GP MALAYSIA
SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2008. ISSUE 196
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THE RED BULLETIN

AN ALMOST INDEPENDENT F1 NEWSPAPER



THE WHEEL TURNS FOR NICK

MALAYSIA SATURDAY 22·03·08

Lewis Hamilton was back in dominant form in Friday's practice, but it was Kimi Raikkonen who got all the attention with an unexpected stoppage in the morning. Other surprises came from Jenson Button, who posted the afternoon's fourth fastest time, and Sebastian Vettel, who was fifth.

Kimi more fuel
Raikkonen's run of bad luck continued yesterday when his Ferrari ran out of petrol in Friday's first practice due to an "internal communications problem". He made up for it in the afternoon, finishing third fastest behind Lewis Hamilton and team-mate Felipe Massa.
Photography: Sutton Images

EJ's lock-in

Force India are unable to get their trucks in and out of their factory because Eddie Jordan has set up a blockade. This bizarre scenario has come about because the Silverstone factory's car park is too small for the workforce, so staff members have been parking their cars along the drive. Apparently, EJ still owns the land that the drive is on and has offered to sell it to the team. Sources close to the team have confirmed that EJ was upset that his offer of land had appeared to fall on deaf ears, so the former team boss has now unloaded concrete blocks at each end of the drive, blocking in the cars. There is another one-way road that grants access to the factory, but the trucks are not legally allowed to use it. As one paddock insider told us, "Eddie might sell you a suit, but chances are he'll remove the pockets first."

No dinner for Heikki

VIPs from both F1 and Malaysian society attended a glamorous gala dinner at the Hilton on Thursday night to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Malaysian Grand Prix. Nat King Cole's daughter, singer Natalie Cole, was on hand to provide entertainment while the drivers were introduced to another King, His Majesty King Mizan Zainal Abidin. One driver, though, was conspicuously absent. While Bernie and Flav were happy to ride the KLIA Express train into town – as has become a tradition with this gala – Heikki Kovalainen had to get there under his own steam. So it was most unlucky for the Finn that he had car trouble en route to the dinner and was left stranded.

Happy birthday Timo

There were more air-travel woes this week, this time for Toyota's Timo Glock. Poor Timo's Qantas flight to Sydney on Monday afternoon was cancelled and he was forced to wait until the evening to try to make his connection to Kuala Lumpur. Then there was yet another delay, and by the time he finally landed in Sydney, his plane to Malaysia had gone. He managed to book himself onto an MAS flight but spent the whole of Tuesday at the airport. To make matters worse, it was his 26th birthday. The whole journey took 40 hours, but at least by the time he arrived at the circuit his team had had ample time to bake him a birthday cake.



SAVING GRACE
On a difficult day for both Red Bull teams, Sebastian Vettel's fifth place in yesterday's afternoon practice session finally brought a smile to the faces of the Toro Rosso mechanics.

Lighten up?

INSTANT OPINIONS #2: NIGHT RACING

Should F1 be illuminated like a fairground?

POSITIVE: F1 can't remain the world's premier motorsport event when it's screened in the middle of the night. The sport is rooted in Europe, and expecting fans to watch a big chunk of the season in their pyjamas is unreasonable. Night racing gives everybody what they want: more races in Asia and a civilised viewing time for Europe. The recent MotoGP under floodlights in Qatar was a triumph.

NEGATIVE: Why should three billion potential viewers in Asia defer to 30 million Europeans who can't set an alarm clock? Not that Europe wants night racing anyway. Do you really think fans care what time the race is run? Getting up at 4am on a winter's morning to watch a grand prix live from the exotic far side of the world is a privilege. Anyone who complains about it should stick to cookery programmes.

Flight fright

Michael Schumacher's manager suffered a mid-air scare this week when his private jet ran into trouble. Willi Weber was flying between Geneva and Stuttgart in his six-seater, twin-engined Beechcraft when passengers experienced what seemed like alarming turbulence or even anti-aircraft artillery. "Suddenly, there were massive impacts," a shaken Weber recalls. "I thought we'd been shot down! Everything rocked and shook – I had no idea what was going on." It turned out that a flock of large wild geese had strayed into Willi's flight path and damaged the plane's nose, right engine and one of the wings. Fortunately, no-one was hurt and the jet was able to make a safe emergency landing.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUTTON IMAGES, CRISPIN THRUSTON.



LOVE BITES?
Not exactly what chef Flo Wenzel had in mind when he went for a soothing post-flight massage.

Honda chef gets battered

Massage is a traditional cultural experience in this part of the world so, in the middle of long-haul back-to-back races, what better than to have a lie down while a local lady rubs lavender oil into your aching limbs? Unfortunately, trying this left Honda chef Flo Wenzel literally black and blue. "The masseuse used a kind of sucker cup, like a sink plunger. Now I have perfectly round purple love bites on my back." Never had a love bite from a sink plunger? Makes you wonder what they get up to in these paddock kitchens.

Good news for TV addicts

The FIA has announced that Kangaroo TVs will be made available to accredited media free-of-charge throughout this season. Permanent pass holders may keep their handset for the whole year. Anyone wanting to borrow a unit should contact Nadia Petrossi in the press room, and give a security deposit of US$350. In addition to last year's services, the new Kangaroo TV boasts a 30-second replay function, split screen views and multi-language audio commentaries, including the circuit broadcast, BBC Radio Five Live and RTL Germany, with more to follow.

The Secret Diary of Hermann Schnell, Aged 19½

TUESDAY, MARCH 11TH MELBOURNE

Hey, great news! I have my own baseball cap! It's brilliant, it has my name embroidered on one side and a really cool signature on the other... it isn't actually my signature because Otto the marketing manager said that looked like something a pigeon had done to a statue. Hopefully I'll get the hang of the new one quickly, because at the moment it's taking me five minutes and quite a lot of tracing paper every time somebody asks for an autograph. But still, a cap!



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12TH MELBOURNE

Signature practice is going well, though it's giving me cramp. I explained to my new physio, Günther, that I needed a cold compress for my wrist because I've been locked in my hotel room, hard at it for two days. He immediately made me stand under a cold shower for a half hour before taking me on a 20km run. No wonder the Stasi sacked him for brutality.

THURSDAY, MARCH 13TH MELBOURNE

I don't think Kevin copes very well with jetlag. This morning at breakfast his eyes looked like two runny eggs and his face was the colour of beetroot – though possibly that might have something to do with his fear the plane will fall from the sky if ever he stops drinking. Apparently the team thought hiring my old race engineer would make me feel more comfortable – they've obviously never seen him gargle with cornflakes.

FRIDAY, MARCH 14TH MELBOURNE

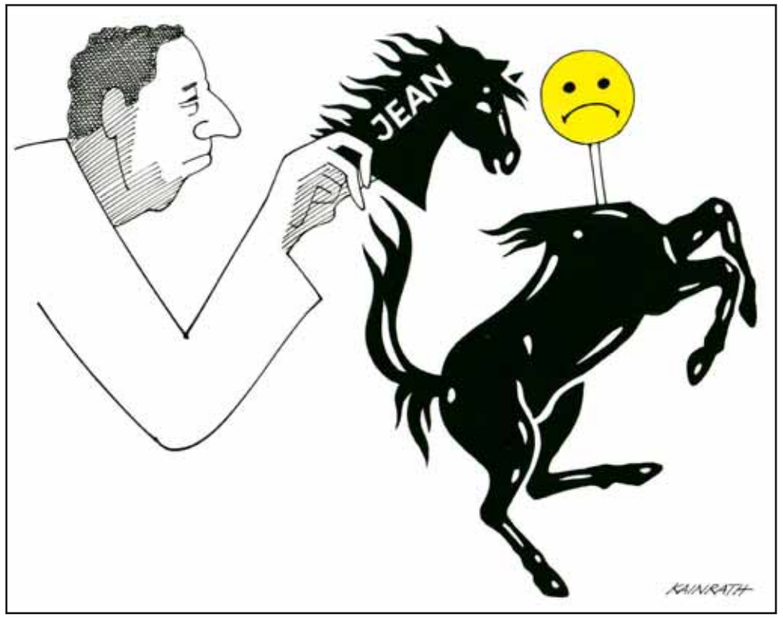
My new team-mate Gianni is a really nice man. He explained that we should be friends rather than rivals, and in the spirit of co-operation, he told me who were the best engineers and mechanics in the team and let me have them. What a nice guy! No wonder he's survived in F1 for so long. I'm now desperately trying to learn everyone's name, though most only have nicknames. Maybe I should have a nickname, too.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15TH MELBOURNE

I saw a couple of people in the grandstands wearing my baseball caps! Talk about seven kinds of fabulous! I have my own fans! I'm going to be really nice to them. I'm going to take time to talk to them and never ignore them when I walk into the paddock and make sure I answer every letter personally. I looked on the website and those caps are pretty expensive, so they must really like me. I'm not quite sure why they're so expensive as Otto said they only cost pennies to produce. I guess labour costs in Vietnam must have gone up. Oh, qualifying was OK. I'm starting ninth.

SUNDAY, MARCH 16TH MELBOURNE

Fantastic day! I saw at least another 10 people wearing my caps as I trudged back from the turn one gravel trap. I made sure I waved to all of them. They didn't seem remotely bothered that I'd failed to finish and just cheered harder – though possibly that was because they'd been outside in the sun all day. There's a rock concert later on and I have a VIP seat! Apparently there will be a man who will vomit blood and breathe fire. I hope it isn't Kevin.



VIEW FROM THE TRUCK: COULD IT BE MAGIC?

Todt a hard act to follow for Brawn dream team

BY JUSTIN HYNES

For a sport so steeped in hard science, where the smallest detail of technical information is relayed, analysed and reported upon, it must rankle that the process of building the perfect F1 team is such an inexact science.

Indeed, it's more art than science. After staff qualifications, track record and technical skill are factored into the equation, you're left with the intangible assets, the criteria that all contribute to the formation of a team: vision, imagination, communication, precision and passion. These are the things that can lift the mundane to the transcendent, the magic ingredients that can pull an F1 team from the middle of the grid to the front, from mediocrity to majesty.

McLaren had it in the 1980s (and it seems again now), Williams in the 1990s, and Ferrari's progress from early 1990s chaos and disorder to turn-of-the-century invincibility is one of the sport's great tales of finding the magic formula. And though an excellent next generation seems to have been put in place in Maranello, the dream team that scooped five consecutive world drivers titles from 2000 onwards still represents the pinnacle of what a harmonious team can achieve in F1. Now, however, that dream is no more, as the last of that golden team has left Ferrari.

Watching Brawn try to turn Honda into winners will be fascinating

Whatever your opinions of Jean Todt as a manager, F1 statesman or team principal, the changes he wrought at Ferrari from 1993 onwards still represent a gargantuan achievement. It may look simple, the deft act of importing the team that won two titles at Benetton in the mid '90s seeming to be an exercise in money talking, but beyond the purchasing power there was also the act of integrating Schumacher, Brawn, Byrne et al with the existing machinery of Ferrari, a notoriously close-knit organisation wary of any radical change or outside interference. Managing that balancing act was a tough job, and one Todt handled with aplomb.

There were moments of madness of course, when the power turned heads (Austria and Indianapolis 2002) and also unpopular decisions (the shackling of second drivers in the service of Schumacher). But nobody ever got successful by being friends with everyone. Making the hard choices was required in the unstoppable pursuit of victory – at all costs.

Just as big an achievement was to leave a legacy, to have found, in the current Ferrari structure, individuals capable of carrying on that pursuit. And the legacy is still spreading. In an interesting coincidence, Ross Brawn now finds himself at Honda, in a similar situation that Todt found himself in at Ferrari all those years ago.

Without wishing to sound harsh, Honda at the moment are at best transitional, with some difficult times behind them and a hard road ahead. To shape and mould the team into the kind of winning machine that Brawn was used to at Ferrari is a monumental task. Certainly the resources are there and almost certainly there are personnel in Brackley who can put in the kind of imagination, communication, vision and passion that lifted Ferrari out of the doldrums.

The process of watching Brawn attempt to apply at Honda the model developed under Todt at Ferrari will be fascinating to watch.

ON THIS DAY... 22/3/08



1934: GOLF
The first Masters golf championship begins in Augusta, USA.
See Tiger Woods' cool chip shot at the 2005 Masters.
YouTube.com search: Tiger + 2005 + chip

1997: COMET HALE-BOPP
The comet's first solar-system visit in 4,200 years.
Watch sped-up footage of the comet's trail.
YouTube.com search: Hale-Bopp + timelapse

2004: OZZY OSBOURNE
The 'Prince of Darkness' is voted the best person to welcome aliens to Earth by British people.
Watch Ozzy rocking out on stage in his solo years.
YouTube.com search: Ozzy + crazy + train

BIRTHS

1931: WILLIAM SHATNER
US actor, best known as USS Enterprise's Captain Kirk in Star Trek.
YouTube.com search: Shatner + changed + the + world

ON THIS DAY, VISIT...

THE KUALA LUMPUR BIRD PARK
The world's largest free-flight aviary, located in the Lake Gardens, is home to 3,000 birds, of which 90 per cent are local species.
Open 9am-6.30pm daily. Admission price 22 RM (adult), 15 RM (child).

ON THIS DAY IN F1...



1992: MEXICO
A 23-year-old Michael Schumacher achieves his first podium finish.
Watch the '92 season highlights.
YouTube.com search: 1992 + F1 + season + video

PHOTOGRAPHY: AP, SUTTON, ILLUSTRATION: KAINRATH



On the outside, a perfectly normal young man, but deep down inside, Seb was a crazy mixed-up kid, with all sorts of complexes and phobias, one of which involved travelling everywhere with his own bed linen.



"Hello? Mr E is here asking for someone called Tot? Todd? Do we have someone by that name?"

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

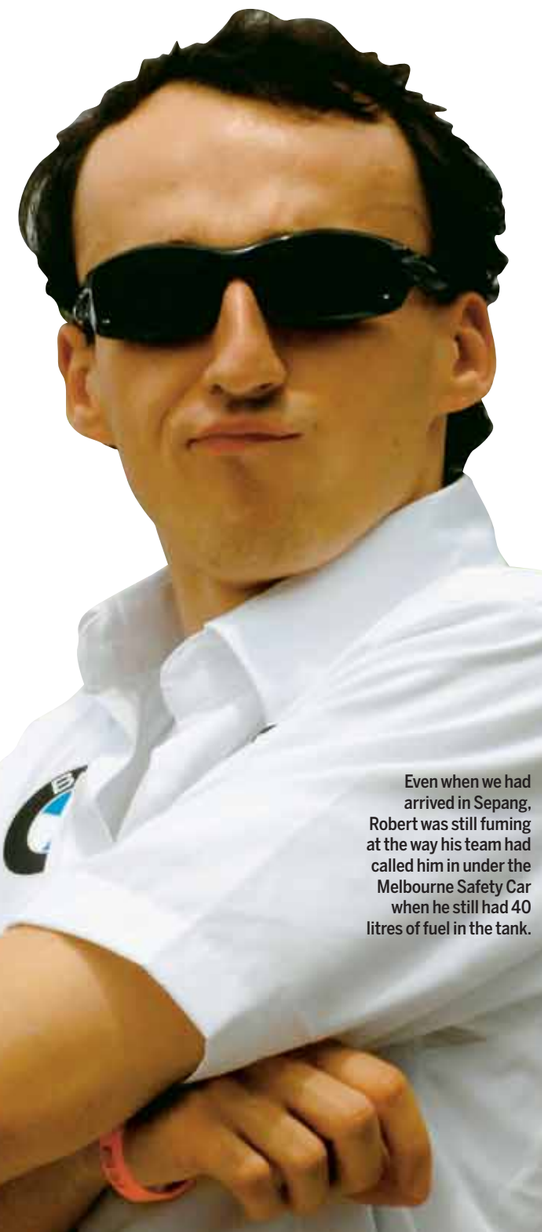
And the Bullseye has spotted a few who really should know better.



Nicholas Todt was always willing to learn from the Master of Driver Management. Here, Flavio demonstrates the 15 per cent armlock with wrist hold, which he has used to such great effect over the years.



Tonio had long forgotten the name of his Melbourne girlfriend, but he could still remember what she looked like.



Even when we had arrived in Sepang, Robert was still fuming at the way his team had called him in under the Melbourne Safety Car when he still had 40 litres of fuel in the tank.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CRISPIN THRUSTON, DPPI, SUTTON, XPB

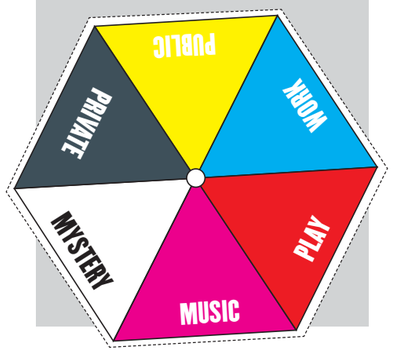
THE PLAYER

There aren't many drivers with a reputation as steady as that of BMW-Sauber's Nick Heidfeld. Give Nick the equipment and he'll get the job done – even if he does look a bit confused when the equipment turns out to be The Red Bulletin's Wheel of Fortune. By Matt Youson.

THE GAME
WHEEL OF FORTUNE

THE RULES
SIMPLE. SPIN THE WHEEL AND WHEN IT STOPS YOU MUST ANSWER A QUESTION TRUTHFULLY FROM THE CATEGORY INDICATED.

THE CATEGORIES
WORK; PLAY; PUBLIC; PRIVATE; MYSTERY; MUSIC



Spin 1: Work

Do you think you came into F1 too early?
No, definitely not. Compared to a lot of other people in F1 now, I had quite a lot of time between karting and F1. I had two years in Formula Ford, two years in F3, then another two in F3000 before getting to Formula One. If anything, I would like to have been here at least a year earlier. I don't think I would have struggled – I think I would have been ready. Last season was certainly my best so far, and I hope I have even better seasons ahead, but I don't think it's necessarily linked to age – I mean, Hamilton shows what can be done. I don't want to say that it would have been exactly the same with me, but it demonstrates that it really isn't the age that matters. Some guys are experienced and can't do it – some are young and can.

Spin 2: Mystery

Can you cook?
I'm more of a good eater than a good cook. As a sportsman, obviously nutrition is very important to me – but we are not 100m runners or tennis players. In those sports it's the most important thing, but for us I think you get to a certain level beyond which there is no further gain – eating and training better isn't going to make you any faster, so you are not going to win more. Eating is a hobby of mine – cooking, less so. When we go to race in a city with a restaurant I like, Josef [Leberer – BMW-Sauber trainer] has to keep an eye on me to make sure I'm not there until the early hours of the morning! Luckily for me, he likes to eat as well… I do cook from time to time, and I would do more often, but normally when I get home after testing or racing I don't feel relaxed enough. For a couple of days at least, I prefer to have something cooked for me than to do the cooking myself. In the right frame of mind, it's different – last year I went on a 'cooking weekend' with friends, and that's something I want to do again.

Spin 3: Play

Do you support a football team? Which one?
Um… Yes. No. Sort of. I'm not really into football, but I was born in Mönchengladbach, and if you're from there you automatically have to support them [Borussia Mönchengladbach]. They're in the German second division at the moment, but they're leading, so they should be promoted this year.

Spin 4: Mystery

If you were a character in a film, who would you be?
Oh, that's a difficult one. My favourite movie is Life Is Beautiful, but I wouldn't be anyone ➜

PHOTOGRAPHY: SHUTTERSTOCK, CORBIS, SUTTON, DPPI, GETTY, LAT, THOMAS BUTLER, REUTERS



True to form Nick comes good, driving through the carnage at the start of the 2005 European GP at the Nürburgring.

➜ from that – it's not that sort of film. I'd like to be both characters from Fight Club in one man – Edward Norton and Brad Pitt. It's a bit of a crazy movie, so that would be cool.

Spin 5: Public

How tough is it for you to explain what you do in the car every day to people who have never experienced anything like it in their lives?

Frankly, I find it very difficult. I'm a good driver, but I'm not a very good speaker, and I'm not good at talking about the feelings and sensations of driving an F1 car. Actually, it isn't something that I'm asked about that often. Usually the questions are more like, "What do you think of the car?" or, "How do you feel about next year?" It's very rare to be asked how it feels. I always say the best thing is to try and experience it yourself. Not everyone can get into an F1 car, but go and try a go-kart, or do a day in a Formula BMW. It isn't the same, but you can get the sense of fun and some of what doing this feels like.

… So, do you find giving technical feedback to your engineers much easier?

Usually! When the engineers ask me to quantify how the car responds, I try to give them a scale between zero and five for how good or bad something is. So, I might say the understeer through there is a two. It sounds very boring, doesn't it? But that's the way I do it and I think it works. As a driver, I think that it's more important to be like that than to emulate how the engineers discuss the car. It is good to be able to communicate with the team on their terms, but it's most important to discuss with them how I feel about things so that, together, we can make the car better.

Spin 6: Music

What's the best live music event you've ever been to?

Well, I love music, but strangely I haven't been to that many concerts. The one that stands out for me was the Rolling Stones at Hockenheim on the Forty Licks tour. I can't remember the set list, but they played Paint It Black and She's A Rainbow… my favourite song on the night was Sympathy For the Devil. It was amazing. I should do more of that stuff.

'I'd like to be both characters from Fight Club in one man – Edward Norton and Brad Pitt'

Spin 7: Private

What is the most extravagant thing you have ever bought?

Mmmm… when I think about extravagance, I think about expense. That would be my house – I don't know if that counts. I've started collecting old cars. I've got a '67 Beetle, a '65 Mustang, an old Porsche, a vintage Ferrari – the team will probably be glad to hear that I've got a vintage BMW on my list…

Spin 8: Work

Are you as calm as you appear – or do you sometimes like to have a good shout and scream in the garage?

I think if you asked around the team, they would confirm that I'm not always as calm as it might seem from the outside. I don't scream that much, but I can get upset and disappointed. I'm pretty good at making things clear when I need to.

… How about in the past with other teams?

Ah yes, there have been times. But it's never been a case of shouting and screaming, more that my general mood gets worse because you have to adjust to what you can achieve. At Jordan and at Prost, it was clear that it was going to be impossible to achieve very much, and you are always disappointed if you don't achieve what you are capable of.

Spin 9: Work

Last weekend you came second in Melbourne, where only seven cars out of 22 actually finished the race. You seem to prosper when a race is chaotic, not losing your cool in a tricky situation. Talk us through your Albert Park experience.

Well, the start was bad, but the result was better than expected – much better than we would have expected based on the car's performance during the winter. Qualifying was good, but after the start I felt it would probably be a difficult race for me as I fell behind Rosberg. I expected him to be longer than me on the first stop, because in qualifying he was really far behind – so it was a surprise when he pitted on the same lap. My pit crew did a fantastic stop to get me in front of him. From that point onwards the day was looking up.

The car had good pace, and in the second stint I could keep up with Kovalainen – although he went a little longer than me so he must have been a little heavier. I was lucky to finish second, normally it would have been third – which would have been good – but Heikki was unlucky with his pitstop and the safety car.

I do tend to do well in races when there is chaos and other guys are struggling, but in a race like Melbourne a lot of it is luck. On the last pitstop, I was lucky – although the team had to work hard and do well to get me into a situation where I could take advantage of a lucky break, so maybe you make your own luck.

The only guy I speak to 99 per cent of the time during the race is my engineer, Giampaolo Dall'Ara. Of course he will speak to Mario Theissen, Willi Rampf and the others, but I only speak to Giampaolo. When the safety car is out we don't talk too much. He informs me as soon as possible when it comes out, then reminds me to keep the brakes and the tyres warm. Then before the restart he'll tell me the safety car is coming in, and another warning about brakes and tyres. Sometimes in the intervening laps we'll discuss strategy, other times nothing at all.

… Melbourne also gave you a less welcome statistic – four times a runner-up, you join Stefan Johansson as the driver with the most second places and no wins.

I share the record for the most second places without a win? Thanks! That's just the sort of thing I want to hear! I think this year will give me the best chance to change that statistic. It's the best start to the season I've had, and also I think there's more potential in the car than before. But how can I say with any confidence that we will win a race? Of course it is our target, and I believe we will eventually achieve it, but when it will happen, I don't know.

IT'S TIME TO PARTY

Fun was in the air when La Formula Unas hit the clubs of Kuala Lumpur.















WINNER

Jamie-Lee Frankland will soon be having even more fun this weekend, after winning a prime trackside spot in the Red Bull Racing garage where she gets to hang out on Sunday.



‘There was a sense of shock... we just assumed the car had broken’

CANADIAN GP, MONTREAL, JUNE 2, 1991, LAP 69

We’ve all seen footballers take the ball around the goalkeeper and then send it wide of an unprotected net from a couple of metres out. Such mistakes are less common in motor racing, but not unknown...

For the fourth straight season, McLaren-Honda were in dominant form. Following consecutive F1 world championship titles in 1988, 1989 and 1990, the team appeared poised for a repeat after Ayrton Senna claimed four straight victories at the start of 1991. Indeed, prior to the fifth race, the Canadian Grand Prix, the Brazilian had led all but nine of the season’s 291 racing laps. The balance of power was beginning to shift, though, and qualifying in Montreal reflected this.

For the first time since the previous season’s Portuguese GP, eight races before, Senna failed to claim a spot on the front row, which was taken by the increasingly potent Williams-Renault FW14s of Riccardo Patrese and Nigel Mansell. So far, Patrese had been the only driver other than Senna to lead a racing lap – a brief cameo in San Marino – but he failed to add to his tally this time. The Italian was feeling distinctly sore, the consequence of a practice accident on Friday, and needed a last-minute restorative massage moments before climbing into his car to take the start. And he soon experienced pain of a different kind as Mansell swept past him to take the lead after only two corners.

It was almost a year since Mansell had announced his impending retirement from grand prix racing, but Williams had signed a sufficiently large cheque to tempt him to change his mind as they sought a first world title since 1987. So far, Patrese had outqualified him five times in five races, but Mansell had complained about a series of technical problems, and in Montreal he had qualified with the team’s spare chassis, with which he was less than comfortable.

‘As he approached the hairpin for the final time, arm in the air, he allowed his Renault V10’s revs to drop...’

ILLUSTRATION: HERI IRAWAN

The race, however, was a different story. Mansell eased away comfortably from the sister Williams, while Senna, back in third, was a fading red and white dot in Patrese’s mirrors. A dominant afternoon looked likely.

It wasn’t straightforward for the leading crew, though. Patrese got a puncture on lap 41 and lost enough time to drop him to sixth, although that was minor compared to the problems faced by the other leading contenders. McLaren had lost both cars by lap 25 – Gerhard Berger to malfunctioning electronics and Senna to a faulty alternator – and the Ferraris of Alain Prost and Jean Alesi retired with a failed gearbox and engine respectively. Roberto Moreno, the quicker of the two Benettons in qualifying, spun after only 10 laps and broke his rear suspension.

With Patrese delayed, Mansell’s closest challenger – although he wasn’t close at all – was Nelson Piquet in the other Benetton. But the Brazilian had made a precautionary stop for a fresh set of tyres and was almost a minute behind. That wasn’t enough to restrict Mansell’s enthusiasm, though. He slipped into cruise mode for a while, but then, with four laps to go, he posted a 1m 22.385s lap time – 0.287s quicker than Patrese’s best, and comfortably more than a second faster than anybody else would go all afternoon. This had been almost too easy…

Mansell had plenty of time on his final lap to acknowledge the crowd’s applause with a cheerful wave. And then, as he approached the hairpin for the final time, arm in the air, he allowed his Renault V10’s revs to drop. He quickly tried to change to a lower gear, but the loss of revs left insufficient charge to power the hydraulic selector system. He found neutral… but then the engine coughed and died, and the FW14 rolled silently to a stop.

“There was a huge sense of shock in the pit garage,” says Ann Bradshaw, Williams’ PR at the time. “We were all there, poised to celebrate our first win of the year, and we just assumed the car had broken. It was a few days before the word began to spread about the possible cause…

“The most amusing part was what went on in the press room. I walked in and Nigel Roebuck [columnist for British magazine Autosport] was sitting there, laughing his head off, because Alan Henry had sent his race report to the Guardian newspaper at the start of the final lap, about 30 seconds before the car stopped. Alan was sitting there groaning very loudly – I think everybody assumed he was a huge Mansell fan, but he’d just hit the ‘send’ button a little too soon.”

Nigel Mansell had totally dominated the 1991 Canadian GP, but in the end he was only classified sixth. Nelson Piquet – the Englishman’s sworn enemy since their days as a fast but mutually hostile duo at Williams in the mid 1980s – was barely able to contain his joy at the sight of the stricken Williams. It was to be the Brazilian’s 23rd and final grand prix victory – and unquestionably his funniest.

THE SUPER MAN AND THE GIANTS

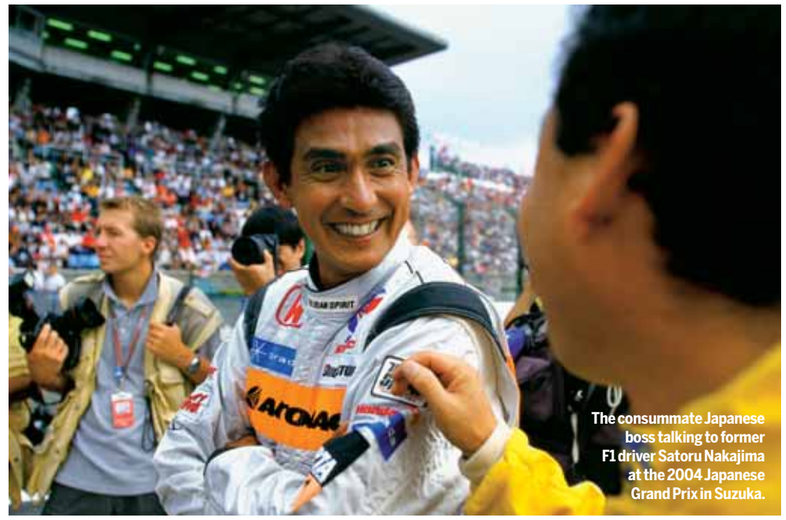
A good year behind, a tough year ahead. Super Aguri team boss Aguri Suzuki goes back to square one. He talks to Matt Youson about 2008's challenges.

When Super Aguri arrived in Formula One they were not afforded a great deal of respect. It was a throwback to days long gone and dimly remembered: the under-resourced little team, competing with old machinery, plenty of heart and precious little else. Gutsy, proud, feisty and doomed to cruise around at the back. There should have been a sign above the garage that said, "Go on, patronise us".

By the end of that year, Super Aguri were lapping within the top 10. Year two was better – and worse. Encapsulating all the highs and lows that F1 has to offer in one story. The third session of qualifying in Australia, a first point in Spain. Then Canada, Taku rampant, passing Toyota and Ferrari for fun. And then, holding his line and his nerve, around the outside of Alonso into the final chicane, with cheers echoing all around the Île Notre-Dame as though the race was run, and won.

Celebrations ensued: mechanics jumped into the rowing basin, Anthony Davidson considered the injustice of a potential podium snatched away by an errant groundhog, while Sato celebrated sixth place. ➜





The consummate Japanese boss talking to former F1 driver Satoru Nakajima at the 2004 Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka.

With hindsight, it was the high point. Soon after, stories of defaulting sponsors circulated, a lack of funds and an uncertain future. Confusion over customer cars made the situation worse. A new year brought no cheer: tests missed, drivers unconfirmed and in limbo, a different investor mentioned in the media every week. Would the team survive, could they be sustained or would they turn into another F1 casualty? The small team disappearing in the middle of the night.

Thankfully it didn't happen. In Melbourne, Super Aguri set up for business as usual, or rather business unusual, a deal with Magma, landlords at Leafield, having put the team on a firm footing and for the first time giving a small amount of security. It was, for many reasons, a relief to see them take their place in the paddock, a sight for which there had been no guarantees a few weeks earlier.

Life may get easier, but for the immediate future the damage has been done: Super Aguri have returned to the back of the grid, and once again will have to perform miracles if they are somehow to overhaul teams with resources and facilities of which they can barely dream. It's enough to drive a man to tears. But not Aguri Suzuki. As usual, the eponymous principal sits at the lowly end of the pitlane, watching the world go by with a shy smile, greeting friends with a few words, dealing easily with his team. Courteous, dignified, thoughtful.

'We were in a difficult situation over the winter, but I felt the team believed in me – as I believed in them'

"The situation in the winter was very difficult for us," acknowledges Aguri-san. "Obviously we were not at the tests, which will cause problems. Our competitors are much improved on last year, so we've got challenges to face and ground to make up – but ultimately that is OK. After a few races our performance will get better. The only thing that really matters right now is that we are here at the start of the season. We are a small team, like a family. Our family is still together, still in one piece, despite everything that has gone on."

Aguri takes his work to heart; his team are dear to him and the references to family recur constantly when he speaks. It's what keeps him going. He has successful motorsports businesses on two continents with teams that represent not a fraction of the grief and torment generated by his F1 operation. It begs the question: why does he bother?

"Ahhhhh! Because three years ago we were nothing. Zero. Then overnight our team appeared. We were thrown together. It made us into a family. And everyone knows that family life is up and down; it can be good, it can be not so good, but the family is always there to help each other. Everybody on my staff is a son or a daughter. They help me, I help them. We were in a difficult situation over the winter, but I felt that everybody in the team believed in me – as I believed in them."

Very quickly, it becomes very clear that F1 demands Aguri's time almost to the exclusion of his other interests. The observation elicits a shrug, and an affirmation. "It's true. I'm concentrating on Formula One. I have to. I have good people in the Japanese office, and good people in the United States. The series they deal with do not cause many problems, and those that will arise, they can cope with. My time is spent here – Formula One is not so straightforward."

One of the more worrying aspects of Super Aguri's predicament is what it says about F1 in general. Long before the team came along, the sport had supposedly begun a process designed to take cost out, removing the excesses of budget the manufacturers felt compelled to spend and powerless to reduce. The new rules and regulations would dramatically decrease spending for the manufacturers, and once again allow privateers to compete on the hallowed turf of the level playing field. Super Aguri were born into this era. Unlike the minnows of the 1980s and early 1990s, they had a professional underpinning, with support from a major manufacturer, an experienced management and technical structure, and proven drivers. And yet the small teams still struggled – almost as if F1 hasn't become more accessible at all.



Takuma Sato's sixth place finish in Canada in 2007 was the high point of the season for Super Aguri – and the cause for much celebration within the team.

Aguri laughs. "It hasn't. It hasn't become easier for the smaller teams, and I don't think it

'Try to imagine how difficult it is for a small team to find $150m. It's a huge sum of money – budget cap or not'

is going to in the future. Every team is constantly developing. Max Mosley has tried to bring in changes to the regulations, suggesting a budget cap or something like that – but even if that happens, we're still going to need $100-$150 million every season. Try to imagine how difficult it is for a small team to find $150 million. It's still a huge sum of money – budget cap or not. The people we have to compete against are big manufacturers with money to spend. I don't know how much each team has, but I do know they have 700 or 800 people working for them. Obviously that makes F1 a very tough proposition for anyone not in that position, and that isn't going to change – but we find a way to make it work."

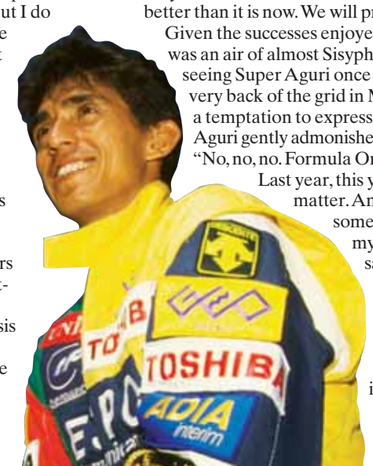
The Magma Group, and its associated financial muscle shows that way. While Super Aguri struggled with sponsorship last season, the urgency to find backers stemmed as much from the about-face decision to require every F1 entrant to become an entire chassis manufacturer in its own right by 2010. "We're all still discussing the chassis regulations, and they're still very delicate. What has become clear is that in the future Honda won't be able to aid my team. We need to build our own car, and for that I needed a partner."

That last comment almost seems an admission of guilt. Aguri makes the universal expression for 'that's just the way it is' before continuing. "Actually it will be a relief, being able to concentrate on racing, rather than chasing finance. It's important for me. For two years I have been constantly trying to find money, almost wholly concentrated on securing the finance to keep the team going. But if I have a partner, I can focus on racing."

New money often means new management, and certainly that seems to be the case with Super Aguri, though quite how widespread the changes will be is a matter of much speculation. Aguri's future in the new structure – and by association the name of the team – has been under scrutiny. So, is he…? "…staying with the team? Yes. Super Aguri is Super Aguri."

It's a definite answer, but in F1 a definite answer one week tends to be discarded the next. Certainly affairs in Leafield won't become clear until Magma reveals its hand. On the subject of what changes the partners will demand, Aguri is carefully opaque. "We have to look to the future and discuss matters with our new partners. What we do in the future will depend on those discussions – but we have a whole staff that wants to go racing and retains their motivation and their passion for Formula One. Maybe in the future the team will be much better than it is now. We will progress."

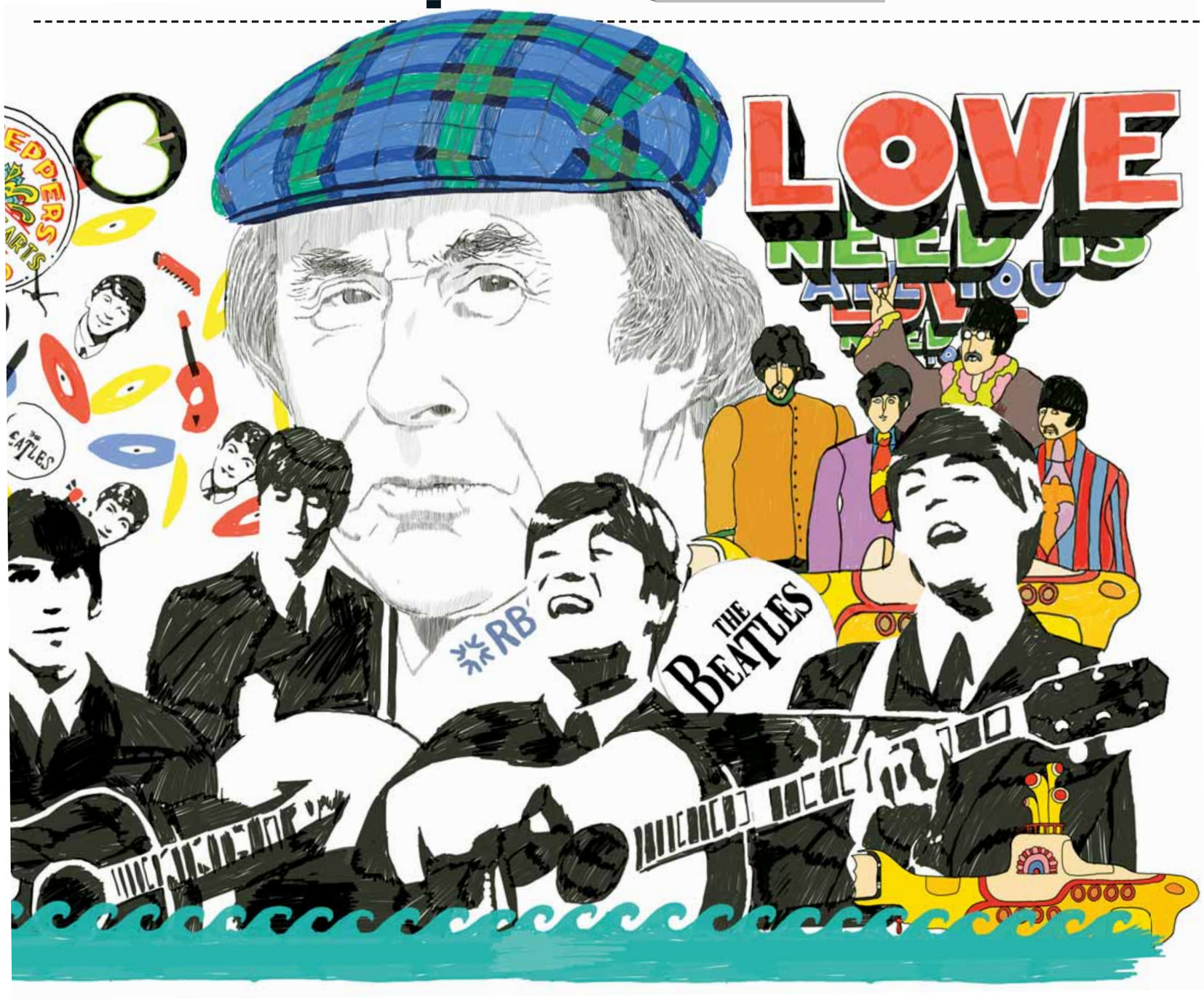
Given the successes enjoyed last season, there was an air of almost Sisyphean tragedy to seeing Super Aguri once again stuck at the very back of the grid in Melbourne. There's a temptation to express sympathy, but Aguri gently admonishes the sentiment: "No, no, no. Formula One is *always* tough. Last year, this year, it doesn't matter. And it isn't just something that affects my team, it's the same for everybody. It doesn't matter if you are working for Super Aguri or Ferrari. Formula One is hard."



PHOTOGRAPHY: JIRI KRENEK, SUTTONS, CORBIS, LAT

24hr Paddock People

> I let in six goals against Chelsea in 1968, when Charlton Athletic FC were a man short and I was in the press box.
>
> Who is the accidental goalie?
> Turn to page 22



HOBBIES

SIR JACKIE STEWART: THE BEATLES

The Beatles are my passion – I have all their records. And when I first met the four of them at the 1969 Monaco Grand Prix, my relationship with the Beatles became a more personal one. George was already a follower of motor racing, and it was only when I spoke with him that I learned he had seen me race before many times at Aintree [Circuit], which is close to Liverpool. He was a passionate driver with an enviable collection of cars, including many Ferraris and a McLaren F1. We spent many wonderful times together, and he became one of my best friends.

I occasionally see Paul – he's a nice man – and I like Ringo very much. I didn't see Lennon as often. I remember where I was when I heard he'd been shot – I was at home in Switzerland.

One of my great regrets is that I never saw the Fab Four in concert. George used to describe the life of the Beatles at that time as like being on a rocket ship, where you forget where you've been and who you've met because you're always on the road. I could relate to that totally.

But George and his private renditions made up for missing the Beatles on stage. I remember driving to Dijon with him in 1979, in a Ford Fiesta, to see the French Grand Prix. That was the one where Villeneuve and Arnoux had a fantastic battle, and I don't know if I'd ever seen George so excited. We got back home to Switzerland that evening. Helen had prepared a barbecue, and my son Paul brought his guitar. He'd taken the thing up purely because of George, who taught him how to play. Paul is actually a very good guitarist now. George took Paul's guitar and started to run through all the great Beatles hits. He played Hey Jude, Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds and Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, which is my favourite, and many other classics. And he explained what the lyrics meant to each member of the band, in between verses. What a privilege that was.

I was also thrilled to appear in one of George's music videos. He'd written a song inspired by F1 called Faster, and got me to drive a Daimler in the video while he strummed his guitar in the back. I wore a white chauffeur's hat with a tartan band – the same style as my old racing helmet. It would have made a wonderful souvenir, but I complained at the time that the hat was too small, so the props department took it back!

GABRIELE POLCARI
PHYSIO RENAULT



LOVE / HATE

1. LASAGNE
Hey, I'm Italian. I make sure it has four or five levels and has not only cream but mozzarella too, and add ham as well as beef, plus parmesan on top.

2. WOMEN
Hey, I'm Italian. Spanish or Italian women are best.

3. MUSIC
When I was at university I sang and played guitar in a band. We used to play quite hard rock like Metallica . Now I'm into slightly softer stuff like Led Zeppelin.

4. DOWNHILL SKIING
My mother is from the Italian Alps and gave me my first skis when I was four years old.

5. TRAVELLING
Before I started this job I'd never been out of Europe. My favourite places are now Australia, Malaysia and Japan. Off the F1 map, the country I'd most like to visit is Mexico.

1. BROCCOLI
And cauliflower too. You may say broccoli doesn't have a smell, but I swear it does when you cook it.

2. QUEUES
I hate them. If I can jump a queue, I will.

3. BUREAUCRATS
People who use their position to make your life as difficult as possible, and take some sort of pleasure from it. They are the worst kind of sadists.

4. INTOLERANCE
I really hate all forms of this. And if it's racism it's even worse.

5. CLEANING THE OVEN
I don't mind cleaning the toilet, that's okay, but for some strange reason cleaning the oven and grill is the biggest pain of all.

ILLUSTRATION: JAMES TAYLOR. PHOTOGRAPHY: CRISPIN THRUSTON

LUCKY NUMBERS

STEVE RIDER

ITV's anchorman is one of Britain's most experienced sports presenters. He knows about dykes, and once saw a man nearly drown in battery acid. Just don't let him near your urine sample…

01

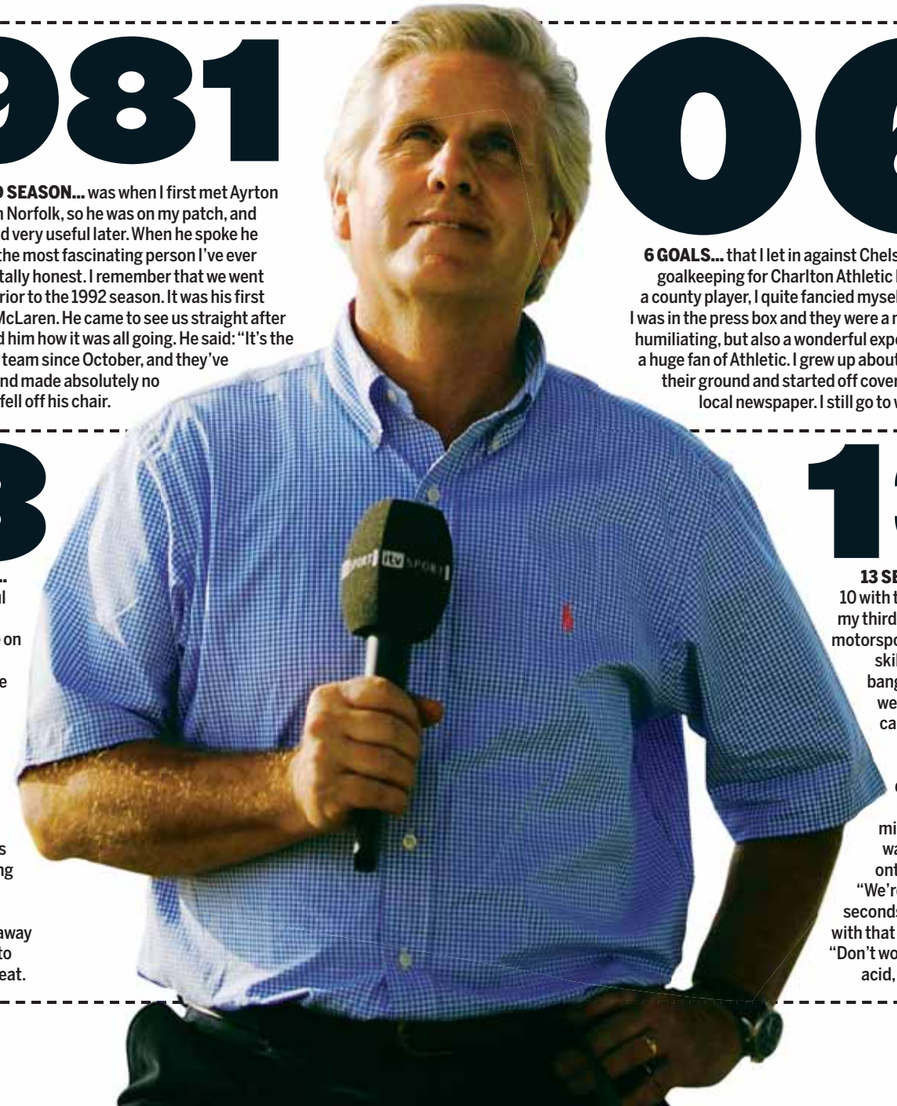
1 DYKE-VAULT... during my early days at Anglia Television in the UK. It was held at the Peterborough Fens [an area of marshland]. The aim was to plant your pole and make it over to the other side of the dyke [levee] without ending up in the mud. No-one ever made it. I also did the 1977 National Pike Fishing Championship, and that was a particularly difficult show, as nobody caught anything.

550

550 EDITIONS OF GRANDSTAND... which was the BBC's main sports show. I was very sorry to see it end. In addition, I've covered four entirely different world cups – I think I'm the only presenter to do the Cricket, Football, Rugby Union and Rugby League World Cups. There were also 50 major golf championships over the course of 20-odd years, including 23 Masters. I've probably done 200 golf tournaments altogether.

1981

1981 FORMULA FORD SEASON... was when I first met Ayrton Senna. He was living in Norfolk, so he was on my patch, and the relationship proved very useful later. When he spoke he was simply riveting – the most fascinating person I've ever interviewed – and brutally honest. I remember that we went to see him at Estoril, prior to the 1992 season. It was his first afternoon in the new McLaren. He came to see us straight after his debrief, and I asked him how it was all going. He said: "It's the first time I've seen my team since October, and they've been working hard... and made absolutely no progress." Jo Ramirez fell off his chair.



06

6 GOALS... that I let in against Chelsea in 1968. I was goalkeeping for Charlton Athletic Football Club. As a county player, I quite fancied myself. But the fact is, I was in the press box and they were a man short. It was humiliating, but also a wonderful experience. I remain a huge fan of Athletic. I grew up about half a mile from their ground and started off covering them for the local newspaper. I still go to watch them now.

13

13 OLYMPIC GAMES... one of which was Seoul 1988. I opened the coverage, and we were on autocue. "Welcome to our breakfast coverage from Seoul," I said live to camera, "where the big news this morning is that Ben Johnson's urine sample tasted positive." The most exciting sporting moment I've covered is Steve Redgrave winning his fifth gold medal in Sydney 2000 when I was lakeside. I came away enormously satisfied to have had a front-row seat.

13

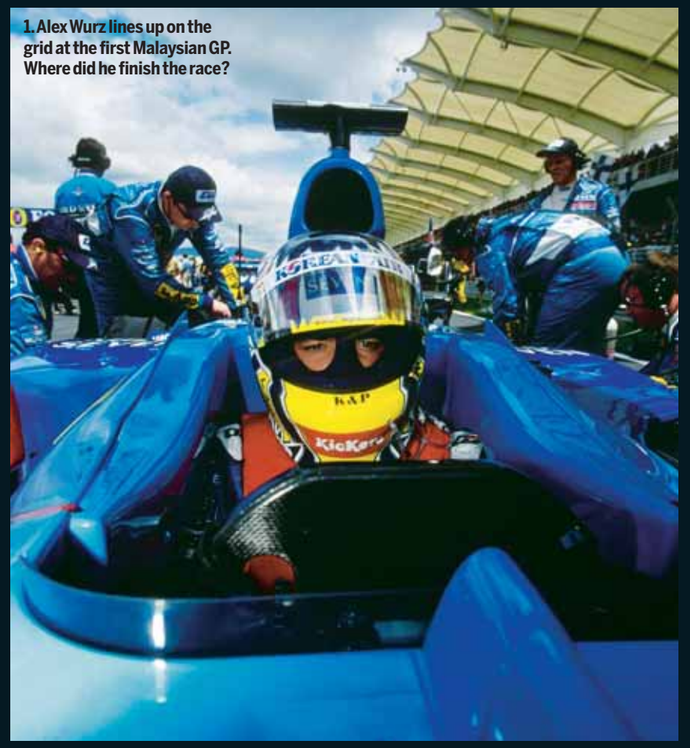
13 SEASONS OF F1... 10 with the BBC and now my third with ITV. But my motorsport broadcasting skills were honed in banger racing. Once, we rushed over to a car that had rolled. The driver was hanging upside down inside, and I passed him the microphone. There was water pouring onto his face. I said, "We're going live in 30 seconds, but are you OK with that water?" He said, "Don't worry – it's battery acid, but I'll be fine..."

PHOTOGRAPHY: CRISPIN THRUSTON, SUTTON IMAGES

Hot Topic

How many Malaysia moments can you remember?

1. Alex Wurz lines up on the grid at the first Malaysian GP. Where did he finish the race?



2. Who is driving the Arrows and in what year?



3. Nick Heidfeld gets some refreshment in 2002. Where did he finish in that year's race??



4. Who is this in 2000? And who did he race for in Malaysia the following year?



5. What are the BAR team celebrating in 2004?



ANSWERS: 1. EIGHTH; 2. ENRIQUE BERNOLDI IN 2001; 3. FIFTH; 4. GASTON MAZZACANE IN A MINARDI – IN 2001, HE DROVE A PROST; 5. JENSON BUTTON'S FIRST EVER PODIUM FINISH (THIRD PLACE).

THE RED BULLETIN

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BID FOR LIFE!

Spinal-injury charity Wings for Life have teamed up with auction site eBay to give lucky bidders the chance to own a piece of sporting history and help fund vital research.

Athletes and other sporting stars across the Red Bull spectrum have donated personal sporting memorabilia to the Wings for Life charity auction, March 13–30, and dozens of unique items are still up for grabs. The Red Bull "Faces for Charity" F1 car that David Coulthard raced in the 2007 British GP at Silverstone is the auction's centrepiece. Bidding started on March 13, and keen F1 collectors have until 0230 MST Sunday morning (1930 CET) to place a bid.

For fans of the Red Bull Air Race World Series, what could be better than a VIP trip for two to San Diego or Detroit to meet Mike Mangold, last year's world champion, with great views of the action and hospitality in the Red Bull High Flyers' Lounge? Bidding is currently at 1,326 euros and runs until 0525 CET on March 27.

Fancy your own soccer team's chances of a stunning victory over the professionals? Until March 30 you can bid on a package offering a friendly football match against Austrian league champions FC Red Bull Salzburg to see if you and your friends can beat the best.

All of the proceeds from the auction will go towards funding research to help the 2.7 million people worldwide with spinal-cord injuries.

Visit www.wingsforlife.com/ebay until March 30, navigate to find the item you would like to bid on, then start planning on how to make space in your workshop, on your bedroom wall or in your trophy cabinet... or start training to prepare to face the Red Bull athletes you want to compete against.



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