

**FORMULA 1** AlphaTauri and Alfa Romeo revealed



# AUTOSPORT

BRITAIN'S BEST MOTORSPORT WEEKLY

25 FEBRUARY 2021

## **F1 2021** — THE — **BIG** **QUESTIONS**

**Karun Chandhok** is your guide to the key issues this season

*Can anything stop Mercedes?*

*Will Hamilton retire soon?*

*Who will be the best rookie?*

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# The new motorsport season starts to gather momentum

Formula 1 launches, the new Formula E season and the World Rally Championship heading to fresh (very fresh!) climes. Despite all the usual caveats and restrictions posed by you-know-what, the motorsport season is beginning to really get under way.

As Red Bull (see page 12), AlphaTauri (p14) and Alfa Romeo (p16) launch their new machines, Sky F1 pundit Karun Chandhok gives his views on some of the key storylines that are likely to unfold this year in our traditional Big Questions piece (p24). Some of the answers might seem obvious, but others are more surprising.

There are plenty of questions surrounding the seventh FE season too, and Matt Kew delves deep into the health of the all-electric series on p34, before being your guide on the the things to look out for on track in 2021. Many teams have something to prove this year...

The Arctic Rally has a fine history and will finally host the WRC this week. David Evans looks at what makes the event so special on p42, while NASCAR legend Jimmie Johnson tells David Malsher-Lopez why he is taking on IndyCar at the age of 45 (p46).

Sportscar racing could be on the brink of a golden era, and G-Drive boss Roman Rusinov explains to us why he believes his LMP2 squad is well placed to take advantage of the increased competition (p50), fresh from another Asian Le Mans Series title last weekend.



**Kevin Turner**  
Chief Editor  
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**NEXT WEEK  
4 MARCH**

**Ferrari special**  
The Prancing Horse went lame last year. Can it recover in 2021?



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AlphaTauri/Red Bull; Alfa Romeo

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Turns 9 and 10 will take inside sweeping bend for faster approach to 11 and 12 sweepers



## AUSTRALIANS REVISE LAYOUT

### FORMULA 1

Track-layout changes to Melbourne's Albert Park circuit are set to be completed in time for November's 2021 Australian Grand Prix in a bid to increase overtaking and alleviate many of the long-standing complaints against the venue.

Race organisers originally planned to complete track resurfacing and corner reprofiling following the 2021 race, initially scheduled for March, but have now opted to bring the changes forward following the event's postponement to a late-season date.

The first phase of the track work featured a widening of the pitlane by two metres, which could allow for the speed limit to be raised. Work has now begun on the

second phase of the track changes, with the biggest alterations coming to the Turns 9-10 complex.

What used to be a heavy braking zone into a tight right-hander will be removed and replaced by a fast, flowing transition to the run along the lake's north-western edge. That will effectively make it two sweeping complexes in a row, with the fast right-left followed by the existing left-right for Turns 11 and 12.

The entry speed to the Turns 11-12 complex will now be higher, which could destabilise cars before the braking zone for the Turn 13 right-hander and create an overtaking opportunity. Turn 13 itself will also be reprofiled, with a wider entry and additional camber to open up the possibility of different lines in the corner.

Work got under way on the track changes earlier





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# FOR PASSING

this week and is set to be completed in July, before a total resurfacing of the circuit with a more aggressive asphalt. It will be the first complete resurfacing of the track since it first staged the Australian GP in 1996.

The revised 21 November date forced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could turn out to be a permanent change for the race, with Australian Grand Prix Corporation chief Andrew Westacott open to reviewing its scheduling. The F1 race is currently scheduled to take place four weeks after the country's MotoGP event at Phillip Island. The two races have traditionally taken places at either end of the calendar, but Westacott is open to a number of options.

"I can't emphasise highly enough that there is nothing definitive about the calendars in 2022," Westacott told Autosport. "We always enjoy the opening-race position with Formula 1. It suits us and it's a major pillar of Melbourne's events calendar."

"What I've also said is that a change of the nature we have now, with a November [Formula 1] event, gives us the opportunity to look at four very distinct scenarios. One is that both events are in an early-season slot, February or March. Another is both races being in a late-season slot, October or November. The traditional F1 at the start and MotoGP at the end. Or, the flip – MotoGP at the start and F1 at the end."

The running of the Australian Grand Prix in November remains subject to confirmation as strict restrictions on entering the country remain in place, forcing all incoming travellers to complete 14 days of hotel quarantine. Australia's vaccination programme started earlier this week, and is planned to be completed by October.

LUKE SMITH & ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN



## Le Mans invites won – but not all will be taken up

### LE MANS 24 HOURS

The Spa 24 Hours-winning GPX Racing squad and 2016 British GT Championship title winner Optimum Motorsport were two of the teams that gained automatic entries for this year's Le Mans 24 Hours on the conclusion of the 2021 Asian Le Mans Series in the United Arab Emirates last Saturday. But only one of them will take up its guaranteed slot.

GPX and Optimum won places on the Le Mans grid for respectively finishing second and fourth in the GT standings after the four races, two in Dubai and two in Abu Dhabi. The British Optimum squad has confirmed that it will be going to Le Mans for the first time this year, but Dubai-based GPX has revealed that it will not be doing likewise.

The biggest problem facing the final wave of Le Mans invitees was that the entry for the big race scheduled on 12-13 June closed at midday French time on Tuesday.

"Time was too short to put together a package necessary to be able to perform at the level we want," said GPX team principal Pierre-Brice Mena. "But we still have the ambition to go to Le Mans in the future."

The GT class of the Asian series is run for GT3 rather than GTE machinery, but Mena stressed that sourcing a GTE car wouldn't have proved problematical.

Optimum sealed its Le Mans berth with a McLaren 720S GT3. Team boss Shaun Goff has revealed that he is forging "a

collaboration with a team that has a GTE car" for its Le Mans assault. He couldn't reveal the identity of the team or the manufacturer, but stressed on Tuesday morning that "the entry has gone in".

The other two GT teams to gain auto invites to Le Mans via the Asian series were the Herberth Motorsport Porsche squad, which took the title with Alfred and Robert Renauer and Ralf Bohn, and the Rinaldi Ferrari team.

G-Drive Racing (above) took the P2 title to ensure it will be back at Le Mans for a ninth season. A second and a fourth for Ferdinand Habsburg, Rene Binder and Yifei Ye in Abu Dhabi combined with their double win from the opening weekend to claim the title by three points from Sean Gelael. The Jota ORECA driver claimed a double victory last weekend with Tom Blomqvist after finishing second and fifth with Stoffel Vandoorne in Dubai.

United Autosports garnered a further automatic entry for winning the LMP3 title with Wayne Boyd, Manuel Maldonado and Rory Penttinen, giving the team a total of five LMP2 invites. It intends to take up two of them, which means that together with its full-season World Endurance Championship entry it will have three ORECA-Gibsons at Le Mans.

The Le Mans entry is likely to be announced at the end of March.

GARY WATKINS

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## Leading team keeps BMW in DTM for series' new era

### DTM

BMW will be represented from the start of the DTM's new GT3 era, with 2018 Spa 24 Hours-winning team Walkenhorst Motorsport fielding at least one of the marque's venerable M6 GT3 machines this season.

BMW pledged support last year for the DTM's GT3 future. While the Munich manufacturer warned that it won't officially get involved in the series until its new M4 is homologated in September, it did state that customer teams are free to contest the 2021 season with the outgoing M6, which was introduced for 2016.

Walkenhorst, which took victories in the Indianapolis 8 Hours and Kyalami 9 Hours last year during BMW's title-winning Intercontinental GT Challenge programme, made no mention of how many cars it would enter or who will be a part of its driver line-up. It has been competing in this month's Asian Le Mans Series with two M6s, with BMW-contracted Nicky Catsburg as its star driver.

"We are delighted to announce our involvement in the DTM," said Walkenhorst team manager Niclas Konigbauer. "As a team, we have worked very hard to turn the DTM project into reality. After our international achievements in the past years, graduating into the high-class DTM is a logical step to expand our involvement in GT3 racing. It is our aim to compete at the highest level in motorsport, so as a result it was clear to us that the DTM is the place to be."

Walkenhorst joined the DTM platform in 2020, when it ran two M4 GT4s in the inaugural season of the

supporting DTM Trophy. The team plans to continue in this series too.

Another German squad, leading GT4 operation Racing One, is evaluating an entry to the DTM. The team already has a brace of Ferrari 488 GT3 Evos for the Nurburgring-based NLS and the 24 Hour Series, but has opened talks with Aston Martin to field a Vantage GT3. "The chances between Ferrari and Aston Martin are currently fifty-fifty," said team boss Martin Kohlhaas.

### RAST RULES HIMSELF OUT

Rene Rast will not continue in the DTM this year to bid for a fourth title. Audi last month confirmed that Rast's fellow DTM stars Nico Muller and Mike Rockenfeller would remain as factory drivers, and that Rast (below) could make appearances in 'select customer racing events', which might have included DTM outings with Audi customers Abt and Phoenix. But he has now ruled that out, saying he wants to focus on his Audi Formula E campaign. Sources have confirmed to Autosport that 2020 runner-up Muller and 2013 champion Rockenfeller *will* compete in the DTM, but it is unclear which team will run either driver.

### RACHIT THUKRAL AND SVEN HEIDINGER



## Parity in place for Gen3 era

### FORMULA E

Formula E and the FIA will boost performance parity for customer teams under the future Gen3 rules by mandating that their cars receive the same software upgrades as their respective manufacturer teams for each race.

Longer-lasting generational rules cycles have allowed the hardware to converge around single-motor, longitudinal configurations, which has increased the emphasis on optimising data to improve efficiency. So far, it has not been mandatory for manufacturers to supply up-to-date software to their customers, although Audi currently does for Envision Virgin Racing (below). It will now be required on a race-by-race basis.

FIA director of FE and innovative sports projects Frederic Bertrand said: "Up to now, the car from the manufacturer was delivered and then additionally the team could provide some software and updates on the performance side. This is no longer possible in the next generation. The car will have to be delivered updated in the same way the works team car is. Every race, the manufacturer will have to provide to the customer and to its works team the same type of software."

"We had the feeling some could deliver the car, but at the end if you don't get all the side upgrades and software management system delivered with it, then the guys are not able to be competitive at the end because they're losing too much time to recover."

This comes on top of new measures to ensure manufacturers who quit the series during Gen3 will have to supply powertrains to any customers until the end of the rules package in 2025-26.

### MATT KEW

### ➔ P34 FORMULA E PREVIEW





**GORDON MURRAY AUTOMOTIVE** Formula 1 design legend Gordon Murray has named the new trackday version of his forthcoming T.50 supercar in honour of three-time Formula 1 world champion Niki Lauda. Gordon Murray Automotive unveiled the T.50s Niki Lauda on Monday on what would have been the 72nd birthday of the Austrian legend, who died in 2019. Murray said that Lauda, who drove Murray-designed F1 Brabhams in 1978 and 1979, “would have appreciated the innovation and engineering detail in our car”.

## Russell gives new Williams pre-launch runout

### FORMULA 1

Williams completed a maiden shakedown of its new FW43B Formula 1 car at Silverstone last week.

Williams announced earlier this month that it would launch its new car for the coming season on 5 March, but has opted to give it a first on-track test prior to its unveiling. In a teaser video posted to social media on Wednesday (17 February), Williams showed the FW43B running at Silverstone in damp conditions, making it the second team known to have conducted a shakedown with its 2021 car.

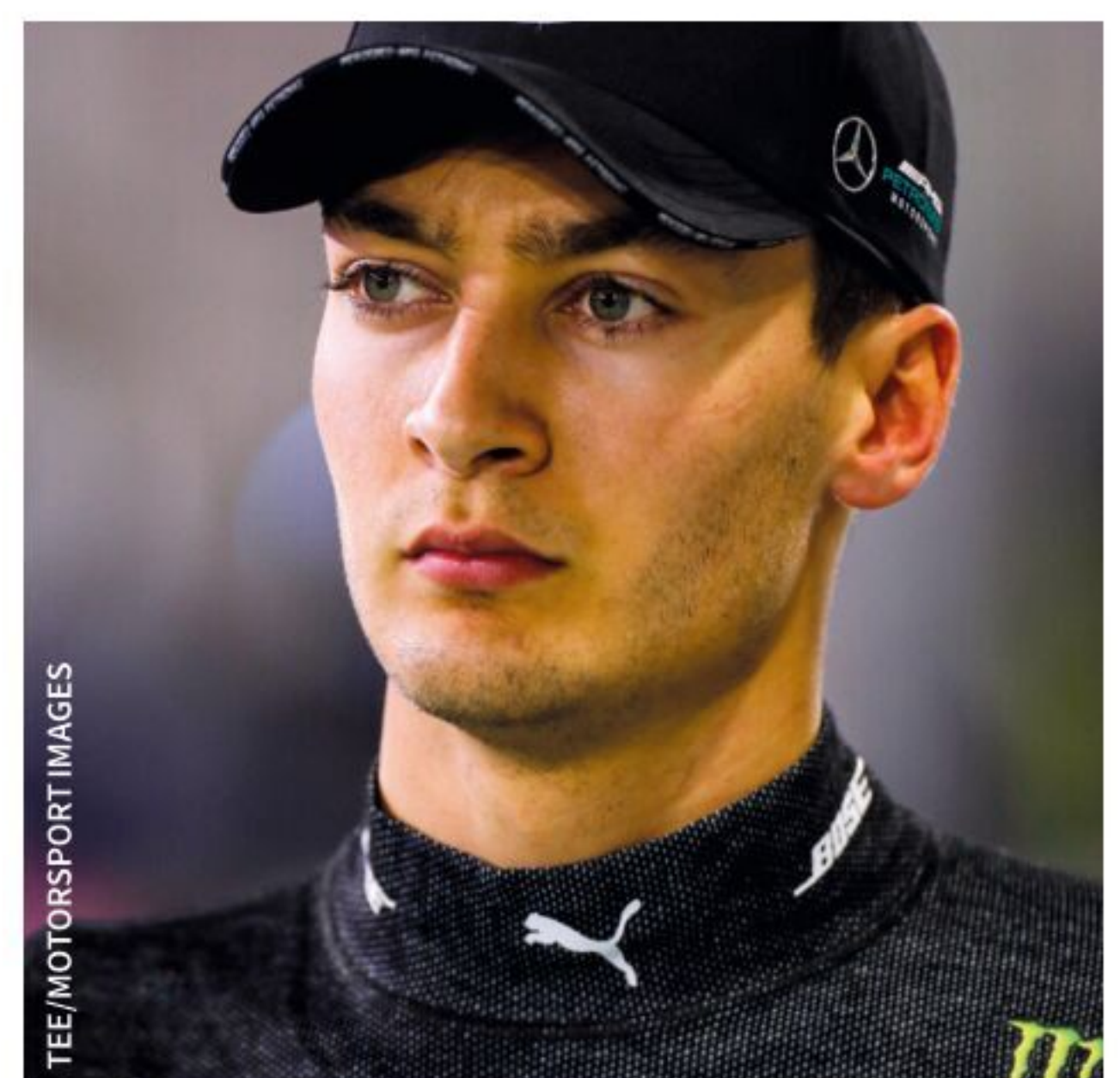
McLaren held a shakedown with its 2021

car at Silverstone on Tuesday last week, the day after unveiling the MCL35M.

Nicholas Latifi was shown watching Williams team-mate George Russell (right) testing the FW43B, with teams limited to just 100km of running under the filming-day regulations, or equivalent to 17 laps of the Silverstone circuit.

Williams, which enters its first full season under the ownership of Dorilton Capital, is one of three teams that have opted to update their 2020 car nomenclature, adding the ‘B’ designation to the FW43 that raced last year to reflect the freeze in the majority of development under the new rules.

**LUKE SMITH**



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## ASP assembles Mercedes superteam



### GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

Auto Sport Promotion boss Jerome Policand has billed it as a “dream line-up”, and it’s difficult to argue. The French Mercedes squad is heading into the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup with a Mercedes-AMG GT3 to be driven by a trio of factory drivers in Raffaele Marciello, Jules Gounon and Daniel Juncadella.

Gounon and Juncadella, who have been added to the Merc GT3 pool for the new season, have returned to a team for which they both drove in 2017 to join Marciello for the five enduros. Gounon and Marciello will

also contest the Sprint Cup segment of the series as ASP defends the overall GTWCE crown won by Timur Boguslavskiy in 2020.

“I don’t think I could have better drivers unless I signed Hamilton, Leclerc and Verstappen,” said Policand, whose team also won the Sprint Cup last year with Boguslavskiy. “I’ve broken the bank to do it, but the Endurance Cup is so competitive now, especially the Spa 24 Hours [the double-points, blue-riband round]. It wouldn’t make sense to have a young driver in the car for the rest of the championship and then change the line-up for Spa.”

Marciello will continue his relationship

with Boguslavskiy in the Sprint Cup after contesting the full championship with him in 2020 bar one race, when he was on duty with Merc in the Nurburgring 24 Hours. Gounon, meanwhile, will race alongside Romanian Petru Razvan Umbrurescu, who made his debut in the GTWCE at Spa last year with the CMR Bentley squad.

Boguslavskiy is scheduled to also drive for ASP in the GTWCE enduros. Policand is working on putting together an entry for the Silver Cup class that would include the Russian and Formula 3 Euro Series race winner Jim Pla in the line-up.

**GARY WATKINS**

## Parfitt completes four-man band for BTCC

### BTCC

Second-generation rocker, ex-Autosport ads salesman and two-time British GT champion Rick Parfitt Jr will contest his rookie season in the British Touring Car Championship this year in an Excelr8 Motorsport-run Hyundai i30 N.

Parfitt, 46, completes a four-car line-up under the Excelr8 Trade Price Cars banner, with topline Tom Ingram also joined by race winner Chris Smiley and 2020 rookie Jack Butel.

“I used to sell advertising in Motorsport News and Autosport and was a huge fan of the series, and it’s amazing to now have the opportunity be part of the grid myself,” said Parfitt, who is yet to test the BTCC Hyundai.

“It’s a chance to live the dream. After undergoing major surgery for my Crohn’s disease in early 2020, the last 12 months have provided me with a chance to get myself in better physical shape than ever before, and I hope to use this season to show people in a similar

position to me that Crohn’s shouldn’t be a barrier towards doing anything that they want to do in life.

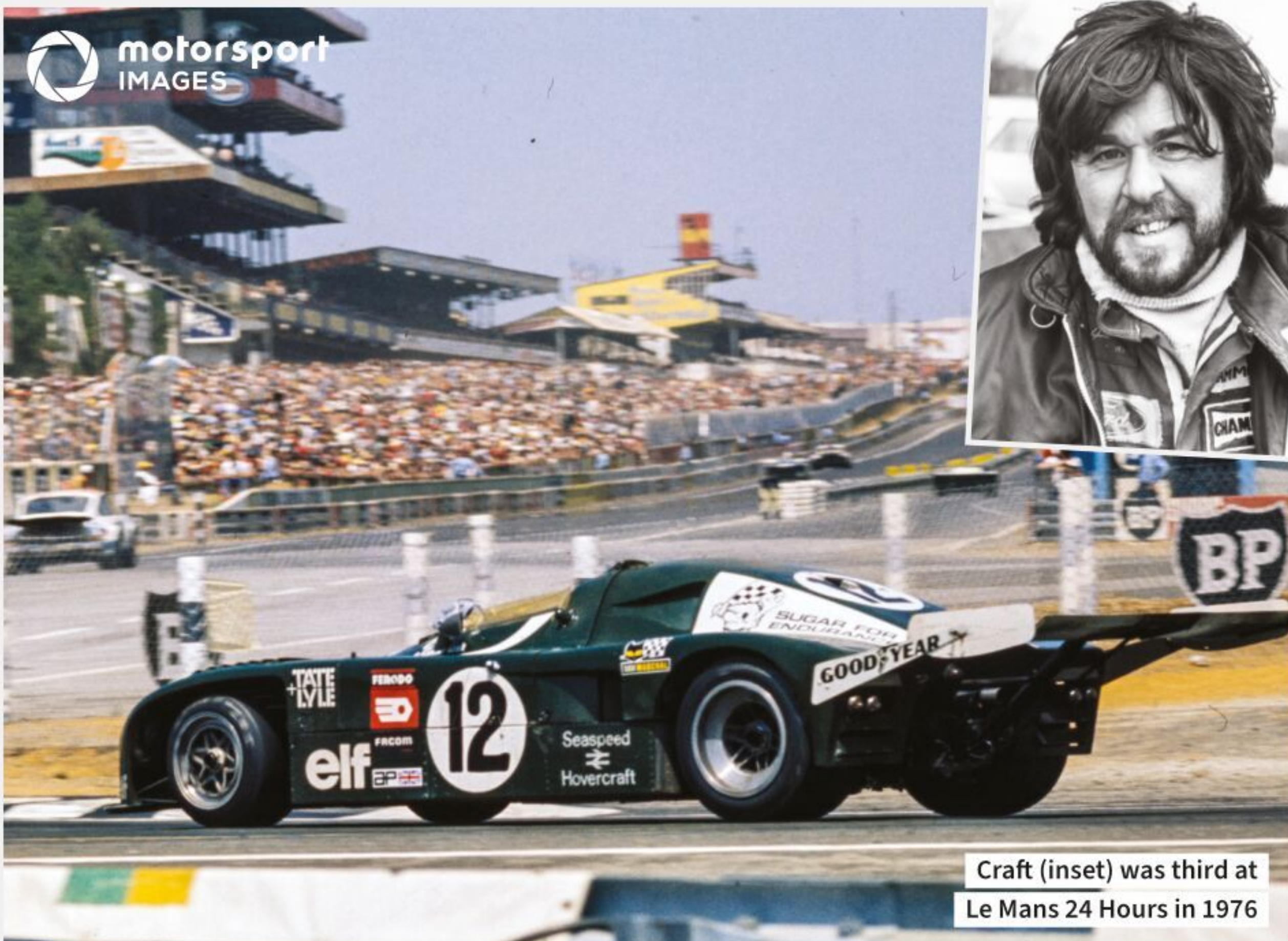
“I want to go out there and have fun this year – and try to kick some ass along the way!”

Parfitt had been linked over the off-season with the second Power Maxed Racing Vauxhall seat alongside Jason Plato, but sources now indicate that this could be going the way of ex-Trade Price Cars Audi driver Bobby Thompson.

**MARCUS SIMMONS**







Craft (inset) was third at Le Mans 24 Hours in 1976

## Chris Craft 1939-2021

### OBITUARY

Cornish-born Chris Craft, who died last Saturday aged 81 following a long illness, was one of racing's great all-rounders.

Craft started one Formula 1 World Championship race – the 1971 US GP in Alain de Cadenet's Ecurie Evergreen Brabham – and showed pace in 1000cc F3 in the 1960s and F5000 in the early 1970s.

Transplanted to Essex with his bank manager father's job, Craft found employment as a Ford post boy. He started racing a self-built Anglia 105E in 1961 and excelled in Superspeed and Broadspeed versions, Escorts, briefly a Mustang fastback, and eventually 3.0-litre Capris, winning BSCC rounds in 1977 and 1978.

Sportscar racing anchored his successes. Craft won the 1970 Swedish GP in a DFV-powered McLaren M8C. He also piloted Lolas, Chevrons, McLaren-Chevrolet M8E and Porsche 908 to 917 with aplomb, and claimed the 1973 European 2-litre championship driving Irish entrepreneur Martin Birrane's Crowne Racing Lola T292.

Craft's partnership with de Cadenet

extended to seven successive Le Mans starts, 12th in 1972 a fine result in the first of three successive participations for the Duckhams Special, designed by Gordon Murray around the F1 Brabham's corners.

After two retirements they returned with a Lola, with a brilliant third in 1976 and fifth in 1977. Subsequent starts with Dome and a Porsche 962 were fruitless.

An aesthete's eye underpinned Craft's pioneering property development work, repurposing London's Thameside wharf buildings to beautiful apartments, and designing fine furniture. He also formed the Light Car Company with Murray to market the latter's Rocket brainchild, of which 55 were made. 'Captain Chris' also bought a naval coastal patrol boat on impulse and cruised the Mediterranean.

Working together on Ford team chief Alan Mann's 1964 Monte Carlo Rally Falcon Sprint programme cemented a friendship with Grahame White, of BARC, Chevron and HSCC fame. "Chris was fabulous company, a great racer and a genuinely lovely guy," he reflected.

**MARCUS PYE**

### IN THE HEADLINES

#### BECKMANN MOVES UP TO F2

FIA Formula 3 Championship race winner David Beckmann finally graduates to Formula 2 this season after no fewer than five years in the third tier, beginning in the old European F3 and progressing via GP3. The German joins Charouz Racing System, with which he took part in last year's post-season Bahrain test. Beckmann will be partnered by Brazilian Guilherme Samaia, who moves from Campos Racing.

#### GOH TO SUPER FORMULA

Team Goh, the 2004 Le Mans 24 Hours-winning team that carried Alex Palou into IndyCar last season by backing him at Dale Coyne Racing, has turned its attentions to Super Formula this year. Goh has aligned with Team Mugen to give Honda Super GT exponent Hiroki Otsu his first full season in the series, alongside lead Mugen driver Tomoki Nojiri. Meanwhile, in the Super Formula Lights 'F3' series, Toyota gives Kazuto Kotaka a third season at TOM'S, and promotes its Japanese F4 champion Hibiki Taira for an expanded three-car line-up that includes Giuliano Alesi.

#### ROSBERG DTM STAFF IN F4

A new Formula 4 team has been set up by staff from the Team Rosberg Audi DTM squad. BWR Motorsport has been established by Erich Baumgartner, who engineered Jamie Green for many years, and also tended the car of Nico Rosberg in his F3 Euro Series days. Some of the Rosberg technical staff have gone with him, and the plan is to compete in the German series in 2021.

#### AUDI'S WTCR LEAD DUO

World Touring Car Cup race winners Frederic Verwey and Nathanael Berthon will remain as official Audi Sport drivers in the series this year. They will drive two of four versions of the all-new RS3 LMS, which goes on general sale later in the year, for Belgian squad Comtoy Racing.

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## COVID CLAIMS LIFE OF TEAM BOSS GRESINI

### MOTOGP

Tributes to double 125cc world champion motorcycle racer and veteran team boss Fausto Gresini flooded in from the MotoGP paddock following the Italian's death on Tuesday.

Gresini was taken ill with COVID-19 just before Christmas. On Tuesday, the Gresini team announced that the Italian had lost his battle at the age of 60.

Dorna Sports CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta led tributes to Gresini. "I'm deeply saddened by the loss of Fausto," he said. "He was a very good friend and I liked him a lot. I have been following the news on his condition closely and I was lucky enough to be able to speak to him even as he was in hospital.

"I am so very sorry to suffer a loss like this in the paddock and I want to send my deepest condolences to his family, friends and his team."

Avintia MotoGP newcomer Enea Bastianini raced with Gresini for the first three years of his grand prix career from 2014-16, winning two races.

In a post on social media, the Italian said: "Thank you for everything you did for me. You were like a father, you made me grow a lot as a rider and as a person. I will never forget you, I love you. RIP."

Honda World Superbike rider Alvaro Bautista, who raced for Gresini for five years in MotoGP from 2012-16, wrote: "All my condolences to family and friends. Thank you for doing so much to motorcycling. Say hello to all those who are no longer with us. A hug [for my] friend."

### LEWIS DUNCAN



GOLD AND GOOSE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



RENAULT SPORT

## Quinn fronts up Arden attack

### FORMULA REGIONAL BY ALPINE

Formula Renault Eurocup race winner Alex Quinn has secured a berth in the newly merged Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine with the series' only British squad, Arden Motorsport.

The 20-year-old Cornishman looks set to lead the three-car attack of Arden after a highly promising rookie season at this level. Quinn, who had three rounds under his belt from the Renault Eurocup in 2019, struggled to raise a budget for 2020, but he was called up by Arden at the last minute to deputise for Australian Jackson Walls, who could not make it to Europe due to COVID-19 quarantine issues. Initially this was on a round-by-round basis, but Quinn eventually contested the full season and claimed fourth in the overall standings, and won the rookie title.

Quinn will have strong back-up from 18-year-old Finn William Alatalo, who was another of the leading rookie Renault contenders last year and transfers from JD Motorsport. The line-up is completed by Nicola Marinangeli – the Italian had a busy 2020, competing in Renault Eurocup plus a couple of Formula Regional rounds, and breaking his leg in a road-car crash.

Arden team manager Ben Salter believes that the team's leading pair of Quinn and

Alatalo can give the team success. "I would say Alex is going to be a leading contender," he told Autosport. "If he just focuses on getting in the car and driving it, he'll be up there. We just want to carry on building on the seasons he and William had last year, and put together some strong results."

Other recent recruits to the Regional grid include Patrik Pasma, who has starred in this month's F3 Asian Championship. He remains at Finnish team KIC Motorsport as it, along with the other teams from the old FRegional series, transfer from Alfa Romeo power to the Alpine engine for 2021.

Ex-Renault F1 junior Hadrien David moves to R-ace GP for his second season at this level. That completes the line-up of men for the French team, which has become the first to confirm an optional fourth entry for a female: that has been taken by Swiss Lena Buhler, who competed in Spanish Formula 4 last season.

Reports suggest that 34 entries have been attracted for the 2021 season. So far 19 drivers have been confirmed, including three apiece at ART Grand Prix and Prema Powerteam, which ran the championship-winning drivers from last year's Renault Eurocup and Regional European series respectively.

### MARCUS SIMMONS



**PURE ETCR** Cupra's new contender for the new all-electric Pure ETCR initiative has broken cover in an official series test at Motorland Aragon. Veteran Jordi Gene drove the Cupra eRacer, while Jean-Karl Vernay continued work on Hyundai's Veloster N ETCR. Cupra has confirmed its up-and-coming World Touring Car Cup race winner Mikel Azcona alongside Gene and the versatile Mattias Ekstrom in its Pure ETCR squad for 2021. **Photograph by WSC/ETCR**

## Graduates from UK scene add weight to Lights

### INDY LIGHTS

For the past three years, the IndyCar Series' designated feeder category from its Road To Indy ladder has been in dire straits. In 2018, Indy Lights grid sizes dipped to an average of 7.5 cars per round. In 2019, that improved to 9.1. In 2020, 10 cars had entered the opening round at St Petersburg, only for that event to be cancelled and then for the whole season to be axed amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Things look much brighter for 2021. New IndyCar Series owner Roger Penske is right behind Lights, and already 12 drivers have been confirmed, with the entire quartet of Andretti Autosport's battalion in place even before Christmas.

Furthermore, British team Carlin is back in the fray for 2021. The team ran in Lights from 2015-17, and claimed the title with Ed Jones in 2016, and its securing of Australian Alex Peroni from the ranks of FIA Formula 3 has already been reported in these pages.

Now the team has added a second car for 2019 US F4 race winner Christian Bogle.

They will be up against a clutch of racers familiar to regulars at British race circuits. Toby Sowery was a leading contender in British F3 in 2016 and 2017 and a McLaren Autosport BRDC Award finalist in 2015-16 before heading Stateside, and he finished up third in his rookie season of Lights in 2019 (right), with one win. He has joined Juncos Racing, the team that took Spencer Pigot and Kyle Kaiser to Lights titles, alongside Indy Pro 2000 champion Sting Ray Robb.

Swede Linus Lundqvist was the 2018 British F3 champion, and dominated the 2020 Formula Regional Americas series to earn a scholarship to Lights. He partners 2019-20 British F3 race winner Benjamin Pedersen at the Danish-American's family Global Racing Group, which has entered an alliance with the HMD Motorsports squad of Lundqvist's closest 2020 rival David Malukas, who also steps up.

Canadian Devlin DeFrancesco, who won races in 2016 British F4 and was runner-up in Indy Pro 2000 last year, is part of the Andretti line-up. So is Kyle Kirkwood, fourth in the 2016 Walter Hayes Trophy as a Team USA scholar, and since then a serial title winner in US junior single-seaters.



# RED BULL RB16B

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

*The few obvious changes to this year's challenger demonstrate how the team is keeping its powder dry and keeping us guessing as to where it's spent its tokens*

PHOTOGRAPHY RED BULL



## FRONT END

If you were waiting for a glut of changes to be present on the RB16B's launch model, then you will be disappointed. Everything is more or less as-was in the Abu Dhabi GP finale last year, barring the mandatory 2021 tweaks and a minor change to the front brake ducts. Red Bull ran with two different nose specifications last season: a squarer design that is seen on the launch-spec car; and a rounder model that was used more sporadically across 2020. The latter shifted the front-wing mountings to the underside of the nose, cleaning up the flow to the

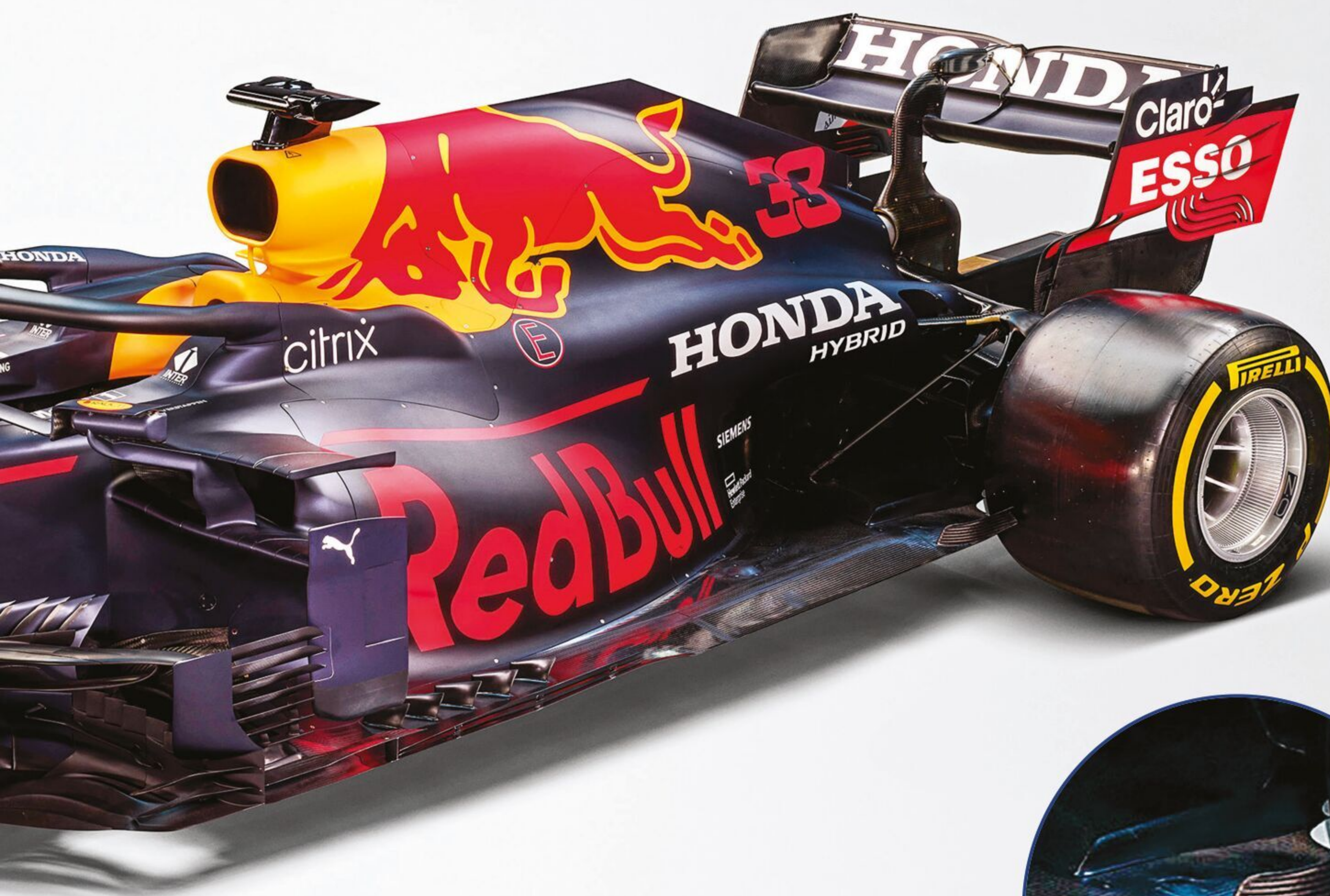
cape behind, but only saw action during the opening and final weekends of the season. Team principal Christian Horner alluded to windtunnel correlation issues that hampered Red Bull's progress, and perhaps that nose took time to understand as a concept. Given its interchangeability, it would be no surprise to see further nose swaps later down the line.





## WHAT IS RED BULL HIDING?

It's no surprise to see a team keeping its powder dry, but there are few talking points on this year's Red Bull. The team has yet to divulge where it has spent its two allotted tokens for 2021, even though a while back Horner mentioned that 60% of the Red Bull was carried over from 2020. That suggests that 40% of it is new but, alas, at this point we can only see the mandatory changes and internals. Perhaps that's the folly of attempting to assess a team based on a few cursory launch shots, but Red Bull's chances do still hinge on the body of work it has produced over the off-season, and whether its development path has transcended that of Mercedes.



## NEW HONDA ENGINE

Like sister squad AlphaTauri, Red Bull will have access to Honda's new powerplant for 2021 as it seeks to close the gap to Mercedes even further. Honda appears committed to accelerating development as much as possible before it hands over its powertrain department to Red Bull for 2022 and beyond, and in recompense has apparently commanded more livery space on the RB16B. Naturally, the Aston Martin logos are gone following the Racing Point team's rebrand as the British luxury car manufacturer, giving Honda prime real estate on the Red Bull's rear wing. Sergio Perez's presence is also felt with his backers adding to the car's portfolio of stickers.

## 2021 FLOOR

The RB16B also has a new floor, which looks to be in the same format as a design that Red Bull trialed in practice at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. It features a fin in the rear corner, which seems to take any airflow drifting outwards and send it back inwards, while there's also an array of added fins further forward of that. It's not unreasonable to expect further changes, as there will undoubtedly be further development as teams seek to unlock the downforce that has been taken away through the cuts to the floor and diffuser.



New floor features a fin at the rear corner, likely to direct air inwards

# ALPHATAURI AT02

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

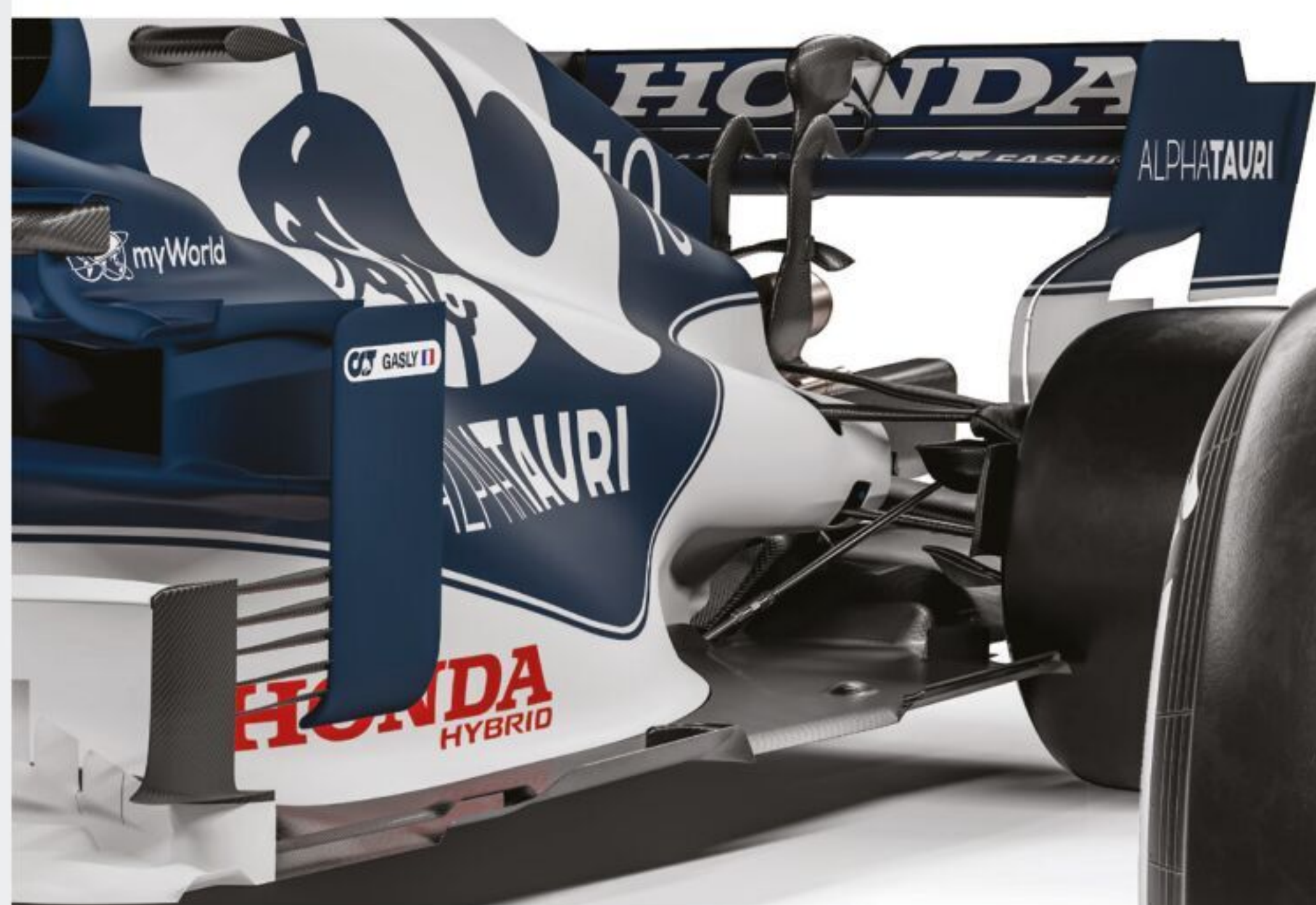
*Here's how the Faenza squad has decided to develop its race-winning 2020 F1 machine*

PHOTOGRAPHY RED BULL

## FLOOR

AlphaTauri has explored a design largely unseen within the confines of the 2020 end-of-season practice sessions in which a smattering of teams prepared for 2021. Here, towards the tapered-in back section, the floor's edge has been raised – much as it has been further forward, where the exclusion zone does not apply. It's only

a small lip but, as the airflow will tend to drift outwards in that zone anyway, adding that lip may yield a little downforce boost. Further forward, it has a larger lip and a small deflector to kick airflow outwards and perhaps find downforce in the mid-section, before the floor squares off slightly ahead of the second scroll.



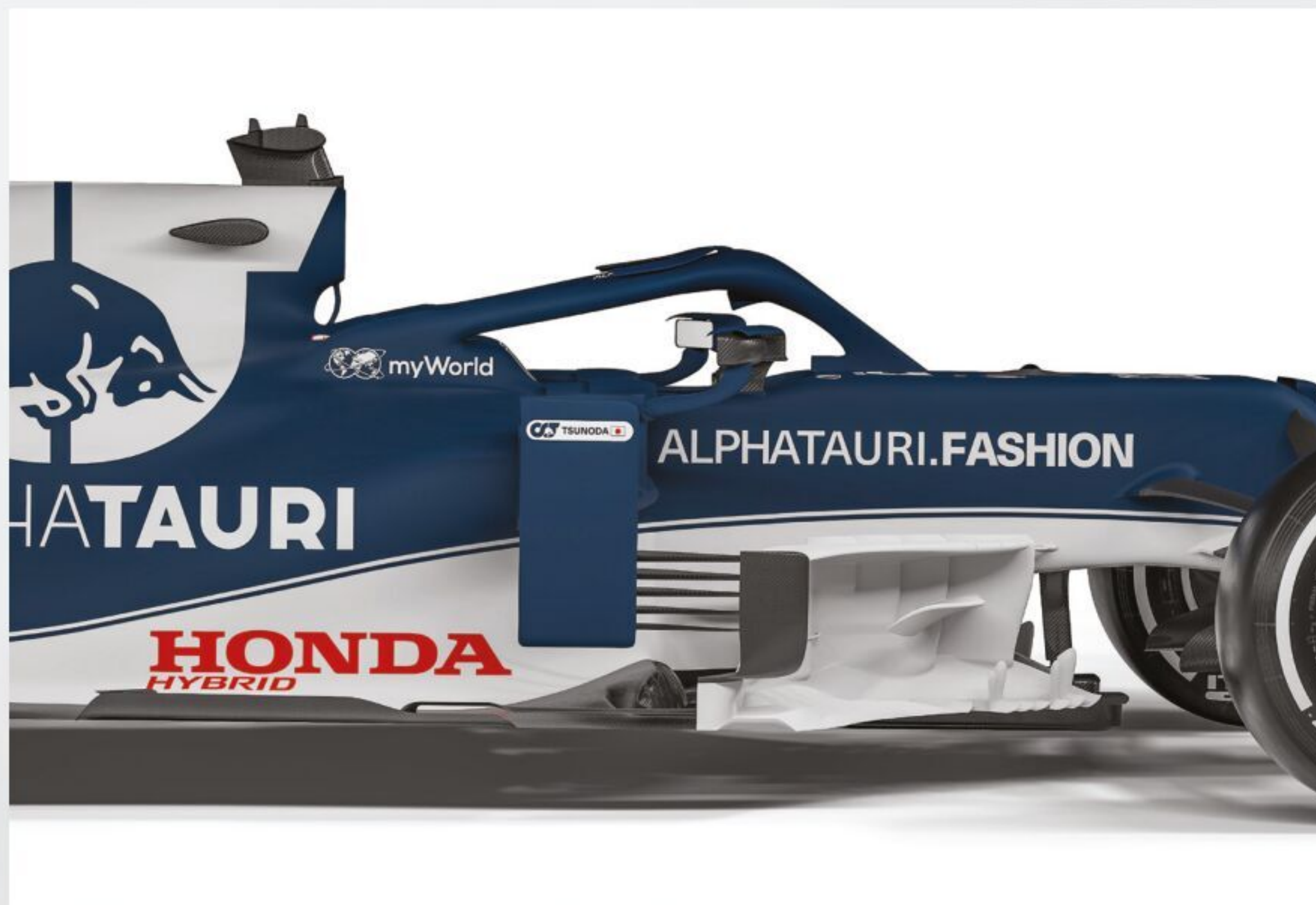
## POWERTRAIN

The recent news coming from the Red Bull/AlphaTauri camps was the parent company's decision to buy out the Honda operation and run it as Red Bull Powertrains for 2022 and beyond. Honda has kept to its part of the bargain and developed a new power unit for 2021. It will continue to develop it to ensure that, when Red Bull picks up the baton next year, it remains competitive.

Technical director Jody Egginton says that Red Bull's desire to retain continuity with the Honda-designed engine is "great news" and avoids problems down the line of having to deviate from its packaging philosophy by having to accommodate a customer unit.

"Honda is giving us a new power unit for this year," he said, "and have taken the opportunity to develop the packaging around it. We are sure the power unit will continue to provide all that is required from it."





## BARGEBOARDS

Behind the whited-out main panels, there are tweaks to the bargeboard package. AlphaTauri usually keeps those sidepod-mounted contraptions rather simple, but has elected to upgrade to the Venetian blind-style array of deflectors seen sporadically up and down the grid. AlphaTauri has historically done a lot with a little and has resisted the temptation to overcomplicate its turning vanes in this area. There are some extra teeth, however, added to the front of the bargeboard zone to work airflow sooner.

## FRONT END

Although AlphaTauri has spent its tokens on a new nose, with a revised crash structure costing its allocation, the nose geometry looks distinctly familiar to the old one. Either the differences are minor, or perhaps AlphaTauri's renderer-in-chief is not entirely being honest with us, and a revised variant may be on the way. We'll have to wait and see on that front, especially given that the prevailing trend has been to explore a thinner nose package over the past season or two. Egginton also suggested that the front suspension had been changed, although the renders once again show the suspension geometry with the split upper wishbone used last season – Red Bull's front suspension package in 2019. Although the team could take on Red Bull's 2020 rear suspension without having to spend tokens doing so, it elected to stick with what it had and avoid a more comprehensive redesign.



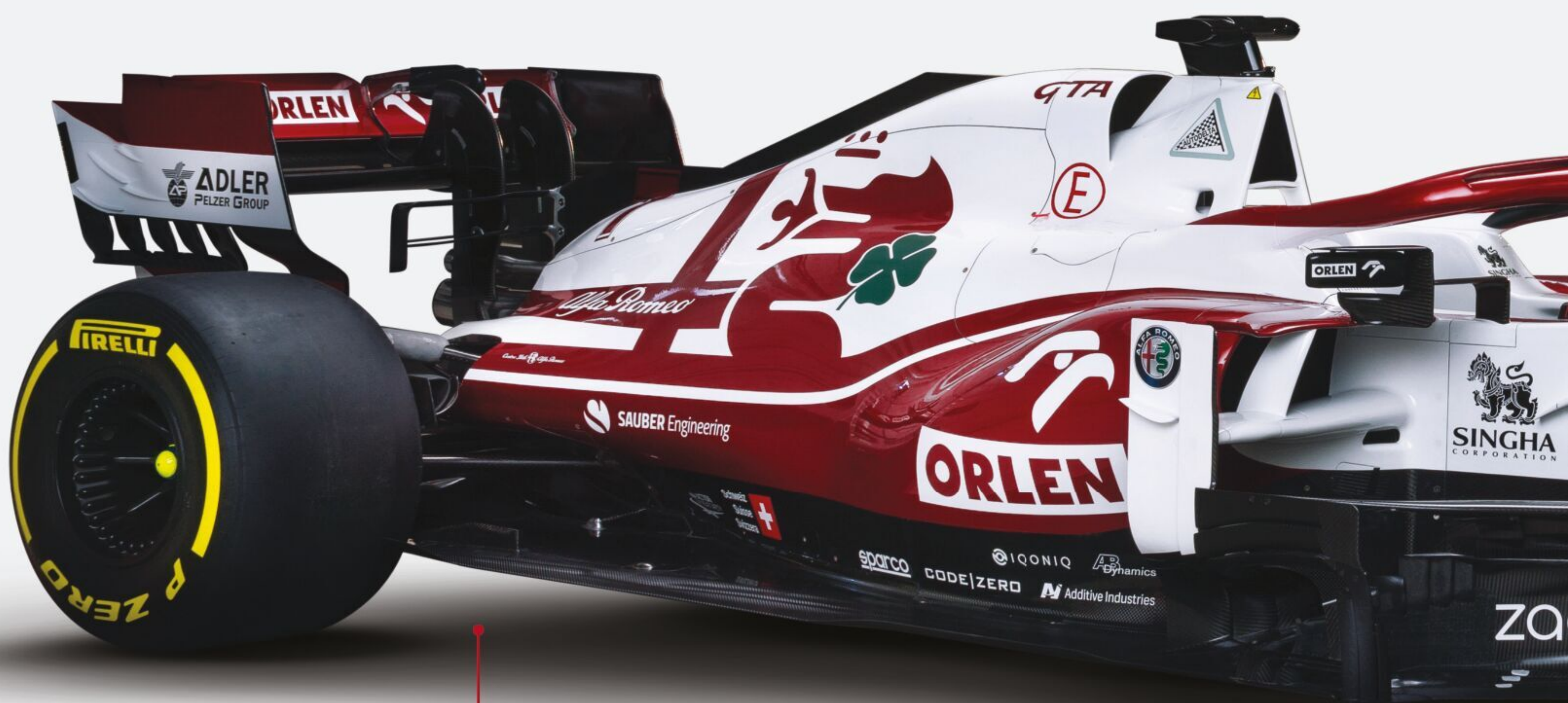
Tokens have been spent on new nose – changes aren't obvious, but more may be revealed later

# ALFA ROMEO C41

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

*The team's new car points to a holding position for this year while attention will soon turn to 2022*

PHOTOGRAPHY ALFA ROMEO

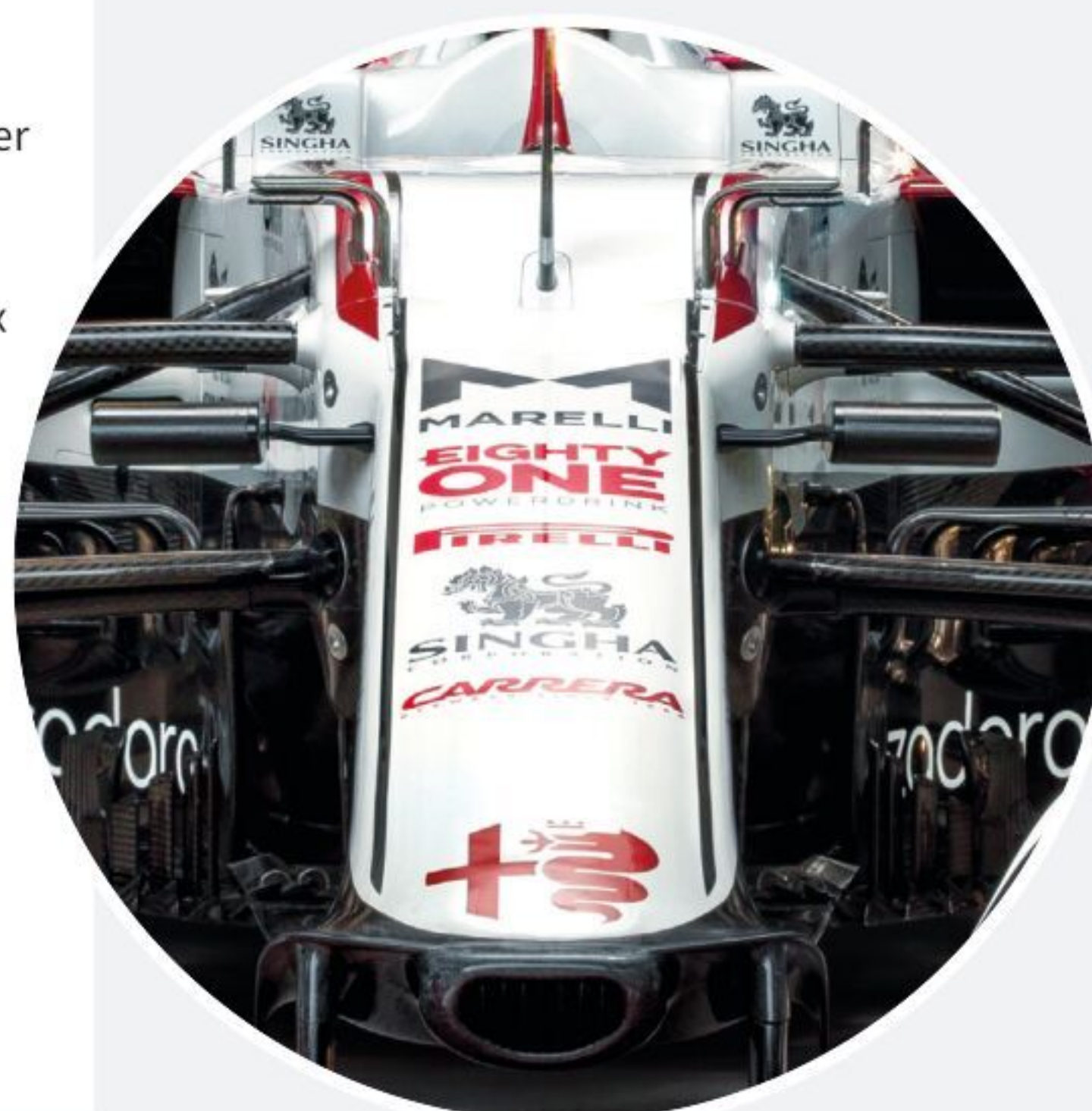


## FLOOR

Given the angle of the launch shots, it's hard to properly see the shape and composition of the floor. It seems that the team has opted for a small curl at the rear corner, perhaps to spit airflow from the underside outwards and rely on any expansion for a hit of extra downforce, but it's difficult to decipher at this stage. This goes hand in hand with the reduced fence size of the diffuser, as part of the 2021 regulations to cut downforce. Everything else looks to be largely similar to how the C39 finished last season, even down to the bargeboard complexities, the ridiculously paper-thin mirror arrangement and bulbous shark-fin arrangements.

## NOSE

The nose seems to have been on a diet over the off-season and now tapers in at the chassis mounting point more than it did last year. Technical director Jan Monchaux revealed that the team had spent its two allotted tokens on the nose, suggesting that the internal crash structure has also been redefined to allow for a more slender design. The complex array of inlets at the tip has now been simplified, with the central snorkel reduced in size and flanked by openings produced by the transition to the front-wing mountings. These will help drive the new cape design, which looks gracefully incorporated into the nose design too.







## FRONT WING

The mainplane looks more aggressive than it did last season. Either side of that central 'neutral section', the mainplane forms a more pronounced curve, largely to help the interaction with the wing tips. There are rules governing the amount of curvature allowed in the wing

to stop teams resorting to the extremities of the pre-2019 wings, but presumably it falls within the given limits. The wing elements have also been reshaped, the top parts trimmed back to make more use of the central elements, tying in with the redefined mainplane.



## EARLY FOCUS ON 2022

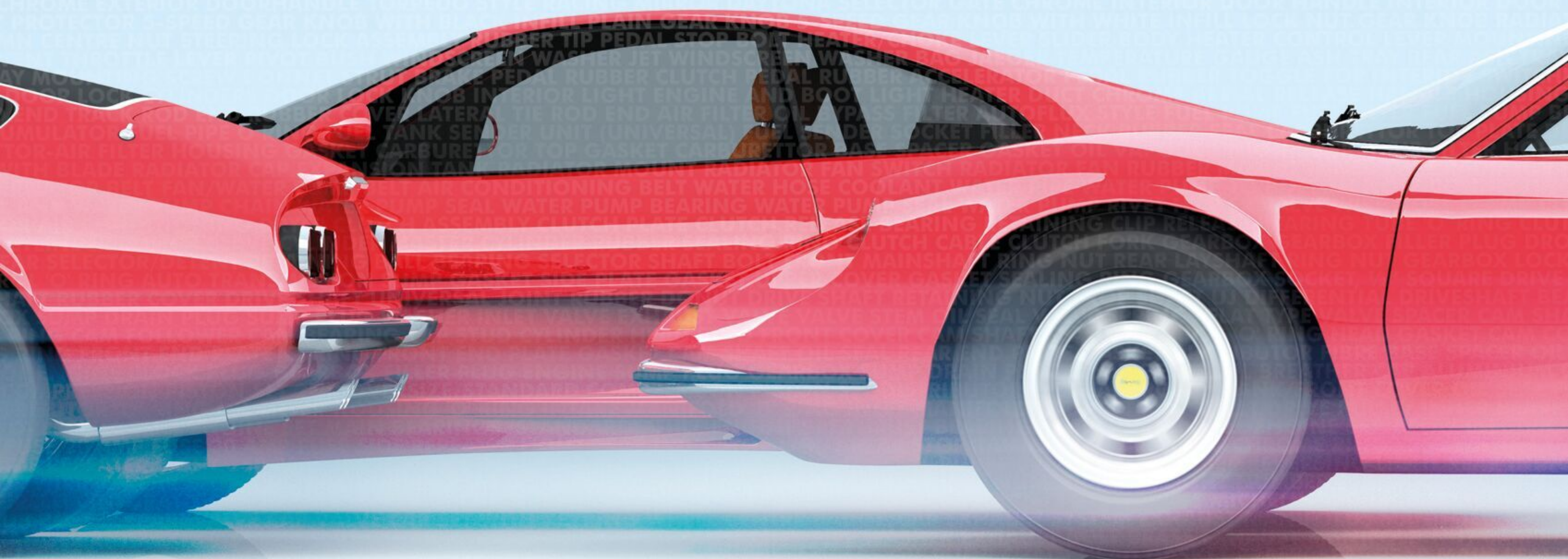
There will surely be changes when the C41 hits the Bahrain circuit for the first time, and Monchaux explained that the team has upgrades planned for the season, although not in the quantity that you might expect. "In terms of development for the season, we are planning to bring updates through the year but certainly fewer than we would do in a regular campaign, because of the ending of the current regulations," said Monchaux. "It is no secret that we are going to give development

preference to the 2022 car during this year." When the engineers at Hinwil will make that transition is currently unknown but, under team principal Frederic Vasseur's watch, it will surely do so at a sensible time. Although teams such as Alfa Romeo, Haas and Williams will be somewhat hamstrung in 2021 with the carryover from last year, it does afford them the opportunity to make a switch to next season far earlier – and with greater windtunnel time available to them.



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# What next for Alex Albon?

*Drivers seeking redemption at Red Bull is something we've got quite used to seeing. He'll be kept busy in the background in his bid to fight back into the team's favour*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

**T**his time last year, Alex Albon knew his 2020 task was to save his Red Bull Formula 1 drive. What followed was a season that started with such promise, but quickly became ever more painful. It ended on a high and included two podium finishes, but that high merely brought Albon back to where he'd started.

Red Bull gave its under-pressure driver a full season to prove he should be kept on for 2021. But, in the end, it opted to bring in an outside hiring in the form of Sergio Perez instead.

Albon's qualifying deficit to Max Verstappen underpins his 109-point and four-place gap to the Dutchman in the drivers' standings. He was, overall, 0.7 seconds slower than Verstappen in his 17-0 qualifying head-to-head defeat, which becomes 0.6s with the two wet qualifying sessions removed, and 0.5s with the three sessions where Albon was eliminated in Q2 taken out too. Qualifying down the order just made Albon's task harder. It left him vulnerable to fights with slower cars, and meant the usual top three disappeared up the road.

Only four times out of 17 starts did he take a top-four finish, and his two podium visits came in the chaotic Tuscan Grand Prix and after Perez's late fiery retirement in Bahrain. In the two races where Mercedes made errors and Verstappen retired, and where Red Bull would still expect a glittering result – the Italian and Sakhir GPs – he was, respectively, 15th after early clashes, and sixth after

## “Albon's F2 squad felt he'd need to be more political to survive in Red Bull's ruthless environment”

qualifying well down the order.

Albon feels “things were going better” as 2020 drew to a close, “but obviously, it was still a little bit too late” to save his seat. The stats back him up – he ended a poor run with third in Bahrain in November. Then he was fourth in the season finale, beaten only by Verstappen and the Mercedes duo.

“I think my best race of the year was in Abu Dhabi,” says Albon. “It just shows that I felt like I am improving.”

The Abu Dhabi event provides an interesting case study in Albon's 2020 struggles. He was not far from harrying Lewis Hamilton in the closing stages, but two regular problems were still evident. First off, he qualified fifth behind Lando Norris's slower McLaren and had to battle past early in the race. But the real damning difference was that Verstappen won from pole.

All year Verstappen looked more comfortable in what was a very unforgiving package. Even in Abu Dhabi FP1, Albon was a spinner at the third chicane, losing the rear suddenly, where Verstappen was whipping the troublesome RB16 through just as he wanted.

It's pretty clear what Albon's role now is for Red Bull in 2021. The team has had him working hard in its simulator ahead of pre-season testing to develop the RB16B where permitted, and he must stay fit to deputise at either Red Bull or AlphaTauri if needed. Plus, he'll do a part-time DTM campaign, which means entering five events that don't currently clash with F1's schedule.

The first task on that list is significant, as Red Bull's car woes in 2020 played a major role in Albon's own struggles, and helping the team fix these will be a critical role in the coming months. “Part of me knows for a fact that, if I could have been more comfortable with [the RB16], the performance would have been much stronger,” says the 24-year-old of weaknesses he must address when trying to earn a 2022 recall. Albon also highlights being “slightly down on experience” as a factor in his 2020 results.

That shouldn't be underplayed: he is now stuck for the foreseeable future on 38 starts, while the least experienced racer at Red Bull or Mercedes in 2021 is Verstappen on 119. It's worth considering whether Albon could have played this card harder in 2020 – after all, when he made his shock switch from preparing for a Formula E debut to making his F1 bow in 2019, the DAMS squad where he had taken third in the 2018 Formula 2 championship felt he'd need to be more political to thrive in Red Bull's famously ruthless environment.

Nevertheless, this is a driver who has been dropped from two F1 junior programmes (Red Bull in 2012 and Lotus after 2015), competed for single-seater titles with his future career continuation far from guaranteed, and even taken a podium three weeks after breaking his collarbone, in a car with no power steering (Red Bull Ring F2 sprint race). His softly spoken geniality doesn't mean he is not tough.

All Albon can do now is excel in his current role and then look elsewhere if he must, suggesting “by summer break, you kind of understand how things are playing out” for the following year. His task as the latest driver seeking Red Bull redemption is well defined – be the best reserve/simulator driver he can, and shine when on DTM duty.

But a successful conclusion, even if he aces those jobs, is made harder if all four Red Bull/AlphaTauri drivers do well in 2021. Daniel Ricciardo's departure decision set Red Bull on its current driver conundrum path in 2018, and perhaps a similar exit is the break Albon will need. ❧

➔ P24 BIG F1 QUESTIONS OF 2021

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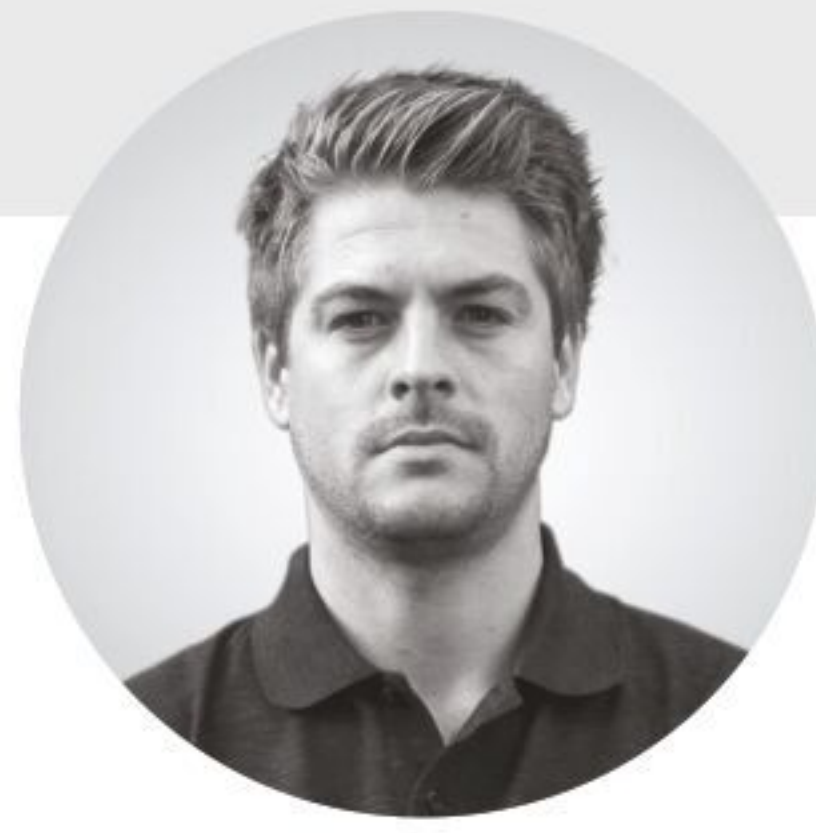


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# Motorsport's newest challenge

*Chief Innovation Officer for Veloce Racing and co-founder of Veloce Esports*

JACK CLARKE

**T**he past 18 months have been a whirlwind to say the least – and I'm not just talking about COVID! In the space of under a year and a half, we have gone from running an Esports operation to running an organisation with a stable of 10 Esports teams, 50-plus gamers and 35 digital media platforms, and launching a real-life racing team in the most exciting new series around.

I come from a racing family – my stepfather, Julian Bailey, is an ex-Formula 1 and British Touring Car driver, and the rest of my family work in the sport. I spent nine years driving in multiple disciplines myself but, more recently, my focus has been on the business side and on co-driving Veloce to where it is today.

Veloce Esports was founded at the start of 2018 by me and my business partners Rupert Svendsen-Cook and Jamie MacLaurin, and we've built it up into what's now one of the leading organisations in the Esports industry. Subsequently, my brother Daniel Bailey joined the management after the full integration of our race outfit, Veloce Racing. It's a great team and I'm incredibly proud to be surrounded by such large brains!

Last year, our 'Not the GP' series was launched to fill the racing void created by COVID-19, and it was the catalyst for a huge step forward for us. The series attracted the likes of Lando Norris, Charles Leclerc and even leading stars from other sports such as Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and golfer Ian Poulter. It also yielded record-breaking viewing figures, along with a giant leap in viewership across our digital outlets, peaking at 190million in December. Last year was one of many challenges,

**“No motorsport discipline is more ground-breaking right now than Extreme E”**

but for the business it simultaneously presented a raft of opportunities to really underpin our Esports vision.

We subsequently collaborated with Lando on the introduction of his Quadrant squad and ran Jarno Opmeer to the F1 Esports World Championship crown with Alfa Romeo Racing Orlen F1 Esports, and we are part of some tremendously exciting projects with both McLaren and our Yas Marina-based partner team, Yas Heat. We always wanted to carry that growing momentum into innovative spaces, and Extreme E had us inspired from the second we heard about it. As an organisation, Veloce prides itself on its disruptive, cutting-edge approach, and no motorsport discipline is more forward-thinking and ground-breaking right now than Extreme E – it's a championship that has purpose at its very core.

Motor racing was built upon the technical advancement of the

automotive industry, and now is not the time to stop evolving; quite the opposite, it's time to double-down! We are facing a climate emergency. Sport has a role to play, and none more so than motorsport. Extreme E provides the ultimate platform to shine a spotlight on climate issues and inspire the spirit of taking action.

Having attended the series' test and preparation events, it blew me away. I am, of course, romantic about the noises and smells of the combustion era, as I'm sure Chip Ganassi and Lewis Hamilton are, but this is a new landscape with some very special features. Ultimately, motorsport is a business that needs a deep connection not only to the automotive industry but to our evolving world.

To underline our commitment to doing the business both on and off-track, we've established what we believe is a strong, diverse and highly skilled leadership team. Racing brains don't come much more finely tuned than that of Adrian Newey, who is our Lead Visionary and whose knowledge and expertise speaks for itself, while Jean-Eric Vergne is a co-founder of Veloce and a staunch advocate of all things innovative. As a two-time Formula E champion and a stalwart of the series from its first season, few people are closer to Alejandro Agag than Jean-Eric, and he is confident that Extreme E will go on to achieve similar if not even greater levels of success. He is a key driving force behind the scenes at Veloce Racing and, like Adrian, brings a wealth of experience.

Talking of experience, our team manager Ian Davies is one of the true 'off-roadies' at Veloce, having played a major role in world championship-winning teams in rallying and rallycross. Combining his expertise with the partnership we've established with one of the sport's leading teams – ART Grand Prix – we feel we've coordinated an exceptional group of people and organisations.

As to our drivers, Stephane Sarrazin is one of motorsport's true all-rounders. Whatever he climbs into – from sportscars to single-seaters to rally cars or touring cars – he is immediately fast, and I'm confident that his versatile skillset will help him to quickly get a handle on the ODYSSEY 21. Jamie Chadwick, meanwhile, is the most exciting up-and-coming female racer around. She demonstrated her class by winning the W Series in 2019 and I have no doubt that she will similarly be on the pace.

There are clearly some big names in many of the other teams too, world champions everywhere you look. The guys at Extreme E have assembled a formidable line-up for the inaugural campaign, and we can't wait to see how we measure up. The calibre of competition is going to be just insane but, while we are something of a newcomer, we are far from wet behind the ears.

It's been a herculean task to pull Veloce Racing together over the past 18 months, and I could not be prouder of the effort made by everybody involved in this massively exciting project. The startline in Saudi Arabia is now almost in sight, with our ODYSSEY 21 onboard the St Helena, which recently set sail for round one of season one. When the ship docks for the Desert X Prix in just a few weeks' time, I can assure you we will be ready to go. 🏁

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# YOUR SAY

*The aerial displays before a GP are laid on at great expense and are hugely enjoyable for the public at the track, while we at home on the TV rarely get a glimpse*

**HARVEY HARRISON**

### Sky's missing a trick – just look to the skies

Whether it's petrol, diesel, kerosene, gas or even electricity, any motor racing fan is, let's face it, a petrolhead. We all love grand prix weekends around the world, and when you can't travel to far off locations TV is the next best thing.

Sky F1 does a great job. But it misses one thing – the aerial displays before a GP. These are laid on at great expense and are hugely enjoyable for the public at the track, while we at home on the TV rarely get a glimpse. How fantastic would it be to have a few cameras on the ground and in the air to record these moments – Red Arrows at Silverstone, Dietrich Mateschitz's aircraft collection in Austria, and the F18 and 747 at Melbourne to mention just three – there are plenty of others.

I used to film F1 in the 1970s, we had film cameras on the aircraft then, even on the old Goodyear blimp. It's not that difficult and certainly an awful lot easier now with tiny digital cameras. To see a F18 at treetop height travelling at around 400mph and a 747 doing 'wheelies' around the circuit is something else.

**Harvey Harrison**  
Wimbledon, London

### Left cold by development freezes

While they may save money, development freezes stifle competition by preventing teams improving, and ultimately removes any interest in the championship beyond the first two or three races.

With the carry-over of last year's cars and little development allowed, we already know that Mercedes will win the 2021 championship, the only possible wild card being that the McLaren chassis was already world-beating and only held back by its Renault engine.

And while the chassis issue may be reset for 2022, with the engine freeze now agreed, whichever manufacturer has the best engine at the start of next season is more or less guaranteed to win the championship for the following three years, challenged only by teams it supplies, but not by anyone else who will be unable to develop their



engine to become competitive. This is not the way to make F1 more competitive, or more interesting to fans or TV viewers.

**Bruce Carlin**  
Byemail

### Is Hamilton paving the way to spectacular new era?

With just a one-year contract, clearly Lewis Hamilton has other plans than to share his career-concluding destiny with Mercedes. The mighty company has nothing left to prove in grand prix racing and has already reduced its equity in the race team. Lewis's one year contract also reduces its outlay from a multi-year deal, though the chances are that it will bag a record eight constructors' titles while Lewis bags his number eight.

Then I see a Michael Schumacher-style move to Ferrari (with Mercedes technicians making the move with all their race-winning knowledge), so Lewis can emulate the plans of Ayrton Senna, his hero who hoped to conclude his career at Ferrari. All of Italy will fall at his feet as another Schumacher/Ferrari-style era dawns with Hamilton its shining star.

**Pat Doyle**  
Byemail

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# BIG F1 QUESTIONS OF 2021

*After an unprecedented season last year, there are plenty of questions and storylines for the upcoming F1 campaign. The Sky pundit gives his verdict*

KARUN CHANDHOK

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport  
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## CAN RED BULL - OR THE RULE TWEAKS - STOP THE MERCEDES STEAMROLLER?

The boring answer, of course, is no. Mercedes has stability in terms of personnel, it stopped development of the 2020 car early to focus on 2021, and it has the reliability and momentum of success on its side. So why would the steamroller stop?

But let's take an optimistic view and look at the back end of last season when, in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, Max Verstappen was genuinely on the pace of the Mercedes drivers.

Red Bull started the season further behind than it would have liked, with a car that seemed to have a much narrower operating window than the Mercedes. Rival aero people in the paddock seem to suggest that the higher-rake philosophy that Red Bull sticks with means it is always going to have a smaller optimal operating window than the flatter set-up of the Mercedes. Red Bull is a top-class team and it's acutely aware that it needs to start the season stronger than it has in recent years.

The team is also aware that its last two cars were edgy to drive. Pierre Gasly and Alex Albon are both very good racing drivers, but Verstappen is exceptional and Red Bull's cars have needed his level of talent to deliver the results over the past two campaigns. But having machinery that relies on just the exceptionally talented to deliver results is not always the best game to play.

Red Bull only need look at Benetton's example from the mid-1990s. The car was brilliant in Michael Schumacher's hands, but the other drivers were never able to extract the same performance. After Michael left, the team didn't reach those heady heights until the exceptional Fernando Alonso came along – a decade later!

In terms of the rule changes, if you ask the data-driven boffins in the pitlane, they will tell you that the 2021 aero rules are massively different, with downforce levels cut back and heavier tyres of a different construction. They're right, of course, but let's be honest: for us watching on, I really doubt we'll be able to tell much of a difference. The aero changes may not be enough to alter the pecking order, but we know how tricky it is to set up the cars for the Pirelli tyres, and therefore the new rubber for 2021 may affect some people more adversely than others.

Verstappen and Red Bull outpaced Mercedes in Abu Dhabi. Can they do so more often in 2021?





How much longer will the Hamilton-Wolff-Bottas combo continue?



## ? WILL LEWIS HAMILTON RETIRE AT THE END OF 2021?

This is a really interesting question, isn't it? I think that Toto Wolff and the Mercedes PR team have done a brilliant job of telling the world that everything was fine and normal throughout last year and through the winter. They were extremely nonchalant and, in general, we believed them because they're very good at their jobs!

But actually when you take a step back, it's not normal that the last seat on the grid to be signed for 2021 was the reigning world champion's. It's not normal that we would go into February before a deal is announced for a driver in the most coveted seat in F1. It's not normal that after saying last year that they didn't just want to sign a one-year deal, they do just that.

Something just doesn't quite add up. On the one hand, Toto says money wasn't a sticking point, but then mentioned that the ongoing uncertainties about the impact of coronavirus on F1, and especially in relation to team budgets, meant that it was difficult to make certain commitments now about a longer-term contract.

Lewis clearly has thoughts and aspirations on his life outside of F1. On a number of occasions I've personally supported his very

**“LEWIS MAY BE ONE OF F1'S OLDEST NOW, BUT THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT HE'S STILL AT THE TOP OF HIS GAME”**

public ways of pushing for diversity and inclusivity in the sport. Clearly this is a guy who is not afraid to use his position of power within the sport to lean on the companies and people he works with to invest in the causes he believes in. Good on him!

He may be one of F1's oldest now, but there's no question that he's still at the top of his game. Mercedes could of course sign George Russell alongside Valtteri Bottas for 2022 and still be very competitive, but I'm pretty sure that they will still be working hard to convince Lewis to stay on beyond this new deal. >>



## ? IS SERGIO PEREZ THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR RED BULL?

Yes, I think that out of the drivers who were available on the market, he was the right choice.

The extent of Daniel Ricciardo's loss to Red Bull has really become clear in the past two seasons. Neither Pierre Gasly nor Alex Albon was able to deliver results alongside Max Verstappen in the way that Ricciardo could.

Perez has shown the maturity that he lacked during his stint with McLaren in 2013, and seems ready to capitalise on a second opportunity with a top team that very few drivers get. He's worked extremely hard to shake off the pay-driver tag that seemed to unfairly follow him around. Checo's tyre management in the Pirelli era has been right up there with Lewis Hamilton's and Verstappen's, but it seemed like in 2020 he was able to raise his game in qualifying as well.

The fact that Perez ended the season fourth in the championship, despite missing two races because of COVID-19 and having an early engine failure in Abu Dhabi, says an awful lot about his ability to consistently hoover up points.

Red Bull doesn't need Perez to beat Verstappen. It needs him to qualify right behind and stay within five seconds of him in the race, so that they can use two cars to mess around with the Mercedes strategy. If Perez can do that, he could be at Red Bull for a few years ahead.

## ? WILL CARLOS SAINZ THRIVE AT FERRARI?

There are some great intra-team battles shaping up, but this is the one I'm most interested to see in 2021. There seems to be this belief that Ferrari has always looked to have a number one and number two driver in its line-up, and therefore Sainz has been signed as a docile sidekick to Charles Leclerc. While that may have been true in some quarters of Maranello, I think that the Spaniard is going to surprise some people.

Make no mistake, Leclerc is an exceptional talent, and some of his qualifying performances last year were among the best we saw all season. Sainz will have to improve his performance over one lap if he wants to get the psychological (and strategic) upper hand from outqualifying his team-mate.

But on a Sunday, I think there's little to choose between them and, in fact, Carlos probably makes fewer mistakes. His clumsy shunt in Sochi last year was an exception, and it's worth remembering that Leclerc had three first-lap incidents in 2020.

Being an Italian speaker will help Sainz get integrated into



Alonso returns to his old team (again) as he approaches 40

the team quickly. He's moving to Italy to be closer to the factory, and his work ethic that's been inherited from his father will certainly be appreciated by a team looking to rebuild after a miserable 2020.

## ? CAN VETTEL RESURRECT HIS F1 CAREER?

If Sebastian Vettel hadn't won those four world championships and was only being judged on the past two and a half seasons, then it would be a surprise that a team would actually choose him over Sergio Perez. As my friend David Coulthard

often says, "past success is no guarantee for future performance".

But Aston Martin has decided to bring in Sebastian along with the star power and experience that he will bring to a marque that is re-entering F1. There's no doubt that if we get the on-form, error-free Sebastian Vettel, then he can be a brilliant asset to the team. The reasons behind his spiral downwards since Hockenheim 2018 remain a mystery to everyone except Seb (and maybe even to him!), but perhaps a change of environment will help to unlock the talent and potential that's in there. Just look at how the switch back

“RENAULT HAD A CHANCE TO FINISH THIRD IN THE FINAL 2020 TABLE, BUT THE REALITY IS IT DIDN'T”



to Toro Rosso/AlphaTauri worked for Pierre Gasly in that respect.

Whatever happens, you get the feeling that this could be Vettel's final team in F1. His legacy has undoubtedly been damaged by the recent past but, with a team closely aligned with Mercedes, and which has a fresh dose of funding and motivated owners, he could leave F1 on a high in a few years' time.

I have a great deal of respect for the race team from the Silverstone factory, which has consistently operated superbly at the track, irrespective of all the ownership and financial rumblings in the background. People like Andy Green, Tom McCullough, Andy Stevenson and Bernadette Collins are top-quality personnel who will give Sebastian the respect and support he needs. It's up to him to channel that into on-track performance.

## ? CAN FERNANDO ALONSO LIFT ALPINE TO THE FRONT OF 'CLASS B'?

Renault had arguably the sixth-fastest car on average across the season and finished fifth in the 2020 constructors' championship. You could say that's where it deserved to finish, but it had a realistic chance of ending up third in the table.

There were a few things that didn't help the 2020 campaign. First off, the reliability was a weakness, with points lost on five occasions. The team also didn't seem to unlock the full potential of the car during pre-season testing and the opening triple-header.

Arguably this also led to Daniel Ricciardo opting to jump ship to McLaren early. But, once the team got to Silverstone, trimmed off some downforce and got the set-up more sorted out, the RS20 was very quick. Esteban Ocon also took about two thirds of the season to find his feet and, certainly early on, he was some way off Ricciardo's qualifying pace.

You could use all three of these factors to draw up a hypothetical scenario for the team finishing third last year, but the reality is it didn't. There have been lots of changes in terms of the rebranding to Alpine as well as on the management side, with Davide Brivio replacing Cyril Abiteboul. On the technical front though, the line-up of Marcin Budkowski, Pat Fry, Alan Permane and Ciaran Pilbeam still leads the way, so at least there's stability there. >>

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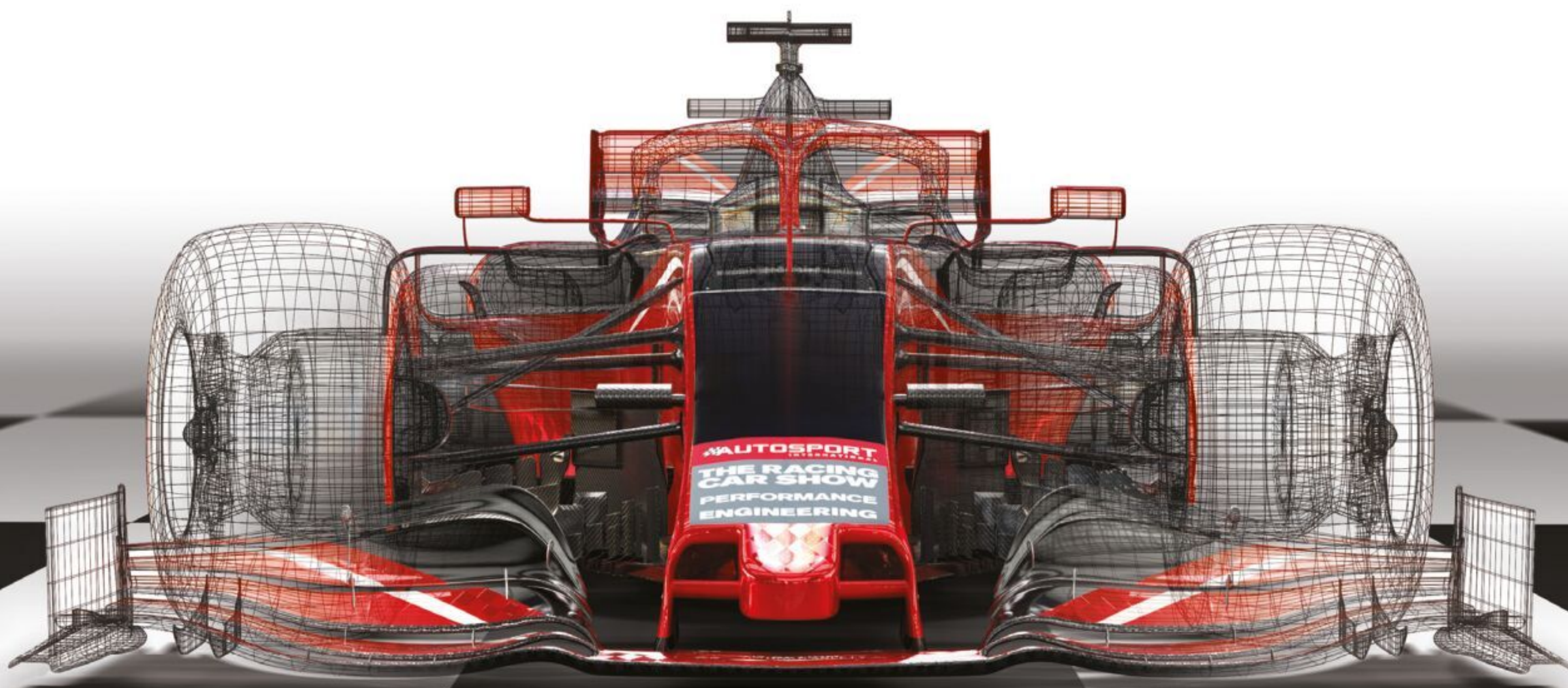
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Will Schumacher (left) or Tsunoda be the best F1 rookie of 2021?

Fernando Alonso is a hard charger with a big personality, and the team will benefit from his leadership and experience. I doubt he's lost any of his speed, and he's done enough days in the 2018 car now to knock off the rust, so I suspect he'll arrive at the opening race fully ready for battle.

The one downside for Alpine could be that, without McLaren as a customer now, it's lost an extra source of data for the power unit side as well as a reference of where the 'Enstone' chassis is when compared to someone else with the same engine. This is something Renault/Alpine will need to look at for 2022 and beyond, as it's a good and objective way to keep perspective of where the performance of your car is.

## **?** HOW WILL LANDO NORRIS STACK UP AGAINST DANIEL RICCIARDO?

In some ways, I think McLaren has an almost like-for-like replacement from Carlos Sainz to Daniel Ricciardo. The difference, of course, is that the Aussie comes with proven race-winning pedigree, whereas Sainz is yet to break his duck in F1.

In terms of race pace and consistency, I think that Daniel and Carlos are equally matched, but over a single lap Ricciardo is probably a small step ahead, as his exceptional quali laps at Silverstone, Mugello and Sochi showed last year. This one-lap pace is something Lando Norris also excels at, so the quali battle between them will be brilliant to watch.

I was really impressed with Lando's race performances last year. I thought in 2019 he still had too many races where he lost out to Carlos in terms of tyre management and race pace, but in 2020 he made a good step forward in that area. One thing that Sainz and Ricciardo seem better at is positioning their cars in the right places on the opening few corners of the race, where they seem to gain spots and set themselves up for a good race result.

McLaren is unquestionably a team on the up again. Zak Brown has done what he does best and put together a fresh influx of investment that the F1 team needed to separate itself from the challenging position that the road car company finds itself in at the moment. Andreas Seidl,

James Key and Andrea Stella do an excellent job of leading the race team. The Mercedes engine will of course also give the team a bit of a boost, although not perhaps the half-second that some people seem to think.



## WHO WILL BE THE SEASON'S BEST ROOKIE?

Mick Schumacher comes into F1 with the highest profile of the three rookies. As F2 and F3 champion, he's proven that he fully deserves his place and it's not just about his surname. Mick seems a very level-headed young man and I think he's shown good mental strength to climb the ladder with all the pressure

of being Michael's son, but sadly without having Michael at the track to help and support him.

I'm slightly confused with where Ferrari has put Mick, though. I think it would have made more sense to place him at Alfa Romeo alongside Kimi Raikkonen, whose experience would have been invaluable in guiding the rookie through his first season in F1. Antonio Giovinazzi had some solid races in the second half of the year, but it doesn't look like he's actually going to end up in the

**“IT WOULD HAVE MADE MORE SENSE TO PLACE MICK AT ALFA WITH KIMI”**

works red cars, so why not place him at Haas? That way, both Ferrari customer teams would have had one rookie and one driver with some F1 experience.

Yuki Tsunoda had a very good rookie season in F2 in 2020. Trevor Carlin, whose team the Honda protege raced for last year, reckoned that Tsunoda is probably as fast as F1 podium finisher and Indianapolis 500 winner Takuma Sato (another Carlin/Honda graduate to F1), which bodes well. He seemed to be particularly good at tyre management and biding his time in the races while others around him destroyed their rubber. This >>





Tsunoda and Gasly should be strong at AlphaTauri

could prove to be a useful tool for him in this Pirelli era of F1.

AlphaTauri has a good team of engineers led by Jody Egginton and Jonathan Eddolls, who are well-versed in looking after and educating young and inexperienced drivers. They of course now have a race winner in Pierre Gasly in the other car, and he will be a good benchmark for Tsunoda.

As I mentioned before, I'm confused by the Ferrari driver placements, because Haas is now left without an established benchmark driver. Nikita Mazepin showed flashes of speed in his F2 days, but also seemed to get into skirmishes and unnecessary incidents with other drivers. The Russian has actually done quite a bit of mileage in Mercedes F1 cars in private and young driver tests, so he probably comes into this season with the most F1 experience under his belt of the three rookies but, based on their past racing history, you'd expect him to be a step behind Schumacher.

Mazepin has already started his F1 career on the back foot. His well-documented incident with a young woman has, rightly, raised a great deal of criticism. The silence in terms of the punishment and disciplinary action taken against him hasn't done him or the team any favours with the fans, and has ramped up the pressure even before he's set foot in a Haas F1 car.



Williams was faster than Haas in 2020 but finished behind

## WILL WE FINALLY SEE A WILLIAMS REVIVAL?

F1 teams are more like cruise liners than speedboats when it comes to turning around momentum. Through 2018 and 2019, Williams looked like it was firmly headed for the shore, but in 2020 it at least managed to drop the anchor and stop outside the shallow port.

Williams was the most-improved team of 2020, gaining a massive 1.3% on pace from where it was in 2019. Considering that the benchmark team Mercedes wasn't standing still, that's an impressive effort, although of course Williams was looking for performance from further behind.

The next 18 months are critical for Williams and Dorilton







## ARE 23 RACES TOO MANY, AND WHAT SHOULD THE CALENDAR LOOK LIKE?

With the ongoing COVID-19 issues, I don't think we'll get to 23 races this year but, even in general, I do think it's a few too many. I really believe that something around 18 or 19 is the maximum number in terms of striking the balance between a wide variety of races and making each one a 'special event'. Once you get up to 23 races, it gets to a point where people start to think, 'Oh, we can miss this one because there'll be another one next week'.

It's also a tricky balance to sustain for the workforce. The drivers and TV folks like us are lucky because we swoop in on a Thursday and leave straight after the race but, for the majority of team personnel, they're gone for a week at a time, which really makes

**“THIS HAS ALREADY STARTED COSTING THE F1 TEAMS SOME GOOD PEOPLE TO OTHER SERIES”**

Capital. Thus far, the new owners have done a good job by coming in and immediately putting their money where it mattered by paying off suppliers and creditors. They've also made key decisions such as the hiring of the well-respected Jost Capito, and switching to the customer Mercedes gearbox for 2022. The latter, of course, is a philosophical departure from the family-run Williams operation, and is a clear sign from Dorilton that it is prepared to do things differently.

On the downside, despite having a slightly quicker car on average than Haas, the team didn't manage to sneak into the points all season long. George Russell could and should have picked up a couple at Mugello and Imola, but ultimately, for 2021, the team will be looking to take the next step towards the midfield by getting ahead of at least the Ferrari customer teams.

family life hard to sustain. Once you add in testing, it basically means they're gone for half the year. This has already started costing the teams some good people, who are willing to earn less money but do Formula E or the World Endurance Championship instead, and only be away from their children for half as many weeks per year.

In terms of the balance, I think we've got it right, with new and historic venues, street tracks and permanent facilities. It was nice to go to Mugello and Algarve as they created some great racing, although I do think these cars are now a bit too big and fast for Imola, which was largely processional apart from after the restart.

All of this is of course dictated by the commercial model and for 2021, once again, by the pandemic. F1 did a brilliant job of putting 17 races on last year and, if we can get to 18 or 19 again this year, that will be a great achievement. ❄



New venues for F1, such as Mugello, were a welcome boost last season

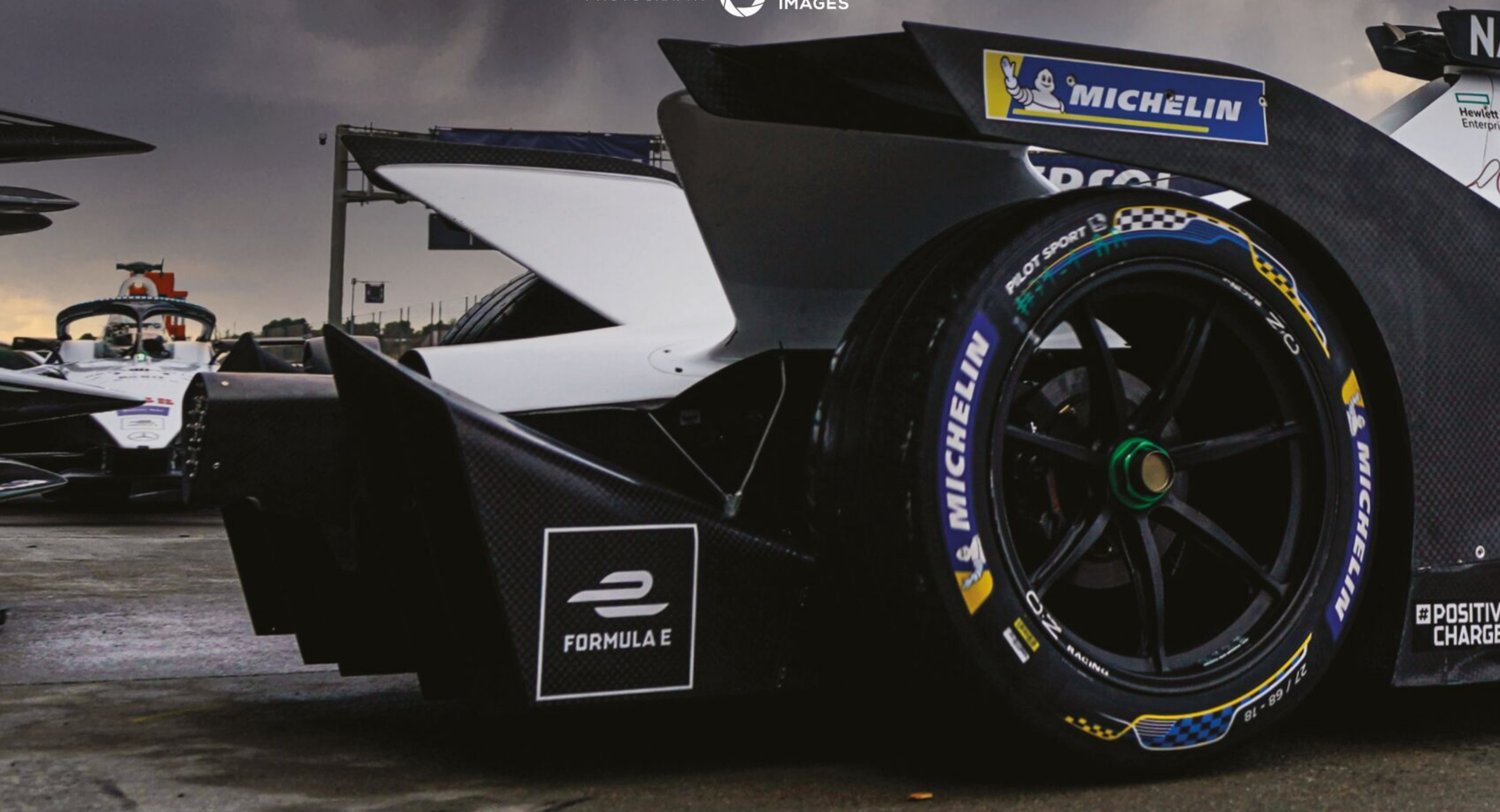
SEASON  
PREVIEW

# THE CLOUDS HANGING OVER THE NEW ELECTRIC SEASON

*It'll be the off-track movements that define the seventh Formula E season, even though everything is set for the closest fight to date*

MATT KEW

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport  
IMAGES



**T**he story of this Formula E season won't be anything like as clear cut as the years that have gone before. An inaugural term answered whether this fledgling and disruptive series could make waves. The second campaign centred on the opening up of the technology to manufacturers. The year after, the main plot was what Techeetah could do with its customer Renault powertrain. Then, if Audi was the new dominant force. After, it was the arrival of the Gen2 cars. Last season, all eyes were on newcomers Mercedes and Porsche.

As for the 2020-21 season lying in wait, the only '2020' part stands as testing in Valencia. All races will take place this year, between now and late September, as the pandemic ensures that arranging a calendar remains the most persistent of headaches for championship organisers.

Rather than the usual clashes with the DTM and major sportscar events, COVID instead means 87 days will have elapsed between Rene Rast completing the final lap at the Circuit Ricardo Tormo and the opening race starting under the lights in Saudi Arabia on 26 February. Unsurprisingly in the circumstances, that's almost a month longer than any gap between testing and the first race in the six previous seasons.

Credit must go to the FIA and FE for their light-footedness that has

allowed a first batch of eight races to make up the improvised schedule. The pair were also white-hot in their response to the logistical issues presented by the global health crisis. Aware of the increased financial pressure and accounting for manufacturing delays, they altered the homologation windows. Now, powertrains will be retained for two years to lower costs and teams could either bring in new designs for





GRIFFITHS

the start of the season or delay until 5 April, the second window, to account for interruptions to parts supply.

When these measures were first introduced, five races were scheduled to take place before that April date. Successive teams' champion DS Techeetah, 2019-20 runner-up Nissan e.dams and the Dragon Penske Autosport squad – all opting to carry over their

## “IT’S NOT LIKE WE ARE HAVING A NEW POWERTRAIN AND ARE GOING TO GAIN THREE, FOUR OR FIVE TENTHS”

existing powertrains – would have had to wade into those battles with slightly damp powder. The remaining nine teams would have enjoyed a five-race window to get a head start with their box-fresh machinery.

But the rapidly spreading strain of the virus detected in the UK threw a spanner in the works. On top of the Mexico City and Sanya races being postponed, the Santiago E-Prix was put on ice as Chile shut its borders

to British travellers. To the surprise of few, the double-header event in Saudi has remained largely unaffected. Although fan attendance will be capped, travel exemptions have ensured it's never properly been at risk. As a result, those three teams now must only survive two races with their old car before they can welcome fresh kit for the Rome E-Prix on 10 April.

Despite the muted chagrin of rival competitors, the FIA and FE haven't altered homologation timelines. Should DS Techeetah and Nissan e.dams limit the damage effectively in Diriyah, they're in prime position to continue their form of late last season as they usher in new cars for the bulk of the calendar. Not only will they have three fewer races with the old equipment but, with FE chief championship officer Alberto Longo targeting a record 15 races this term, they'll have more rounds after the April cut-off date to put their new cars to good use.

That's not to say DS Techeetah cannot be dethroned or Nissan e.dams will again be best of the rest. As double champion Jean-Eric Vergne makes clear: “The [new powertrain] improvement we're talking about is barely seeable in lap times [sic]. It's more about efficiency in the race. Everything has been improved a little bit. But it's not like we are having a new powertrain in Rome and are going to gain three, four or five tenths.” >>



DS Techeetah seems to have found a qualifying fix to add to its race pace

That's because the arms race in FE isn't with hardware but software. While Nissan e.dams revived the art of twin-motor powertrains in 2018-19, which could offer massive performance potential but often upsets the handling due to added weight over the rear, all teams agreed to a ban of the set-up chiefly to contain costs. Combined with a convergence around longitudinal configurations, a growing emphasis has been placed on data. Engineers can increase efficiency and optimise the calibration of the regenerative braking. Put simply, drivers have more energy to use for longer and can cut back on lifting and coasting.

Although Xavier Mestelan Pinon, the performance director at DS, has promised "exciting new technology" for the new black-and-gold cars, evolution rather than revolution is the order of the day throughout the grid for the penultimate season of the Gen2 regulations.

In truth, the on-track action in 2021 will be somewhat secondary amid the wider landscape. As bankruptcy loomed in March 2015, FE co-founder Alejandro Agag was briefly out of a job and had to fund the freight of the cars from his own pocket around the time of the Miami E-Prix. Only then was the health of the series substantially more in question than now.

A quadrupling of team budgets per season, disquiet over the lack of mass media coverage and questions raised over the capability of FE to transfer technology to the road – generational rule cycles mean developments in the automotive market have caught up – have left two manufacturers to vote with their feet. The 2021 season marks the

last we'll see of Audi and BMW in FE. With a cost cap "mandatory" in the eyes of Zak Brown and his prospective McLaren Racing entry, and the deadline for signatures for the forthcoming Gen3 rules looming, it's the off-track movements that will dominate the bigger picture. The coming months represent a litmus test for a championship that, in the eyes of many people involved, could share race weekends with F1 or converge with it altogether.

There are still fascinating stories to unfold: whether DS Techeetah will be toppled from its status as the 'Mercedes F1 team of FE', can Antonio Felix da Costa defend his crown or will Vergne retaliate against his team-mate? These will be answered, but the main narrative for the weeks ahead won't be wholly informed by what happens on the circuit.

Thanks to Mahindra and DS Automobiles becoming the first manufacturers to commit to the Gen3 rules – with the signatures of Nissan, Mercedes and Porsche expected imminently – the tide is beginning to turn back in FE's favour.

When the political respite comes, fortunately FE is in line for another ultra-competitive season. Six races in Berlin last season, organised to stem the loss of rounds to the pandemic, went some way to denying a wide-open title fight. Da Costa scored two wins from two poles as the season resumed in Germany to put the drivers' crown within his grasp. As the attack from Jaguar Racing's Mitch Evans stumbled and BMW Andretti went off the boil, the title was won with two races to spare. Never before had it been decided so early.



Guenther topped ultra-competitive testing for the second year running

FERRARO



Audi will walk away from FE at the end of the season

**“THE CARD I’M TRYING TO PLAY ON IS CONTINUITY. I’M MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THE TEAM. I FEEL AT HOME”**

With a more normal calendar planned for 2021, and only Saudi and Chile confirmed as double-headers for now, there’s fewer opportunities for one track to suit a specific car and driver combination. Add that to the closest ever timesheet from pre-season testing – the 24-strong pack, led by Maximilian Guenther for BMW Andretti, was covered by less than 0.8 seconds – and a vintage campaign for fresh-faced FE might well await.

All but the recovering NIO 333 and Dragon Penske Autosport should expect to be in contention for a win this year. There’s every reason to expect a similar trend from the past two campaigns, which logged nine and eight different victors respectively.

Even that comes with a health warning, though. When the field reconvened at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin after the pandemic’s initial interruption, teams were buoyed by a feeling that they had closed the gap to DS Techeetah thanks to various software upgrades. What few accounted for was the improvements the in-form squad had made itself as it won three of the six concluding races.

There were only two chinks in DS Techeetah’s armour last season. One was a reluctance from the pitwall to swap da Costa and Vergne when they held each other up in the races. The second was a discomfort from both drivers in qualifying that related to a lack of confidence with the brakes. The first issue can, in part, be solved with the experience that’ll come as da Costa prepares for his second term with the team. Meanwhile, the one-lap drama has been a particular area of focus over the off-season.

As da Costa explains: “The card I’m trying to play on is continuity. I’m way more comfortable with the team, the car, the people around me. I feel more at home.”

On the qualifying remedy, Vergne adds: “It took us a long time to try and understand what the problem was with the brakes. But we found the issue and we were able to fix it, so this year I should be in a much happier position to drive the car and feel a lot more comfortable. It doesn’t mean I’m going to be on pole every race, but I hope to be fighting for those.”

Although that’s an ominous sign from the pre-eminent FE squad, it’s not necessarily what the championship needs or wants. As the current 10 manufacturer teams show, the electric formula has proved successful. FE can absolutely survive and thrive with fewer constructors. But as the politics, particularly concerning Gen3, weigh heavy in the air, the more teams that can rival DS Techeetah, win races and break its recent monopoly, the more attractive the championship will look to the boardrooms that ultimately decide where the money is spent. ❄️

**FORMULA E ENTRY LIST**

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
4	<b>Robin Frijns</b>	Envision Virgin Racing
37	<b>Nick Cassidy</b>	Envision Virgin Racing
5	<b>Stoffel Vandoorne</b>	Mercedes
17	<b>Nyck de Vries</b>	Mercedes
6	<b>Nico Muller</b>	Dragon Penske Autosport
7	<b>Sergio Sette Camara</b>	Dragon Penske Autosport
8	<b>Oliver Turvey</b>	NIO 333
88	<b>Tom Blomqvist</b>	NIO 333
10	<b>Sam Bird</b>	Jaguar Racing
20	<b>Mitch Evans</b>	Jaguar Racing
11	<b>Lucas di Grassi</b>	Audi
33	<b>Rene Rast</b>	Audi
13	<b>Antonio Felix da Costa</b>	DS Techeetah
25	<b>Jean-Eric Vergne</b>	DS Techeetah
22	<b>Oliver Rowland</b>	Nissan e.dams
23	<b>Sebastien Buemi</b>	Nissan e.dams
27	<b>Jake Dennis</b>	BMW Andretti
28	<b>Maximilian Guenther</b>	BMW Andretti
29	<b>Alexander Sims</b>	Mahindra Racing
94	<b>Alex Lynn</b>	Mahindra Racing
36	<b>Andre Lotterer</b>	Porsche
99	<b>Pascal Wehrlein</b>	Porsche
48	<b>Edoardo Mortara</b>	Venturi Racing
71	<b>Norman Nato</b>	Venturi Racing



**2021 FORMULA E CALENDAR (SO FAR)**

RD	LOCATION	DATE
1	<b>Diriyah</b> (SAU)	26 February
2	<b>Diriyah</b> (SAU)	27 February
3	<b>Rome</b> (ITA)	10 April
4	<b>Valencia</b> (ESP)	24 April
5	<b>Monaco</b> (MCO)	8 May
6	<b>Marrakech</b> (MAR)	22 May
7	<b>Santiago</b> (CHL)	5 June
8	<b>Santiago</b> (CHL)	6 June

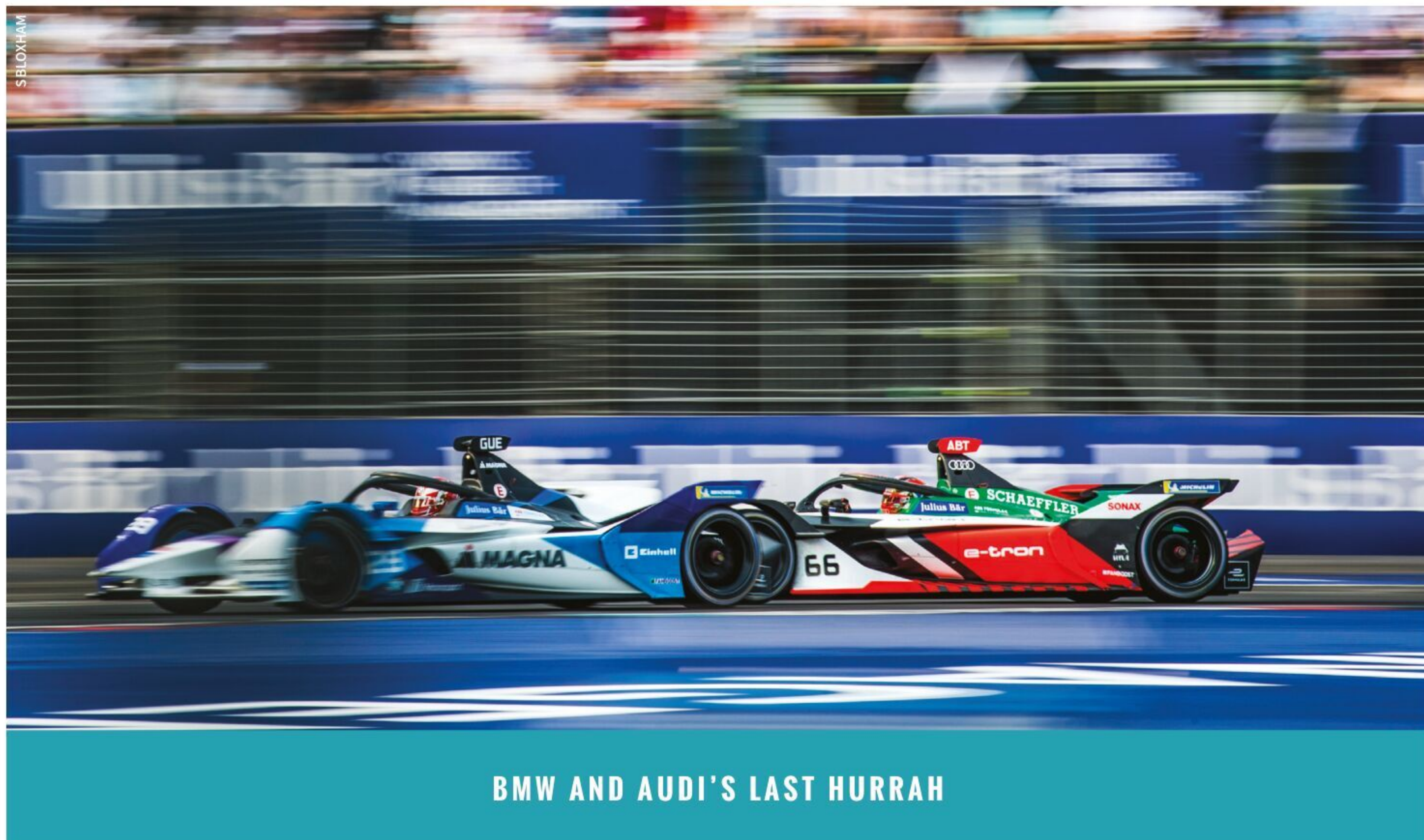
SEASON  
PREVIEW

# THE STORIES TO WATCH IN FORMULA E THIS SEASON

*Half a calendar still to come, teams and drivers promising title ambitions and a likely rookie sensation will make for stellar subplots in 2021*

MATT KEW

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport  
IMAGES



## BMW AND AUDI'S LAST HURRAH

A pathological appreciation for data and a podium in Berlin aided the very easy case for Audi to retain Rene Rast for the full 2021 season. But the triple DTM champion had no idea he was effectively signing up for a one-year gig, with the marque quitting the series at the end of the campaign.

Likewise, that Audi has invested heavily in developing its new FE powertrain in-house for the first time suggests the race team was caught somewhat by surprise with the decision from above to exit. The same is true of the Andretti Autosport operation, with many staff only finding out its partner BMW was heading for the door when an email landed while they were waiting to check-in for their flight out of Valencia Airport.

Audi will walk away having guided Lucas di Grassi to the 2016-17 drivers' title. It also won the teams' crown the following season. But with its final stint in the championship, it will look to that new powertrain to add to its 12 victories in FE after chalking up a first win-less campaign last year, having dropped from second down to sixth in the standings.

BMW has a habit of not sticking around in motorsport, regardless of its success – see GTE, top-flight sportscar racing and Formula 1. It doesn't stand by its programmes to allow them to evolve sufficiently to get the results. After just two seasons of full factory backing, it's ready to wave farewell to FE also. While that's a reflection on

some of the issues with the series at present, there's little denying that BMW has yet to reach the heights. As Antonio Felix da Costa and Alexander Sims looking to pastures new in recent years shows, BMW doesn't cultivate consistent results (and modest salaries play a part, too) to encourage its talent to stick around.

Maximilian Guenther, again the youngest driver on the grid, and rookie Jake Dennis will look to salvage the team's form in 2021, after its genuine bid for the title last season crumbled in Berlin.

While Audi can look back on its titles, for both German marques there's much to be done during their swansong seasons so they don't depart FE as recent high-profile underperformers.

## MERCEDES AND PORSCHE GUNNING FOR THE TITLE

Mercedes and Porsche want to topple incumbent king DS Techeetah in their second seasons in FE. This target has been placed knowing how hotly contested FE is, that consistency and incremental gains are the keys to a sustained title push.

For Mercedes, it enters the new campaign with its house in order. It retains Stoffel Vandoorne, and Nyck de Vries after his starring rookie season. The goal is to pick up from where it ended the 2019-20 campaign. In the final Berlin race, polesitter Vandoorne led in comfort as de Vries progressed from fourth to deliver a 1-2 finish. It was a commanding maiden victory.

Mercedes has introduced a new car from the kick-off but, aping the tactics that have borne so much fruit for the marque in F1, there's not been a clean sheet of paper. Team principal Ian James says: "Conceptually, it's an evolution. But there isn't really any component part we haven't touched, redesigned and gone at again."

A season of the HWA Racelab forerunner aside, it was a debut campaign that returned a superb third in the constructors' chart. But it was tinged by operational and reliability errors.

"We haven't fallen into the trap of thinking we've suddenly turned a corner and cracked it and we've got it made," adds James. "Quite the opposite, we know actually how precarious the situation can be. Our rookie year is now behind us. We cannot make errors twice, that's clear."

Porsche has further to climb to claim the trophy, having finished eighth last term. But from fans and the boardroom, there's a weight of expectation that comes with its glittering track record in



PORTLOCK

motorsport. As such, the intention from Porsche head of FE operations Amiel Lindesay is clear. His target is "to win the championship. The podium was the target [in 2019-20] – this year we expect to have a car and team that can win races and contend for the championship." That's far from being a flight of fantasy from the former 919 Hybrid LMP1 crew chief.

To deliver, ex-BMW chief mechanic James Lindesay has come in as team manager, with his brother Amiel having covered that role in addition to his own last season. Most notably, ex-Mahindra Racing driver Pascal Wehrlein replaces Neel Jani.

Alongside the incumbent Andre Lotterer, neither driver nor the team has won an FE race so far. All need to shake that monkey off their back in 2021.

Amiel Lindesay adds: "What we've really worked on for season seven is to be consistently up there. The ups and downs we had last year... we need to smooth it out."

In a bid to address this, during private tests, Porsche has visited a variety of tracks to mimic real-world FE corners better than the unrepresentative official pre-season testing venue in Valencia.

Make no mistake, Mercedes and Porsche are on course for that so-called difficult second album in a field that's as competitive, if not more so, than any other in racing. Both need to make the bad days fewer and farther between. Working on race pace will aid that mission for both as they bid to win the top prize in electric motorsport.

## FRESH LAYOUTS PEPPER THE OPENING ROUNDS



BATHIE

Given the difficulty in arranging a sporting calendar in the current circumstances, it's remarkable that the first four circuits of the six listed so far will run configurations not previously seen in Formula E.

The teams have been thrown an immediate curveball by last-minute changes to the Diriyah layout. These consist of a handful of minor modifications to open up apexes to speed up sections of the track. It leaves minimal time to optimise simulator programmes as drivers fly to Saudi Arabia earlier this year to allow for two days of hotel quarantine.

Next up is a heavily revised iteration of the Rome layout, which becomes the second longest lap ever used in FE, to avoid main roads and minimise the impact on local traffic.

Then, so long as Vallelunga – on standby as a reserve destination for an Italian event – isn't

called into action, FE will make its debut on a bona fide permanent race track with a round at the Circuit Ricardo Tormo pre-season testing venue in Valencia.

Championship organisers assessed possible configurations over the winter, and teams won't know the final layout until two weeks ahead of the 24 April slot. Although drivers reckon it will more closely mimic a typical FE street circuit rather than defy convention with lots of fast and open corners.

Competitors are also currently working to the expectation that the full Monaco Grand Prix route will finally make its FE debut. With the F1, Historic GP and FE weekends taking place within a month of each other, sticking to one layout will minimise disruption for residents. That said, some tweak could yet be added to avoid direct lap time comparisons.



FAN ATTENDANCE PLANNED FOR FUTURE RACES

Eight races are a start, but Formula E co-founder and chief championship officer Alberto Longo is planning a record-breaking schedule in 2021. Despite the ongoing pandemic, he says: “We have a very aggressive, optimistic target to do 15 races. This is the season when we will be delivering more races in our history.”

The FIA released an initial draft of the calendar back in June, but that’s long since been retracted. Instead, rounds will be announced in batches. There’s one more to come, which will be unveiled later in the spring.

Autosport understands that FE is currently in talks to add the London ExCeL Centre, plus races in New York, Berlin, Sanya and an inaugural Seoul E-Prix to the schedule. This leaves scope, if all six come to pass, for at least one to become a double-header in order to meet Longo’s ambitious aim to surpass the 13-round 2018-19 season.

The races that are yet to be announced won’t run beyond a late September date to ensure minimal overlap with the 2021-22 campaign. And any venues that are added have been organised with the understanding that, should restrictions allow, fans will be able to attend.

Longo adds: “The races that are on the calendar are because we are confident on having the public. This is a key factor and decision element for us.”

FORMULA E’S BEST-EVER ROOKIE

When Audi customer team Envision Virgin Racing signed Nick Cassidy to replace Jaguar-bound Sam Bird, they billed their new recruit as a “rising star”. This was not true. As the 2016 Super GT and 2019 Super Formula champion, Cassidy is already an established star and one who should take the FE grid by storm.

The wonderfully affable 26-year-old makes for a stellar rookie prospect and he enters with an FE record already under his belt. Topping last year’s Marrakech test, held in much warmer conditions than the preceding day’s race, he bagged the highest average lap speed ever clocked in

championship history. From then on, the odds on him moving out of his home in Japan, shared with Jann Mardenborough, became shorter and shorter.

Cassidy says: “Apart from adding multiple championships, I’d achieved everything I could [in Japan]. I wanted a new challenge and to keep learning. The best guys in the world are here and I wanted to put myself up against them.”

While he hasn’t had the benefits of private manufacturer testing to better prepare for the season, expect Cassidy to give his team-mate Robin Frijns (also a lovely chap) something to think about.



CAN JAGUAR HELP BIRD TO A TITLE, AND VICE VERSA?



You can’t mention Sam Bird without shortly following with the epithet: he’s the only driver to win a race in every FE season to date. But in his bid to go further and finally win the title, he’s departed his effective second home at Envision Virgin Racing to finally sign for Jaguar – having initially held talks with the squad in 2016.

Jaguar looked as though it had finally found its swagger last year, with undisputed lead driver Mitch Evans on pole in Santiago, winning in Mexico and mounting a stunning recovery from last to sixth in Marrakech. All before his shot at the crown fell away with a loss of car performance in Berlin.

The frequent chopping and changing of his team-mates, and outperforming all of them, has meant Evans has largely had everything his own way within the squad. But Bird, and the quality he brings, will be a different prospect.

The Kiwi and the Brit get on well. Combined, they represent arguably the second-best driver pairing only ranking behind the DS Techeetah line-up. Both remain good bets for an overdue crown and, at last, there are two drivers in the team who can work together to boost Jaguar’s own title credentials. How they compare will be one of the more exciting threads to this season.





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## CAN VERGNE OVERTHROW DA COSTA?

It's a story we've told before. DS Techeetah was Jean-Eric Vergne's team. He courted the services of Andre Lotterer and then, when the German left for Porsche, again it was Vergne entrusted to tempt eventual replacement Antonio Felix da Costa.

In that time, Vergne won the drivers' crown twice in a row – an FE first – and delivered as many teams' titles to match. But he was thoroughly beaten by da Costa last season. The Portuguese's three wins and runaway championship success played Vergne's solitary triumph, which itself

came rather late in the day. The French racer is also more abrasive than his team-mate and lost his cool over the radio on more than one occasion.

Vergne seemed to suffer much more with the brakes in qualifying. Given a great deal of his past title success was built on the days he progressed into superpole, then delivering in the races, the fix that DS Techeetah seems to have found tees up an intra-team fight to be relished in 2021.

"I feel very good with the car," says Vergne. "What [do I need to] do to take the lead again?"

Always questioning yourself, working tirelessly, obviously more than I was able to do last year."

But whereas DS Techeetah had a certain degree of command last year, Vergne isn't expecting a simple two-way dogfight.

"I wish we were in a Mercedes-style F1 situation where I would only have to worry about my team-mate," he says. "Unfortunately, there are so many other good drivers and good teams out there that I cannot regard Antonio as my only competitor. I have to watch out for everyone."

## COUNTDOWN CONUNDRUM

The deadline for teams to commit to the forthcoming Gen3 regulations is fast approaching. We know cars will be 120kg lighter, increase to 470bhp, and welcome rapid charging and massive increases to regenerative braking capabilities.

What we don't know is how FE will implement some kind of cost cap. It's seen as a must from some quarters. But with teams already starting to develop their new cars, that spending can't be undone.

The FIA is revamping the FE supply model to improve the competitiveness of customer teams. Despite being billed as otherwise, it's not unfair to view this as a reaction to Audi and BMW's pending exits.

A concept for the Gen3 car is due in late spring. Along with a formalisation of the new rules, that's not long to wait as FE bids to remain attractive to both prospective and existing competitors.



SBLOXHAM

# SNOW, ICE, WOOLLY JUMPERS... AND WOLVES

*This week's Arctic Rally Finland will bring the World Rally Championship into new territory. And almost without exception, the service park can't wait*

DAVID EVANS

**K**alle Rovanner opens the door of his Toyota Yaris WRC, thinks about getting out, then pulls it shut. It's February, it's minus 28C and he's within the Arctic Circle.

Rovanpera is getting ready for the World Rally Championship's latest addition, this week's Arctic Rally Finland, and rarely has a new round of the series engendered so much enthusiasm, or attracted so many pullovers. But we should be clear here: the Rovaniemi-based event is a single-season stand-in for Rally Sweden, lost to the pandemic even before 2020 became 2021.

The plan is for the WRC's winter qualifier to move west back into Sweden (and/or Norway, as has been its cross-border nature

in recent years) from next season. But the Swedes will be painfully aware that the bar is about to be raised. It's easy to bash their Torsby-based event for the lack of snow and ice (or even a hard frost this time last year), but it's also worth noting – and not without significant irony – the foot-high snowbanks in Swedish Varmland this week. Rarely has the weather been a more fickle beast than now.

But for now, it's all eyes on Finland and the first of two WRC 2021 counters within the borders of rallying's spiritual home (Jyväskylä's summer festival of flying being the second). Technically, the WRC's winter round is actually knocking on the door of spring, but it doesn't matter when you're just 1500 or so miles south of the North Pole. "It will be warmer for the rally week," said Rovanner.

Incorrect, Kalle – it will be less cold for rally week. Temperatures should 'warm' to around -15C... "That's still cold," points out Elfyn Evans, last year's championship runner-up and Rovanner's teammate at Toyota. "Minus 30 in the test was properly cold, but it was stunning as well. With the snow, the sun and the blue skies, it was fantastic to drive like this. The key is to stay in the car – there's a big incentive here not to go off: you don't want to be standing around in the middle of nowhere in those temperatures!"

According to the drivers, going off because you've run out of grip is less likely this week than on other events, which is ironic given how difficult it is to actually stand on your own two feet in such conditions. Much of the grip comes from the 384 7mm steel studs protruding from each Pirelli Sottozero, the single permitted tyre in Finland. But a significant chunk is also offered by the radical aerodynamics bolted to the current generation of World Rally Cars. And here's the thing: the colder it gets, the more aero grip is available. Cold air is, you see, denser than warm air. At -15C,



Evans loves the snow, sun and blue skies – from the warmth of his Yaris WRC

MCKLEIN



the air pushing down on the splitters, wings and diveplanes is heavier here than anywhere else in the season.

Hyundai driver Craig Breen can relate to that. “The grip is unbelievable,” says the Irishman. “Every year you go to the winter rally and have to think again about what you can do with these tyres – they’re just incredible. The good thing is, the more speed you have the more you’re forcing the stud into the road, and the more grip you’re getting from the tyre and from the aero.”

Fastest has always been best in Finland, and travelling north from Jyväskylä to Lapland changes nothing. In fact, it’s entirely plausible that this week’s WRC counter could make history and become the fastest WRC round ever, eclipsing the 78.68mph record set by Kris Meeke when he won Rally Finland in 2016.

When Rovaniemi tackled the Finnish Rally Championship round in these parts at the start of the 2020 season, he managed an average of 89.41mph for one stage. Could he make history this

time around? “Maybe,” ponders the 20-year-old. “In some places it can be, but Rally Finland in the summer time is also really fast. There could be some technical places on the route in Lapland, but it is going to be fast. We will see this week.”

And speed shouldn’t be hard to find from the Yaris WRC beneath him. These should be some of the best conditions for turbocharged engines, with cold, dense air forced through the intercooler. But the WRC’s winter round does provide a unique technical challenge. Where else, for example, would a technical director sign off on a shovel being packed away into the boot. Granted, it will be the lightest shovel ever made, but it’ll be in there to help dig the car out, should the straight and narrow be deviated from.

Warm clothes, by regulation, are also in place, and 2017 Rally Finland winner Esapekka Lappi explains why: “If you are stopping because you crash or have a mechanical problem, you can be a long, long way from anywhere in this place – the phones don’t work >>



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Ari Vatanen won  
1977 Arctic Rally in  
a Ford Escort RS 1800

and you are just alone with the wolves. In times like this, you want to stay warm...”

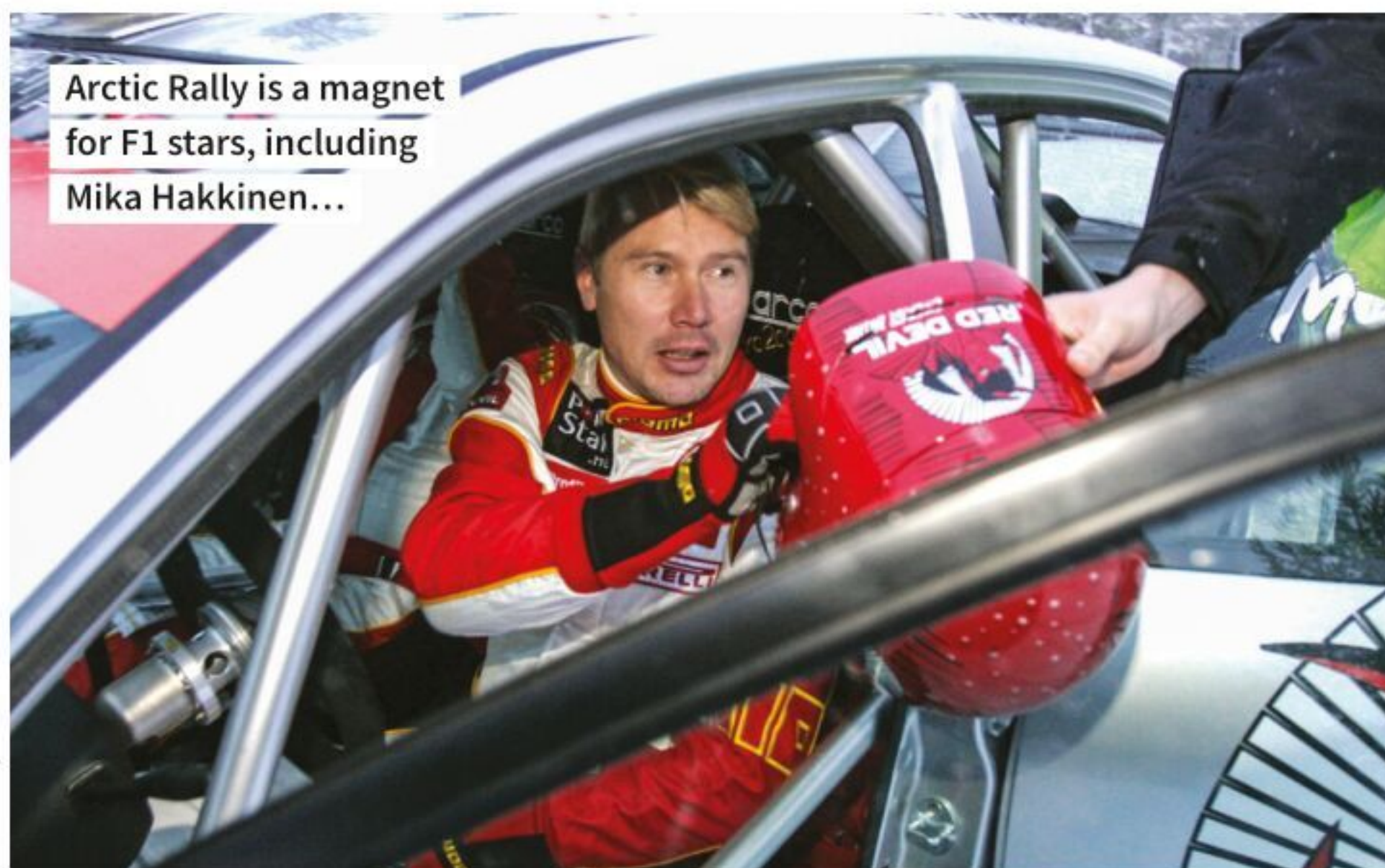
Probably best keep the motor running and the wheels turning. And keeping them going means maintaining the air flow, which requires steering clear of the snowbanks. One of the most common causes of retirement on rallies like this one come when a driver goes headfirst into a bank, or just nibbles at the corner and forces powdery snow into the air intake. Having returned to the road, the 100mph-plus windchill soon packs the snow hard to block the air intake, strangling the engine and sending temperatures dangerously off the charts.

The drivers will keep a watchful eye on those warning lights, while the co-drivers do their bit to maintain the engine temperature too. Look into the cockpit of a factory car and you’ll see a reminder, ‘Blanking plate’, in the co-driver’s eyeline. These pieces of plastic are installed to block the intake when the car’s not in a stage and driving at competitive speed; the air is so cold it can damage the engine when the car’s trundling along road sections. It’s a co-driver’s job to remember to put them in and take them out at the right time. Failure to do either can be rally-ending.

Ending this rally early will hurt more than anywhere else. Competing on a true winter rally with conditions as good as they are this week is something drivers wait a very long time for. Even Formula 1 stars Keke Rosberg, Mika Hakkinen, Kimi Raikkonen, Mika Salo and JJ Lehto have all contested the Arctic Rally, and more recently it’s Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas who has continued that trend. Bottas completed his third Arctic Lapland Rally last month, finishing sixth overall in a 2016-specification Citroen DS 3 WRC.

The Arctic Lapland Rally is the national event out of which this week’s WRC round grew. The stages are roughly the same, the organising team – to whom so much credit is due – pretty much identical.

Such is his love of the place and the competition, Bottas had hoped to be back in Rovaniemi for Arctic Rally 2021, take two. That was before F1 simulator work took priority. He has, however, left his



Arctic Rally is a magnet  
for F1 stars, including  
Mika Hakkinen...

LIESIMAA/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



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...and Valtteri Bottas is a big fan of the “unreal”, “beautiful” event

NIINIMAKI

rallying colleagues in no doubt about what lies in wait. “I’m sure all the guys will love the place,” he says. “The stages are so unreal. You need to see and feel them to really acknowledge how beautiful this place is. It’s fantastic news and a really good thing for Finland.”

He’s not wrong. Lapland is beautiful and magical. Yes, it’s cold, but when the mercury dips down towards -30C, that’s part of what makes this place so special.

The World Rally Championship is a series that trades on taking its competitors to the extremes. To counter a piping-hot Mexico or sun-baked Sardinia, you need the deep freeze. Step outside in a service park based out of the car park at Santa’s place (Rovaniemi is, of course, the home of Joulupukki – Father Christmas) and you’ll understand what cold means. Britain’s had a fairly tough winter, with Scotland sporting nightly values of -20C, but it’s the sustained Arctic chill that ices the Lapland trees and creates breathtaking views of bright white against vivid blue skies. And the good news is, running later in February, there’s more daylight to play with. In the middle of winter the sun barely shows its face, but this week, provided it’s not snowing, we can expect the dream to come alive.

If it is snowing – especially for Friday’s two stages – expect Sebastien Ogier to be sacrificed as a high-speed snowplough. The Frenchman’s Toyota will sweep aside the worst of the powder, with every subsequent car creating a quicker line for those following. But when it stops snowing, those following can be caught in the strange Arctic phenomenon that is some sort of snow fog, which leaves the white stuff apparently hanging in the air. Get some strong sunshine strobing in and it can create havoc when you’re searching for an all-white, top-gear apex.

One thing is abundantly clear. Forget the threat of rain or the misery of mud – Arctic Rally Finland is ready to open the doors on a winter wonderland. ❄️

#### NEXT WEEK

#### ARCTIC RALLY FINLAND 4 MARCH ISSUE

We find out whether home hero Rovaniemi can beat points leader Ogier

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STAT  
**83**  
Johnson's 83 top-tier wins  
put him equal sixth  
on the all-time  
NASCAR list



# A NASCAR LEGEND'S NEW CHALLENGE

*Jimmie Johnson is one of the greatest NASCAR drivers of all time and has decided to take on IndyCar. He tells us why*

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY OWENS/IMS PHOTO AND



**A**pproaching his IndyCar debut at 45 years old, Jimmie Johnson is an old rookie, but he's not just *any* old rookie. In a NASCAR Cup career that spanned 20 years and 686 races, he won seven championships and took 83 race victories. Now, with Chip Ganassi Racing, he's about to embark on an IndyCar career of currently indeterminate length.

The active Scott Dixon and retired Dario Franchitti, with 10 IndyCar championships between them, will respond favourably to tutoring this 21st-century legend because they know that Johnson hasn't just turned to open-wheel racing as a passing whim, something to occupy himself now his NASCAR days are over. He was always into this form of racing. His original hero was four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Rick Mears, and racing Indycars was his ambition when he was a pre-teen growing up in Southern California, attending the Grand Prix of Long Beach, and watching all the IndyCar races on TV with his grandfather.

Recalling his attendance of the 2004 Formula 1 Spanish Grand Prix with fellow NASCAR legend Jeff Gordon, as guests of Juan Pablo Montoya and the Williams F1 team, Johnson principally recalls "the pageantry of open-wheel racing". But it was the December 2018 car-swap with Fernando Alonso in Bahrain that fanned the smouldering interest into a flame of desire. Alonso drove a NASCAR, Johnson piloted that year's McLaren F1 car and found the experience "unlike any other I've had".

"It was, 'Holy crap! I want to do more of this,'" he remarks. "I wasn't sure it was going to come together and a lot had to happen between then and now, but that was when I got really serious about open-wheel."

Initially, it seemed that McLaren was the team most likely to present Johnson with his first IndyCar opportunity, for a test with the Arrow



Test at Indianapolis confirmed he wanted to make the switch

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McLaren SP team was planned for Barber Motorsports Park last April. This fell victim to the upheavals caused by COVID-19 but, as Johnson puts it, "Zak Brown [McLaren CEO] and Fernando really created that opportunity with the McLaren F1 car, and Zak believed in me and was crucial in getting that test date that unfortunately never happened.

"But I really wanted to try an IndyCar, know what it's about and get a sense of how far off I might be. After Zak's plan fell through, I tried to keep the ball moving. Chip Ganassi Racing was another team I'd been chatting with, and one day Chip simply said to me, 'Look, just come out and drive it, see what you think', and that really was the right approach. It was basically, if I liked it, and the team saw some hope in me, then OK, let's look into how we can go forward together."

A day's testing on the Indianapolis road course in July last year was enough to convince Johnson he liked it, and yes, the team saw hope. In October, Ganassi and Johnson announced their deal with title sponsor Carvana to run all of IndyCar's road and street course rounds in 2021 – a total of 13 races. Former series champion and 2013 Indy 500 winner Tony Kanaan will drive the #48 Dallara-Honda in the four oval races.

It was a huge leap of faith considering the Ganassi/Johnson combo had just that one day of testing together. Since then, Johnson has tested his IndyCar at Barber, Laguna Seca, Sebring and Laguna Seca again (and flogged around in a Formula 3 car), and progress has been noteworthy. At Barber last autumn, he was 3.7 seconds off the pace. At Laguna Seca last week, he was 1.6s off, but his ideal lap – ie putting all his best sectors together – was just 0.7s from Dixon's, according to managing director Mike Hull. Impressive and encouraging, although modesty and realism keep Johnson's feet on the ground.

"Based on lap time deltas with the fastest laps from my team-mates >>



Record-equalling seventh NASCAR Cup crown came in 2016

HARRELSON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Can Johnson add success in IndyCar before the sun sets on his career?

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THE TEAM'S PERSPECTIVE

"I think all of us were – and maybe some still are – in awe of both who Jimmie is and what he's accomplished," admits Chip Ganassi Racing managing director Mike Hull. "Jimmie's won seven championships in an era where it's actually more difficult to do that in most forms of motorsport.

"And now we've worked with him, it's easy to see why he found success. He's very dedicated to detail, he's very dedicated to getting himself ready, and he's very open-minded about how to process information that will make him a better team member.

"Right from the very first test at Indianapolis road course last summer, it felt like we'd been working with him forever. We could tell

he came from a team system that must be very close to ours in terms of the mechanism of a team itself and the resource that the team can supply on a test day. He asked all the right questions... and he has two great people in Scott

[Dixon] and Dario [Franchitti] who will work with him and patiently answer all his questions and accelerate him up the learning curve."

If, as Johnson admits himself, finding the last 20% of his deficit to Dixon

will be the hardest, race fans who appreciate watching one of the greats tackle a whole new venture must hope that Johnson will continue to pursue his quest beyond 2021. But what does Hull, someone who enjoys studying the

attitude and aptitude of Ganassi's drivers, believe will be enough to maintain Johnson's interest and application to the new task in hand?

"Maybe the satisfaction comes in never being satisfied," he replies. "That's always been the mark of a great driver. If you assume everyone's ability is equal, what separates the equality is the dissatisfaction with the present.

"Drivers are always working really hard to separate themselves in ways that they feel will make them outstanding and hard to beat. And Jimmie has that about him. He pushes himself and, leading by that example, he pushes everyone around him to get the most out of the opportunity."



SKIBINSKI/INDYCAR

Hull has already been impressed by Johnson's approach



[Dixon, Alex Palou, Marcus Ericsson], I've covered about 60 per cent of the deficit," he says. "I feel like the last 20 per cent will be the hardest to get, and that's where years of experience – which I don't have! – will come into play. But I've taken big chunks out of the gap as I've become more comfortable in the car, reacting instinctively and not thinking as much. I'm still going to be racing a lot of tracks I don't know, but at least I'm acclimating to the car.

"I've gained a little everywhere. At straightforward sixth-gear-down-to-first-gear tight turns, I seem to be close to the top guys. High-speed stuff like Turn 6 at Laguna, I'm line for line with my team-mates. I lose time in middle-speed corners where there's a lot more lateral capability in the car than my senses tell me is there. I overslow the car, braking or staying off the throttle too long, so that's where I'm trying to rewire."

Discovering what is and isn't possible in an IndyCar is a tough task, even for those groomed in junior open-wheel categories. For a driver who has spent two decades in cars with more power than grip, that lurchingly inform drivers in advance if they're about to break away, finding the limit of adhesion on fat, wide Firestones in each corner of a flat, downforce-equipped single-seater is daunting. There's so much less 'feel'.

"Trying to pick up cues on when to get back to the gas exiting slow-speed corners, I've found myself backward quite a few times," chuckles Johnson. "You've got to be so ahead of an IndyCar – anticipating, not just reacting. And it's so stiff. In NASCAR, there's much more suspension to absorb chassis rake and roll and twist; in an IndyCar, it stays flat, so you're driving off the tyre sidewall, and it's either going to hook up, or it's gone."

That said, Johnson has refined his senses as he's gotten quicker, and gotten quicker as he's refined his senses – and so continues to edge towards the edge. For example, when he leaves the pits during a test session he can feel the extra grip from a fresh set of Firestones and also detect the car's lazier responses from a full tank of fuel, "but I'm not kidding myself that I'm at the limit.

"I lay down a lap and feel I'm driving the car the fastest it's ever been – and then come in and see the lap times, and think, 'Oh, guess not! There's more to come.' But honestly, that's fun: it makes me really



An alien environment, but one Johnson is relishing in 2021

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uncomfortable but in a good way, where I'm constantly challenging myself. I'll think, 'OK, only half the amount of brake this time... but will it stick?' and then it does – and I can feel there's more potential beyond that. I think, 'You're kidding me!' Then next time, I get further into that area, reduce the braking even more. That's fun."

So it's clear that it may be a while before Dixon, Palou and Ericsson are looking at Johnson's traces for tips. But Johnson can gauge the progress of his adaptation in how his feedback corresponds with that of his team-mates. "We had an engineering call recapping our recent Laguna Seca test, and the changes that Scott, Marcus and Alex were talking about, I had the same feedback, so that's a sign that I'm feeling the right things," he says. "Granted, I was seven tenths off Scott's times – that guy's special – but I was really encouraged by that call."

Johnson admits that being a newbie aged 45 is an odd feeling – "You just don't expect at this point in life to have to go back to basics!" – but he doesn't feel overawed by his environs, nor a direct comparison

## "I'VE BEEN RUNNING A FORMULA 3 CAR ALONGSIDE 15-YEAR-OLDS. THAT FEELS A BIT BIZARRE"

with one of IndyCar's greats.

"I've been with the VRD [Velocity Racing Development] team, running a Formula 3 car alongside 15-year-olds, kids with their whole careers ahead of them who dream of being professional race car drivers. There I am, going back to ground zero, learning all over again, and that feels a bit bizarre.

"But once I get close enough, the resources I have around me at Ganassi – people like Scott and Dario – are going to be priceless. So no, I don't feel intimidated by having those guys there, just excited to have vastly experienced people around me."

Fitness-wise, age hasn't been a factor, because Johnson – trim and still race sharp – has taken careful note of advice from Jim Leo of the renowned PitFit organisation and has had suitable training equipment delivered to his home. With the physical demands figured out, adapting to his new venture is thereafter just a mental issue, says Johnson.

"We're seeing athletes in all sports extend their careers staying healthy and disciplined," he asserts. "Right now, I don't know how competitive I'll be, but we're all learning from watching Tom Brady in NFL, Scott Dixon in IndyCar, myself in NASCAR, that desire and determination are the foundation of success. And people can still have the required desire and determination in their forties and onward, in any walk of life. They're the defining factors, not age itself, and that's a secret that fortysomethings are currently unlocking across a range of sports."

If anyone can do that, even in an utterly different branch of his chosen sport, it's Jimmie Johnson. Watch and enjoy, folks. 🍷



"Special" Dixon should help JJ's progress

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# G-DRIVE AND AURUS: EARLY SPORTSCAR ADAPTERS

*How entering endurance racing ahead of the game could be about to pay off for one of LMP2's top teams*

NELSON VALKENBURG

PHOTOGRAPHY CLEMENT MARIN AND  motorsport  
IMAGES



**O**ne World Endurance Championship crown, three European Le Mans Series titles and two Asian Le Mans Series successes. G-Drive Racing has been one of the benchmarks in the LMP2 category for the past decade, and has an overflowing trophy cabinet to prove it. The team has also linked up with Russian luxury automotive brand Aurus and has big plans for the future.

It's almost 18 years since current managing director Roman Rusinov, fresh from his Euro 3000 single-seater season, got his first taste of international sportscar racing as he stepped into a factory Courage C65 for the end-of-season Le Mans 1000Km, the event

that would give birth to the contest we now know as the European Le Mans Series. And while that race was won overall by Seiji Ara and Tom Kristensen in an Audi R8 LMP900, the brand-new Courage finished fourth overall and won the smaller LMP675 class. "It was a crazy race with crazy autumn weather, but I knew this was a magical place," recalls Rusinov.

It would take him another five years to appear in the greatest endurance race in the world, driving a Lamborghini Murcielago in the GT1 class at the 24 Hours. In between, the Muscovite raced for Team Russia in A1GP and spent two seasons as a Formula 1 test driver. But it was clear that he was bitten by the Le Mans bug, and



Rusinov believes G-Drive and Aurus are well placed for new sportscar era

at that first year, it is crazy to see that we won four races in a row and finished a very close third in the championship [in 2013].”

It was the start of a remarkably consistent run that, in the next four seasons, would yield another 12 race victories and the LMP2 WEC crown in 2015, Rusinov sharing with Sam Bird and Julien Canal. That was followed by a hat-trick of ELMS titles between 2016 and 2018. The team has won at least one major LMP2 race every season since it was formed, although Le Mans victory has so far proved elusive. It crossed the line first in 2018 before being stripped of victory due to a fuel-rig irregularity, meaning the team has yet to achieve its ultimate aim.

“If you only look at the results, it is easy to become complacent and almost expect that each year will give you the same sort of

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**“I’VE BECOME FULL-TIME MANAGER OF A GLOBAL PROGRAMME. RACING IS ALMOST THE RELAXING PART!”**

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success,” says Rusinov. “But it requires a lot of work behind the scenes to make it work financially.

“I have become a full-time manager of a global programme. The racing is almost the relaxing part!” adds a smiling Rusinov, who manages a successful organisation while running with different drivers and even teams from one year to another.

Such a business model could prove unstable, but for G-Drive Racing it works, especially as it has continuously worked with the same technical team, led by British engineer David Leach. “You can rarely achieve such stability, and it’s an engineer’s dream to be able to work through your ideas over a longer period than you are usually awarded,” says Leach.

And because the programme has moved between teams, with operations such as Jota, Graff and TDS Racing having been tasked with the day-to-day running of the cars, it has continuously learned and evolved into the juggernaut it has become. “Our set-up gives us the luxury to continuously work with the team on our car performance – it’s a privileged position,” adds Leach.

It’s a model that was unique when it was launched by Rusinov eight years ago, and is continuing into 2021. G-Drive recently formed a partnership with Algarve Pro Racing, with two Aurus 01 LMP2s entered for the ALMS and the ELMS. >>

a plan was conceived to bring a Russian brand to the classic enduro. “I worked hard to bring Marussia to Le Mans,” says the 39-year-old. “We wanted to build a Marussia GT car and race a Marussia LMP2 car at Le Mans as I knew it would have been the right place for them to build up and promote their brand.”

It was not to be as the Marussia name appeared in F1 instead. But Rusinov, an intense competitor, was not content to simply race for himself. After his first WEC season he set up his own racing operation with his original ideas still very much alive. A year later he created a partnership with Gazprom Neft to promote its performance brand, and G-Drive Racing was born: “If I look back

When it was announced in 2019 that G-Drive had teamed up with Aurus, best known for the development of the Russian presidential limousine, it was not simply bringing in another Russian partner to the table. The team took full advantage of the manufacturer’s engineering tools to further enhance G-Drive Racing’s technical arsenal while creating a global marketing platform for both brands.

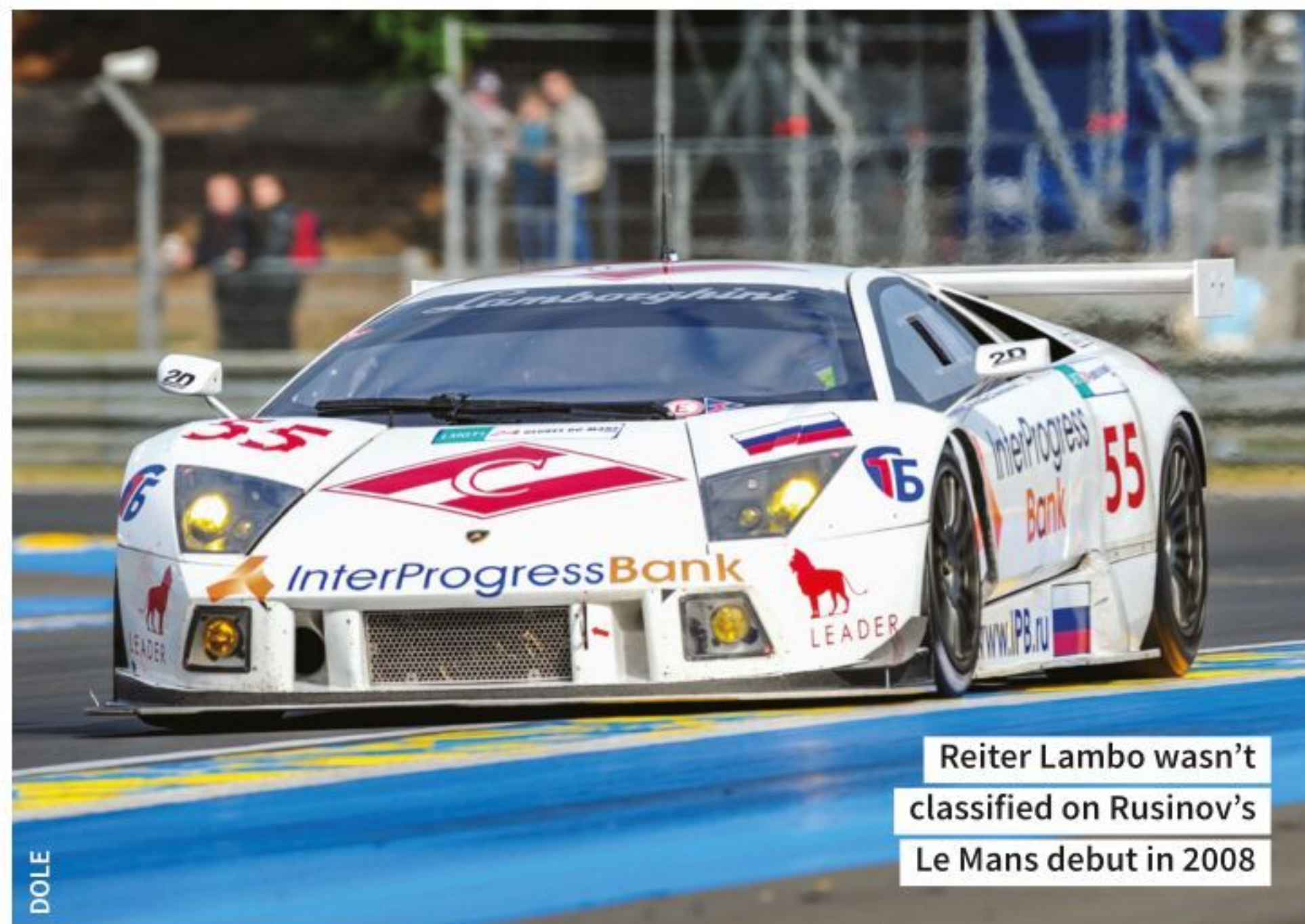
The team’s ORECA 07 was rebranded as the Aurus 01 to take on a strong LMP2 field. The new partnership took pole position at the European Le Mans Series opener at Paul Ricard, and Rusinov and Job van Uitert nearly won the title before G-Drive headed out to the ALMS and won the 2019-20 crown.

“It was the right time for Aurus to jump into endurance racing,” reckons Rusinov. “Endurance racing, and the Le Mans 24 Hours in particular, have always had a romantic appeal to fans and automotive brands alike. One only has to look at the success of the recent *Le Mans ’66* film to understand that there is something to this sport that sets it apart from anything else.”

And the fact that in recent times the sport had failed to attract new manufacturers proved to Rusinov that this was the right moment to convince Aurus to move into LMP2: “In any business, it is best to enter the market when it’s at a low point. In that respect, Aurus has been more than an early adapter and it’s now clear it was the right move for Aurus to become involved.”

That market now appears to be taking off, with the Automobile Club de l’Ouest and its American counterpart IMSA settling on a set of regulations for the future of the discipline that should ensure a healthy influx of marques for the top class. With Porsche, Audi, Toyota, Peugeot and Honda already confirmed, a new era of sportscar racing is about to begin.

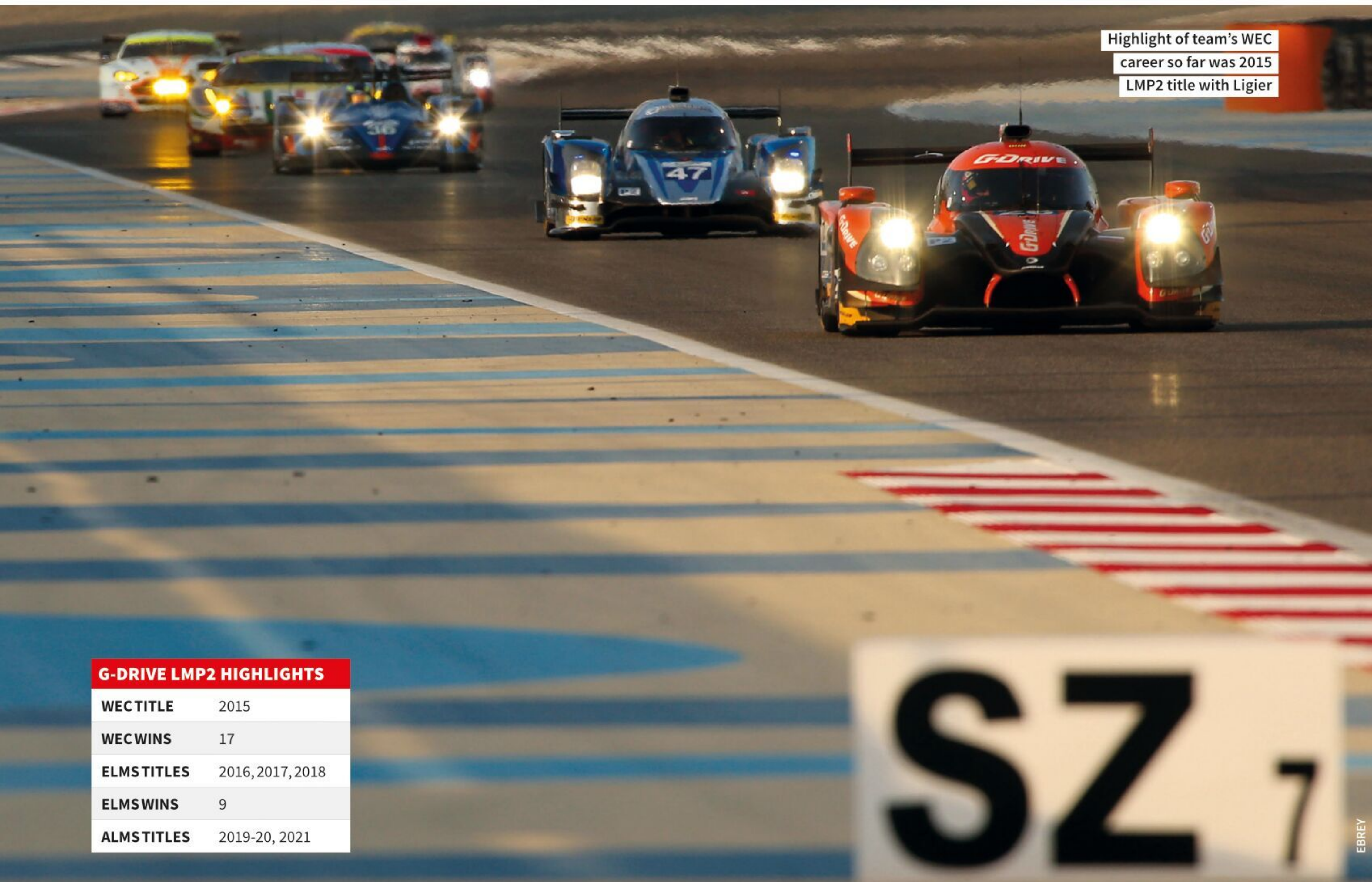
“It takes away so many hurdles,” enthuses Rusinov. “If a manufacturer wants to develop and build everything themselves,



Reiter Lambo wasn't classified on Rusinov's Le Mans debut in 2008

they race a Hypercar at Le Mans. If they want to develop a programme that doesn't cost as much as a Formula 1 operation and want to race in multiple championships, you race an LMDh. And with so many big brands involved, the entire landscape of the sport has changed. That is why it was so important for us and Aurus to already be a player on this stage because right now the market, and with that the global interest in endurance racing, is starting to boom!”

And this surge of interest has also impacted the LMP2 class. “LMP2 has become incredibly competitive over the past few years, and teams are now working to achieve factory-team levels of quality,” he adds. But Rusinov also sees a direct effect of the new rules as the reason for new teams and drivers stepping into



Highlight of team's WEC career so far was 2015 LMP2 title with Ligier

G-DRIVE LMP2 HIGHLIGHTS	
WECTITLE	2015
WECWINS	17
ELMSTITLES	2016, 2017, 2018
ELMSWINS	9
ALMSTITLES	2019-20, 2021



First WEC win came  
at Interlagos  
in 2013

EBREY



Success in the ELMS  
began with Jota  
in 2016

EBREY

LMP2: “Manufacturers are moving teams and drivers in to get ready for the new top class, and this has a snowball effect because suddenly people realise that LMP2 is the most cost-effective way to show you are ready for the top class.”

It begs the question: will Aurus become the next automotive manufacturer to move into the top class? “I am asked this quite often,” Rusinov smiles. “People have suddenly understood that this programme makes a lot of sense and a future move to the LMDh category is very, very interesting. It multiplies the global impact G-Drive Racing can have for our partners.”

But as 18 years of sportscar racing have shown, Rusinov is anything but a big risk-taker. He prefers to build strong foundations: “We have started the general LMDh discussion,

but a lot of questions need to be answered before those discussions become more serious.”

Among those are which next-generation LMP2 chassis will prove the strongest base, as well as what a sensible budget comes down to in a class filled with factory teams and drivers. And more fundamentally, what the best route is for G-Drive itself. “I believe it would be a big and important step to welcome a Russian manufacturer into LMDh, and if we could build the partnership with Aurus to a point where we can manage such a factory programme, as a Russian, it would be very special,” says Rusinov.

But he is also realistic: “Moving from LMP2 into a manufacturer programme is a big step and represents a large commitment.”

Should the luxury manufacturer opt against such a move,



Celebrating Le Mans  
victory in 2018... before  
it was taken away

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Success has continued  
with Aurus-badged  
ORECA since 2019

## “ENDURANCE RACING, AND LE MANS IN PARTICULAR, HAS ALWAYS HAD A ROMANTIC APPEAL TO FANS”

there is still a path for a successful partnership between Rusinov and his main partner: “When we started, the idea was to promote our Gazprom Neft’s premium fuel on the world stage. These new regulations present us with many new opportunities to be successful in the biggest motorsport event in the world. And given the fact that the Russian automotive market is the seventh largest in the world, a collaboration with a brand like Audi or Porsche would also make sense for the team.”

As would Rusinov’s other big dream, a World Endurance race in Russia: “St Petersburg would be the ultimate venue for such an event, and it is a long-term project we continue working on.”

For the immediate future, the focus remains on the 2021 season. “We have entered two cars in the ALMS as well as the ELMS,” confirms Rusinov, who now spends more time managing the project than he does behind the wheel. “I want the team to defend our crown in Asia [which it successfully did last weekend] and regain it in Europe. I believe we have everything in place to achieve that aim.”

But with the competition in the LMP2 class becoming fiercer each year – United Autosports became the pacesetter in 2019-20 following its switch to ORECA chassis – the team has its work cut out, especially at Le Mans.

“The biggest race in the world hasn’t always been kind to us,” admits Rusinov. “Looking back only at our two starts with the Aurus, we were dominating in 2019 and well in contention last year before electrical issues hit. We have been close a few times, so if we start, the aim can only be to win it. Nothing else will do.” ❧

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# Bell calls time on Elliott's road course monopoly

**NASCAR CUP**  
**DAYTONA (USA)**  
**21 FEBRUARY**  
**ROUND 2/36**

In recent times, a NASCAR Cup road course race has meant a Chase Elliott victory. Prior to last Sunday's event on the full Daytona track, the reigning champion hadn't been beaten on such circuits since 2018, racking up four consecutive wins.

This event seemed to be going much the same way. Elliott eased to stage one victory

and maintained the lead after the final green flag stops with around 20 of the 70 laps left.

However, a silly decision to throw the caution flags for a brief sprinkling of rain turned the race on its head. Elliott elected to pit for fresh slicks like most of the field but was left mired in the midfield upon the restart with 10 laps to run. He was pushed wide and further contact with Denny Hamlin while lining up Brad Keselowski for a move spun Elliott's Hendrick machine down the order and he was classified 21st.

Meanwhile, Joey Logano and Christopher

Bell were among those not to pit for fresh tyres under the rain caution, vaulting them up the running order. Logano bolted on the final restart, although new Joe Gibbs signing Bell quickly cleared Kurt Busch and began to hunt down the leading Penske Ford. On the penultimate lap, Bell slipped by at the final chicane and pulled away to record a maiden Cup win from Logano, stage two winner Hamlin, Busch and Keselowski, with Daytona 500 winner Michael McDowell salvaging eighth after a first-lap puncture.

**JAKE NICHOL**

## Zhou takes last-gasp crown

**F3 ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP**  
**YAS MARINA (ARE)**  
**19-20 FEBRUARY**  
**ROUND 5/5**

Guanyu Zhou fought back to snatch the title – and 18 Formula 1 superlicence points – from under the nose of Pierre-Louis Chovet at the F3 Asian finale.

While Alpine F1 protege and Formula 2 race winner Zhou battled weekend-long with Formula Regional ace Patrik Pasma at the front, FIA F3 newcomer Chovet suffered his worst weekend of the

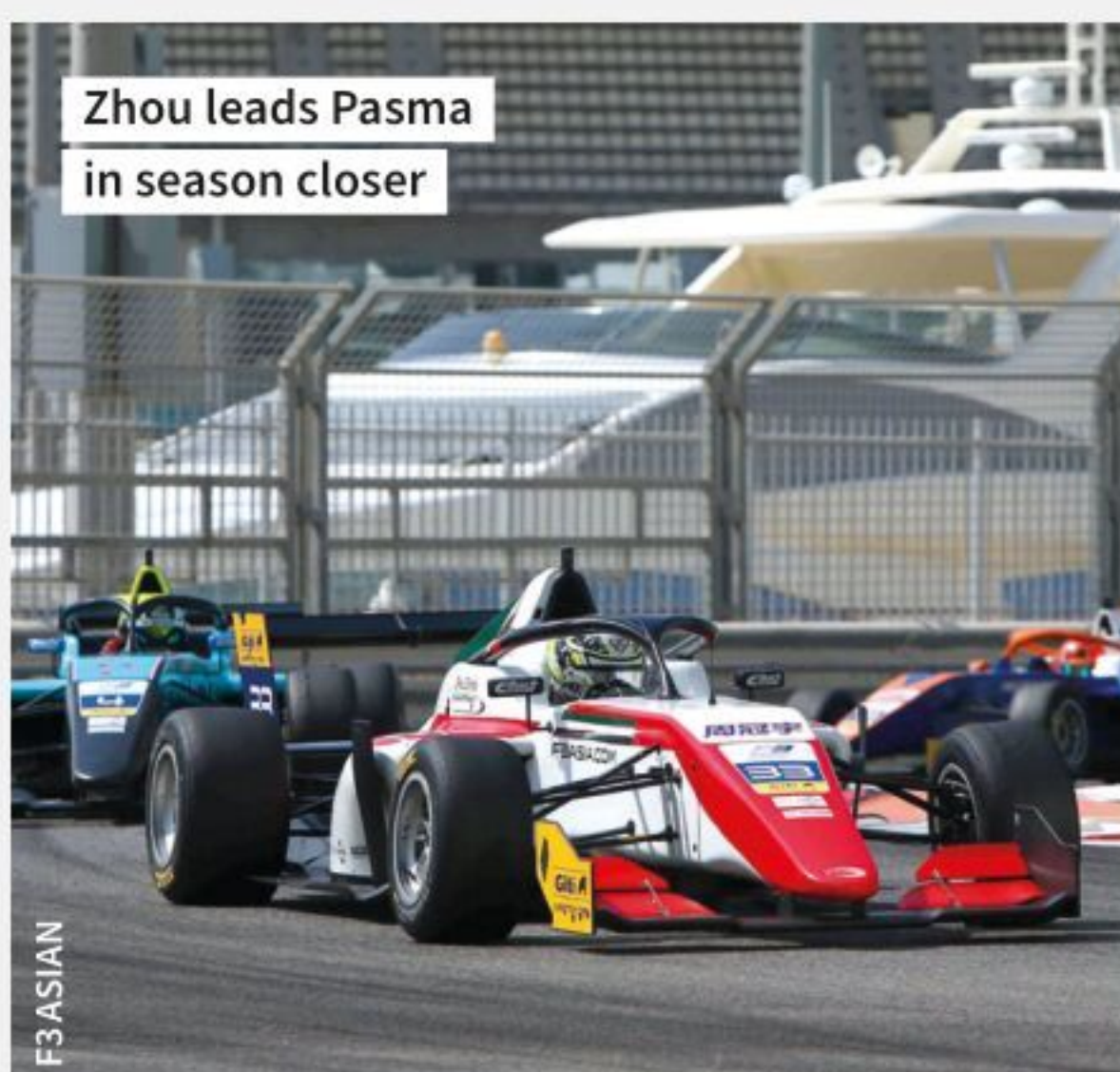
quickfire Middle East campaign.

Zhou claimed pole for all three races in his Abu Dhabi Racing by Prema car, but fast starter Pasma's Evans GP machine led him all the way in the first two races. The unfortunate Pasma lost the first of those two victories, however, when he was one of a handful of drivers penalised five seconds for improving sector times under a yellow flag, dropping to second.

Zhou finally got a good getaway in the finale, and this time it was Finn Pasma chasing the Chinese ace all the way to end another trio of processionary races.

Pinnacle Motorsport-run Chovet lost a frantic battle with Roy Nissany for what became fourth (in the wake of the penalties) in the opener, and was eliminated in a clash with Roman Stanek in race two. He was fifth again in the finale, unable to find a way past Stanek.

Jehan Daruvala concluded an up-and-down few weeks with a pair of third places, as his Mumbai Falcons team-mate Kush Maini took a big step forward with a third and a fourth. Daruvala therefore finished a distant third in the points, with Pasma's late form elevating him to a comfortable and worthy fourth spot.



### WEEKEND WINNERS

**NASCAR CUP**  
**DAYTONA (USA)**  
 Christopher Bell  
 Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota Camry)

**NASCAR XFINITY SERIES**  
**DAYTONA (USA)**  
 Ty Gibbs  
 Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota Supra)

**NASCAR TRUCK SERIES**  
**DAYTONA (USA)**  
 Ben Rhodes  
 ThorSport Racing (Toyota Tundra)

**F3 ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP**  
**YAS MARINA (ARE)**  
**Race 1** Guanyu Zhou  
 Abu Dhabi Racing by Prema  
**Race 2** Patrik Pasma  
 Evans GP  
**Race 3** Guanyu Zhou  
 Abu Dhabi Racing by Prema

**ASIAN LE MANS SERIES**  
**YAS MARINA (ARE)**  
**Races 1 and 2**  
 Sean Gelael/Tom Blomqvist  
 Jota (ORECA-Gibson 07)



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Have you ever been to a race meeting hosted by the Vintage Sports Car Club?

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The Vintage Sports Car Club invented the historic race meeting; The VSCC held the first motorsport event after the second world war when 12–15,000 people flocked to the Elstree Speed Trials. It was the Frazer Nash section of the VSCC that held the first race at Silverstone, called the Mutton Grand-Prix, enjoyed by all except the sheep that were run over during the race.

Since 1934 the VSCC has provided a playground for old cars, of all sorts, be they fantastic straight 8 supercharged Grand Prix cars such as a Bugatti 35B, the humble Austin 7, an opulent Rolls Royce Silver Ghost or a light weight GN hill climb special built in a garden shed displaying its exposed valve gears on an air-cooled V-Twin engine. But what makes a VSCC event extraordinary is that the drivers of this remarkable and historic machinery are happy to talk to anyone who shows an interest. A VSCC event does not promote the hierarchy feeling where the drivers are aloof; we are all in the paddock together to race our



cars and provide a spectacle for people who want to come along and share our passion for the beginnings of autosport.

VSCC race meetings have a friendly, clubby feel. Many people camp at the race track, as part of the fun. There is a community within the club that has something for everyone, be it racing your car, helping fettle and race prep a car, join the buoyant, jovial crew of volunteer marshals or just sit on a grassy bank with a picnic and watch the most extraordinary range of historic machinery race by.

The paddock offers the unique opportunity to get up close and personal with these fabulous vehicles. You will often find a car undergoing a major rebuild between races. Part of the joy of pre-war cars is you can fix them yourself. For a spectator with an interest in engineering, the fascination of the way cars used to work is endless. Many of the VSCC race meetings and hill climbs have a unique, localized, classic and vintage tyre-fitting service, with Longstone Tyres



in residence, providing the opportunity to see a range of classic tyres in the flesh, and having a tyre fitting service at a race track near you. Where else can you get your wire wheels balanced? Added to that there's often a Concourse de Elegance displaying some of the most beautiful pre-war cars and an auto solo driving test where you can get close to the cars in action.





photo: jamiebubb.com

## Enthusiasts young and old

A lot of these vintage cars will drive to the race meeting, compete in the races, and then drive home again afterwards. The same car may compete in other speed events the VSCC organizes such as Hill Climbs and sprints and other events that are not about speed. The VSCC also hosts Rallies, both competitive and country-side tours, driving tests, off road vintage trials, and the VSCC club house holds one of the most complete libraries about historic cars.

What other racing club is so pro-active in the furtherment of motorsport that it offers race entries to under 30 year old enthusiasts, who are borrowing



©ChrisDicken



Grandad's car to get out on the track with half price entry fees and learn about the history of our machinery, how to use it, and most importantly how to fix it? A VSCC race meeting can be the antidote for the internet. Get your children off Grand Theft Auto and get them into the real world and on the tarmac at Silverstone.

The VSCC race meetings of 2021 are not just for pre-war cars. They also feature occasional grids from Formula 500 F3 single seaters, pre 1961 racing cars, Edwardian cars, 'fifties sports car racing club, Formula Junior, Historic Grand Prix Cars association, Classic Ferrari, Historic Racing Drivers Club, Morgan Challenge, and this year

Longstone Tyres plan to sponsor the first Light Car and Cycle Car race this century. Visit a VSCC race meeting at a track near you to enjoy the thrill of continuing historic motorsport across the UK.

## VSCC Race and Speed 2021

- **17th April**  
Spring start and auto solo Silverstone
- **2nd May**  
Curborough sprint
- **5th June**  
Harewood hillclimb
- **19th June**  
Cadwell race meeting
- **4th July**  
Shelsley hillclimb
- **10th July**  
Oulton park race meet, auto solo and concours
- **7th/8th August**  
Prescott hillclimb
- **22nd August**  
Mallory park race meet
- **11th/12th September**  
Loton park hillclimb

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The CSCC is among the clubs that had planned a March event, which now can't go ahead

## GREEN LIGHT FOR CLUB MOTORSPORT IN APRIL

### CORONAVIRUS

Club motorsport in England will be able to restart from the end of March, after the government outlined its planned roadmap for the easing of lockdown measures.

Since the turn of the year, only elite sport has been able to take place in the UK as a third national lockdown was implemented to combat a surge in coronavirus cases attributed to a new strain of the virus.

The ban on grassroots sport will continue until at least 29 March, and governing body Motorsport UK will not grant any event permits until after this date. March traditionally represents the start of the UK club racing season, and a number of events had been scheduled for next month.

The MG Car Club, British Automobile Racing Club and Classic Sports Car Club were the only organising clubs that had planned March circuit racing meetings, which will now not be able to run. The British Racing & Sports Car Club had already made the decision last month to cancel its two events scheduled over the 20-21 March weekend.

Motorsport UK CEO Hugh Chambers says the organisation is “extremely grateful” for the opportunity to restart non-elite motorsport from 29 March in England, and will give updates on events in the rest of the UK in due course.

“This will be very welcome news for our community, which extends from professional drivers

and teams through to the grassroots of the sport, with tens of thousands of enthusiasts,” he said.

“Clearly, strict protocols still apply, as our sport needs to play its part in supporting the NHS and wider frontline community in keeping infection rates under control, and our restart guidance has enabled us to accomplish that objective on two previous occasions.

“I would like to thank the Motorsport UK community for their support during lockdown, and for their spirit and fortitude in keeping the sport together for when this announcement came. We now look forward to getting motorsport up and running at the end of March.”

The CSCC is “keeping our options open” about whether or not to reschedule its planned Snetterton opener. “For those of us who had booked to start early, we’re a bit gutted we’re going to miss an event,” said club director David Smitheram, who added it was good to have clarity over when racing can resume. “It’s always been a good meeting, and we already had about 300 entries, which was with over a month to go. It’s a bit of a blow but at least we know now.”

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has indicated that, if the vaccine programme continues successfully and there is not a sudden spike in COVID-19 cases, fans could begin returning to sporting events from 17 May. This date follows the first two British Touring Car Championship events, but is the week before the new British GT Championship opener.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**

# Fire destroys college's cars and workshop

## BIKESPORTS

A man has been arrested on suspicion of arson after a fire destroyed Bridgwater and Taunton College's motorsport workshop and a number of cars, including the 2019 Bikesports title-winning Radical PR6.

The blaze, in the early hours of Thursday last week, was found to have been started deliberately, and gutted two trailers outside the building as well as all the equipment inside. The successful PR6 – known as Poppet – that the college runs for course leader Josh Smith was destroyed, as were three other Radicals run by the students and Smith's RJ Motorsport squad for customers, plus a number of cars that were used as vehicles for the students to practise working on.

In what has been a tough 12 months for the college, the fire followed the impact of lockdowns on education and a cyber attack.

Smith described the incident as "shocking". "It's a massive shame for everyone – there's been years of work



Bridgwater and Taunton College ran Smith's Radical

TALBOT

that's gone into creating that," he said. "You can go and buy a car that's similar but they've not had the same amount of effort or attention to detail. There was lots of specialist equipment and things we've made along the way for a bespoke purpose."

A GoFundMe fundraising page has been set up to support those affected, and has raised over £11,000. Smith added: "We'll work with our insurance company and see how quickly we can get back to some sort of normal. We've had plenty of people who have offered support and loaning us equipment, which is really nice and will help us in the short term."

Anyone who would like to help support the college can get in contact via the raceteam@btc.ac.uk email address.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**

## OPINION



Finally, there is something to aim for. After months of uncertainty over when the English

motorsport season could begin, 29 March is now the date in the diary when things should be getting back under way.

And having clarity over that moment is a good thing for everyone. It does mean that the three remaining circuit racing events planned in March will now not take place but, given the direction of travel and the repeated insistence of caution from the government and scientists about easing lockdown restrictions, the prospects of those meetings being able to go ahead were relatively slim. It's a small price to pay in the grand scheme of things, though frustrating for those affected.

But it's important to consider that the announcements from the government and Motorsport UK earlier this week do not end all of the uncertainty for organisers.

Take the issue of overnight stays. Hotels are not due to formally reopen until 17 May at the earliest, per Boris Johnson's roadmap. It's therefore likely that organising clubs, as some did last year, will look at event timetables and ensure as many categories as possible only appear on one day of two-day meetings to minimise the number of people needing to stay overnight, especially if there are restrictions on camping at circuits. More guidance is expected in the following weeks from Motorsport UK about matters such as this.

Motorsport was able to restart successfully and safely after the first lockdown last July and, with that experience under organisers' belts, the same can now happen again from 29 March.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**



JONES

# No Vnuk threat to UK motorsport

## MOTORSPORT UK

Motorsport UK has hailed the British government's decision to exempt the UK from the European Union's Vnuk law, which threatened to render motorsport insurance unfeasible, as "a hugely significant victory".

The EU's interpretation of a 2014 court case, brought by Damijan Vnuk after he was knocked off his ladder by a tractor, resulted in changes to its Motor Insurance Directive that required all vehicles to be insured, even when on private land.

The implications of the Vnuk case were significant for motorsport, because any collision

between racing cars would be treated as a road traffic accident and involve police, threatening to make insurance policies prohibitively expensive.

A crucial vote in January 2019 by an EU Parliamentary committee was positive as it excluded motorsport from the amended wording of the MID. This was subsequently approved by the European Parliament, but still had to be approved by each member state.

Following the UK's official exit from the EU, transport secretary Grant Shapps has now announced that the UK will scrap the "over-the-top" Vnuk requirement from British law.

**JAMES NEWBOLD**



WALKER



Turner will race an Aston Martin Vantage GT4 in GT Cup this season

## Turner joins Guess in Aston Martin GT Cup campaign

### GT CUP

Factory Aston Martin veteran Darren Turner is the latest big name to be announced for the GT Cup this year.

Turner, a three-time class winner in the Le Mans 24 Hours, will race a GT4 Aston run by Feathers Motorsport in the category alongside his Base Performance Simulators business partner James Guess. It is Turner's

first British-based programme since 2018 with Beechdean in British GT.

The news follows Adam Carroll and Oliver Webb being named earlier this month as part of new McLaren squad Greystone GT's line-up. Turner is due to contest six of the planned seven events, skipping the September Donington Park round because it clashes with the Goodwood Revival.

Guess finished runner-up in the

GTH class last season in the GT Cup, racing a Ginetta G55.

"I work alongside James most days and I've been aware of his progress last season, so when he asked if I'd like to be involved in the project this year I thought it seemed like a fun opportunity and good chance to help out a friend," said Turner, who will be racing the GT4 car for the first time at a venue other than the Nurburgring Nordschleife. "The Vantage GT4 is a very rewarding car to drive, and this is a nice chance to return to some of the old favourite haunts from the British racing scene."

Meanwhile, the Paddock Performance Motorsport squad set up by 2019 British GT4 Pro-Am champions Martin Plowman and Kelvin Fletcher will also race in the GT Cup this season. The team is due to run a pair of McLarens, and has announced 18-year-old former Britcar racer Moh Ritson as its first driver. It will also field the ex-JMH Automotive machine in which Steve Ruston and John Whitehouse won the 2019 overall crown and GTH titles in 2019 and 2020.

Plowman, whose early career was backed by the Signature RV and First Choice catering companies of Ruston and Whitehouse, told Autosport that he was "cherry-picking the best freelance guys from the teams I've raced with, some with F1 and touring car experience".

**STEPHEN LICKORISH & JAMES NEWBOLD**

## Les Ely 1949-2021

### OBITUARY

The death of Les Ely last weekend has shocked the historic racing community, particularly its Jaguar fraternity in which he was entrenched as a driver and engineer, the latter through his CL Panelcraft body shop.

Ely started stock car racing with a Singer Gazelle in 1970 and progressed to Hot Rods, becoming East Anglian champion in 1975. After a decade of racing Minis on the ovals, he 'discovered' long circuit racing when he acquired a Jaguar Mk2 from Rob Newall.

After scoring his first race win at

Castle Combe in 1986, Ely scooped numerous Jaguar Drivers' Club championship titles and awards for best-prepared Jaguar. Subsequently, he tackled FIA Historic events throughout Europe with Rob Buck and Mike Cann.

He won the Historic Sports Car Club's final Classic Sportscar Championship in 2006 in his E-type as he forged firm friendships in the paddock.

Competitor Graeme Dodd said: "He was a great guy and we subsequently did a lot together, including several Spa Six Hours with some good results.

"I'm very sad to hear this news, and bitterly regret not having spoken to



Les for a few weeks, but we did have a lot of fun on track and socially. A wonderful character, he will be missed by many."

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## IN THE HEADLINES

**BARTHOLOMEW TO REDLINE**

Former Lamborghini Super Trofeo Middle East champion Jack Bartholomew will contest a British series for the first time since 2016 this year as part of Redline Racing's Porsche Sprint Challenge GB line-up. He has spent several seasons racing Lamborghinis, including taking the 2018 Middle East title, since racing in British GT. "The championship gives me a great opportunity to return to racing after a year off in 2020," he said.

**PROCTORS TEAM UP FOR BGT**

Stewart and Lewis Proctor have been announced as a father-and-son Silver-Am entry in British GT this season, driving a McLaren 720S GT3 run by Balfe Motorsport. Proctor Jr raced for McLaren squad Optimum last year and finished second in the Oulton Park season opener, while his father Stewart took a best finish of fifth from his three outings with Balfe. Championship promoter SRO has also extended its deal with governing body Motorsport UK to organise the series until at least 2025.

**WALKER MOVES TO KMR**

Kevin Mills Racing has completed its three-car National Formula Ford 1600 line-up with the signing of Alex Walker. The former British Formula 4 driver switches from the PWR1 team, after claiming a best finish of eighth at Silverstone last year. He joins the previously announced Megan Gilkes and Lucas Romanek in the fleet of Spectrums operated by KMR, which ran Neil Maclennan to last year's title.

**MCCOSH PASSES AWAY**

Legends driver Gerard McCosh has passed away after a long battle with cancer. The 67-year-old was a regular on the grid with his mascot 'Napoleon' the pig (below). Legends owner Phil Cooper said: "Gerard was a wonderful character, a great competitor who absolutely loved his racing and simply a fantastic person – a gentleman in the truest sense of the word."



HOLBON



## Team Parker switches to Porsche GT3 and joins Supercup in 2021

**BRITISH GT**

Team Parker Racing has swapped its Bentley Continental GT3 for a Porsche 911 GT3-R for British GT this year, and will also expand into the Porsche Supercup.

The 2017 GT3 title-winning squad has moved to align its operations with a single manufacturer to tie in with its activities in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB and Sprint Challenge GB, thereby completing the "boxset" of levels on the Porsche motorsport pyramid. The GT3-R will be driven by team regulars Scott Malvern and Nick Jones, who won the 2018 GT4 Pro-Am title in a Parker-run Mercedes.

"We decided at the end of last year that we would try and simplify the business – rather than having different brands in different championships, we would

consolidate and stick with the one brand all the way through," said team boss Stuart Parker. "If you go to Carlin, you've got a ladder in single-seaters – you go in as a novice and go up to the top – and we're mimicking that in the sportscar world."

Parker believes now is the perfect time to progress to the Formula 1-supporting Supercup as 2021 marks the introduction of the latest Type 992 version of the 911 GT3 Cup car, and will run two cars in the series in collaboration with Dutch Porsche specialist Revs Motorsport.

Runaway 2020 Carrera Cup GB champion Harry King has targeted a Supercup bid, and Parker added: "We would love him to be part of our programme and we're working very hard for him to be part of the programme."

**STEPHEN LICKORISH & JAMES NEWBOLD**

## Rattican progresses to GT4 Supercup

**GINETTA GT4 SUPERCUP**

Ginetta Junior title contender Josh Rattican will graduate to the GT4 Supercup this season with leading squad Elite Motorsport.

Rattican had a strong finish to last year's Junior campaign after switching from R Racing to Elite, and fell just nine points shy of eventual champion Tom Lebbon.

After spending two seasons in Ginetta Junior, he will join Elite team regular Tom Emson in the operation's GT4 Supercup line-up.

"I'm delighted to be racing again with Elite

Motorsport," said Rattican. "We got together for the second half of my 2020 Ginetta Junior season and hit it off straight away. Ed [Ives, team boss] understands me and we work well together, as the results from last year proved. I'm confident that we have what it takes to win races in Supercup, and I have my eyes set firmly on the top prize."

Last year's Am class champion, former British Touring Car Championship driver Stewart Lines, will also be back on the GT4 Supercup grid. He will be piloting a brand-new G55 run by the title-winning Rob Boston Racing operation.

# Alesi set to race '74 Ferrari in Monaco Historique

## HISTORIC F1

Jean Alesi is poised to join fellow ex-Ferrari Formula 1 driver Rene Arnoux in racing a 1974-spec Ferrari 312B3 in the Monaco Grand Prix Historique event in April.

Arnoux was scheduled to contest the event in 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic led to its postponement, and the delay has allowed German entrant Methusalem Racing to get Alesi in a car too. The duo will take part in the Serie F event, for three-litre F1 cars from the 1973-76 era.

The 312B3 was originally raced during the 1974 season by Niki Lauda and Clay Regazzoni, and it was the pacesetter for much of the year. Lauda scored his first F1 win at Jarama and triumphed again at Zandvoort, while also logging nine pole positions, including in Monaco. Regazzoni scored his only win of the year at the



Nurburgring, but the Swiss remained in title contention until the final race.

Also scheduled to be in the Serie F field is former F1 driver Alex Caffi, at the wheel of a 1976 Ensign N176, while 2012 Spanish GP winner Pastor Maldonado will drive a 1937 Maserati 4CM in the Serie A race for pre-war cars. Like Arnoux and Caffi, the Venezuelan was entered in 2020 and has had to wait for his chance to take part.

The Automobile Club de Monaco says that, despite the pandemic, it has received

170 entries for its seven historic races over the 23-25 April meeting.

The 70th anniversary of F1 could not be commemorated last year at the event, and the focus will now be a celebration of 70 years since Ferrari's first world championship race victory, achieved by Froilan Gonzalez at Silverstone in 1951.

The ACM has revealed that construction of the circuit for its historic, Formula 1 and Formula E events will begin this week.

**ADAM COOPER**

# Second stolen Cadwell Park vehicle is recovered

## MSV

The second of the vehicles stolen from Cadwell Park has been recovered within a month of the theft from the MotorSport Vision venue.

A BMW M240i safety car and BMW X5 medical car, with a combined value believed to be more than £100,000, were stolen at

about 0015 on 26 January. Maintenance equipment was also taken, and the circuit office IT and security systems were damaged.

Following an investigation by Lincolnshire Police, the X5 was recovered on 9 February, and a week later the M240i was also found.

MSV operations manager Giles Butterfield said:

“The cars are on loan as part of our partnership with BMW UK and they’ve gone back to be checked over. We’re hoping they’re not going to be in too poor a state.

“We’ve not got a lot of definitive information, but we hope that they would be in a condition where they can be fixed and put back

into service quite soon.

“The police have done a brilliant job. They’ve worked closely with BMW’s crime unit, and they have apprehended three people.”

Three men aged 30, 34 and 50 were arrested, and have been released under investigation while enquiries continue.

**STEFAN MACKLEY**

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# Memories of national racing legends

*Inspired by Autosport's 70th anniversary feature looking at great club racing characters, here's one long-time UK competitor's recollections of his encounters with them*

HUGH MARSHALL

**W**hen I read Autosport's special 70th anniversary publication, I realised how fortunate I have been during my 40-year involvement in national motorsport. The recent deaths of Pete Stevens, Ricky Parker-Morris and Brian Jones have focused my mind on a long association with British motorsport and the characters who are highlighted in the 70th anniversary edition.

Tony Lanfranchi and Gerry Marshall, fed up with me continuously haranguing them in the Victoria pub in London W2 about racing, told me to stop talking about it and do it. By that time, in 1978, I knew the two of them well, and also Brian Jones and Barrie Williams from the old clubhouse at Brands Hatch (pre-Kentagon) and the Victoria, which was close to my office. Tony lent me an old pair of overalls and a spotty crash helmet, the latter of which he took back when I rolled my Renault 5TS at Snetterton wearing it. The helmet was the one on the cover of *Down the Hatch*, Tony's book.

Gerry had enlisted Tony 'Strawberry' Strawson to prepare two Renaults for the 1979 Elf Gunk Renault 5 Championship. Juliette Slaughter and Barrie provided driving tips, and Cognac Camus Brandy the sponsorship. Brian enjoyed a tippie when he commented on my progress with team-mate Rob Upton.

---

**"I don't think he taught me anything that day, but he certainly frightened me when he went off"**

---

Dave Loudoun was one of the competitors in the championship that year, as were TVR stalwart Steve Cole, Dave Cox, Jim Edwards Sr and a number of drivers who went on to greater things.

My friendship with Tony, Gerry and Whizzo lasted to the end, and Brian's death really rounded out an extraordinary period in the history of British motorsport. Brian always welcomed me to the commentary box (and the bar afterwards) when I was racing – I have a treasured picture on the back of the Capri winner's car with Brian at Brands. Jackie Epstein became a firm friend, and he and Brands boss John Webb helped me on my way with my foray into team ownership with Multisports in the 1980s. Nigel Greensall came to drive with us and we were narrowly beaten to the championship with Jeremy Hoyland driving. The association with Brands led us to some development work for Ford through

Brands Hatch Ford and Jackie. In 1984, I made a few outings in the ex-Letchworth Roofing Triumph Dolomite Sprint bought from Gerry Marshall for £600, and sold back to him for the same price in part exchange for his Production Saloon 2.8 injection Capri, which saw me through a 25-race season in 1985. That introduced me to the likes of John Cleland, Colin Blower, Skid Scarborough, Malcolm Prior, Vic Lee, John Hammersley and many others.

Then, in 1986, I raced a Mk1 Lotus Cortina owned by Peter Bryant, who sadly passed away this Christmas. Peter was a great rally man, navigating for Ari Vatanen and Russell Brookes after his early Motoring News rally days. His friendship with John Whitmore and Tony Lanfranchi moved the Cortina on towards the end of that year and I graduated to Class B Thundersaloons in 1987 in an Escort RS2000. Among my co-drivers were Tony (for most of 1987), Barrie Williams, Ian Khan, Rod Birley, Barry Barnes and Rod Barrett from Tasmania and Brands Hatch's press office. Following Gerry Marshall's parting of the ways with Nick Oatway, after Gerry crashed the Stars and Stripes Manta at Zandvoort, I took over the car's preparation and co-driving duties in Class A. Arguably the Stars and Stripes was a more iconic car than Vauxhall's Carlton and, in my opinion, deserved more than a passing reference in the Autosport Thundersaloons article (12 November 2020). It was true to its engine origins, hence the colour scheme. The car won in Malaysia and then came back to the UK and to Thundersaloons, where I was racing an ex-British Touring Car Championship Toyota Supra.

Later, I sampled TVR Tuscan in 1998 and, after a short foray in the Marcos Mantis Championship – including the 1999 grand prix support GT race – I went back to the Tuscan, running these fabulous cars until I hung up my helmet in May 2019. Gerry Marshall's final link with my career was at Donington Park, when I first arrived to test a Tuscan. He was surprised to find that my initial test had impressed, and took me on a rollercoaster ride of the circuit in a roadgoing TVR Griffith. I don't think he taught me anything that day, but he certainly frightened me when he went off at the Old Hairpin! We didn't hit anything, thank goodness!

Tony Lanfranchi thought I was nuts to drive a Tuscan, while Barrie Williams always wanted to drive mine and sadly never did. Gerry Marshall was a great exponent of the car and looked at my exploits in motorsport in a different way from the moment I started racing those cars. Brian Jones remained the gentleman he always was, and he and I shared the odd beer to reminisce about the old Gerry and Tony show whenever we met. It is so sad that they are now all gone and an era has ended. ❧

# FINISHING STRAIGHT

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## NASCAR'S MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD



### NETFLIX SERIES

#### REVIEW THE CREW

Television executives must have fielded pitches for every conceivable workplace comedy by now. Following the success of *The Office* (on both sides of the Atlantic), the likes of

*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Parks & Recreation* have both commanded legions of fans and airtime across the world. Adding to the extensive list of workplaces, a down-on-its-luck NASCAR operation now gets its own send-up in Netflix's new series: *The Crew*.

Set within the workshop of the fictional Bobby Spencer Racing team, a once-successful NASCAR Cup squad now swimming in its own mediocrity, *The Crew* follows the exploits of crew chief Kevin Gibson (played by Kevin James), who runs the shop floor for the retiring Bobby Spencer. Spencer, a caricature of a NASCAR veteran in his bolo tie and country shirt, opens the series by handing over the reins of his team to his commercially astute daughter Catherine (Jillian Mueller). Freddie Stroma is the pacey, goofball lead driver Jake Martin, and *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* regular Gary Anthony Williams plays mechanic Chuck, so the cast is loaded with known quantities.

Fox Sports' coverage of the 2021 Daytona 500 placed James front and centre in its pre-race fanfare, and littered the contest itself with adverts for *The Crew*,

and the show gets a certain level of access to drivers and sponsorship, with product placement more prevalent than ants at a picnic. In good grace, it does at least poke fun at that in one of the episode's cold opens.

NASCAR is no stranger to screens outside of broadcast races, and the cult successes of *Days of Thunder*, *Talladega Nights* and *Logan Lucky* have used it as a plot point to varying degrees. But the translation to a Netflix comedy series is arguably less successful; although it's a clear part of *The Crew*'s premise, it feels as though many of the characters' interactions are boilerplate conversations that could be transposed to any middle-of-the-road US sitcom. Sure, the mentions of NASCAR figures and history keep it in the universe, but it's sometimes too easy to forget that premise.

If it feels derivative of Chuck Lorre's portfolio of sitcoms, *Two and a Half Men*, *Mike & Molly* and *The Big Bang Theory*, that's because it is. *The Crew* has been penned by former Lorre collaborator Jeff Lowell and uses many of the techniques seen in those productions. That, sadly, includes a profligate use of canned laughter – there are solid jokes, but you don't need them to be pointed out.

With that NASCAR access, *The Crew* welcomes a handful of sporadic driver cameos. NASCAR drivers have made on-screen appearances before, but rarely interact with the leading characters quite so palpably. In the second episode, Austin Dillon and Ryan Blaney trade barbs with the main cast in a sports bar – and take great delight in poking fun at themselves – but those cameos are few and far between, especially given that Blaney possesses some good acting chops.



# COURSE COMEDY



Blaney proves to be surprisingly adept at acting

NKP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

While there's the true-to-form of butting of heads – Catherine's new methods to invigorate the team treading water are met with resistance from Kevin, because it wouldn't really be a show if everyone agreed, and the team slowly becomes less abject as the series progresses. But *The Crew* itself chases its tail a bit; James's character is certainly its heart as he's the team's linchpin, but it's hard to really care about the others. Drivers popping up is fun and it's nice to pick out familiar faces, but it's also very clear that they're lip service to the NASCAR-themed premise.

Overall, *The Crew* is OK; it's not ground-breaking, but a cookie-cutter US sitcom. It's not *Seinfeld*, and it never will be. Instead, *The Crew* is a 17th-place finish at the Michigan 400. And it's OK with that.

**JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE**



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## GREATEST MERCEDES GRAND PRIX CARS



Autosport Chief Editor Kevin Turner takes centre stage this week to explain his recent ranking of the top 10 Mercedes grand prix cars of all time, battling off various challenges to certain positions and the exclusion of some high-profile machinery. Meanwhile, podcast host Alex Kalinauckas does his best to contain the various meanderings from his favourite colleague Matt Kew.

## WHAT'S ON

### INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

#### Arctic Rally Finland World Rally Championship Round 2/12

Ounasvaara, Finland

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**TV Live** BT Sport 1, Fri 1300, 1630, Sat 0800, BT Sport ESPN, Sat 1500, BT Sport 1, Sun 0800, BT Sport 2, Sun 1100

**TV Highlights** BT Sport 1, Fri 2300, Red Bull TV, Fri 2300, Sat 2300, Sun 2300

**Live** coverage on [wrc.com](http://wrc.com)  
All live service via WRC+

#### Australian Supercars

**Round 1/12**

Mount Panorama, Australia

**27-28 February**

**TV Live** BT Sport 1, Sat 0330, Sun 0330

#### Formula E

**Round 1**

Diriyah, Saudi Arabia

**26-27 February**

**Live** coverage via the BBC iPlayer, BBC Sport Website and BBC Red Button, Fri 1630, Sat 1630

#### NASCAR Cup

**Round 3/36**

Homestead, USA

**28 February**

**TV Live** Premier Sports 2, Sun 2000

#### NASCAR Xfinity Series

**Round 3/33**

Homestead, USA

**27 February**

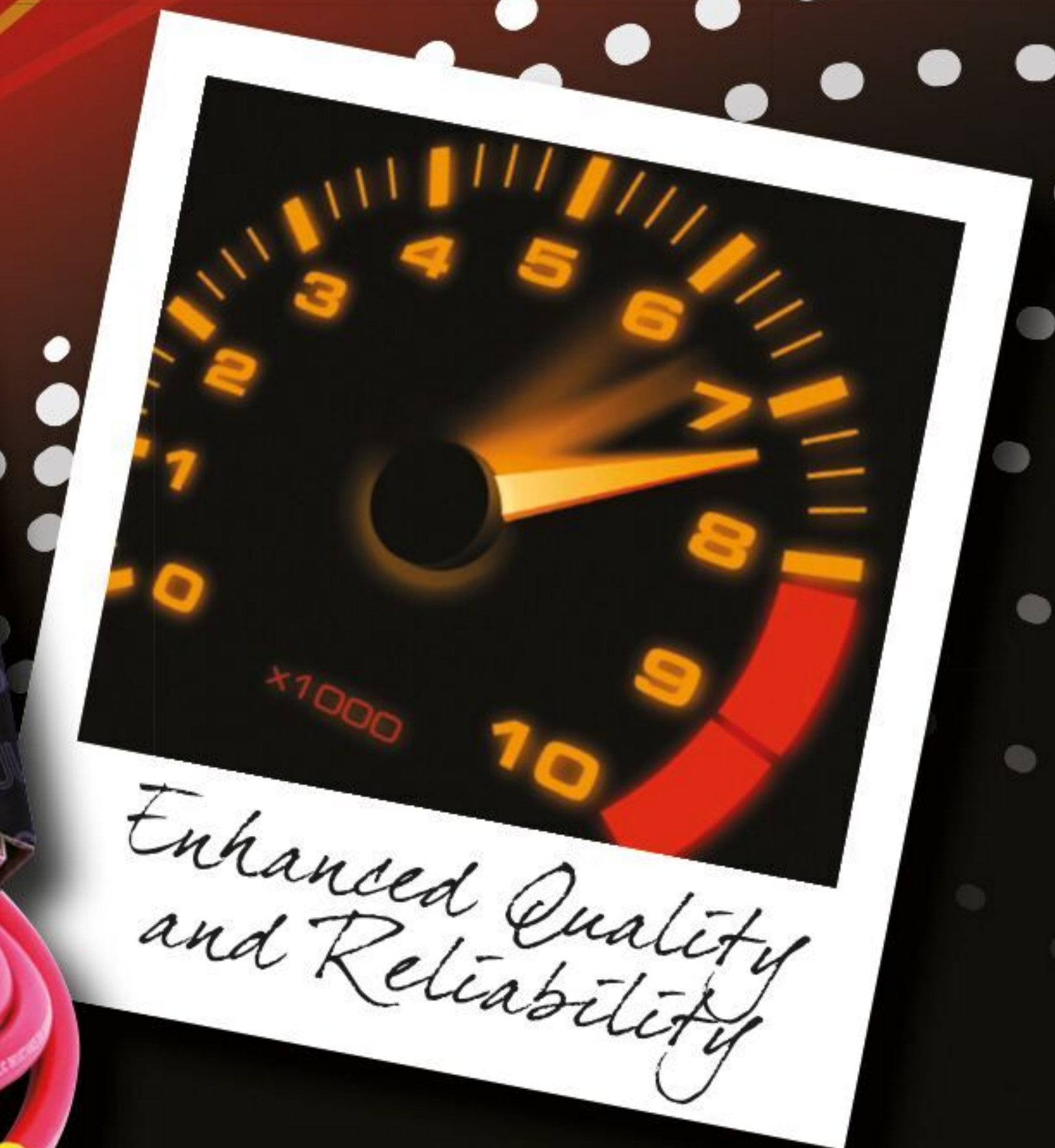


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## HAVE-A-GO HERO

WHEN DRIVERS CROP UP IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

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Wallace finished just outside the points in his Dynamics BMW



## ANDY WALLACE

*When a Le Mans winner enjoyed a combative BTCC cameo*

JAMES NEWBOLD

**W**hen Le Mans winners making British Touring Car Championship cameos with Team Dynamics come to mind, the majority would immediately cite 1991 winner Johnny Herbert's three-round stint in 2009. But back in the team's early days in 1993, it had welcomed 1988 Le Mans winner Andy Wallace for a rare foray into tin-tops at Oulton Park.

Toyota-contracted Wallace had been looking to supplement his racing activities after the cancellation of the world sports car championship left him with "not much going on" after Le Mans, and he duly found it in a third Dynamics-run BMW alongside future champion Matt Neal and Alex Portman.

"I was always looking around for something to top the season up," recalls Wallace. "I think it was a last-minute call-up too, because I didn't have a chance to test before the race. It would have been my first time [at Oulton] since the F3 days."

Indeed, the 1986 British F3 champion wasn't a frequenter of the Cheshire track during his Group C pomp, although had previous experience of racing with a roof over his head from a guest appearance in a Renault 5 Turbo in 1986, when he'd finished fifth after jumping out of his regular Madgwick-run F3 Reynard.

"Touring car racing is such a different discipline from single-seaters or sportscars that I certainly didn't find it easy to just jump in and go," says Wallace, who qualified 23rd in the 25-car field. "It was rear-wheel drive, so that was one thing that wasn't quite so different, but even so it made you think. I was trying to look at where I was losing compared with Matt Neal and he was just brilliant everywhere."

Naturally, Wallace sought advice from his paddock contemporaries, but not everybody was helpful: "I spoke to quite a few people and they were trying to give me bum information so I would do rubbish. I think Patrick Watts was one of those..."

Come the race, Wallace had a spirited battle with fellow BMW racer David Pinkney that involved a fair amount of old-fashioned trading paint, culminating in a last-corner fracas when Wallace anticipated a shove and braked early to hold on to his 11th place.

"The shove did happen and it was quite a big one!" he says. "I made it OK around the corner, but I have a nasty suspicion he punctured his radiator..."

It would prove to be the one and only BTCC outing for Wallace, although his tin-top education continued in the DTM in 1994. "It wasn't exactly a spectacular result," he says. "I would have needed a lot more running to be competitive." ❄



JBLOXHAM/MOTORSPORTIMAGES

**"TOURING CAR RACING IS SO DIFFERENT THAT I DIDN'T FIND IT EASY TO JUST JUMP IN AND GO"**



#### FROM THE ARCHIVE

Two Lotus 81s (with a curious choice of rubber) and three Williams FW07Bs line up in the Osterreichring pitlane at the 1980 Austrian Grand Prix. It was Lotus that

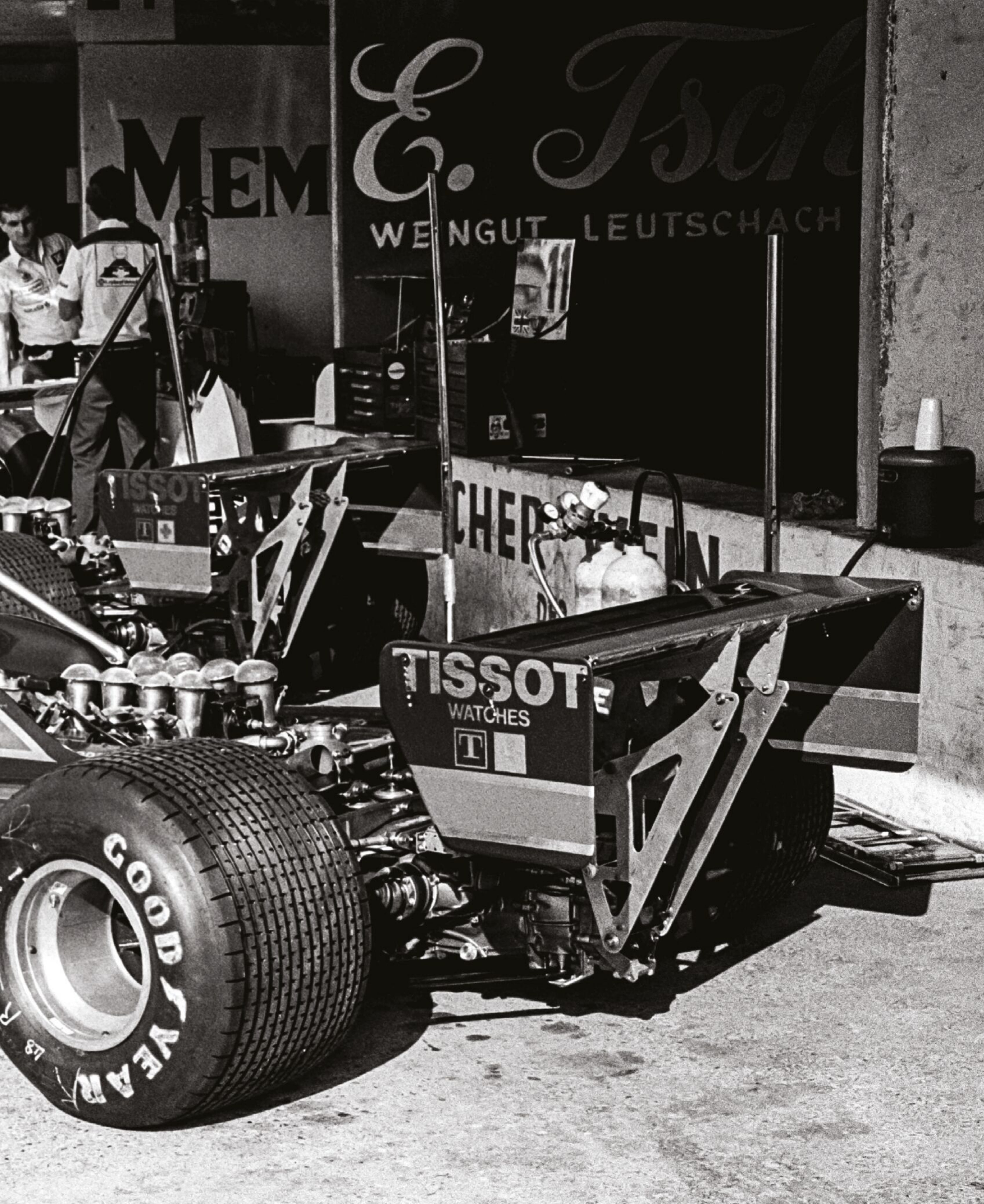
entered three cars in the race, for Elio de Angelis, Mario Andretti and F1 debutant Nigel Mansell. Williams's Alan Jones and Carlos Reutemann finished second and third behind the Renault RE20 of Jean-

Pierre Jabouille. De Angelis was the only Lotus finisher in sixth. Andretti was the race's first retiree half a dozen laps in and Mansell made it to lap 41 of 54, despite fuel burns, before his engine also died.

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Autosport, ISSN number 0269946X, is published weekly by Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. Subscription records are maintained at Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



**CIRCULATION TRADE ENQUIRIES**

Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT.  
**Tel:** +44 (0) 20 7429 4000.  
 Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 28 Planetary Road, Willenhall, Wolverhampton WV13 3XT.  
 ISSN 0269-946X. Autosport is published weekly by Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG.

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IN DEFENCE OF...

# WEBBER'S WILLIAMS MOVE

"I really wanted Mark Webber as a team driver in 2005," says then-Renault engineering director Pat Symonds, "but Mark was absolutely adamant that Williams was the place to be and nothing was going to convince him otherwise."

On the face of it, Webber's decision to join a Williams team in decline above a return to the Enstone squad on the cusp of a world championship double, and for which he'd tested in its Benetton guise in 2001, has to go down as a blunder. In his autobiography, *Aussie Grit*, Webber describes his two-year spell with Williams as "the lowest time in my entire F1 career".

While Giancarlo Fisichella grasped at the opportunity to trade a mid-pack Sauber for Renault's R25 (the best all-round package of 2005, if not quite as fast as the fragile McLaren MP4-20), Webber's hopes of forging a new Alan Jones-esque alliance never came close to materialising.

Although there was a maiden F1 podium at Monaco, and strong drives to fourth at Spa and Suzuka, the 2005 FW27 was the first Williams not to win a race since 2000. Unbeknown to Webber, the marriage with engine supplier BMW was on the rocks,

while a demotivated workforce meant the factory environment was "like walking into a morgue". The nadir came in Turkey, where two tyre failures and contact with Michael Schumacher while trying to unlap himself made for an utterly forgettable day.

But while Webber almost certainly would have been able to win races at Renault – Fisichella managed two – and wouldn't have made life easy for team leader Fernando Alonso, joining a team that Alonso had built around him would have carried significant risk, not least because the Spaniard was also managed by team principal Flavio Briatore. Webber too had links with Briatore, but only one could be the winning horse.

Although his Williams chapter wasn't a happy one, it wasn't a complete waste of time either. Amid the disappointments, Webber showed enough flashes – his Monaco 2006 performance was a strong indicator – to earn a career lifeline at Red Bull. Toughened by his travails, he went on to win nine grands prix and challenge for the 2010 world title. Not a bad return, all told.

**JAMES NEWBOLD**



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