo throwback to the days when Lowe was at McLaren and drivers such as Alexander Wurz and Pedro de la Rosa made a big impact. If he can do that job well, the rest of the paddock will hear about it. And if the pace is strong enough he’ll become a contender for a race seat, because interested teams will be watching.

“Because he’s got time in the car there’s a validity to what he’s saying, and he feels a validity in his presence that wouldn’t exist if he was just a spectator, which is how he might feel if he just turned up to sit in meetings,” says Lowe. “In those days, Wurz and Pedro used to drive the car week in week out, then they’d come to the race meeting and speak with some relevance.”

Beyond what he’s doing in F1, Kubica is also a serious contender for a seat in Manor’s two-car LMP1 World Endurance Championship line-up. If he lands that drive, that will give him another arena in which to prove himself.

Kubica knows he has to do an excellent job to have any chance of a race seat. Doubly so given his age, injury and length of layoff. He’s already come so far, and maybe this is as far as it goes. But if anyone can complete this fairytale return, it’s Robert Kubica. ✱

HALO: THE TRUTH



The halo is to Formula 1 what Brexit is to British politics — divisive, emotive, largely inconsequential to the world beyond, but symbolic of a battle between romantic past and cold, hard progress

BEN ANDERSON

THE 'HALOISTS' — THE FIA, OTHER SAFETY CRUSADERS, and Fernando Alonso — believe its introduction is a no-brainer. Halo is demonstrably safer than no halo, so there is no reason to prevent it. Consequences be damned.

The anti-halo brigade — many fans, Nigel Roebuck and Kevin Magnussen — froth with fury. To them, it is an aesthetic abomination that devalues the spectacle of Formula 1; indicative of a 'nanny-state' attitude that is tearing the fearless heart from the body of grand prix racing.

That the halo improves safety is not in dispute. The contention concerns whether this improvement is necessary and worth the cost elsewhere. 'Drivers won't be able to see properly'; 'they won't be able to get in and out of their cars quickly'; 'it's too heavy and makes the cars slower'; 'it looks terrible and lessens the visual splendour of Formula 1'.

This is broadly the body of criticism that fuels the anti-halo diatribe. Pre-season, Christian Horner described it as a "scaffold pole; not very F1-ish". Toto Wolff would like to take a chainsaw to it.

But now the teams have finally run their own, fully developed versions of the halo, we can begin to understand what it has *actually* done to Formula 1.

It is time for the truth about the halo.

The drivers can see fine, mostly

There was much suspicion that the halo would substantially reduce the drivers' visibility, but a driver's-eye-view video of

Robert Kubica piloting the new Williams suggests this won't be a problem, except potentially in the pitlane.

Valtteri Bottas completed two race distances in Mercedes' simulator and said he "didn't even notice it anymore", while Daniel Ricciardo confirmed that doubts have been overplayed, saying he could see start lights no problem at all.

Carlos Sainz Jr raised a concern about the halo blocking raindrops from specking his visor, making it more difficult to read changing conditions from inside the car, but broadly speaking it seems that the halo's actual effect on driver visibility is negligible so far,





SBLOHAM/LAT

though Magnussen has raised doubts about its potential trouble through Eau Rouge at Spa and Turn 1 at Austin.

Getting in and out is tough

Inserting a solid structure over the cockpit was always going to make getting in and out of the car more difficult, and so it has proved, with Toro Rosso-Honda driver Pierre Gasly describing it as a “big mess” that tore his racesuit.

“It’s quite weird conditions,” he says. “You need to be a long way back, to slide into the car, and with all the winglets you have on the halo you cannot really touch it.”

The cars aren’t slower

Wolff’s chief reason for wanting to chainsaw the halo from his Mercedes is that it’s a heavy item that sits high on the car – two things that are bad news for performance.

The minimum weight limit has increased by 5kg – to 733kg – for 2018, but some teams estimate that the halo – and its associated mountings – has added 15kg to their cars.

Nevertheless, the relentless pace of development, combined with softer tyres for 2018, means the cars have lapped faster than they did in pre-season testing last year.

As Bottas says, “we would prefer the weight to be lower, but we can always fit stiffer rollbars”.

Halo looks better now, but still not good

The ‘real’ halos developed by the teams, as opposed to the FIA test hacks trialled previously, are not so visually offensive now that they’re blended properly into the chassis design.

But it does create a big problem properly identifying drivers, given their helmets are now hidden, and it seems the darker versions run by Red Bull, Mercedes, McLaren, Haas and Renault look better to the naked eye than those painted to integrate into the livery, according to our reporters on the ground.

The halo remains a frustrating and unsightly halfway house, and we’ll inevitably get used to it, but the FIA needs to continue pushing for a more elegant solution. 🍷

OTHER NEW THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

No more T-wings

The FIA has narrowed the proscriptive dimensions atop the engine covers, which means no more unsightly T-wings. Sharkfins were meant to disappear too, but teams have reprofiled their designs to retain them.

More Pirelli tyres

Pirelli admits it was conservative in 2017, so aims to introduce strategic variation by expanding its range of compounds from five to seven and narrowing the gap between each. The superhard and hypersoft are the additions at either end of the tyre spectrum.

FIA gets tough on engines...

The FIA will limit each car to three combustion engines, three turbochargers, three MGU-Hs, two MGU-Ks, two Energy Stores, and two Control Electronics units for 21 races. Last season, four of each were available.

...and engine oil...

The FIA is also banning oil injection into the engine air intake, as well as requesting teams’ data on engine-oil mass and oil-tank levels. One oil per driver per race must be specified, and the FIA will only allow its own sensors to monitor temperatures and pressures inside the engines, except in exhausts and the internals of electrical boxes.

...and hybrid weights and intake temperatures...

The FIA has standardised the weight and volume of certain electrical items in the hybrid

systems, and will constantly measure engine-plenum air temperature to ensure it remains above 10C ambient.

...and engine parity...

It has also issued a technical directive reminding manufacturers they must supply identical engine specifications to customer teams, including software, fuel and lubricants (where the supplier is identical).

...and suspension...

The FIA is attempting to clamp down on teams using steering angle to gain an aerodynamic advantage via the use of clever front-suspension systems. A rideheight change under steering lock is normal, but now cannot exceed 5mm.

...and jumped starts

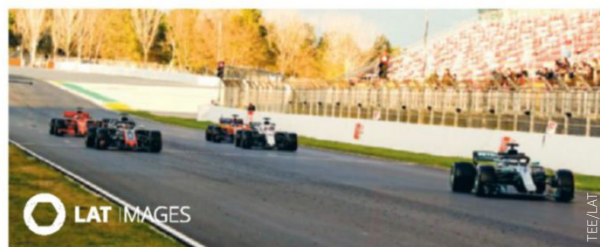
After Valtteri Bottas made his contentious lightning start to win last year’s Austrian GP, the FIA has tweaked the rules to penalise drivers whose cars move before the lights go out. It will impose 10s stop/go penalties if transponders detect illegal movement.

Grid penalties simplified

Any driver who earns a penalty over 15 places will simply have to start from the back of the grid. Timing of engine-component changes will dictate the grid order.

Standing starts after safety cars

Races will feature standing starts after safety-car periods following red flags, unless conditions are unsafe.



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ALL START TIMES ARE LOCAL

PORTLOCK/LAT

AUSTRALIAN GP

Melbourne

March 25

1610

TV Sky Sports F1

CANADIAN GP

Montreal

June 10

1410

TV Sky

BELGIAN GP

Spa

August 26

1510

TV Sky & C4

RUSSIAN GP

Sochi

September 30

1410

TV Sky

MEXICAN GP

Mexico City

October 28

1310

TV Sky

BAHRAIN GP

Sakhir

April 8

1810

TV Sky & Channel 4

FRENCH GP

Paul Ricard

June 24

1610

TV Sky

ITALIAN GP

Monza

September 2

1510

TV Sky

JAPANESE GP

Suzuka

October 7

1410

TV Sky & C4

BRAZILIAN GP

Interlagos

November 11

1510

TV Sky

CHINESE GP

Shanghai

April 15

1410

TV Sky

AUSTRIAN GP

Red Bull Ring

July 1

1510

TV Sky & C4

SINGAPORE GP

Marina Bay

September 16

2010

TV Sky & C4

UNITED STATES GP

Austin

October 21

1310

TV Sky & C4

ABU DHABI GP

Yas Marina

November 25

1710

TV Sky & C4

AZERBAIJAN GP

Baku

April 29

1610

TV Sky & C4

BRITISH GP

Silverstone

July 8

1410

TV Sky & C4

SPANISH GP

Barcelona

May 13

1510

TV Sky

GERMAN GP

Hockenheim

July 22

1510

TV Sky

MONACO GP

Monte Carlo

May 27

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HUNGARIAN GP

Hungaroring

July 29

1510

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THE RACE NOT TO MISS

Lewis Hamilton will be gunning for a record-breaking sixth British GP win in 2018. For ticket information visit:

silverstone.co.uk/events/

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LAT IMAGES

MAUGER/LAT

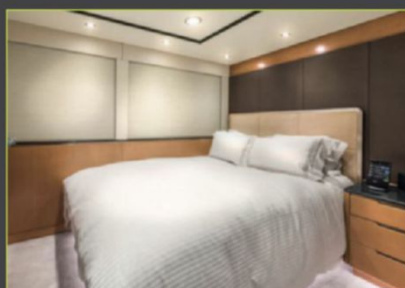
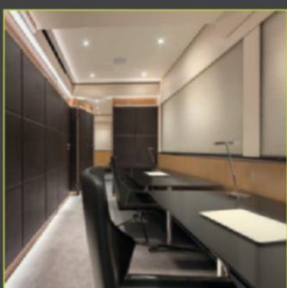
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 LAT IMAGES

MERCEDES

CAR Mercedes F1 W09 ENGINE Mercedes M09



STARTS 168 | FIRST GP FRANCE 1954 | WINS 76 | POLES 88 | FASTEST LAPS 56 | 2017 1ST

The main problem with Mercedes – for everybody else – is that the dominant team of this era of

Formula 1 had a small problem last year. That led to a great deal of head scratching, and with the sheer depth of expertise on tap in Brackley and Brixworth that's probably the worst thing that could have happened for Mercedes' rivals.

It may prove that last year was actually the team's weakest – and a missed opportunity for the rest. The result of all that self-examination is a car that, during pre-season testing, has looked to be the class of the field.

Mercedes has put together an iterative development of last year's car, and that was the right thing to do. Mercedes knew the speed was in there; the difficulty came in unlocking it on more occasions.

So the team's challenge was to identify why this happened and

rectify the problem. From what we have seen so far, the car is quick. But we will have to wait until we hit a few other tracks to see if any 'diva' characteristics carry over.

That said, throughout testing the car looked strong from trackside, turning in well in the fast corners and allowing Lewis Hamilton, a master of this art, to attack the slow corners and get the rear end working on entry with precision.

The car doesn't look perfect, but it gives the drivers confidence, which is a major asset when they need to go and find lap time.

This team has dominated the past four seasons of F1, and it could do the same again this year. While that will be bad news for those watching, you can't fault what Mercedes has done in recent years. If it does win both titles again this year, it will match Ferrari's record for consecutive drivers'/constructors' championship doubles.



**#44
LEWIS
HAMILTON**



**#77
VALTTERI
BOTTAS**

1 ST	2017 POSITION	3 RD
33	AGE	28
208	STARTS	97
AUSTRALIA 2007	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2013
62	WINS	3
72	POLES	4
38	FASTEST LAPS	3

LEWIS HAMILTON

There's no question that he is the title favourite, and at 33 he is very much in his prime and enjoying being the focus of the Mercedes team after Nico Rosberg's retirement. The only question mark is that there are times when he seems to lose a little focus and get distracted – but there was very little of that last year. Overall, he's a class act who only seems to be getting better and is going to take a lot of beating.

VALTTERI BOTTAS

Bottas still has a lot to prove, but which version of him will we see in 2018? The one who gave Hamilton a hard time in the first half of the season, or the one who was number two thereafter? He's proved he can win races and support Hamilton, but he needs to do more to keep his seat for 2019. Bottas has the ability but now must show that he has the mental strength to perform to the maximum on every occasion.



FERRARI

CAR **Ferrari SF71H** ENGINE **Ferrari 063**



STARTS 928 | FIRST GP MONACO 1950 | WINS 224 | POLES 208 | FASTEST LAPS 237 | 2017 2ND

This time last year Autosport was praising Ferrari for its aggressive approach to the new regulations.

And out on the circuit, the car looked really good. It didn't matter which tyre it was on, the balance seemed to be there. The big question was whether the development rate could be sustained throughout the season, but Ferrari was also able to keep up with that.

But this year, based on trackside observation of the SF71H, Ferrari doesn't seem to have moved on that much. On the track the car looks pretty good, but it seems to be operating on the limit. When the drivers try to push that little bit more it just slides wide. Even so, it's pretty nicely balanced – it just doesn't look like it has the grip level of the Mercedes.

There's always a danger that when you make big changes to your

concept, as Ferrari has done by going to a much higher rake configuration, that you can create new problems and accidentally eliminate the virtues of the previous car. Looking at the way the car was behaving in testing, and the fact that part of the 'tea tray' seemed to be grinding on the track through the final parts of the faster corners, suggests it has not got on top of the set-up demands.

If Ferrari's testing performance is representative – not the headline time, but the underlying picture of race pace on a variety of rubber and fuel loads – then there will be dark clouds over Maranello. Mercedes seems to have an advantage right now. If the car doesn't prove to be a step forward from last year's, or at least equivalent in performance, then heads will roll again.

For the sake of the season, let's hope Ferrari does get on top of the car and can unlock the performance that it thinks is in there.



**#5
SEBASTIAN
VETTEL**

**#7
KIMI
RAIKKONEN**

2ND	2017 POSITION	4TH
30	AGE	38
198	STARTS	270
USA 2007	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2001
47	WINS	20
50	POLES	17
33	FASTEST LAPS	45

SEBASTIAN VETTEL

He showed he was still up for a title fight last year, but lost out as reliability deserted his car, coupled with a few moments when the red mist overcame his professionalism. He's got the might of Ferrari behind him and a team-mate who will support him, so if the car is strong enough he'll have a good shot. The question is whether he can get the upper hand over Hamilton, who had the edge in last year's title fight.

KIMI RAIKKONEN

He's there to support Vettel and did a solid job of that last year. But good as Raikkonen once was, it's difficult to see why Ferrari wouldn't want to have a younger, more motivated driver in there to keep Vettel honest and wring the neck of the car. It's been five years since Raikkonen won a race and he knows what he's there to do – deliver consistent points and maybe even get his first victory since 2013.



DUNBAR/LAT

LAT IMAGES

RED BULL

CAR Red Bull RB14 ENGINE Renault RE18



STARTS 244 | FIRST GP AUSTRALIA 2005 | WINS 55 | POLES 58 | FASTEST LAPS 54 | 2017 3RD

Red Bull has done a good job with the RB14, but not quite good enough. A portion of that will be down to the disparity in performance of the Renault power unit compared with the Mercedes, but that's what Red Bull has got to work with.

Renault will be hoping to introduce improvements throughout the season and run the engine package less conservatively, and if it can do that it should make a difference. But Renault seems uncertain about when its upgraded ERS package will be introduced; the date could easily slip back to the second half of the year.

The car looks pretty good on the track and Red Bull has two very hungry drivers ready for success, but if they don't start the season with a win or two under their belts their enthusiasm may drop fairly quickly. You can swallow being best of the rest for only so long. Since Max

Verstappen is clearly very ambitious and there are question marks over whether Daniel Ricciardo will extend his contract or go elsewhere, there's considerable potential for trouble.

Over the test days the reliability wasn't perfect, and if Red Bull is going to challenge for either of the championships that part of the technical equation needs to be solid. There will be plenty of outside factors threatening to prevent Red Bull from finishing all the races, but self-inflicted issues need to be a thing of the past. Last year Red Bull failed to finish 13 times, while Ferrari and Mercedes did so six times between them. That's not good enough.

Overall, based on testing Red Bull looks like the team best placed to give Mercedes something to think about. Even so, this could prove to be yet another season where it's fighting for the odd win here and there rather than delivering the consistent challenge that F1 needs it to offer.



**#3
DANIEL
RICCIARDO**



**#33
MAX
VERSTAPPEN**

5TH	2017 POSITION	6TH
28	AGE	20
129	STARTS	60
GREAT BRITAIN 2011	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2015
5	WINS	3
1st (1 POLE)	BEST GRID POSITION	2ND
9	FASTEST LAPS	2

DANIEL RICCIARDO

There's big pressure on Ricciardo, because although he outscores Verstappen last year he wasn't quite as impressive, and he struggled to adapt his style to the higher-grip 2017 cars. We know he's got serious pace when he's at one with the car, and he's shown he has the mental capacity to recover from bad situations. He's looked like a potential world champion in the past, but he must get on terms with Verstappen.

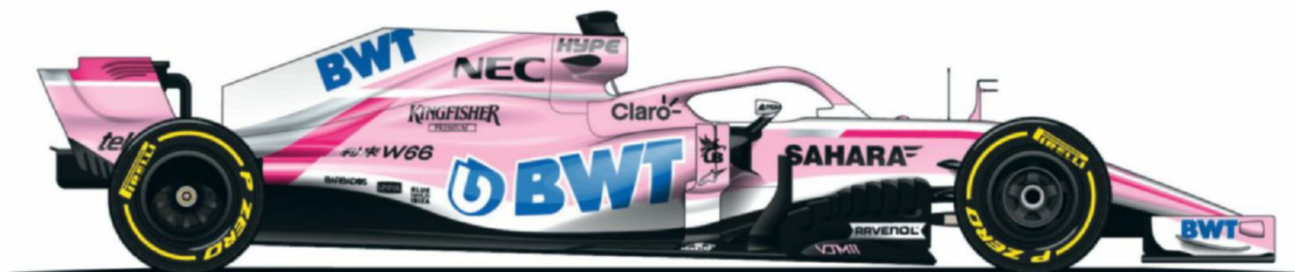
MAX VERSTAPPEN

Verstappen is a world champion in waiting. He's a driver who makes things happen and drove some great races last year, but like any driver he needs the tools to do the job. The Red Bull-Renault package needs to be strong enough to challenge for podiums every week; if it is, he'll be able to do the rest. He's willing to push the limits on track, and in doing so he's earned the respect of his rivals at the front.



FORCE INDIA

CAR Force India VJM11 ENGINE Mercedes M09



STARTS 191 | FIRST GP AUSTRALIA 2008 | BEST FINISH 2ND | POLES 1 | FASTEST LAPS 5 | 2017 4TH

Fourth place in the constructors' championship for the past two seasons has been a remarkable set of results, but you are only as good as what you can do tomorrow. This year it's going to be tough to maintain that position — in reality, Force India could do a better job on pace relative to the top teams and still end up seventh. To hold on to fourth this year, in the face of tough opposition from resurgent underachievers such as McLaren and Renault, would be the biggest achievement of all.

What we saw in testing was quite a dramatic drop-off in performance relative to the frontrunners. But the team is adamant that it came to these tests with the clear goal of putting a lot of mileage on the mechanical platform to gain an understanding of it, while running very basic aero.

Force India says it intends to introduce a major aerodynamic

package in Melbourne — and, looking at the times from the test, it needs to be major. On the plus side, race pace looked better, which suggests the team achieved its goal of validating the mechanical platform. It didn't appear to bother with low-fuel runs.

Out on the circuit the car looks adequate — it just doesn't have the grip of the frontrunners. A lot hinges on how much downforce the team can add for Australia.

But on the positive side, Force India has looked mediocre in pre-season testing before and been competitive come the start of the season. It's managed to deploy big upgrades effectively, even if it takes a few races to get on top of the set-up.

If it can find the pace, Force India has the operational strength to score consistently. Last year it managed a remarkable 16 double points finishes, so you really cannot underestimate this team's capacity to continue to be a giantkiller.



#11
SERGIO PEREZ



#31
ESTEBAN OCON

7TH	2017 POSITION	8TH
28	AGE	21
134	STARTS	29
AUSTRALIA 2011	FIRST GP	BELGIUM 2016
2ND	BEST FINISH	5TH
4TH	BEST GRID POSITION	3RD
4	FASTEST LAPS	0

SERGIO PEREZ

Perez is a very good driver for a team like Force India. He's well-established there, they know how to get the best from him, and he's very capable of scoring points consistently. He's also still keen to get himself another shot with a top team, so there's no danger of him getting too comfortable and easing off. But whether he can deal with Ocon is the question. If he gets beaten, he's not going to get another shot at the big time.

ESTEBAN OCON

With Bottas under pressure at Mercedes, Ocon knows that if he has another strong season at Force India he has a chance to earn himself a shot at the big time with Mercedes. He improved over last year and was starting to get the edge over Perez, but he'll still face a tough battle. He's shown he's quick and capable of getting results, but he can't let immaturity allow him to get caught up in clashes with his team-mate or anyone else.



DUNBAR/LAT

LAT IMAGES

WILLIAMS

CAR Williams FW41 ENGINE Mercedes M09



STARTS 646 | FIRST GP SPAIN 1977 | WINS 114 | POLES 127 | FASTEST LAPS 131 | 2017 5TH

Williams seemed to struggle a lot during much of testing, and out on track the car often looked a little unstable, particularly on corner entry. The team was also labouring to get the tyres working and spent a lot of time trying to understand these problems. But on the final day there were some more encouraging signs: single-lap pace improved to the extent that it's now reasonable to imagine Williams running strongly within the midfield pack.

Williams has changed its car's aerodynamics dramatically, and those alterations likely extend to the mechanical-design philosophy too. The FW41 is a mix of Ferrari and Mercedes concepts rather than an iterative design, which accounts for why it appeared to take Williams until the latter phase of testing to develop an understanding of its behaviour. This is the first time

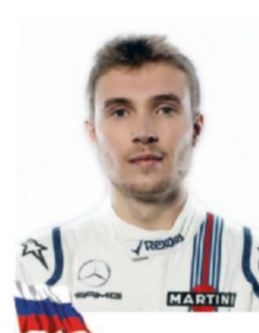
Paddy Lowe has had the chance to influence the approach to a car from start to finish, having joined the team this time last year, so this is a good test of the ambitious direction he's trying to take it in.

It would be good to see Williams back in contention. After all, it has a long and impressive pedigree. But heritage counts for little in the heat of competition and the team has acknowledged that by recruiting aggressively from outside, hiring Lowe from Mercedes and Dirk de Beer from Ferrari.

Williams has two relatively inexperienced drivers, but that can also be a positive when trying to build a team: older drivers can bring preconceived ideas of how things ought to be rather than just driving the wheels off what they now have. Sirotkin and Stroll both have something to prove, which is always good for the motivation, especially with Robert Kubica on standby.



#18
LANCE STROLL



#35
SERGEY SIROTKIN

12TH	2017 POSITION	-
19	AGE	22
20	STARTS	0
AUSTRALIA 2017	FIRST GP	-
3RD	BEST FINISH	-
2ND	BEST GRID POSITION	-
0	FASTEST LAPS	-

LANCE STROLL

Talent is something you can't buy and, while Stroll had some bad weekends last year, there were others where his driving pushed back strongly against the prevailing narrative that he is only in F1 because of his father's money. You don't start on the front row or finish on the podium without having some degree of talent. In his second season he's got to start qualifying better, since that held him back in 2017.

SERGEY SIROTKIN

Sirotkin has been around for a while and has made a genuinely good impression on both Renault and Williams. While the finance he brings has played a part in him getting the drive, his performance level shows he's worthy of a place in F1. It will be interesting to see how the battle between him and Stroll plays out; with Robert Kubica hovering in the background like Banquo's ghost, neither rookie can slip up.



RENAULT

CAR **Renault RS18** ENGINE **Renault RE18**



STARTS 341 | FIRST GP GREAT BRITAIN 1977 | WINS 35 | POLES 51 | FASTEST LAPS 31 | 2017 6TH

Renault has been building what had been a grossly denuded 'Team Enstone' back to the kind of resource level that's required to challenge for race wins. Now it's time to see if that investment has been as transformative as expected.

The big challenge for Renault is to be ahead of McLaren, the latest addition to its customer roster, and over pre-season testing it just about achieved that. Red Bull is a team that has been operating at a very high level for quite a few years, so it's reasonable to expect it to remain out of touch this year. That won't stop Renault trying to beat *all* its customers, but it should remain reasonably happy so long as it can consistently make progress as the season unfolds.

Last year it ended the season with the fourth-fastest car, and that looks to be a realistic target again. What

we did observe during testing was that the car was reacting more to the kerbs than any others, and the team has admitted it may have some work to do on set-up come Melbourne because the smooth, resurfaced Barcelona track didn't give many opportunities to understand what the reasons may be.

Renault had quite a few reliability problems in Barcelona that it must get on top of. This happened last year too, squandering several points-scoring opportunities.

Nico Hulkenberg and Carlos Sainz are going to push each other hard and are both capable of success if they have the tools at their disposal. Sainz is hugely ambitious.

Overall, this is a team on the up and one that has had a big injection of resources in recent years. Its challenge is to show it's at a good enough level to justify even more support from Renault and push to reach the level of Mercedes.



#27
NICO
HULKENBERG

#55
CARLOS
SAINZ

10TH	2017 POSITION	9TH
30	AGE	23
135	STARTS	60
BAHRAIN 2010	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2015
4TH	BEST FINISH	4TH
1st (1 POLE)	BEST GRID POSITION	5TH
2	FASTEST LAPS	0

NICO HULKENBERG

Hulkenberg is a class act, and he's long overdue a podium finish, which will come this year if Renault continues to improve. The new technical package, with higher-grip cars and less-extreme demands on tyre management, enabled him to shine last year. But he now has to face the challenge of Sainz as well as showing that he can deliver consistent results, which is the minimum a works team expects from its drivers.

CARLOS SAINZ

With a very successful father, Sainz has been brought up in motorsport so nothing is new to him. His focus and professionalism are very impressive. He's coming into Hulkenberg's team, but has started well and should be able to give him a good fight this season. We've seen him produce some very good results at times with Toro Rosso, and with a works team he now needs to deliver consistently.



TORO ROSSO

CAR Toro Rosso STR13 ENGINE Honda RA618H



STARTS 226 | FIRST GP BAHRAIN 2006 | WINS 1 | POLES 1 | FASTEST LAPS 1 | 2017 7TH

Toro Rosso was probably the surprise of the test, or at least the Honda part of the equation was. The new partners seem to be very much at home with each other and that can only be a positive sign. Most encouragingly, Toro Rosso completed the third highest number of laps, behind only Ferrari and Mercedes.

Early on in testing the car seemed to be showing signs of a front-end problem. As testing progressed the team seemed to have dialled it out, but towards the end of the second week the drivers looked like they were finding it a handful once again. That's a concern from a chassis perspective; when you have the big task of integrating a new engine package, it sucks in resources from other parts of the development. Toro Rosso will have been stretched, and there's a risk that there is still a lot of work to do on the aero.

As a counterpoint to that, the sheer number of laps Pierre Gasly and Brendon Hartley completed between them will have provided the team with a rich seam of data, giving it a fighting chance of getting to the root of the problem quickly.

The drivers are inexperienced at this level, similar to the Williams pair, which will add to the pressure on the team from outside as it builds for the future with its new engine partner. Importantly, the two sides have put a lot of effort into communication. What we need to see from Honda now is an ability to deliver performance with reliability, in what is still clearly the weakest engine package, but one that's not as far off as it once was.

There's another reason to keep a very close eye on Toro Rosso – given the state of relations between Red Bull and Renault, the 'senior' team will be hoping the Honda power unit comes good soon.



**#10
PIERRE
GASLY**



**#28
BRENDON
HARTLEY**

21 ST	2017 POSITION	23 RD
22	AGE	28
5	STARTS	4
MALAYSIA 2017	FIRST GP	USA 2017
12 TH	BEST FINISH	13 TH
14 TH	BEST GRID POSITION	17 TH
0	FASTEST LAPS	0

PIERRE GASLY

He's won GP2 and might have won the very competitive Japanese Super Formula championship last year but for a typhoon, so he's clearly a quick young driver who has earned his chance. You don't get into F1 with Red Bull backing unless you've got something about you – although Helmut Marko is a stern taskmaster. If the Toro Rosso package is competitive, Gasly will need to deliver on his potential very quickly.

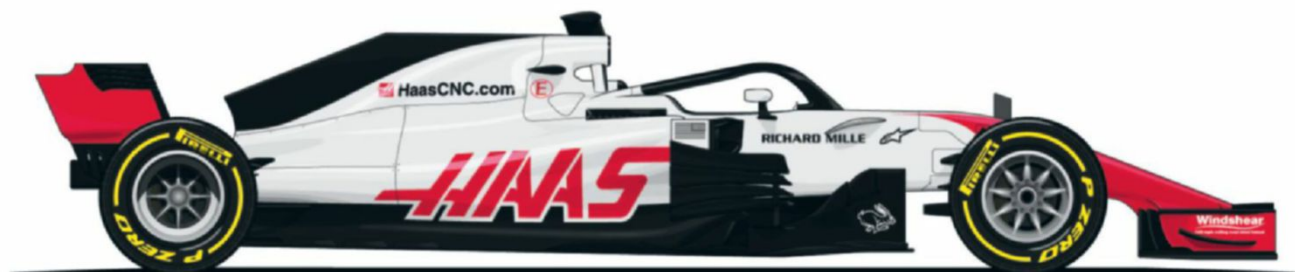
BRENDON HARTLEY

Given the number of grid penalties he incurred through no fault of his own during his handful of races last year, it was difficult for Hartley to show what he was capable of in F1. But he's demonstrated his qualities in sportscars, did enough to convince Red Bull to keep him on, and has the experience to add to the speed. He's going to face tough competition from Gasly, but he's enjoying his unexpected chance.



HAAS

CAR Haas VF-18 ENGINE Ferrari 063



STARTS 41 | FIRST GP AUSTRALIA 2016 | BEST FINISH 5TH | BEST QUALIFYING 6TH | FASTEST LAPS 0 | 2017 8TH

The main problem this team faced last season was inconsistency as its drivers battled to get inside the top 10.

If what we observed in testing is real progress and representative, then there are reasons for optimism.

When Haas revealed its car it didn't look very adventurous, but for a team at this stage in its short life an iterative approach is wise. Reliability compromised its running at times, but during qualifying simulations the VF-18 was quick.

Over the past two seasons Haas has been very erratic, and perhaps having a car like this will give it the chance to ensure it is learning how to get the best out of its package on a more regular basis.

The VF-18 did look the part on track, well-balanced and consistent. So it passed the 'eye test' and this, combined with the encouraging single-lap and long-run pace,

suggests it could start the season as a dark horse in the midfield pack.

Haas really needs to concentrate on consistency and keeping up with development, since this is where the team mainly fell down last year. We won't know if it has got on top of that until we are well into the season. But at the very least it looks like it has a car that will start the year as a genuine threat for good results. It will be important it makes the most of those opportunities to bank points early on, just as it did in its first season.

Haas also believes it has got to the root of the brake trouble Romain Grosjean had last year, although persuading him to brake a couple of metres earlier may yield greater progress. Kevin Magnussen is bringing a lot to the team, and Grosjean will be driven on by that. This team has two drivers we know are capable of delivering, but they must do it consistently.



**#8
ROMAIN
GROSJEAN**



**#20
KEVIN
MAGNUSSEN**

13TH	2017 POSITION	14TH
31	AGE	25
122	STARTS	60
EUROPE 2009	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2014
2ND	BEST FINISH	2ND
2ND	BEST GRID POSITION	4TH
1	FASTEST LAPS	0

ROMAIN GROSJEAN

Watching Grosjean during pre-season testing shows nothing has really changed; he's still trying to brake later than the car can manage. Recently he has lacked consistency, having a mixture of good days and bad days; perhaps dialling it back a bit and driving to the limitations of the car would enable him to string results together. But that's not likely to happen, so this will probably be another year of seesawing performances.

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN

Like his team-mate, Magnussen delivered a mixed bag of results last season; with three seasons in F1 under his belt, he has to be more consistent. He seems to fit in well at Haas, and the team appreciates the speed he brings to the table, but he needs to work hard on his qualifying form. Some of his race performances last year, particularly in Mexico, were outstanding. He needs to deliver those more often.



DUNBAR/LAT

LAT IMAGES

McLAREN

CAR McLaren MCL33 ENGINE Renault RE18



STARTS 821 | FIRST GP MONACO 1966 | WINS 182 | POLES 155 | FASTEST LAPS 154 | 2017 9TH

The MCL33 certainly looks good, both on the circuit and up close. The detail work on the car is impressive, but that doesn't always turn into lap time.

The change to Renault engines should only be positive. It may not be the best engine in the pitlane, but at least it puts McLaren in the position of having a power unit in common with two other teams, therefore enabling it to benchmark its chassis performance.

But that's where it ends. The reliability has been abysmal and the main problem is that every failure seems to be a new one. McLaren has had an electrical problem, a hydraulic leak, an engine oil leak and turbo issues — and those are just the ones we know about.

This is a team that has a huge facility and commitment behind it, and it should be on top of all that.

McLaren has as much in-house test equipment at its disposal as anyone else, yet smaller teams are able to get better reliability out of their cars.

All that said, it's better to have these problems in pre-season testing than at the first few races. But there will be lots of McLaren personnel in Melbourne with their fingers crossed every time the car leaves the garage.

There's also a very big aerodynamic package due for the Australian GP, potentially bigger than we will see from any other team. If that works as hoped and doesn't cause more reliability problems (and there's no guarantee of that), then it could put McLaren in good shape. One area the upgrade must address is the rear-end instability into the slow corners.

There's a lot at stake for McLaren this year, given the financial risk it has taken in parting company with Honda. If results don't match up to expectations, there will be some serious consequences.



#2
STOFFEL
VANDOORNE



#14
FERNANDO
ALONSO

16TH	2017 POSITION	15TH
25	AGE	36
20	STARTS	290
BAHRAIN 2016	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2001
7TH	BEST FINISH	1ST (32 WINS)
7TH	BEST GRID POSITION	1ST (22 POLES)
0	FASTEST LAPS	23

STOFFEL VANDOORNE

Vandoorne took a while to come to terms with being up against Alonso in an uncompetitive package last year, but he learned from that and now understands that on any given weekend you can only do your best. Because of that, he could give his team-mate a hard time. He's quick, capable of putting in race performances of a similar standard to Alonso's, and now should have a better car.

FERNANDO ALONSO

We know how good Alonso is and he'll enjoy having a more competitive package. But he's a driver who is out to win, so how long he'll be satisfied fighting for points finishes and the odd podium is another question. As long as he's happy and motivated, as he was pre-season, he'll get the best out of the car. But in taking on the World Endurance Championship with Toyota, he may be overstretching himself.



SAUBER

CAR **Sauber C37** ENGINE **Ferrari 063**



STARTS 421 | FIRST GP SOUTH AFRICA 1993 | WINS 1 | POLES 1 | FASTEST LAPS 5 | 2017 10TH

The Sauber team went into pre-season testing with what looked like a big step forward in aerodynamic complexity and high hopes that it would have hauled itself off the back and well into the midfield fight. It ended pre-season testing and heads to Melbourne looking to be in exactly the same place as it was last year.

Looking at the percentage deficit to Mercedes in 2017 compared with the gap in testing, Sauber has more or less stood still. Given the substantial gain of having a latest-spec Ferrari engine rather than a year-old one, that's deeply troubling.

The car does look completely different, but a change of aerodynamic concept doesn't automatically improve the performance. The question is whether there is a fundamental problem, or it's just that Sauber hasn't developed enough of an

understanding about how it's working. That is the problem with adding complexity: you need to know everything is working in order to get the most out of a package. That will be a big test of the aero department at Sauber, which is in a rebuilding phase after some difficult years.

Help could be at hand in the form of Ferrari and its new 'technical relationship' with Sauber. It won't stand back and allow the Alfa Romeo branding to be tarnished.

On the circuit the car looks like it hasn't got enough grip, preventing the drivers from committing properly to the corners. The fact that both Marcus Ericsson and Charles Leclerc visited the kitty litter on various occasions suggests that when the car is leaned on it bites back.

But this is a team in a rebuilding phase after years of underinvestment, so there is hope it will improve over the season. If not, it's going to be another long, hard year.



#9
MARCUS
ERICSSON



#16
CHARLES
LECLERC

20TH	2017 POSITION	-
27	AGE	20
76	STARTS	0
AUSTRALIA 2014	FIRST GP	-
8TH	BEST FINISH	-
9TH	BEST GRID POSITION	-
0	FASTEST LAPS	-

MARCUS ERICSSON

Ericsson didn't stack up too badly against Mercedes junior Pascal Wehrlein last season, but he will face a big challenge this year with Ferrari's Leclerc alongside him. He has his moments, but hasn't scored a point since mid-2015 and needs to show he can consistently put race weekends together to be in a position to take a top 10 when it's on offer. As usual, he'll have his good days and bad days, and still has something to prove.

CHARLES LECLERC

Arriving with an excellent racing pedigree and Ferrari support, Leclerc is a very exciting prospect. He excelled in Formula 2 and has the possibility of using Sauber as a platform to stake his claim for a 2019 Ferrari drive. It may still be a little early for him, but what could be a better motivator for a young, talented driver? First he has to outperform Ericsson though, and then grab big results when he can.



INSIGHT

MOTOGP PREVIEW • GOODWOOD MEMBERS' MEETING PREVIEW

GOLD AND GOOSE/LAT

 LAT IMAGES





MotoGP's confused 2018 picture

Winter testing threw up a mixed form guide heading into the new season, but don't be surprised to see last year's protagonists rising to the fore

JAMIE KLEIN

Can Dovizioso (#04)
go one better this year
and topple Marquez?

TEAM BY TEAM

APRILIA GRESINI

**ALEIX ESPARGARO** (E)

AGE 28
STARTS 128
WINS 0
DEBUT 2009
BEST SEASON
7th (2014)

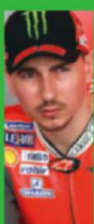
**SCOTT REDDING** (GB)

AGE 25
STARTS 72
WINS 0
DEBUT 2014
BEST SEASON
12th (2014)

DUCATI

**ANDREA DOVIZIOSO** (I)

AGE 31
STARTS 178
WINS 8
DEBUT 2008
BEST SEASON
2nd (2017)

**JORGE LORENZO** (E)

AGE 30
STARTS 174
WINS 44
DEBUT 2008
BEST SEASON
1st (2010, '12, '15)

PRAMAC DUCATI

**DANILO PETRUCCI** (I)

AGE 27
STARTS 100
WINS 0
DEBUT 2012
BEST SEASON
8th (2017)

**JACK MILLER** (AUS)

AGE 23
STARTS 48
WINS 1
DEBUT 2015
BEST SEASON
11th (2017)



Testing has not gone smoothly for Yamaha's Vinales, hitting rock bottom in Thailand

IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT LAST year's MotoGP season taught us, it's to not make bold predictions for the season ahead based solely on winter testing.

The story of the 2017 pre-season was clear: Yamaha new boy Maverick Vinales topped every test and looked to be the clear favourite going into the campaign. It was a tag he lived up to initially, with wins in the first two races, before his challenge crumbled later in the year, leaving plenty of observers perplexed – not to mention Vinales himself.

This time around, after nine days of testing at Sepang, Buriram and Losail, there's nobody sitting in a similar position. And with so many riders looking like possible contenders – if not for overall

honours, then at least for wins and podiums – more mystery than ever surrounds the form guide heading into the season.

All in all, seven different riders, representing four manufacturers and six teams, topped at least one of the nine test days, with many riders' form varying alarmingly from track to track, or even from day to day at the same venue – often without any real explanation.

At Sepang Jorge Lorenzo looked imperious on the Ducati, beating the lap record on the last day. Then in Thailand Honda was firmly in command as Dani Pedrosa ended up setting the pace. Finally, in Qatar, it was the turn of Yamaha to come good after a wretched time at Buriram, which Vinales called the



Marquez, with new Honda team boss Puig, still has to be title favourite

Lorenzo was boss at Sepang, beating the lap record, before things went awry elsewhere



LAT IMAGES

CALENDAR

LOSAIL (Q) MARCH 18	ASSEN (NL) JULY 1	MOTORLAND ARAGON (E) SEPTEMBER 23
RIO HONDO (RA) APRIL 8	SACHSEN RING (D) JULY 15	BURIRAM (T) OCTOBER 7
AUSTIN (USA) APRIL 22	BRNO (CZ) AUGUST 5	MOTEGI (J) OCTOBER 21
JEREZ (E) MAY 6	RED BULL RING (A) AUGUST 12	PHILLIP ISLAND (AUS) OCTOBER 28
LE MANS (F) MAY 20	SILVERSTONE (GB) AUGUST 26	SEPANG (MAL) NOVEMBER 4
MUGELLO (I) JUNE 3	MISANO (I) SEPTEMBER 9	VALENCIA (E) NOVEMBER 18
BARCELONA (E) JUNE 17		

GOLD AND GOOSE/LAT

“worst” test of his tenure with the team.

But amid the confusion there were two riders who stood out as the most consistent runners over the course of the three tests, if not on raw one-lap speed then certainly on long-run pace: last year’s main title protagonists, Marc Marquez and Andrea Dovizioso.

For Marquez, this was a much smoother winter than he’d been used to in recent years. Sepang was spent comparing engine types, with a preferred specification more or less sorted by the time Honda packed up and headed for Thailand. Then it was a case of experimenting with new aerodynamic fairings and honing the set-up of the latest iteration of the RC213V.

At Buriram Marquez, his team-mate Dani Pedrosa and LCR’s Cal Crutchlow (who, with his new status as a Honda-contracted rider, now has a bike very close to that of the factory duo) appeared to be a class apart, topping a day of running each while their rivals – especially Lorenzo and the works Yamaha riders – were busy tying themselves in knots.

But things took a turn in Qatar, where Marquez declared Dovizioso was “six or seven tenths” faster than him. Mind games designed to pile pressure on Dovizioso? Perhaps, but the reigning champion did seem concerned with the apparent ease with which his rival was able to post quick laps, while he was still having to test the limits to find speed.

Whatever the case, Dovizioso certainly looks to be relishing his new status as bona-fide title contender after last year’s agonising near miss. The Ducati rider did not set a fastest time throughout the nine days of testing, but was never too far off the ultimate pace either, exuding a quiet confidence as he

opted to focus mainly on longer runs.

But nagging questions remain over whether the Ducati’s turning weakness has been sufficiently improved to allow Dovizioso to beat Marquez to title glory, particularly as Sepang and Losail have traditionally been happy hunting grounds for the Desmosedici riders.

On the other side of the Ducati garage, Lorenzo still looks some way off his previous title-winning form at Yamaha. Topping the times in Malaysia proved to be a false dawn, as things went so awry in Thailand that the Spaniard even reverted to last year’s GP17 for the final day, before deciding in the end that the GP18 was the better bet. In Qatar there was a return to some normality, even if an attempt at combining the best traits of the 2017 and ’18 frames in a new chassis failed. But Lorenzo was still lagging some way off Dovizioso’s pace, and was even behind the ‘other’ GP18 rider, Pramac’s Danilo Petrucci.

After a nightmare test for both Vinales and Valentino Rossi in Thailand, things looked up a little for Yamaha in Qatar, where Tech3’s Johann Zarco led Rossi on the final day with Vinales not too far behind. Still, neither factory rider was exactly oozing confidence about the opening part of the season, with 39-year-old Rossi particularly concerned about his race pace.

Rossi was even convinced that the Yamaha, for all the work the marque has done over the winter following its dismal 2017 campaign (by its standards), remains “more or less the same” performance-wise as it was at the end of last year, when Zarco was regularly showing up the factory men on his year-old M1 machine.

It didn’t take Zarco long to realise that he was best served by sticking to the 2016 version of the Yamaha chassis, with which >>>

TEAM BY TEAM

AVINTIA DUCATI



XAVIER SIMEON (B)
AGE 28
STARTS 0
WINS N/A
DEBUT 2018
BEST SEASON N/A



TITO RABAT (E)
AGE 28
STARTS 35
WINS 0
DEBUT 2016
BEST SEASON 19th (2017)

ANGEL NIETO DUCATI



KAREL ABRAHAM (CZ)
AGE 28
STARTS 85
WINS 0
DEBUT 2011
BEST SEASON 14th (2011, '12)

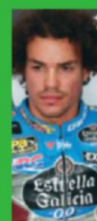


ALVARO BAUTISTA (E)
AGE 33
STARTS 139
WINS 0
DEBUT 2010
BEST SEASON 5th (2012)

MARC VDS HONDA



THOMAS LUTHI (CH)
AGE 31
STARTS 0
WINS N/A
DEBUT 2018
BEST SEASON N/A



FRANCO MORBIDELLI (I)
AGE 23
STARTS 0
WINS N/A
DEBUT 2018
BEST SEASON N/A

TEAM BY TEAM

HONDA



DANI PEDROSA (E)
AGE 32
STARTS 199
WINS 31
DEBUT 2006
BEST SEASON
2nd (2007, '10, '12)



MARC MARQUEZ (E)
AGE 25
STARTS 90
WINS 35
DEBUT 2013
BEST SEASON
1st (2013, '14, '16, '17)

LCR HONDA



TAKAAKI NAKAGAMI (J)
AGE 26
STARTS 0
WINS N/A
DEBUT 2018
BEST SEASON
N/A



CAL CRUTCHLOW (GB)
AGE 32
STARTS 123
WINS 2
DEBUT 2011
BEST SEASON
5th (2013)

KTM



BRADLEY SMITH (GB)
AGE 27
STARTS 86
WINS 0
DEBUT 2013
BEST SEASON
6th (2015)



POL ESPARGARO (E)
AGE 26
STARTS 71
WINS 0
DEBUT 2014
BEST SEASON
6th (2014)

he excelled last year, rather than going with the '17 frame as tradition would dictate. While rapid over a lap in Qatar, the Frenchman's race pace wasn't quite as impressive, but he remained bullish about the prospect of a maiden win.

Zarco is unlikely to be the only privateer in the mix at the front of the field come the start of the season, either. Crutchlow, while not as quick in Qatar as he was in Thailand, still looked to have solid long-run pace, and both Petrucci and Jack Miller on the GP17 Ducati also appear to be capable of fighting for top-five results for Pramac.

Then there's Suzuki, which, after its disastrous 2017 campaign, looks to be on the brink of a mini-revival, with both Alex Rins and Andrea Iannone looking strong in testing. Rins may only be heading into his second MotoGP season, but this will be his first with proper preparation after his injury-strewn winter last year. The young Spaniard is looking much more like the rider Suzuki hoped he would be – the new Vinales – and came close to topping the opening day in Thailand.

Iannone has had a more turbulent winter, topping the second day in Qatar only to sit out the final test day, reportedly with a stomach bug. But with a year of experience on the GSX-RR, and no repeat of last year's engine-choice error, things are looking up for the Italian, who will need to work hard to ensure he isn't outshone by his younger team-mate.

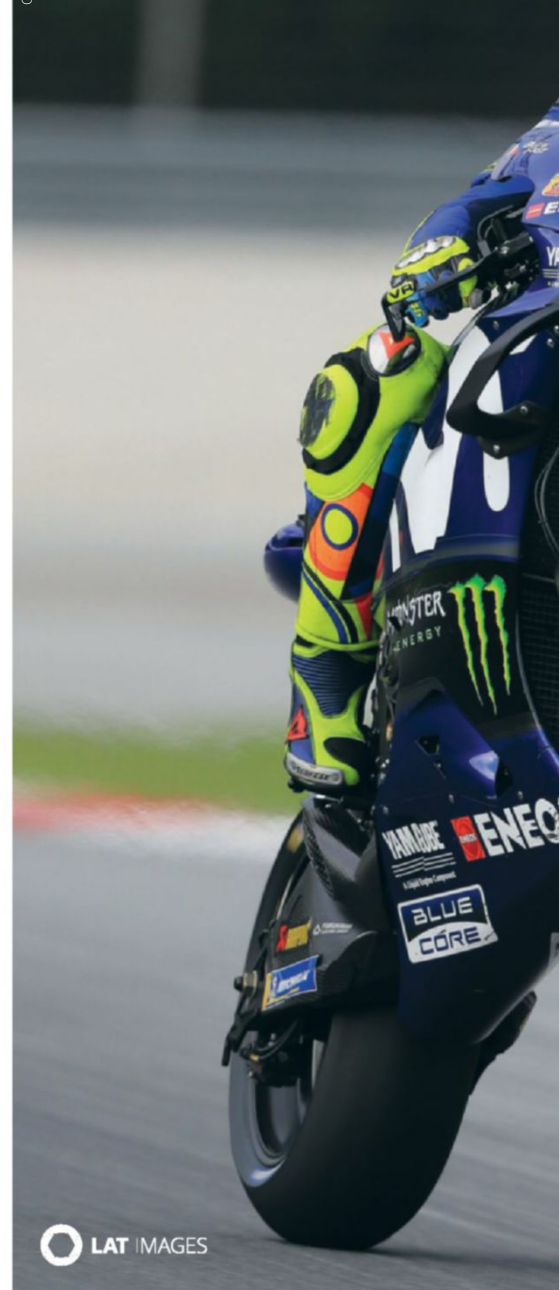
While Suzuki has made strides, the same cannot be said of its fellow 'new' manufacturers, Aprilia and KTM, which both look to be in for another year of midfield survival.

Aprilia was forced to do without its new specification of engine all winter, much to the frustration of Aleix Espargaro, after the updated motor's arrival was delayed until the Qatar curtain-raiser. That meant both Espargaro and new team-mate Scott Redding failed to make much impact all winter, the Spaniard ending up 14th fastest on the final day of testing. The new engine should help to cure the chronic acceleration deficit the RS-GP continues to suffer, but whether it will be enough to turn it into a top-eight contender, as Espargaro hopes, remains to be seen.

KTM, meanwhile, was not helped by Pol Espargaro injuring himself in a terrifying high-speed crash at Sepang, robbing the Austrian squad of a reference for the final day in Malaysia and all three days in Thailand. He returned in Qatar, only to find his injuries were still holding him back, costing another vital day of testing.

That left Bradley Smith and Mika Kallio doing the bulk of KTM's testing programme and, while Smith was an encouraging 13th on the final day in Qatar, the rapid progression of 2017 looks unlikely to be repeated this year. After all, going from two seconds off the

GOLD AND GOOSE/LAT



pace to one is the easy bit; going from one second to half a second off is much harder.

Fighting Aprilia and KTM in the lower half of the pack will be a new crop of rookies, with no fewer than five fresh faces making the step up from Moto2. The most consistent of these has been LCR Honda's new rider Takaaki Nakagami, whose performances in testing bely his relatively modest Moto2 record. Honda may have pushed hard to have a Japanese rider in the premier class, but the evidence suggests Nakagami is not out of his depth and could be a contender for top 10s.

Conversely, Moto2 champion Franco Morbidelli and his Marc VDS team-mate

LAT IMAGES



Silly season stays sensible

WITH SO MANY BIG names out of contract for 2019, predictions of another hectic MotoGP silly season were rife late last year. But as the new season gets under way, most of the major players were either already signed or looking virtually certain to stay put.

Maverick Vinales was first to nail his colours to the mast in mid-January with a new two-year factory Yamaha contract, while Valentino Rossi (left) hinted in Qatar that another deal for him to continue racing in 2019 and '20 was imminent.

Ducati has made it clear it wants to keep Andrea Dovizioso and Jorge Lorenzo, which means the only real question mark among the 'big three' factory teams is Honda, where Alberto Puig's arrival as team boss over the winter has prompted rumours of a shake-up.

Marc Marquez isn't going anywhere, having just signed for

another two years, but Dani Pedrosa's place doesn't appear as secure. Moto3 champion Joan Mir, who is in Moto2 this year, could be attractive if Puig feels the need to bring in fresh blood. Likewise, Mir could find himself with a Suzuki offer – to join Alex Rins – if Andrea Iannone doesn't improve on a rather mediocre maiden season at the Hamamatsu firm.

One Moto2 rider who definitely will be in MotoGP next year is Francesco Bagnaia, who joins the Pramac Ducati squad in 2019. He effectively replaces Danilo Petrucci, who craves a works ride and has been linked to an Aprilia move if there's no room at the Ducati inn.

KTM has eyed up Johann Zarco to place alongside Pol Espargaro, but its newly-announced Tech3 alliance could yet mean that the Frenchman stays put with a guarantee of works parity.

Dovizioso will probably be the man to beat when the season starts in Qatar – albeit with the proviso that the track is very well-suited to the Ducati and not at all to the Honda – with Marquez likely leading a chasing pack consisting of Zarco, the works Yamaha riders, the Suzukis, Crutchlow, Pedrosa, Lorenzo and the Pramac Ducatis.

Qatar is traditionally a poor indicator of the season to come, though. And, taking all the evidence from pre-season testing into account, you'd have to say that Marquez remains the odds-on favourite to clinch a fifth premier-class title. But then again, life is rarely that straightforward in modern-day MotoGP. Just ask Vinales... ❁

Thomas Luthi have had a tougher time, although Morbidelli did at least end Qatar testing on a high note with a strong run to 12th on the last day. Luthi, meanwhile, admits he's having a hard time breaking his Moto2 habits after more than a decade in the intermediate class.

Little is expected of the remaining two newcomers. Xavier Simeon is at Avintia Ducati more for his cash than his ability, while Malaysia's first-ever MotoGP rider, Hafizh Syahrin, faces a steep learning curve on the second Tech3 Yamaha having been hastily signed to replace the unwell Jonas Folger – although he proved to be no slouch in his first two tests.

TEAM BY TEAM

SUZUKI



ANDREA IANNONE (I)

AGE 28
STARTS 83
WINS 1
DEBUT 2013
BEST SEASON 5th (2015)



ALEX RINS (E)

AGE 22
STARTS 13
WINS 0
DEBUT 2017
BEST SEASON 16th (2017)

TECH3 YAMAHA



JOHANN ZARCO (F)

AGE 27
STARTS 18
WINS 0
DEBUT 2017
BEST SEASON 6th (2017)



HAFIZH SYAHRIN (MAL)

AGE 23
STARTS 0
WINS N/A
DEBUT 2018
BEST SEASON N/A

YAMAHA



MAVERICK VINALES (E)

AGE 23
STARTS 54
WINS 4
DEBUT 2015
BEST SEASON 3rd (2017)



VALENTINO ROSSI (I)

AGE 39
STARTS 305
WINS 89
DEBUT 2000
BEST SEASON 1st 2001, '02, '03, '04, '05, '08, '09

10

Reasons to go to Goodwood's 76th Members' Meeting

Goodwood's racing season kicks off this weekend and, as usual, there are plenty of attractions for a trip to West Sussex

MARCUS PYE



THIS WEEKEND'S 76TH GOODWOOD MEMBERS' MEETING is the 50th event of the venue's modern era, a landmark of which the Duke of Richmond and Gordon (Lord March when he brought motorsport back to his family seat in 1993) should rightly be proud. While it's Goodwood Road Racing Club members and Fellowship associates only in the fifth edition of the 21st century, here are 10 compelling reasons to be at the Motor Circuit if you can. Otherwise follow the action via live screening wherever you are in the world.



1. Heritage

The Duke of Richmond and Gordon (pre-war MG racer Freddie March) opened the Goodwood estate's airfield – RAF Westhampnett during hostilities – to racing in September 1948. Stirling Moss (right) – the venue's most successful driver by a distance – won the 500cc race in a Cooper. A decade later, the combo rocked Formula 1 when Moss scored the first world championship grand prix victory for a rear-engined car in Argentina in Rob Walker's T43.

The first of 71 'contemporary' British Automobile Racing Club Members' Meetings at the Motor Circuit, on August 13 1949, enabled enthusiasts to enjoy its flowing 2.4-mile boundary track. Winners were Len Gibbs (Riley Nine), Eric Thompson (HRG, twice), John Craig (Jaguar SS100), Rodney Clarke (Connaught L2), Dickie le Strange Metcalfe (Fiat Balilla 508S), Dick Jacobs MG TA Special), Guy Jason-Henry (Delahaye 135M) and Sydney Allard (Allard).

When Goodwood closed – following the July 2 1966 event – Michael Head, Chris Lawrence and 'Doc' Merfield topped the winners table with nine apiece.



2. Dan Gurney tribute race

Nowhere else on Earth pays homage to fallen heroes like Goodwood, thus it's entirely fitting that this year's big sportscar race is named for Dan Gurney, a true giant of the sport – and four-time F1 GP winner, culminating in the '67 Belgian GP success in his own Eagle – who passed away in January, aged 86.

His Motor Circuit appearances spanned the 1959 and '64 RAC Tourist Trophy races. Starting in the former, Gurney and Tony Brooks (with Gurney, left) co-drove a Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa to fifth place. Five years later Dan finished a brilliant GT class-winning third overall – behind the sports-prototype Ferraris in a Shelby American AC Cobra Daytona Coupe.

Priceless Ford GT40s, Porsche 906 and 910 models, plus Lotus 30s, McLaren-Chevrolet M1As and the ex-Roy Salvadori Cooper-Maserati T61M are in Sunday's Goodwood pack, with a couple of Daytona Cobra evocations, one for Dutch teenager Oliver Hart, star of last year's Revival. Zippy Elva-BMW Mk8s and Lotus 23s may well run rings around the big bangers however.

3. Mike Hawthorn remembered

It is 60 years since Mike Hawthorn became Great Britain's first Formula 1 world champion, although tragically the Surrey garage's son was killed in a road accident on the A3 just three months after being crowned.

Seven short years before he scaled racing's Mount Everest, Hawthorn alerted racegoers to his latent talent by winning Members' Meeting races – and the Motor Sport Brooklands Memorial Trophy series – in a pre-war Riley. Having impressed on his 'single-seater' debut in Bob Chase's Cooper-Bristol T20 at Goodwood in the spring of 1952, Mike was signed by Enzo Ferrari and justified the *Commendatore's* faith.

Cooper-Bristols and a Ferrari 246 Dino appear in the Hawthorn set of course, but the opportunity to see Maserati 250Fs (the quickest Joaquin Folch's ex-Paco Godia '2524'), BRM Type 25s (with rising star Ben Mitchell in '60s Goodwood racer Robs Lamplough's), Connaughts, HWM and Alta go head to head will make a fine tribute to a home-grown hero.



4. John Bolster Cup

John Vary Bolster (1911-1984) and his brother Richard were enthusiastic special builders from their schooldays. JVB's fabled Bloody Mary hillclimb car, a scary minimalist contraption with four motorcycle engines, is to be demonstrated during the Members' Meeting.

Bolster raced ERAs post-war, indeed it was while he was in hospital recuperating from rolling R5B 'Remus' in the British GP at Silverstone in 1949 that Gregor Grant sowed the seeds of Autosport magazine with him. 'Mr Bolster' remained its technical editor until his death.

Like Bolster, the MM's pre-war race is always a crowd-pleaser. This year's carries his name and includes his brother's eponymous special (with Paul Baker up) on a cracking entry. From thumping Bentleys and young Mathias Sielecki's Delage V12 (right), via aero-engined hybrids such as Tom Walker's Amilcar-Hispano Suiza and Duncan Pittaway's GN Curtiss, to the hairy Morgan RIP Special of Charlie Martin, it is guaranteed to delight.



5. Porsche 904 Carrera GTS octet

Porsche's stunning 904 Carrera GTS model was a rare sight in Great Britain in the mid-1960s. That eight examples star on the Ronnie Hoare Trophy GT race entry, which opens Goodwood's Saturday programme, is a considerable coup.

The two-litre quad-cam flat-four engined beauties, their sturdy steel chassis cloaked in exceedingly pretty fibreglass panels, achieved plenty of success in races, from sprint events to a class win in the Sebring 12 Hours and overall victory in the Targa Florio in 1964. More remarkably, a 904 GTS finished second on the snowy '65 Monte Carlo Rally in the hands of Eugen Bohringer.

Britons David Clark and James Cottingham are the home boys ranged against a strong set of continental 904 specialists. As founder of UK Ferrari importer Maranello Concessionaires, Colonel Hoare would have preferred a Prancing Horseman to prevail, so hopes rest with Vincent Gaye (275 GTB/C). Alfa Romeo TZs, Abarth-Simca 2000GT, Morgans, early Porsche 911s, Triumph TR4s and a raft of fast MGBs are the opposition.

6. Miles Lotus joins F3 screamers

The 1000cc Formula 3, active from 1964-70, is universally revered as unsurpassed in the category's history for quality and intensity of racing. Three-time F1 world champion Jackie Stewart's rapid rise to fame was accelerated by it and, in a stellar '64 season, he dominated in a Ken Tyrrell-run Cooper-BMC and won at Goodwood on Easter Monday.

It's popular in its Historic iteration too, but it's high-revving 997cc Ford MAE (modified Anglia engine) power that trumps the BMC A-Series now, as it did over the majority of the chapter's eight-year reign, although winners saddled a wide variety of chassis, mainly from British and Italian constructors.

Ten marques go into battle in the Derek Bell Cup race, with Brabhams, Chevrons, Tecnos and a lone Merlyn to the fore. But many eyes will be drawn to the unique Gold Leaf Team Lotus 41X that has not raced since 1970. Driven in '68 by future Lotus F1 pilot John Miles, the old warhorse has been superbly restored by Davide Riparbelli and Enrico Spaggiari at RS Historics in Italy.



TIMETABLE

SATURDAY MARCH 17

0900-1045 Practice
1100-1140 F5000 demonstration
1150-1335 Practice
1345 NASCAR demonstration
1420-1450 Group 5 demonstration
1505-1610 Practice
1630-1650 Ronnie Hoare Trophy for road-going sports and GT cars 1963-66

1740-1825 Gerry Marshall Trophy for Group 1 saloons 1970-82

SUNDAY, MARCH 18

0900-0920 Hawthorn Trophy for pre-1959 front-engined grand prix cars
0940-1000 Derek Bell Cup for one-litre F3 1964-70

1020-1040 Hailwood Trophy for 250cc and 350cc GP bikes of the '70s and '80s
1100-1120 Salvadori Cup for 1955-60 sportscars
1155-1220 F5000 demonstration
1235-1255 Caracciola Sportwagenrennen for pre-Second World War continental sportscars

1315-1400 Moss Trophy, 1960-62 GTs
1420-1435 Gerry Marshall Sprint
1455-1515 Bolster Cup for early specials
1530-1550 Gurney Cup for 1960s sportscars
1605 NASCAR demonstration
1620-1655 Group 5 demonstration
1720-1740 Sears Trophy for saloon cars 1958-63

7. Marshall arts black belt

'Win on Saturday, sell on Monday' was a motto to which motor manufacturers' marketers clung in the 1950s and '60s when racing saloons looked like their road-going cousins. After a wild Group 5 interlude they came closer again in the 1970s with the advent of Groups 1 and 2, and something in between.

From the mid-1970s into the '80s, battles involving shrill three-litre Ford Capri V6s, thundering V8-engined Chevrolet Camaro Z28s and Rover V8s entertained spectators, with shrieking rotary-engined Mazda RX-7s, rapid Triumph Dolomite Sprints and three-wheeling VW Golf GTIs, Ford Fiestas and Mini 1275GTs in the chase, the tiddlers waiting for a chance of wet-day glory.

Flamboyant showman Gerry Marshall, whose phenomenal car control brought a huge fan following, raced a Mini in the 1960s and remained a star until his passing in 2005. Gerry's indomitable spirit is recalled in the tin-top celebration. World and British Touring Car champions, Le Mans winners and NASCAR's Mike Skinner are in the weekend's most colourful pageant.



8. Modern-era maestros

Every Goodwood Road Racing Club race event of the venue's modern heyday – starting with Lord March's inaugural Revival of September 1998 and the 72nd Members' Meeting of March 2014 – has celebrated the past with first-period returnees, but have also highlighted the skills of later generations.

Watching the likes of Gary Pearson (who tops the table of Revival race winners) and Sam Hancock, Andrew Hibberd, Nick Padmore and Chris Ward wringing the maximum performance from their steeds is a real treat.

Between 1949-66 the second-tier events were initially aimed at weekend warriors, amateurs who raced sportscars for fun, although those of the calibre of Mike Hawthorn, Tony Brooks, Innes Ireland, Derek Bell and Peter Gethin went on to achieve greater things as professionals.

The sport has changed dramatically since then but, as you watch the most able drivers weave their magic over the weekend, marvel at the subtleties of their skill sets and enjoy seeing old cars raced on the limit again.

9. Formula 5000 at 50

The biggest, baddest single-seaters on the planet, a super-fast playground and Brian Redman – who took a hat-trick of US championships in 1974-76 driving Lolas – Formula 5000 does not get better than this.

While Goodwood was closed when North America's Formula A admitted five-litre stock-block V8 engines in 1968, F5000's 50th-anniversary celebrations are enshrined in the Members' Meeting, over which Redman will preside.

Although AMC, Dodge, Ford and Plymouth engines played cameo roles Stateside, the immortal 302ci Chevrolet ruled. Immensely tuneable, the four-inch-bore, three-inch-stroke unit slugged out 500bhp plus.

Enjoy the thudding bark of the machines whose performance rivalled three-litre F1's at lower cost. Double British champion Peter Gethin overcame the F1 brigade to win the 1973 Race of Champions at Brands Hatch in a Chevron B24. Watch for ex-Gethin McLaren M10B and Chevron B37 in the demos, alongside a rare Shadow, Trojan and New Zealand-built Beggs.



10. Stunning Group 5 cars

The freedom of Group 5 regulations harboured the wildest production-based cars ever seen on track. In the 1970s these steroidal caricatures – only the base shell's contours, if onlookers squinted hard enough, were clues – wowed fans on the international stage and attracted intrepid drivers and huge audiences to the Deutsche Rennsport Meisterschaft, Germany's finest series.

The Kremer brothers' bewinged, fire-breathing turbocharged 935 K3s were the ultimate expression of the 911 line. Five of the imposing 700bhp monsters will be on parade, running alongside tubeframe Zakspeed Capris, sleek Ferrari 512 BBLMs, Lancia Beta Montecarlo Turbos, BMW M1s and 320is, a Greenwood Corvette and the Triumph TR8 twin-turbo in the daily demos.

Ogier on top as Loeb rolls back the years

The return of a rally legend revived memories of an old rivalry, but it was today's superstar who turned up the heat and triumphed in Mexico

DAVID EVANS



A WIN? FORGET IT. NOT GOING TO happen. That was the verdict before the start of last week's Rally Mexico. And the verdict came in French. From Sebastien. But which one? Ogier or Loeb. Take your pick. They were of the same mind.

Those hoping for a return to civil war were wide of the mark. Partly because the Sebs had moved on from the bitterness and acrimony that reigned through 2011. And partly because of their individual situations.

"This rivalry is a bit behind us now, but it's been reactivated by the fans and maybe some of the media," said Ogier. "The truth is, we're not really in the same race this week. We don't have anything to prove to each other and the targets we have are a bit different: we're here to make the best result for the championship and he's here to enjoy himself.

"The difficulty for Seb [Loeb] will be to overcome five years out of rallying and get the rhythm; for me the challenge is being

near the front [in the start order]. I would be very happy to see the scenario to fight with him for the top, but this is nothing linked to what happened in the past – it would mean that we had both had a good rally."

They both had a very good rally. Ogier took his fourth win in six years in Leon, while Loeb wound back the years to win stages, lead the rally and remind the world how and why he dominated the sport for nine years.

Five days before Christmas last year, Loeb gave fans around the world the present they'd been hoping for: the news that he would be back with Citroen. Limited programme, three rallies, starting in Mexico. The countdown, not to mention the pontificating, began. His two-day test in Spain came and went but, as is the way with a closed test on a private road, there was no indication of where he would slot back in.

All eyes on shakedown. Here we go, the moment the world's been waiting for...



Ogier put in the drive
of a champion to seize
control of Rally Mexico

and it's happening on three miles of gravel just outside Leon. Ready, what's it going to be? Tenth, almost a second per mile down on team-mate Kris Meeke.

Meeke was the first to jump to his defence. "It's not representative," he said. "We've done this stage four times a year for the last five years, so 20 times and it's a really tricky piece of road. He came for the first time today."

So what did he think the following three days would bring? "He has no idea himself, so how can we know? We've talked a little bit: he's asked a few questions, all the right ones! We were talking about some stage and the line through a corner and he said, 'Oh yeah, I saw that with Ogier in 2015, but he took a different line there in '16...' He's not been sitting at home twiddling his thumbs; he's done his homework for this. When the rhythm's right, he'll be there."

The tunnels beneath the beautiful

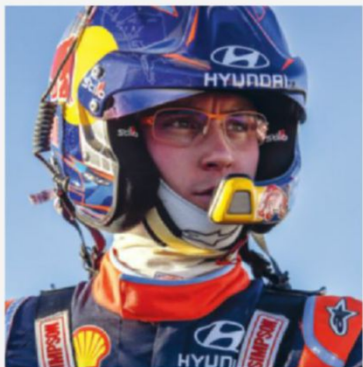
Guanajuato city are not the place to find rhythm. Loeb was 10th here, but the road from Duarte to Derramadero first thing Friday morning was a different story. Eleventh on the road, Loeb undoubtedly benefited from a line swept clear of much of the Mexican loose. He was third. Next stage he was fourth. Then, in Ortega, second — just 1.9s off fastest. The rhythm was coming, and it arrived on the second shot at El Chocolate with his first stage win since Sospel on a Monte Carlo Sunday three years ago. And there was even better news in that the scratch time had moved him up to second place, just 14.9s behind Dani Sordo's Hyundai.

History will show that Loeb rarely spent long in the Spaniard's rear-view mirror. But this time the pair weren't sharing the same team. This time there would be no Guy Frequelin or Olivier Quesnel on the telephone reminding Sordo of his place

"THIS RIVALRY IS A BIT BEHIND US NOW, BUT IT'S BEEN REACTIVATED BY THE FANS"

in the team. Not that Loeb ever really needed such a call.

Finally, the chance for redemption for Sordo. But could he stay ahead for more than half the rally? Saturday morning's opener would be crucial. Loeb knew it. Sitting at breakfast, he knew the team bus was waiting to ferry him to service... but there was time. "Espresso, por favor," were the words for the waiter. Turning to Autosport, he added: "This morning I need to wake up..." >>

BUBBLES BURST
FOR NEUVILLE

WOOLLY HAT STILL IN PLACE AND smelling of champagne, Rally Sweden winner Thierry Neuville (above) promised he would do his bit next time out in Mexico. Yes, he knew all about sweeping the road and yes, he was ready for it.

The reality was somewhat different. Championship leader by a useful 10 points coming across the Atlantic, the Hyundai driver made the return journey put back in his place by Leon lightning-bolt Sebastien Ogier. Neuville may have visited the odd ditch, but this time he was let down by the hardware as well. A fuel-starvation problem cost him time on Friday, while the i20 took on a watersplash and stopped for two minutes to swallow it on Saturday morning. By then, his rally was pretty much ruined. And that's when he started attacking the ditches, struggling to find any balance in the car. That victory in the snow last month looked like a distant memory.

Hyundai's other preferred full-timer Andreas Mikkelsen couldn't offer much more joy. Last time out on a hot gravel rally – in Australia last year – the Norwegian had been exceptional. This time he was mediocre as he struggled to find balance and grip at the rear of the car.

Here's something you don't say every day: Hyundai must have thanked its lucky stars it had Dani Sordo on the loose.

It was a similarly miserable story for Toyota. Remember that confident pre-event talk of engine-mapping work done at the equivalent of 5000 metres in Toyota's climatic chamber in Tokyo? Well, the mapping worked well, it's the thin-air cooling that tripped them up this time. None of the Yaris WRCs went the distance (although Esapekka Lappi did trip himself up by going off on SS7), but Ott Tanak looked racey enough while he struggled with an engine shorn of response after the anti-lag system was turned off to try to contain the heat.

Loeb's stint out front was brief; he had to settle for fifth place



Saturday was a different story; he would be seventh in, with Ogier (remember his theory on the Sebs not running close?) just two cars ahead of him. More immediately, Loeb was focused on the 7.2s deficit to Sordo and his own 3.8s buffer over the Toyota of Ott Tanak. Team-mate Meeke was fourth, 17s behind, with Ogier 5s behind the Northern Irishman. Yes, Saturday was worth waking up for.

The caffeine worked a treat. Sordo, bothered by less-than-perfect balance on the brakes and a car moving more than he would have liked, wilted. Loeb was in. Sensationally, the 44-year-old was back to the front.

For three stages, Alsace was back at the centre of the rallying universe. But what the Guanajuatito stage gave with one hand in the morning, it cruelly took back in the afternoon. Loeb clipped a small rock halfway through the stage and punctured the left-front. He stopped to change at the cost of two minutes, the lead and the dream.

By that evening, he was kicking himself. And his recent Dakar experience where, when a problem strikes, you stop immediately to sort it. "It was stupid that I didn't go through the stage," he said. "We didn't think enough. We didn't think before about what we would do with the puncture and, with the reflex of the Dakar and no knowledge of these tyres, we just pulled over."

Going into Guanajuatito after lunch, Ogier had trimmed the gap to Loeb to 15s. He and Meeke were tied to the tenth. But coming out of SS14, Ogier had the lead, with Meeke 3.8s behind; Sordo had suffered a similar deflation to Loeb.

Having endured the strange sensation of the French media writing Sebastien-themed headlines not about him, Ogier set about winning some stages and writing some headlines of his own. And what a way to do it. His M-Sport Ford was unbeaten on the dirt through Saturday afternoon in a stunning run. With victory firmly in his sights, nobody could touch the #1 Fiesta.



Sordo was on form, upholding Hyundai's honour in second place

Coming out of El Brinco for the second time, Ogier pulled over to inspect the tyres. He couldn't help but smile. "Ah, I have to say, this day has been really perfect," he said. "OK, in the middle stage this afternoon there was some sand around and it was sometimes quite difficult to be absolutely on the limit, but I was pushing all the time and it's nice now to bring the time."

For Meeke, there was more frustration. He'd spun the C3 and then been forced to drive back up the road to find somewhere to turn it around. "I had to drive back into my own dust," he said. "It was stupid, a stupid mistake. I couldn't find anywhere to turn. We've lost 30 seconds to him there easily. Not good enough."

That spin explained the thick end of the 37s gap between the top two at the end of the day, but Meeke wasn't interested in flattery of any form. "No, today I have to say, Seb was right there," said Meeke. "I couldn't follow him this afternoon. Fair play to him – he had too much pace for us."

M-Sport team principal Malcolm Wilson admitted he was impressed. Again. "You look back to places like Portugal last year," said Wilson, "and you think, 'Yeah, that was impressive'. But then he drives like he did today and it's just impressive all over again. He was masterful today. Superb."

Watching the footage, it's impossible to argue. Ogier was inch-perfect in the line, and his braking was simply breathtaking. A couple of times he looked like he might have overcooked it, but at the final nanosecond he would lift his left foot from the brake, turn in and tip-toe through. Brilliant.

There was more disappointment for Meeke when he dropped to third after putting his Citroen on its side on Sunday morning – a move that allowed Sordo back up to second. Meeke will, perhaps, want a word when he gets home – he was no doubt distracted on his Saturday morning Facetime call to see his daughters sporting Dani Sordo T-shirts. "I've never been as disappointed with third as this," said Meeke. "Maybe that's progress."

For Sordo, there was nothing new to battling with a Sebastien and then finishing second to one. But the one he usually trailed was back in fifth, just behind Andreas Mikkelsen's Hyundai. The Ogier version was out front and very happy.

And, no doubt, somewhere in the back of his mind there was the memory of 2011. Seven years ago, having been told by Citroen that he would follow Ogier home in second, Loeb got to the start of the first stage on Sunday morning, exited his DS3 and opened the door of the leaders. He informed Ogier, in no uncertain terms, that he would not be slowing down. Minutes later, Ogier had torn a wheel off his car, leaving Loeb to win.

Yes, yes, all those rivalries are behind them. But there can be little doubt that last Sunday there would have been a smile of satisfaction on Ogier's face. 🏆



RESULTS ROUND 3/13, RALLY MEXICO, MARCH 8-11

POS	DRIVER	CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Sebastien Ogier (F)	Julien Ingrassia (F)	M-Sport Ford WRT · Ford Fiesta WRC	3h54m08.0s
2	Dani Sordo (E)	Carlos del Barrio (E)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT · Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+1m03.6s
3	Kris Meeke (GB)	Paul Nagle (IRL)	Citroen Total · Citroen C3 WRC	+1m19.2s
4	Andreas Mikkelsen (N)	Anders Jager (N)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT · Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+1m38.4s
5	Sebastien Loeb (F)	Daniel Elena (MC)	Citroen Total · Citroen C3 WRC	+2m24.6s
6	Thierry Neuville (B)	Nicolas Gilsoul (B)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT · Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+9m03.0s
7	Pontus Tidemand (S)	Jonas Andersson (S)	Skoda Motorsport · Skoda Fabia R5	+10m24.7s
8	Jari-Matti Latvala (FIN)	Miikka Anttila (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT · Toyota Yaris WRC	+15m37.1s
9	Gus Greensmith (GB)	Craig Parry (GB)	Ford Fiesta R5	+17m09.3s
10	Pedro Heller (RCH)	Pablo Olmos (RA)	Ford Fiesta R5	+24m18.1s
OTHERS				
11	Esapekka Lappi (FIN)	Janne Ferm (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT · Toyota Yaris WRC	+30m57.8s
12	Teemu Suninen (FIN)	Mikko Markkula (FIN)	M-Sport Ford WRT · Ford Fiesta WRC	+33m06.3s
14	Ott Tanak (EST)	Martin Jarveoja (EST)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT · Toyota Yaris WRC	+1h02m42.8s
R	Elfyn Evans (GB)	Daniel Barritt (GB)	M-Sport Ford WRT · Ford Fiesta WRC	SS5-concussed co-driver

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Ogier 56; 2 Neuville 52; 3 Mikkelsen 35; 4 Meeke 32; 5 Latvala 31; 6 Tanak 26; 7 Lappi 23; 8 Breen 20; 9 Sordo 18; 10 Loeb 11.

MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT 84; 2 M-Sport Ford WRT 72; 3 Citroen Total 71; 4 Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT 67.

STAGE TIMES

STAGE		FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND	
SS1	Street Stage GTO	1.57 miles Neuville 2m06.7s	Neuville	Tanak	+1.9s
SS2	Duarte-Derramadero 1	16.19 miles Meeke 17m08.9s	Meeke	Sordo	+3.8s
SS3	El Chocolate 1	19.54 miles Sordo 24m05.6s	Sordo	Meeke	+9.5s
SS4	Ortega 1	10.71 miles Sordo 9m33.2s	Sordo	Meeke	+15.1s
SS5	Street Stage Leon 1	0.69 miles Suninen 1m03.7s	Sordo	Meeke	+16.6s
SS6	Duarte-Derramadero 2	16.19 miles Meeke 16m56.7s	Sordo	Meeke	+12.3s
SS7	El Chocolate 2	19.54 miles Loeb 23m54.2s	Sordo	Loeb	+14.9s
SS8	Ortega 2	10.71 miles Tanak 9m24.8s	Sordo	Loeb	+7.9s
SS9	Autodromo de Leon 1	1.43 miles Tanak 1m37.8s	Sordo	Loeb	+7.8s
SS10	Autodromo de Leon 2	1.43 miles Ogier 1m37.3s	Sordo	Loeb	+7.2s
SS11	Guanajuatito 1	19.24 miles Loeb 20m35.6s	Loeb	Sordo	+5.1s
SS12	Otates 1	16.39 miles Meeke 20m26.9s	Loeb	Sordo	+6.0s
SS13	El Brinco 1	6.20 miles Ogier 5m29.2s	Loeb	Sordo	+2.9s
SS14	Guanajuatito 2	19.24 miles Ogier 20m10.1s	Ogier	Meeke	+3.8s
SS15	Otates 2	16.39 miles Ogier 20m05.1s	Ogier	Meeke	+34.5s
SS16	El Brinco 2	6.20 miles Ogier 5m24.6s	Ogier	Meeke	+37.1s
SS17	Autodromo de Leon 3	1.43 miles Meeke 1m38.0s	Ogier	Meeke	+35.8s
SS18	Autodromo de Leon 4	1.43 miles Meeke 1m36.6s	Ogier	Meeke	+35.2s
SS19	Street Stage Leon 2	0.69 miles Mikkelsen 1m02.7s	Ogier	Meeke	+35.9s
SS20	Alfaro	15.11 miles Latvala 15m23.7s	Ogier	Sordo	+48.0s
SS21	Las Minas 1	6.88 miles Tanak 6m42.9s	Ogier	Sordo	+55.2s
SS22	Las Minas 2 (Power Stage)	6.88 miles Tanak 6m33.1s	Ogier	Sordo	+1m03.6s



Spirit of Villeneuve quashed at last gasp

The stunning debut of Robert Wickens reminded some of another Canadian, before Sebastien Bourdais pulled off a stealthy Jody Scheckter '79-style win

DAVID MALSHER

IT WAS 40 YEARS AGO NEXT MONTH that a 28-year-old Canadian with an unorthodox path into a top echelon of open-wheel motorsport signalled that he was a star of the future with a brilliant drive that ended in a frustrating DNF. That man was Gilles Villeneuve, who dominated the first half of the Formula 1 Long Beach Grand Prix — only his seventh race at this level — until an overambitious manoeuvre on a backmarker sent him into a wall.

No-one would want to heap pressure on Robert Wickens by trying to compare his talent with one of the greatest drivers in history. But make no mistake, this 28-year-old Canadian (he turned 29 two days after the race, on Tuesday) sent an even bigger shockwave through the IndyCar paddock

last weekend. Villeneuve had at least warned the world of his talent on his F1 debut with McLaren in 1977, and only some inconclusive races in between had caused a wavering in opinions of his talent. At St Petersburg, Wickens was making his race-weekend debut in IndyCar — notwithstanding the two sessions he ran with the previous-gen car at Road America last summer — and yet he took pole, led 69 of the 110 laps... and ended up in the wall thanks to an overambitious manoeuvre...

An overambitious manoeuvre by whom? The majority would conclude that Alexander Rossi was at fault. But the backdrop to the controversial collision was confusion caused by IndyCar not following its regular procedure, nor, indeed, motorsport

convention. Approaching the decisive restart with two laps to go, the pace car's flashing lights remained on even as it emerged from the final turn onto the pit straight and swerved right, into the pitlane. On previous restarts, Wickens had seen the lights on the Corvette extinguished several corners earlier, as is standard practice when a race is due to go green next time by the starter's stand.

After the race, there came a strange official response from the series. "IndyCar acknowledges that the pace car lights remained on for the race's final restart," read the statement, "but the radio call for an impending restart was communicated by race control and the pace car pulled off the track as it had in previous situations." Two out of three ain't bad, seemed to be the



tone of this note, but you'd assume that president of competition and operations Jay Frye will be knocking a few heads around.

Whatever, Wickens's momentary uncertainty meant Rossi was right on his tail and, in another digression from procedure in all other restarts and starts, the push-to-pass boost was available. Rossi moved right as they approached the braking zone, onto the dirtier line – an area where many had lost grip under braking throughout the weekend. Wickens jinked right as if to block, enough to persuade Rossi to move further to the right, but the debutant thought better of it, returned to the racing line, and then carved across to the apex of the turn. A slithering, sideways Rossi couldn't get his car slowed down, and the inevitable collision sent Wickens drifting into the tyre wall. It straightened Rossi's car up for Turn 2, but sapped his momentum. The more conventional route through the corner sequence was taken by Sebastien Bourdais and Graham Rahal, who thus scored unlikely first and second places for Dale Coyne Racing and Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing respectively.

Who was at fault for the clash?

Wickens: "I defended a little bit, but then I realised if I went any further, it would have been a block, so I opened up, let him take the inside and just braked as late as possible and gave him enough space on the inside... He braked too late, the track was too dirty off line. He went too deep, locked the rears and slid into me. There's really no other explanation to it." >>

WICKENS THE SUPER-ROOKIE

THERE ARE ROOKIES AND THEN THERE are rookies. Robert Wickens's open-wheel career, even before his six years spent in DTM (winning in all but one of those seasons) reveal a strong resumé showing his adaptability. Five wins in Formula BMW USA, one in Atlantics, one in A1GP, one in Formula 3 Euro Series, two in Formula 2, three in GP3, six in Formula Renault 3.5... So to that extent, his pole at St Petersburg wasn't a surprise, especially given the ever-changing track conditions. But even so, just four weeks earlier, he had told Autosport that he was struggling to get the most out of a fresh set of tyres.

Piers Phillips, general manager at Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, who also calls strategy for Wickens, felt vindicated. "I told Honda, I told my team owners, 'Robert's not a rookie! He's a fully rounded driver,'" he remarked a couple hours later. "He just gets on with it, and I like that. He's never been here before, but he has not passed a single comment about the track, how bumpy it is, how slippery it is. I know people will say he overachieved, but I don't think we did – I think we just executed properly."

Phillips added that Wickens has been a galvanising force within the SPM workforce. "He's hard work – a bit of a diva, quite demanding – but of course he's used to working with Mercedes in DTM," he said. "But being demanding is fine because he puts in the same amount of work. And the funny thing is, you don't notice that he's pulling you up to his level.

"I reckon I've worked with just two

other drivers who could have that effect on everyone in a team and they're Ryan Briscoe and Jason Plato. Those three will have you working at 115% all day, and you don't even realise because you're caught up in trying to do your maximum-plus. That's a special trait. Some drivers would do it by effing and blinding and sticking a rocket up you, and others do it by spinning the flywheel of the whole team."

Most gratifying, and most promising for the future progress of the team, is how well Wickens and his pal since childhood and incumbent SPM star James Hinchcliffe are working together. "The great thing about what we've got now, especially with Robbie and James, is that if one of them says, 'Yes, this works better', the other one will try it and say, 'Yeah, I agree,'" said Phillips. "That's what you need and it's very different from when Mikhail Aleshin was here, and he and James drove two completely different set-ups.

"Jack [Harvey in the Michael Shank Racing with SPM entry] has played his part too. He tested at Sebring last week and he had a very productive test not just for him, but for Schmidt Peterson as a whole. We brought stuff he tested there and it worked for us here."

Understandably, 24 hours later the mood in the SPM camp was darker, but Wickens has still claimed a special place in IndyCar history. Only two other drivers in the past 25 years have scored pole position on their IndyCar debuts. One was Nigel Mansell, the other Sebastien Bourdais. And they both worked out just fine.



Except Rossi had one: “I made the pop [out of the slipstream]. He defended the position, which he has the right to do, but by moving in reaction he put me into the marbles pretty late into the corner.”

Asked if he felt race control’s “no call” on the incident had vindicated his perspective, Rossi replied: “Yeah, they made it very clear in the drivers’ meeting that the rule on blocking was that you can’t move in reaction. If he’d defended the inside initially out of [Turn] 14 or even halfway down the straight, and I’d still continued to go to the inside, then yeah, that’s my decision to put my car in danger. But there’s no reason why I can’t pop out and stay next to him. I don’t have to have all four wheels on the part of the track where nobody goes on.”

Reflecting on the positives of the weekend, Wickens should be proud of his pace. He was swift in dry practice, but in the damp-but-drying conditions of Q3 he was sensational, edging seven-time St Pete polesitter Will Power to pole by 0.07 seconds. At the start, the pair went side by side through Turns 1 and 2, but as the Penske driver went up on the kerb to avoid the Schmidt Peterson Motorsports machine, he lost traction, spun and hit the wall backwards, necessitating a rear-wing change when the caution flag flew for Charlie Kimball’s spin-and-stall. Other significant runners to stop at the same time were sixth-place qualifier Ryan Hunter-Reay, who’d already pitted at the end of the final parade lap to have his ECU rebooted, and Bourdais, who’d needed a tyre change after getting a puncture in the opening-lap melee.

Another of the rookies who had starred in qualifying was Ed Carpenter Racing’s Jordan King, who started fourth on his IndyCar debut. At the first restart he swept around leader Wickens, but ran wide after the second restart and gave back the position. Ironically, that second full-course caution had been caused by the other ECR car of Spencer Pigot being thumped to a standstill by Rahal at Turn 1. Race control decided no action was necessary.

The man to watch in the early laps was Rossi who, having been penalised in



St Pete resident Bourdais won on his home streets for second year in a row

LAT IMAGES

qualifying for interference with another driver’s lap, was up from 12th on the grid to run third, just ahead of another super-quick rookie, Matheus Leist in the AJ Foyt Racing machine. Indy Lights graduate Leist had qualified a brilliant third, but would have his race day ruined when his car jammed in gear and he lost 12 laps to have it fixed. He left his pitbox with equipment still attached, and after serving the subsequent drivethrough penalty he struck the wall at Turn 4.

Rossi grabbed second from King — who would eventually pick up a puncture and brush the wall, necessitating suspension

repairs — and then the Andretti Autosport car proved able to keep pace with Wickens. When the pair pitted for the first time, they were tailing the necessarily off-strategy Pigot and Bourdais.

The Coyne squad left Bourdais out even during the laps 35–37 yellow period, caused by Chip Ganassi Racing legend Scott Dixon diving up the inside of James Hinchcliffe and slamming into the back of Takuma Sato. The incident temporarily halted Dixon and sent Sato’s RLLR machine crawling to the pits with a right-rear puncture.

Finally, when the fifth caution flew on lap 40 for Jack Harvey’s stricken car, Bourdais headed for the pits after being demoted on track by a charging Wickens, Rossi and Marco Andretti (another driver penalised for interference in qualifying). Yet within just 20 laps of the 1.8-mile street/runway course, Bourdais was back up to fourth, behind Wickens, Rossi and Hinchcliffe. And when this trio pitted, Seb was back in front. That’s where he’d stay until his lap 77 stop, which would be his final one in this 110-lap event, and that allowed him to jump past the late-stopping Hunter-Reay and Hinchcliffe in the final stint.

In terms of sheer pace, though, Bourdais had nothing for Wickens and Rossi, who were 10s clear and blanketed by 0.7s, until Rossi slid wide while lapping Kimball. But a caution for debutant Rene Binder skating



Dixon flew over kerbs and took out Sato (30)

LAT IMAGES



RESULTS ROUND 1/16, ST PETERSBURG (USA), MARCH 11 (110 LAPS – 198.000 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM/CAR	TIME
1	Sebastien Bourdais (F)	Dale Coyne Racing · Dallara-Honda	2h17m48.4954s
2	Graham Rahal (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing · Dallara-Honda	+0.1269s
3	Alexander Rossi (USA)	Andretti Autosport · Dallara-Honda	+0.7109s
4	James Hinchcliffe (CDN)	Schmidt Peterson Motorsports · Dallara-Honda	+1.5175s
5	Ryan Hunter-Reay (USA)	Andretti Autosport · Dallara-Honda	+1.9907s
6	Scott Dixon (NZ)	Chip Ganassi Racing · Dallara-Honda	+2.2716s
7	Josef Newgarden (USA)	Team Penske · Dallara-Chevrolet	+3.3842s
8	Ed Jones (UAE)	Chip Ganassi Racing · Dallara-Honda	+4.2992s
9	Marco Andretti (USA)	Andretti Herta Autosport · Dallara-Honda	+4.8363s
10	Will Power (AUS)	Team Penske · Dallara-Chevrolet	+6.1272s
11	Tony Kanaan (BR)	AJ Foyt Enterprises · Dallara-Chevrolet	+6.5176s
12	Takuma Sato (J)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing · Dallara-Honda	+7.4005s
13	Simon Pagenaud (F)	Team Penske · Dallara-Chevrolet	+7.9903s
14	Gabby Chaves (CO)	Harding Racing · Dallara-Chevrolet	+9.2272s
15	Spencer Pigot (USA)	Ed Carpenter Racing · Dallara-Chevrolet	-1 lap
16	Zach Veach (USA)	Andretti Autosport · Dallara-Honda	-1 lap
17	Zachary Claman DeMelo (CDN)	Dale Coyne Racing · Dallara-Honda	-1 lap
18	Robert Wickens (CDN)	Schmidt Peterson Motorsports · Dallara-Honda	108 laps-accident
19	Max Chilton (GB)	Carlin · Dallara-Chevrolet	-2 laps
20	Charlie Kimball (USA)	Carlin · Dallara-Chevrolet	-3 laps
21	Jordan King (GB)	Ed Carpenter Racing · Dallara-Chevrolet	-3 laps
22	Rene Binder (A)	Juncos Racing · Dallara-Chevrolet	100 laps-accident
23	Jack Harvey (GB)	Michael Shank Racing/SPM · Dallara-Honda	38 laps-puncture/accident
24	Matheus Leist (BR)	AJ Foyt Enterprises · Dallara-Chevrolet	16 laps-accident

Winner's average speed
86.207mph.
Fastest lap Rossi
1m01.7244s, 104.983mph.

Q3 1 Wickens 1m01.6643s;
2 Power 1m01.7346s;
3 Leist 1m01.7631s;
4 King 1m01.7633s; 5 Sato
1m01.8821s; 6 Hunter-
Reay 1m02.0385s.

Q2 Wickens 1m00.5428s;
Power 1m00.5911s;
King 1m00.7305s;

Leist 1m00.7679s;
Sato 1m00.8470s; Hunter-
Reay 1m00.9243s;
7 Hinchcliffe 1m00.9986s;
8 Chaves 1m01.1191s;
9 Dixon 1m01.6527s;
10 Kanaan 1m01.7213s;
11 Pagenaud 1m04.6739s;
12 Rossi 1m07.0377s.

Q1 – GROUP 1
Power 1m00.5969s;
Leist 1m00.6331s; Dixon
1m00.8435s; Hinchcliffe
1m00.8441s; Chaves

1m00.8507s; Sato
1m00.9580s; 14 Bourdais
1m00.9587s; 16 Pigot
1m00.9668s; 18 Andretti
1m01.3013s; 20 Chilton
1m01.3360s; 22 Claman
DeMelo 1m01.8567s;
24 Rahal 1m04.0990s.

Q1 – GROUP 2
King 1m00.0476s; Rossi
1m00.0936s; Wickens
1m00.0999s; Kanaan
1m00.2828s; Pagenaud
1m00.3242s; Hunter-Reay

1m00.4087s; 13
Newgarden 1m00.4320s;
15 Veach 1m00.4585s;
17 Jones 1m00.5009s;
19 Harvey 1m01.0270s;
21 Kimball 1m01.1868s;
23 Binder 1m01.7003s.

CHAMPIONSHIP
1 Bourdais 51; 2 Rahal 40;
3 Rossi 36; 4 Hinchcliffe 32;
5 Hunter-Reay 31; 6 Dixon
28; 7 Newgarden 26;
8 Jones 24; 9 Andretti 22;
10 Power 20.

into a tyre wall with eight laps remaining put Rossi in Wickens's mirrors, and Bourdais in Rossi's. The penultimate restart was clean, but Max Chilton spun and stalled, necessitating that final fateful restart...

If the main theme at St Pete was about startling performances by several rookies, so too it was about errors from several veterans. There was Power's spin at the start of the race; his Penske team-mates Josef Newgarden and Simon Pagenaud overdriving and spinning respectively in qualifying, resulting in mid-grid starting slots from which they never truly recovered – admittedly, not helped by a puncture for Newgarden. Rahal's charge from the back row was a result of him spinning in qualifying and was also tainted by his clash with Pigot. Dixon was moved to the back for his collision with Sato and later received a pitlane speeding penalty too.

Rossi may also come to rue not fully capitalising on one of those rare weekends when the Penske and Ganassi drivers toppled off the rails, and Bourdais won in a car that was probably only eighth or ninth fastest.

But it's Wickens who will rue the most even if, hours after the race, Schmidt Peterson marketing manager Jeff Darks was starting to see the bright side. Quoting Mario Andretti's famous comment following his 1987 Indy 500 dominance and DNF, Darks muttered: "At least they knew we were here." ❄

WORLD OF SPORT



Harvick helms hat-trick

NASCAR CUP
PHOENIX (USA)
MARCH 11
ROUND 4/36

Kevin Harvick won his third consecutive NASCAR Cup race, becoming the first driver to do so since Joey Logano achieved the feat during the 2015 playoffs.

Harvick's victory in his Stewart-Haas Racing Ford came after a late four-way battle for the lead with the Joe Gibbs Racing Toyotas of Kyle Busch and Denny Hamlin, and Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet man Chase Elliott. Over the final 20 laps Harvick and Busch eventually became the only two contenders; Harvick edged out Busch with Elliott taking third.

The victory capped a controversial

week for Harvick after he was handed a 20-point penalty and the loss of seven playoff points because his car's rear window was flexing during the preceding weekend's race at Las Vegas.

"This organisation does a great job," Harvick said after his Phoenix win. "To take that away from those guys just really pissed me off last week. Everybody was just determined this week. We just wanted to stomp them. We didn't stomp them but we won and that's really all that matters."

Hamlin ended up fourth after falling away during the final battle while defending against Harvick and Busch. Polesitter and reigning Cup champion Martin Truex Jr was fifth after running within the top five for the majority of the race, just ahead Clint Bowyer.

WEEKEND WINNERS



Harvick retook NASCAR points lead

NASCAR CUP
PHOENIX
1 Kevin Harvick
Stewart-Haas Racing Ford Fusion
2 Kyle Busch
Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota Camry
3 Chase Elliott
Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet Camaro

INDY LIGHTS

ST PETERSBURG

Race 1
1 Pato O'Ward
Andretti Autosport
2 Santi Urrutia
Belardi Auto Racing
3 Colton Herta
Andretti Steinbrenner Racing
Race 2
1 Urrutia
Belardi Auto Racing
2 Shelby Blackstock
Team Pelfrey
3 Ryan Norman
Andretti Autosport

BRAZILIAN STOCK CARS

INTERLAGOS

1 Daniel Serra/Joao Paulo de Oliveira
Eurofarma RC
2 Rubens Barrichello/Filipe Albuquerque
Full Time Sports
3 Ricardo Mauricio/Felipe Nasr
Full Time Sports

'Old school' racing relish

BRAZILIAN STOCK CARS
INTERLAGOS (BR)
MARCH 10
ROUND 1/12

A host of motorsport stars – including ex-Formula 1 ace Felipe Massa and 2017 TCR International champion Jean-Karl Vernay – took part in the annual Brazilian Stock Car invitational race, and were impressed with what they found.

"These cars are awesome to drive," said Audi DTM driver Robin Frijns. "You must keep focus all the time because they

are heavy, hard to brake and are always sliding. I love it because you really have to drive it – it's old school."

"It's heavy – driving is all about weight transfer," added Super GT regular Joao Paulo de Oliveira. "You must hit the brakes hard, but as the speed goes you have to modulate strength on the pedal, as there's much less downforce than I'm used too. If you turn in while braking it understeers."

De Oliveira and Daniel Serra triumphed in the wet-to-dry race ahead of Rubens Barrichello and Filipe Albuquerque.

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- Interest in instrumentation, data acquisition, and telemetry tools and technologies combined with a desire to learn
- Competent in using MathWorks tools, especially Simulink and associated code generation
- Strong communication skills are key to success in this role, as the Simulator Systems engineer must be able to work with others, as the role involves significant interaction with other groups within the Vehicle Dynamics department

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You will have excellent communication and teamwork skills as you will be required to interact with various departments across the Company.

Simulation & Modelling Engineer 2

Working within the Modelling and Simulation team you will be responsible for the ongoing research and development of model based optimisation and analysis tools, principally focussed around vehicle dynamics and performance. You will also have responsibilities for the continual development of vehicle models and the surrounding simulation toolchain.

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Plato has tested Boss
Mustang ahead of the car's
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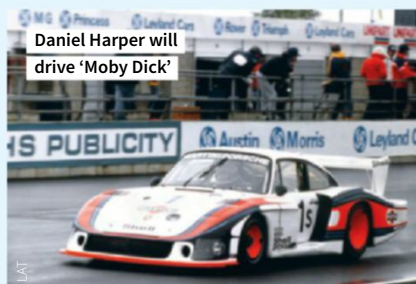
GOODWOOD MEMBERS' MEETING

Double British Touring Car champion Jason Plato will race a Ford Mustang Boss 302 in the Gerry Marshall Trophy at Goodwood this weekend.

The Members' Meeting race for Group 1 touring cars of the 1970s and early '80s has traditionally been dominated by Ford Capris, Rover SD1s and Chevrolet Camaros. Now Plato will give the five-litre V8 its debut with owner and historic racer Craig Davies.

"It's absolutely monstrous, it's tricky to drive," said Plato after testing the Alan Mann Racing-built Mustang at Goodwood earlier this week. "We didn't

**"IT'S ABSOLUTELY
MONSTROUS,
IT'S TRICKY
TO DRIVE"**



Daniel Harper will
drive 'Moby Dick'

really have a set-up and it was wet. There's enough power to put a smile on your face, but enough to give you a bit of fear too. With a car like this the power-to-grip ratio is always going to be in favour of power."

Gerry Marshall Trophy debutant Davies, who has raced with Plato before, added: "Henry Mann wanted to recreate the car AMR built [in period], and has all the old papers for that car. Steve Warrior engines have done a brilliant job. It felt lovely, very torquey. I'm relaxed about it [the race], but I would be disappointed if we weren't near the front."

Other current tin-top drivers in the entry include Rob Huff (Capri), Mat Jackson (Ford Fiesta), Andrew Jordan (Mini 1275GT), Adam Morgan (Triumph Dolomite Sprint), Matt Neal (Camaro) and Sam Tordoff (Ford Escort RS2000).

Aside from the racing, Porsche Junior Daniel Harper will showcase the famous Porsche 935/78 'Moby Dick' in the Group 5 demonstration.

The car produces up to 850bhp and reached 228mph on the Mulsanne Straight at Le Mans in 1978 on its way to eighth, driven by Rolf Stommelen and Manfred Schurti.

Harper, who will compete in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB this year after being selected by Porsche as its new Junior, said: "The 935 will be by far the most powerful car I've ever driven, as well as the most expensive, so I will certainly be on my best behaviour."

Malvern gets Mercedes for GT4 attack on British GT

BRITISH GT

British Formula Ford and Formula Renault BARC champion Scott Malvern will switch to a Mercedes AMG GT4 for this season's British GT Championship.

Malvern and team-mate Nick Jones will enter their third British GT4 campaign with one of the new German machines, which will be run by reigning GT3 champion Team Parker Racing.

"The Mercedes really is a huge step up for us," said Malvern, who previously drove a Porsche Cayman with Jones. "We tested the car at Portimao over the winter and it's clear that Mercedes has worked closely with its factory teams and drivers.



"The Porsche hid a lot of what we were doing last year. Nick is improving constantly, but it's hard to be noticed when your machinery isn't quite quick enough.

"This year we'll be competitive and we'll be up there fighting for the Pro-Am championship, and I believe we can be in the mix for outright podiums and wins."

Jones added: "I feel I'm driving better than ever, so hopefully we'll get a few test days under our belts before Oulton Park and hit the ground running."

The car will be the third new Mercedes in British GT4, joining Fox Motorsport and Richardson Racing, which has yet to confirm its drivers.

ROB LADBROOK

Motorbase back to Carrera Cup

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

British Touring Car squad Motorbase Performance will return to the Porsche Carrera Cup GB for the first time since 2011 this year.

The team has a history of success in the category. Although it hasn't won the title outright, it has finished second twice, with British Touring Car champion Tim Harvey in 2006 and Michael Caine in '10. Its drivers have taken 26 victories — third on the all-time list for Carrera Cup squads.

In recent years Motorbase has focused on the BTCC as well as competing in British GT (up to the end of 2016) and the Blancpain GT Series with an Aston Martin Vantage GT3. Now it will run former Radical racer Dan Vaughan in the Carrera Cup Am class, and could expand to a second car.

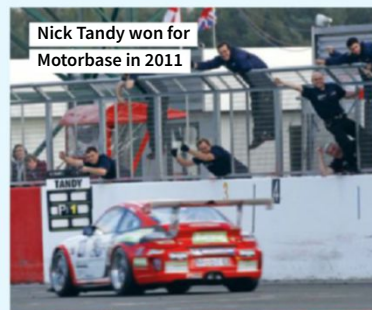
"We are delighted to be back in the Porsche paddock — it is a brand that suits us very well, and a championship that we have had big success in," said team boss David Bartrum.

"With the new car coming for 2018, this was the perfect time to rejoin the series. I've been really impressed with Dan so far, and he is a great fit for the team.

"We have the capability to run a second car and we are talking to some drivers, but it might be that we just run one — we are a bit late in the day announcing our plans."

● Former BTCC racer Richard Hawken will also be on the Carrera Cup grid after joining the Slidesports squad. JTR has also completed its line-up after signing 2016 Ginetta GT4 Supercup champion Tom Wrigley.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



Tolman has a deal to run three McLaren 570S GT4s

Osborne joins McLaren

BRITISH GT

Joe Osborne will dovetail his attack on this year's British GT Championship with development work on McLaren's forthcoming 720S GT3 racer after being signed by the British manufacturer.

Osborne will share a 570S GT4 with regular team-mate David Pattison in British GT this season as part of a three-car entry by the Tolman Motorsport team.

Tolman has also been contracted to run the extra two 570S GT4s for McLaren's young drivers. Michael O'Brien will share one car with Charlie Fagg, while Jordan Albert pedals the other with Lewis Proctor.

Osborne has landed his first full factory role, joining Ben Barnicoat as the Woking

company's newest works-driver recruits.

"It's a chance I've been working for all my life and I've never been so excited, or in such good shape, for a race season before," said Osborne.

"This year will be all about David and me going for the GT4 title, that's the full focus, but alongside that I'll get to work on the development of the new 720S GT3 with Ben and Rob [Bell]. That will bring a whole new area of experience to my driving and I can't wait.

"It's great to have the consistency of the same team and team-mate in British GT. David [Pattison] improved hugely last year so he's ready to put a title challenge together this season."

ROB LADBROOK



BRDC BRITISH F3

Carlin Motorsport has been given special dispensation to run a fourth car in BRDC British F3 this season, opening the door for Billy Monger to race in the series.

The series' rules state that teams can only run three cars, but Monger's unique circumstances — both his legs were amputated after a Formula 4 crash last year — have prompted the exception.

Group operations manager Giles Butterfield from MotorSport Vision, which operates British F3, said: "The Billy Monger situation is utterly exceptional in our opinion and we're very keen to help his rehabilitation. Obviously there are unknowns, such as how is he going to get on, how is he going to fund it. But everyone is hoping the effort and money to make the fairytale come true is worth it."

Monger has been testing with Carlin but

has yet to officially announce that he will compete in British F3.

He said: "I just want to make sure the funds are there and Carlin have been enquiring about running me as a fourth car, so there are a couple of things that need to fall into place."

"Judging by our pace in the car we're near the sharp end of the grid."

Monger's car has been adapted so that he can operate the throttle with a paddle on the steering wheel; he still uses a brake pedal.

Butterfield is confident that there is no advantage to Monger using such a system, stating: "It's a level playing field: if Billy wins he will be winning on merit."

Changes have also been made to the Tatuus-Cosworth car used in British F3 following recent FIA directives and in the wake of Monger's accident.

The upgrades include a longer carbonfibre rear impact structure with a slightly modified diffuser, and at the front a strengthened bulkhead will be fitted.

● Tom Gamble, the reigning Ginetta Junior champion, will race in the BRDC British F3 Championship this season with Fortec Motorsports. The 16-year old has moved across to single-seaters after taking eight wins on his way to the Ginetta title last season.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Coates, Rivett to fight for Clio title

RENAULT UK CLIO CUP

Renault UK Clio Cup race winner Max Coates has switched to Team Pyro for this season, and three-time champion Paul Rivett will also be back in action.

Coates has contested the last two seasons of the Clio Cup with Ciceley Motorsport but has made a tactical switch to Pyro — the team that has been responsible for running

the championship winner eight times in 10 years.

The 24-year old is confident of launching a title bid in his new squad, having finished third and fourth in the standings in the past two seasons.

"Ciceley wanted to concentrate more on their touring car operations [the team has expanded to run two cars] so I was looking for a new team," explained Coates. "The engineering side we had

at Ciceley was great but maybe Pyro bring a bit more experience and a different take on how to do things. We've got a good strong team and there's no reason why we shouldn't be fighting for the drivers' and teams' titles."

Meanwhile, three-time champion Rivett will again return with WDE Motorsport, which ran him to second in the drivers' standings last season.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



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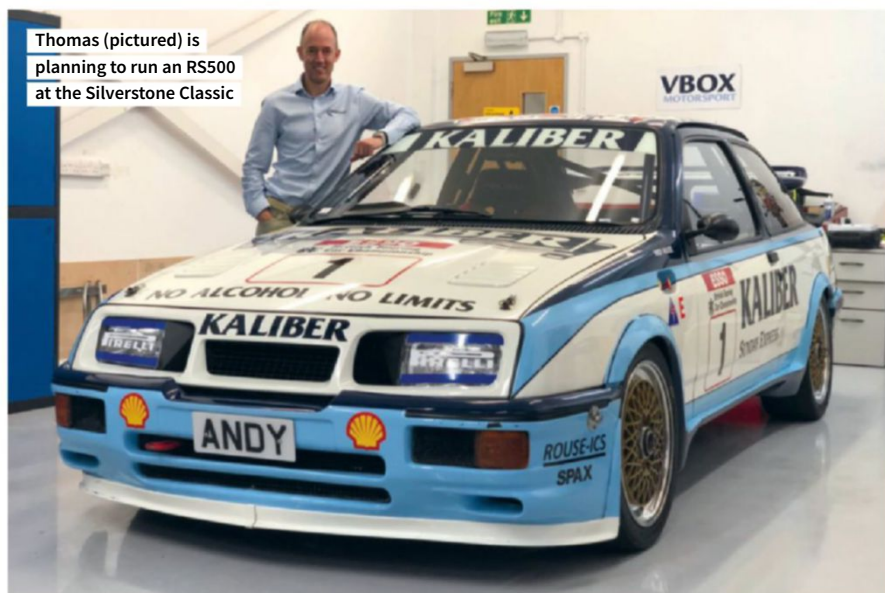
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RYAN
MOTORSPORT INSURANCE

Thomas (pictured) is planning to run an RS500 at the Silverstone Classic



Ex-Rouse RS500 to race

HSCC SUPER TOURING

Racelogic boss Julian Thomas is gunning to join the Historic Sports Car Club Super Touring series this summer, having acquired a 560bhp Rouse Sport Group A Ford Sierra RS500.

Thomas purchased the car — originally driven by Guy Edwards and Andy Rouse in period — from dealer Duncan Hamilton, still in Kaliber livery.

“I worked with Andy Rouse on his Toyota Carinas [when the turbocharged Sierras were outlawed and British Touring Cars adopted two-litre atmospheric engine regulations for 1991],” said Thomas.

“I bought it as Edwards’, then discovered it had Rouse race history, which is pretty cool. After Guy crashed Andy’s regular car in qualifying at Silverstone in June, Andy

put this one — rebuilt following Guy’s Thruxton shunt — on pole. He finished third behind Robb Gravett and Tim Harvey.

“The car hasn’t raced for 25 years, although it’s done trackdays and been up the hill at Goodwood.

“It needs a lot of work, including a new rollcage and safety equipment and refitting the original gearbox, which Jeremy Welch will oversee.”

The aim is to race the car for the first time at the Silverstone Classic, where it may be joined by a sister car.

“I’d love to start it at the Silverstone Classic,” said Thomas. “I’ve been speaking to Sean McNerney, who is preparing a 1990 Rouse RS500, so hopefully there will be two of them out there in July.”

MARCUS PYE

Legend Treherne returns

LEGENDS CARS CHAMPIONSHIP

Former Legends champion Stephen Treherne will return to the series, which will have over 30 entries in 2018.

The 2011 champion will race a rebuilt car under the Pro24 banner for owner Craig Phillips in selected rounds.

Although doubtful for the second meeting at Brands Hatch, which clashes with the expected birth of his child, Treherne — who last raced in 2013 — will fight with the likes of reigning

champion John Mickel, last year’s runner-up Ben Power, and frequent race winner Connor Mills.

“Last time I raced John I beat him in 2011, but there are some very quick drivers out there,” said Treherne.

One driver will earn a prize drive in Handy Motorsport’s BTCC Alfa Romeo Giulietta this season, owned by Treherne’s former Legends team-mate Simon Belcher. The winner will be chosen based on “performance, presentation and sportsmanship”.

DAN MASON

IN THE HEADLINES

NORMA TO RACE IN LMP3

A second marque will compete in the UK LMP3 Cup in 2018. The Mectech squad has confirmed it will field its Norma M30 in the championship. The car — which won last year’s Michelin Le Mans Cup with the DKR Engineering squad — will be driven by Bradley Smith and Duncan Williams.

F5000 AT PHILLIP ISLAND

Australians Tom Tweedie (Chevron B24/28) and Tim Berryman (Lola T332) dominated the MSC New Zealand Le Mans Cup 5000 Revival Series finale at last weekend’s 29th annual Phillip Island Classic Festival.

MONOPOSTO TO GINETTA

Monoposto frontrunner Andrew Gordon-Colebrooke will complete Century Motorsport’s Ginetta GT4 Supercup line-up for 2018. The 2014 Monoposto 1600 champion has also raced in selected outings with Porsche and SEAT machinery in the 24H series over the past three years. He joins fellow rookies Angus Fender and Michael Crees in the team.

GINETTA CHAMP TO MINIS

Reigning Ginetta GT5 Challenge champion Lewis Brown will compete in the Mini Challenge this season with Reeve Motorsport. The 19-year old, who took seven wins last season on his way to the title, will make his debut in the JCW class at Oulton Park in March. The 2015 champ, Charlie Butler-Henderson, also returns.

BIRLEY ESCORT REBUILT

Rod Birley is aiming to race his rebuilt Ford Escort WRC at the Brands Hatch Easter Monday meeting, following extensive damage from a 130mph crash last November. The 2016 Modified Saloons champion hopes it will make the first round on April 2.

STORER TO HISTORIC F2

Historic FF2000 racer Andrew Storer, who finished runner-up to double champion Andrew Park last season having switched to a Reynard SF79, has acquired a Chevron-BDG B34 for some HSCC Historic F2 and Derek Bell Trophy sorties in 2018.

RUN BABY RUN ESCORT

David Brodie’s famous ‘Run Baby Run’ Ford Escort Mk1 will return to the race track in 2018, but will not contest the Escort 50th anniversary celebration races at Brands Hatch in September, as announced in last week’s issue (p68). We apologise for the error.

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TOO MUCH RACING

With so many club racing series in the UK and Ireland, is it time for a cull? Autosport is going for a new approach for the season

STEPHEN LICKORISH

It's not exactly a new argument and it's one that Autosport has made numerous times over the years. But it's arguably more relevant now than ever: there are simply too many club-racing series and events in the UK.

If you take the February 25 edition of Autosport from 1982 as an example, there's an editorial stating that: "The 1982 season will see 768 qualifying rounds of 64 championships (including lesser series) at 228 meetings. This is our oblique way of saying, once again, that there is too much motor racing in this country."

Now things are even more imbalanced. While the number of race meetings has only slightly increased over the past 36 years, the number of categories has ballooned. There are an incredible 208 club series in the UK and Ireland in 2018 (well, as it stands at least, with a few appearing on decidedly dodgy ground as we approach the season). But how can we possibly justify having 208 series when there are only about 30,000 Motor Sports Association licence holders, and that includes many branches of the sport, not just club racing?

The UK is alone in having such a populated club scene. Most European countries have only a handful of incredibly well-

supported categories just for that one type of car: the MX-5 Championship, MX-5 SuperCup, MX-5 SuperSeries, MX-5 Cup and MaX5 Championship. These are just two of the many examples where obvious reductions could be made.

And given the sheer volume of club racing there is at the moment, we are making some changes to the way we report on it in Autosport. In the past, we've adopted a policy of trying to cover every single race meeting, but we will no longer be doing this. Instead of reporting on everything, we will now concentrate on the best that club racing has to offer and give more space to that. And as well as freeing up space by not covering every meeting, we will also have extra space by no longer including race results.

Again, because of the huge number of races that take place, huge amounts of space was dedicated to information that is now widely available online. Instead of using that space listing the top six in the results, we will now have more room to tell the best stories from the meetings – details that you most definitely can't get from an online results sheet. We will adopt an approach that focuses on the interesting stories, fascinating cars, best events and amazing people in club racing rather than the intricacies of every single race – but we will still cover all the races at the biggest and best-supported events.

We feel that these changes will better celebrate the eclectic world that is club racing rather than trying to cover everything without any great detail. Don't worry, no organising club or championship will be banned – and we will constantly review what is getting reported on to make sure nothing is getting unfairly left out. And all series will continue to be included in the news section.

As that editorial from 1982 said: "A changed attitude is needed from the RAC, the promoters and the organising clubs. The innovation of new formula is healthy and necessary but now is the time for some innovation of a different kind. There is only a limited pool of people who want to race, and an even more restricted number who can afford to race. Let's not squander these resources by trying to cater for every conceivable minority, so losing out on the quality of racing."

That's just as true today.

Although this column may seem overly negative, there's no denying the huge amount there is to celebrate in club racing this year. Last week our national writers picked out just a few of the things they are looking forward to this term. The season begins in earnest this weekend with the Goodwood Members' Meeting (as previewed on page 78) and there's also a busy Donington Park season-opener for the 750 Motor Club. A great way to start what will be another very busy but exciting year. 🏁

"SURELY IT WOULD BE BEST FOR FEWER BETTER-SUPPORTED SERIES RATHER THAN HAVING MORE NOT-SO-GOOD CLASSES"

supported categories, with the Netherlands one of the table-toppers with just 25. Now, there are certainly some excellent club-racing series in the UK and the variety is second to none – both facts that should be celebrated – but that still does not justify the sheer volume that we have.

A closer look at the list makes it clear that there are some series that we just don't need.

Take one-make series catering for BMW machinery. There are seven: Kumho BMW, Production BMW, BMW Compact Cup, M3 Cup, BMW 330 Challenge, the BMW Car Club Racing series and the Scottish BMW Championship. Some of these don't boast particularly large entries, so surely it would be best for fewer better-supported series rather than having more not-so-good classes. Even worse is the Mazda MX-5. There are five

Simpson, Berridge and Tandy worked hard to finish first on the road



Simpson stars as Ginetta heads 12-hour field

SILVERSTONE
CREVENTIC 24 HOURS
MARCH 10-11

There are no Creventic overall race winners. Positions are given within classes, so the Simpson Motorsport Ginetta G58 Prototype was technically in a race of one, not against the GTs. But try telling Mike Simpson, Steve Tandy and Bob Berridge that, as they beamed after a stunning comeback chase of the ROFGO Racing Mercedes GT3 to be first home in the inaugural Silverstone 12 Hours.

That team spirit was reflected in a prank played on Berridge in the final stint. “We kept telling Bob he was in second at the end,” Simpson grinned. “He got out of the car all cheered off!”

As the only two P2 cars present, the Simpson Ginettas were expected to dominate. And one of them — driven by Andreas Laskaratos, John Corbett and Neale Muston — fell back with a variety of issues, including a damaged floor and a clutch that needed replacing.

But Simpson, Tandy and Berridge were not set fair. Plenty goes wrong in endurance racing, particularly when it’s held in England in early March. The problems started when Tandy had a heavy crash against the Hangar Straight wall in Thursday testing after a tyre blowout. This left him with a swollen knee, and the car as a write-off.

“The lads had to go back and get a car

from the factory,” Simpson explained. “It had only just come out of the container from Dubai. The lads stayed up all night — that was the car we ran. Bloody brilliant!”

The Ginetta led the early laps, but when rain fell it struggled for tyre temperature and ended the first part of the race, which is split into two segments on consecutive days, a lap adrift.

In Tandy’s hands in the damp-but-drying part two, it looked well on the

way to recovering, but then misfortune struck again with five hours remaining with another puncture.

“There was a lot of debris everywhere, cars going off, coming back on,” said Simpson. “Also, the gravel... it’s like shale, so you imagine that going in the tyre — it’s like a sledgehammer.”

A long in-lap, followed by the tyre change, left the trio three laps down. Did Simpson think they still had a



chance? “No, definitely not!” he said.

“I was sitting in the BRDC clubhouse and I got a call from Bob saying, ‘Come back, we might need you shortly’. Then literally it was, ‘Get in the car!’ I fell over in the garage getting changed and everything; it was all going off!”

Soon there was another delay. “We pitted too early for slicks,” Simpson continued. “The tyre was just too hard and the track was just too wet for our car. So we came back for wets. It was a right rollercoaster!”

From then it was flat-out running. Simpson took the overall lead from the ROFGO Mercedes with just over an hour left.

“It’s great to win a race like this,” he said. “I know we’re the only prototypes in the race, but they’re GT3 Pro teams – we’re semi-Pro and Am. It’s tough.”

The win again looked under threat when there were suggestions that Simpson had completed more than the maximum allowed stint time. But not so.

“I got downgraded to FIA Silver in January, so I could have done longer,” said Simpson. “It’s the perks of getting old. We had to go to race control with a copy of the driver grading. We knew what we were doing.”

It was a day for comebacks. An hour before losing the overall lead, Stuart Hall in the ROFGO Mercedes had chased down the leading Forch Racing Porsche 911 GT3 piloted by Patrick Eisemann, wiping out a minute and a half’s advantage. This helped make up two laps lost late in the previous day when Dan Brown spun at Club in heavy rain and got his rear wheels stuck in the gravel. The ROFGO Mercedes also completed almost all of part two with a broken diffuser after being hit on the first lap.

In the end, Hall, Brown and Roald Goethe took the GT series win comfortably. “Everyone did their jobs, and I tried to pull my weight as well,” said Hall.

GRAHAM KEILLOH

SILVERSTONE WEEKEND WINNERS

7 RACE SERIES

Race 1: Phil Jenkins (Caterham 420R)

Race 2: Lee Wiggins (Caterham 420R)

CREVENTIC 12 HOURS

– PROTO SERIES

Steve Tandy/Bob Berridge/Mike Simpson
(Simpson Motorsport Ginetta G58)

CREVENTIC 12 HOURS

– GT SERIES

Roald Goethe/Stuart Hall/Dan Brown
(ROFGO Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3)

CREVENTIC 24 HOURS

– TCE SERIES

Ivo Breukers/Rik Breukers/Konstantins Calko
(Red Camel-Jordans.nl SEAT Leon TCR)

NEAL PREPARES FOR BTCC... WITH A 24HR RACE



Were you to think of a motorsport series furthest from 24-hour endurance racing, then the crash-bang British Touring Car Championship would be near the top of the list. So what was triple BTCC champion Matt Neal doing taking part in the Creventic 24 Hours at Silverstone?

“With the Synchro guys really,” he said. “It’s a bit of solidarity, doing it all together with the Honda brand. I haven’t done a 24-hour race in a long time, so it’s great to come back and do it with the guys.”

Neal drove a Honda Civic in the A3 class, with Alyn James and Dan Wheeler. Endurance racing isn’t unfamiliar to Neal – and not just from his four Bathurst appearances, the most recent a decade ago when he shared a Supercheap Autos Holden with Boris Said.

“I’ve done the Creventic before,” Neal confirmed. He completed the 12 Hours of Mugello in 2015, finishing 31st in a field shared with GT cars.

Despite not having driven the Civic in a long-distance race, he didn’t have concerns about adapting.

“It’s easier because it’s less cut and thrust,” Neal said when comparing endurance racing to the BTCC. “You have to keep your eye on the mirrors a bit – the LMPs and GT3s can arrive at you a bit quickly and divebomb you. You’re trying to be kind to the car as well when BTCC is just about speed. But I enjoy it, it’s something different for me.”

Neal feels that one-off enduros are endurance racing’s unique selling point. “A lot of younger drivers are focused on a career,” he said, “and the Creventic endurance events aren’t about a career; they’re about participation, enjoyment,

getting good track time. You get amazing track time.”

Ahead of the event, Neal had no pretensions about an overall victory, as the Synchro Civic was no match for the TCR cars it would be racing against.

“It was good,” he said of his first taste of the car in qualifying. “I wasn’t too sure how hard to push it, so I was just trying to get some solid lap times in.

“The TCR cars are noticeably quicker. We’re pretty quick down the straights, but they’ve got us in the corners with the wider wheels and tyres. We’re not the quickest in our class, but we should have reliability on our side.”

But Neal had spoken too soon. The Civic needed an engine change at the halfway mark when it was running third of the A3s. This took 90 minutes, and then Wheeler brought the car in with 90 minutes left and was unable to rejoin.

The race was won by the Red Camel-Jordans SEAT Leon TCR, driven by Rik Breukers, his father Ivo and Konstantins Calko. They had to fight back when, after four hours, Breukers Sr spun from the lead at Becketts and got stuck in the mud; then, having been pulled out, he spun again.

They dropped two laps behind the new leader, the Team Bleekemolen SEAT driven by Sebastiaan Bleekemolen, Melvin de Groot, Robert Smith and Rene Steenmetz. But the winning trio overhauled their rivals by the six-hour mark and won by two laps, with the LMS SEAT – led by Antti Buri – in third place.

There was lengthy overnight disruption due to fog, with several code 60 periods and a near five-hour red-flag stoppage.

GRAHAM KEILLOH



WHAT'S NEW IN BT SPORT'S

WITH A FRESH NEW CONTRACT THAT will keep MotoGP on BT Sport until 2021, the broadcaster has added several new elements to its coverage of the championship for the coming season.

Replacing Julian Ryder in the commentary box alongside former 500cc rider Keith Huewen will be BT Sport pundit Neil Hodgson – the 2000 British and 2003 World Superbike champion. The duo will commentate on all 19 of the MotoGP races, whereas the booth roles for Moto2 and Moto3 will change throughout the year.

“We are sharing more of the commentary than we’ve done in the past,” says Huewen. “For MotoGP, Hodgy will do his grid walk then he’ll come and join me, a bit like the Martin Brundle of MotoGP. For Moto2 and Moto3, we’ll share it out. I will lead and then Gavin [Emmett, BT Sport reporter] or Colin [Edwards, former MotoGP rider and World Superbike champion] will join me.”

There’s a shakeup in the paddock too, as British Superbike racer Michael Laverty will join BT Sport’s punditry team alongside

Hodgson and double World Superbike champion James Toseland. The Tyco BMW rider will also play a key part in the channel’s coverage of the inaugural season of the British Talent Cup, a national Moto3 series for aspiring riders. BT Sport will have live coverage of the Silverstone round and Valencia finale, since they coincide with MotoGP races, and it will show footage from the other four rounds that take place intermittently alongside British and World Superbikes, as well as featuring riders from the junior series throughout the year.

Toseland will now be making regular appearances on BT Sport’s MotoGP

“ANALYSIS HAS BEEN MISSING A LITTLE BIT. WE’VE GOT THE TOOLS TO DO IT PROPERLY”



HOT ON THE WEB THIS WEEK



DRIVER'S EYE VIEW OF ST PETE STREETS

Search for VISOR CAM: James Hinchcliffe at the 2018 Firestone Grand Prix of St Petersburg Practice 3

Click the full-screen button, crank up the volume and watch the 'Mayor of Hinchtown' stretch the legs of his Schmidt Peterson Motorsports Dallara-Honda ahead of the opening round of the IndyCar season at St Petersburg in Florida.



WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

SEBRING 12 HOURS

IMSA SportsCar

Rd 2/12

Sebring, Florida, USA

March 17

FORMULA E

Rd 5/10

Punta del Este, Uruguay

March 17

TV Live Channel 5, Saturday 1830.

Eurosport 1, Saturday 1900.

NASCAR CUP

Rd 5/36

Fontana, California, USA

March 18

TV Live Premier Sports, Sunday 1900

MOTOGP

Rd 1/19

Losail, Qatar

March 18

TV Live BT Sport 2, Sunday 1530

UK MOTORSPORT

OULTON PARK BARC

March 17

Caterham Graduates, Legends, MGOC, CNC Heads Sports/Saloons

SNETTERTON MSVR

March 17

FF1600, Lotus Elise/Lotus Cup, Allcomers, Karts, Lotus Sprint

GOODWOOD MEMBERS' MEETING

March 17-18

Classic and historic races (see p78)

DONINGTON PARK 750MC

March 17-18

Club Enduro, Toyota MR2, RGB Sports 1000, Roadsports, Bikesports, Classic Stock Hatch, Hot Hatch, MX-5 Cup, Bernie's V8s/Sports Racing and GT

MOTOGP COVERAGE?

coverage. His time on the show last year was limited by his touring commitments with his eponymous band, but for 2018 he has committed to 18 rounds of the season, missing only the season opener in Qatar.

"My main thing for the past six or seven years has been writing two albums and going on tour," he explains. "But because festivals don't put you on consecutive years, the management said I may as well not do the festivals this year and save it for when the album's out next year, which has enabled me to have the free time."

After feeling that a technical approach had been missing from its coverage, BT Sport will use new tools in the form of a Sky Pad-esque big screen to allow its pundits to analyse the racing in detail. But for logistical reasons it won't be seen until the first European round at Jerez in May.

"Analysis has been missing a little bit," Hodgson explains. "We've analysed things, but we've not had the tools to be able to do it properly. Now we've got the tools, a little bit like what you see on football when

they get the ex-professional and go: 'just watch him now'. We've got similar sort of equipment and with bikes everything happens so fast, there are subtle things ex-racers can see that the public might not see."

The channel's technical team also has control of a 360° camera that will be mounted on Johann Zarco's Tech3 Yamaha, footage of which will be streamed via the BT Sport app.

Facebook Live broadcasts in the final segment of BT Sport's post-race analysis show 'Chequered Flag' and during the 'In case you missed it' post-Friday practice stream will enable fans to ask questions directly to the presenters, and the practice sessions themselves will now get a dedicated programme.

CHRIS STEVENS

BT Sport is where the best in sport go head to head. Watch the new MotoGP season exclusively live on BT Sport 2, starting in Qatar on Sunday March 18. For more information visit www.BT.com/sport

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WHEN DRIVERS CROP UP IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

RICHARD STYLES

FELIX ROSENQVIST

Prolific racer recalls early international adventure

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

F

or a Formula 1 driver, Kimi Raikkonen has a fairly wide-ranging CV thanks to his adventures during his grand prix racing sabbatical.

In comparison, Felix Rosenqvist's resumé simply blows those efforts away.

The Swede has compiled a mammoth 23 championships during his career — some merely cameo or guest outings — thanks to his junior single-seater stint and more recent moves into sportscars and Formula E.

Back in 2009, at “the start of my international adventure”, Rosenqvist rocked up at the Snetterton finale of that year's Formula Palmer Audi season. Racing in the car that Josef Newgarden had taken to two wins in a one-off at the season-opener at Brands Hatch, he matched the American's victory tally.

“It was my third year in cars — I'd done two years of Formula Renault national

championships,” he recalls. “Basically we were looking at the next thing after and at that time it was the new [MotorSport Vision-run] Formula 2 championship. That was launched that year and we were thinking about doing it in 2010.

“We started talking with the Palmer organisation a bit and in the end they said ‘you should come and do a race for the final weekend’ because I think some driver was missing. It was a good deal and we decided to do it. Even if it was a small series, it was probably the biggest race I'd been in during my career at that point.”

In 2018, Rosenqvist competes for the Mahindra Formula E squad in a series that has positioned itself at the forefront of a rapidly developing technology field. The Formula Palmer Audi cars were not quite so sophisticated, but the meeting may have been handy preparation for the Formula E field's liberal interpretation of motorsport's ‘non-contact’ rules of engagement.

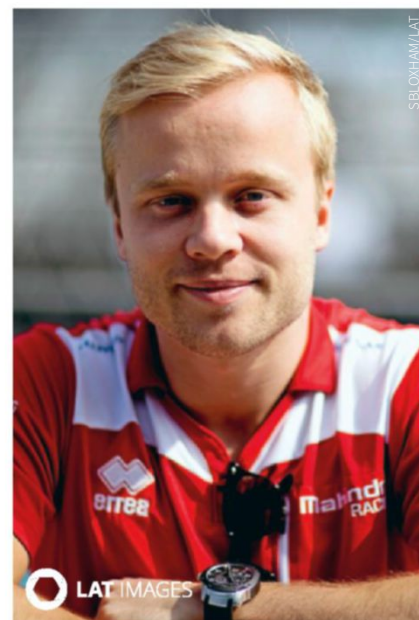
“The cars were quite robust — they were like tanks — because they were very old and it had like huge turbo lag and you actually had an H-pattern gearbox,” says Rosenqvist. “So I had to learn to shift like that, which was quite cool, because you'd spend a lot of time with only one hand on the wheel. It was rough — it was like no finesse — really aggressive kind of driving style. But it was good fun — I won two out of three races. It was good.”

“THE CARS WERE QUITE ROBUST, LIKE TANKS, WITH HUGE TURBO LAG. IT WAS ROUGH, LIKE NO FINESSE”

STAT

29

Number of wins
Rosenqvist scored in
FIA Euro F3



S. BLOOMHART

LAT IMAGES

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Jackie Stewart (BRM P261), Jim Clark (Lotus-Climax 33) and a slightly less amused Graham Hill (BRM P261) share a moment of joshing at the 1966 Monaco Grand Prix. Stewart went on to win the race, 40 seconds ahead of the Ferrari 246 of Lorenzo Bandini. Hill was third, one lap down. There was only one other classified finisher, Bob Bondurant in a privately entered BRM. Poleman Clark dropped out on lap 61 when his rear suspension broke.





TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

QUIZ

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN?



WHO AM I?

This earnest trailblazer was renowned for his testicular commitment and overtaking prowess.

From saucy beginnings his career was almost over before it started after digging in in the garden of England. But channelling the power of Italian mountains he overcame adversity – a common theme in his career – and attracted the attention of a sacred flower. This led to his big break, although it would take a move to a more recent champion, where the sun was rising on a new dawn, for success to arrive.

Having come close twice, there was an emphatic run to the title, which this individual followed up in unprecedented style over the pond.

An Indian summer came down under, but the less said about the final act the better. Occasional cameos followed to the delight of his adoring fans.

QUICK QUIZ

1 Which marque scored its only F1 pole position on this day (March 15)?

2 It was also the first pole position for its lead driver – name him.

3 Which junior formula star bagged his best F1 finish on this day in 2015?

4 Born on this day in 1913, Jack Fairman raced for five GP marques. Name them.

5 Born on this day in 1923, who was the 1955 Indy 500 Rookie of the Year?

NAME THE HELMET



ANSWERS NEXT WEEK

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

CAN RED BULL SAVE F1?

WE GET THE INSIDE TRACK FROM THE TEAM THAT HAS MERCEDES WORRIED



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