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31 DECEMBER 2020

F1 2020 Review



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116 PAGE SPECIAL ISSUE

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TEE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Hamilton leads the many storylines of a remarkable 2020

It seems strange to be running our Formula 1 season review in the last issue of the year, but lots of things have been out of the ordinary in 2020. As Luke Smith shows on page 70, that F1 managed to get in 17 races is a testament to everyone involved.

That was the normal length of a season as recently as the early 2000s – and we'd suggest it is a more sensible number than the 23 being targeted for 2021 (p8). A less compressed schedule would be welcome.

Remarkably, the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on 13 December is not the latest a world championship event has run. The 1962 showdown in South Africa between Jim Clark and Graham Hill took place on 29 December, Hill dramatically clinching the title when the Lotus failed.

There was no such climax to the 2020 season. The Mercedes W11 was too fast for its rivals and Lewis Hamilton was too good for Valtteri Bottas. It was another remarkable campaign for Hamilton, who broke so many records and scooped the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award just before Christmas. He's the fifth F1 star to win (John Surtees won for his two-wheeled exploits), and only the third to take it twice.

There were many fine motorsport moments this year – including the first F1 victories for Pierre Gasly (p60) and Sergio Perez, who thankfully now has a confirmed drive (p6) – but I think most of us are looking forward to getting away from 2020 and into 2021. Autosport wishes you a happy and safe New Year.





Kevin Turner
Chief Editor
kevin.turner@autosport.com

NEXT WEEK
7 JANUARY 2021

Heirs to the throne
The F1 stars most likely to challenge Hamilton and Verstappen



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Motorsport Images/ Etherington, Mauger, Sutton; Red Bull

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Starring performances, here with Sakhir GP win, made Perez a catch for Red Bull

PEREZ GETS THE NOD AS RED BULL OUSTS ALBON

FORMULA 1

Red Bull has signed Sergio Perez for the 2021 Formula 1 season to replace Alexander Albon.

After months of weighing up Albon's future, Red Bull has stepped outside of its own young-driver pool for the first time in 13 years to recruit the Racing Point exile. Perez therefore joins Red Bull on an initial one-year contract to partner Max Verstappen, while Albon will serve as the team's reserve and test driver next year with a focus on development work for 2022.

"All of us wanted to see Alex succeed," said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner. "What we said was that we would give Alex the season, and not make any decisions before, to have a complete set of data. But when you look at the data, and you look at the ratio between the two drivers, it was a decision that was obviously very much driven by that. It was just impossible to ignore Sergio's performance in the Racing Point over the course of the year, and particularly in the second half of the season."

Back in September, Racing Point opted to trigger an exit clause in Perez's contract for 2021 in order to sign four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel from Ferrari. Talks with Alfa Romeo, Haas and Williams failed to result in a deal for Perez, who said he was "at peace" with the prospect of taking a sabbatical for next year before returning in 2022, for which he already had offers on the table.

Perez's performances left the paddock wondering how a driver of his calibre could be without a seat for next year. He scored a brilliant second-place finish in Turkey, and was set to finish third in Bahrain prior to an MGU-K failure with four laps to go. He then scored his maiden F1 victory at the Sakhir Grand Prix, the crowning result of his best season so far.

Perez's upswing in form coincided with Albon's struggles at Red Bull as he continually failed to match Verstappen, who scored more than double his team-mate's points tally this year. A return of just two third-place finishes compared to Verstappen's haul of two wins and nine further podiums left Albon in a precarious position, prompting the call to replace him.

"This year's car has been tricky," said Horner. "I think it's improved significantly throughout the year, particularly in the last third of the year. But, again, it's what you make of it, isn't it? The gap between Alex and Max has largely remained consistent from Austria to certainly Bahrain 2. He's a great racer, he's an absolute gentleman within the team. He's very popular within a team because he's such a nice guy. That's what's made this decision harder. But when you look at the data and you trust the facts opposed to emotion, Sergio is the logical choice."

Albon was officially informed of the decision in a meeting with Horner just hours before the official announcement was made, by which time reports had already leaked out in international media.

"I can't lie, it hurts," Albon wrote on Instagram. "I gave it everything out there, but it wasn't quite enough. I want to say a huge thank you to all of you that supported me throughout this year. With all the different opinions out there, I always had you guys to push me through it. I'm not giving up, I've poured my life into this and I won't let it stop here. I have more to give and my focus is getting back for 2022."





Verstappen said Albon was "a great guy" and was pleased that he will remain part of the team, but hoped that Perez could help Red Bull take the fight to Mercedes more often. "We'll have a second car which is capable of being up there as well the whole race and trying to put a bit of pressure [on]," said Verstappen. "Most of the time, Mercedes try to go for an extra stop or whatever, and then I'm in more difficulties, because most of the time when we were quite competitive this year, I was the only car trying to beat them.

"I just hope that Checo will be the one to first of all push the whole team forward, but also keep me on my toes, which is always nice. To have a team-mate pushing you, it's exciting."

Red Bull had made clear weeks before the decision that, unlike Daniil Kvyat and Pierre Gasly, Albon would not be able to return to its junior team, AlphaTauri, for 2021 due to the signing of F2 star Yuki Tsunoda (above). The confirmation of the Japanese means an exit for Kvyat from AlphaTauri and the Red Bull programme, with the Russian likely to now take a year out of racing before working on an F1 return for 2022.

LUKE SMITH

P19 F1 SEASON REVIEW



Alonso beats the youths in Abu Dhabi running

FORMULA 1

Fernando Alonso set the pace for Renault in the final Formula 1 running of the season when he topped the times in the 'young' driver test at Yas Marina.

After controversy surrounding his inclusion in the test following a late rule change by the FIA, Alonso finished 0.262 seconds clear of Mercedes Formula E driver Nyck de Vries. The Spaniard's time was faster than Renault's 2020 F1 race drivers Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon managed during qualifying for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix a few days earlier.

De Vries took second for Mercedes in his maiden F1 test, with his FE team-mate Stoffel Vandoorne ending the day third with Merc upon his return to official F1 action.

AlphaTauri new boy Yuki Tsunoda completed more than two race distances to continue his preparation for his rookie F1 season, while Juri Vips and Robert Shwartzman made their first appearances for Red Bull and Ferrari respectively.

Callum Ilott finished the day eighth for Alfa Romeo, and will now become Ferrari's test driver for 2021 after finishing as runner-up to Mick Schumacher in Formula 2 this year.

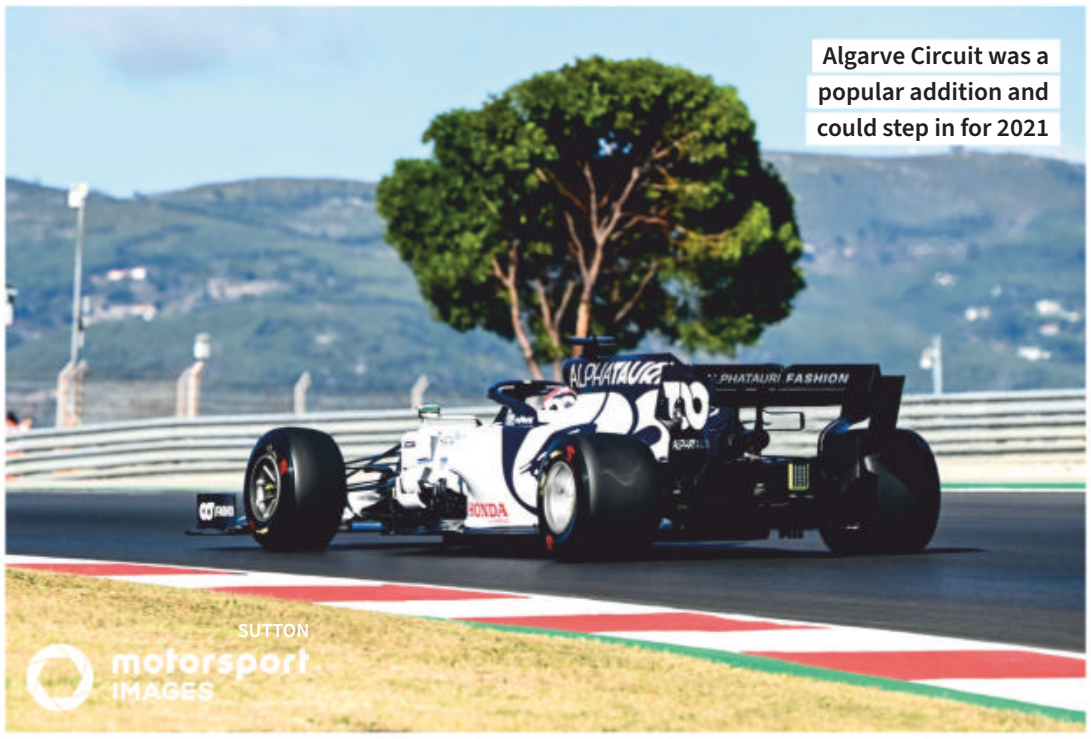
Schumacher propped up the times for Haas after focusing on race simulations throughout the day, racking up 125 laps.

LUKE SMITH

YAS MARINA TIMES

POS	DRIVER (CAR)	TIME
1	**Fernando Alonso** (Renault)	1m36.333s
2	**Nyck de Vries** (Mercedes)	1m36.595s
3	**Stoffel Vandoorne** (Mercedes)	1m36.840s
4	**Robert Kubica** (Alfa Romeo)	1m37.446s
5	**Yuki Tsunoda** (AlphaTauri)	1m37.557s
6	**Juri Vips** (Red Bull)	1m37.770s
7	**Antonio Fuoco** (Ferrari)	1m37.817s
8	**Callum Ilott** (Alfa Romeo)	1m37.826s
9	**Guanyu Zhou** (Renault)	1m37.902s
10	**Jack Aitken** (Williams)	1m38.153s
11	**Robert Shwartzman** (Ferrari)	1m38.157s
12	**Sebastien Buemi** (Red Bull)	1m38.284s
13	**Marino Sato** (AlphaTauri)	1m38.495s
14	**Roy Nissany** (Williams)	1m39.800s
15	**Mick Schumacher** (Haas)	1m39.947s





Algarve Circuit was a popular addition and could step in for 2021

FIA reveals 23-race F1 calendar, plus reserves

FORMULA 1

The FIA World Motor Sport Council has approved a 23-race calendar for the 2021 Formula 1 season, with Vietnam's empty April slot still remaining blank.

F1 unveiled its provisional calendar for next season in November, listing a record-breaking 23 races as it bids to return to a more regular schedule following the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic through 2020. A new grand prix in Saudi Arabia was added to the calendar, with a night race in Jeddah listed as the penultimate race of the season, while a gap was left in April following the scrapping of the planned race in Vietnam.

The new season will start in Australia on 21 March, and finish on 5 December with the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The British Grand Prix will be a standalone event on 18 July, returning to its traditional date after an August slot in 2020.

The schedule features two triple-headers, compacting a run of six races into seven weeks following the summer break. In the first, the Dutch Grand Prix has moved from its originally planned spring date in 2020 to an autumn slot between races at Spa and Monza. Russia, Singapore and Japan form the second triple-header, while the US and Mexico return to their traditional pairing.

Interlagos will remain on the F1 calendar next year. The Brazilian race will now be known as the Sao Paulo Grand Prix and will be run on 14 November after a new five-year contract was confirmed by F1.

The calendar was approved with the 25 April slot that was vacated by Vietnam still to be confirmed, but it is understood that one of the tracks used this year would fill the gap. Imola, the Algarve Circuit and Mugello are understood to be possible options to mark the beginning of the European season, having all joined the calendar for 2020 in place of events cancelled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

LUKE SMITH

2021 FORMULA 1 CALENDAR

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	**Melbourne** (AUS)	21 March
2	**Sakhir** (BHR)	28 March
3	**Shanghai** (CHN)	11 April
4	**TBC**	25 April
5	**Barcelona** (ESP)	9 May
6	**Monte Carlo** (MCO)	23 May
7	**Baku** (AZE)	6 June
8	**Montreal** (CAN)	13 June
9	**Paul Ricard** (FRA)	27 June
10	**Red Bull Ring** (AUT)	4 July
11	**Silverstone** (GBR)	18 July
12	**Hungaroring** (HUN)	1 August
13	**Spa** (BEL)	29 August
14	**Zandvoort** (NLD)	5 September
15	**Monza** (ITA)	12 September
16	**Sochi** (RUS)	26 September
17	**Marina Bay** (SGP)	3 October
18	**Suzuka** (JPN)	10 October
19	**Austin** (USA)	24 October
20	**Mexico City** (MEX)	31 October
21	**Interlagos** (BRA)	14 November
22	**Jeddah** (SAU)	28 November
23	**Yas Marina** (ARE)	5 December

Fernley takes single-seat role

FIA

Ex-Force India Formula 1 deputy team principal Bob Fernley has become the new president of the FIA Single Seater Commission. He replaces Stefano Domenicali, who will start his new job as the chairman and CEO of the F1 organisation next month.

Fernley was involved with the Ensign F1 team and Indycar racing in the 1980s before becoming a key player at Force India after his close friend Vijay Mallya bought the then-Spyker team at the end of 2007. He left in the summer of 2018 after the team went into administration and was reborn under the Racing Point name. In 2019 he had a brief spell as the head of McLaren's Indy 500 programme, which ended in frustration when Fernando Alonso failed to qualify.

Fernley becomes the fourth president of the Commission, after the late Barry Bland, Gerhard Berger and Domenicali. "I think the rebel has finally come into the establishment!" he told Autosport. "It'll take me a few months to get my feet under the table as you can imagine. But, once we're under way with it, hopefully we can continue the good work that they've done, and maybe progress it on a little bit."

Much of the planned work of the Commission has already been done in consolidating the single-seater ladder into a progression through F4, F3 and F2. But Fernley says there are still challenges ahead, particularly cost control.

"That's something I was very keen on, even at Force India," he said. "I see us still continuing that process to make sure we can get it as affordable as possible so as many people can take part as they can. It's about understanding where the categories are today because, obviously, I'm coming in new, and when people come in new you always have a different take on things, and you can have a look with new eyes, which is not a bad thing."

ADAM COOPER



Wolff increases Mercedes share

FORMULA 1



Toto Wolff will remain as team principal of the Mercedes Formula 1 squad for at least three more years as part of a deal in which British chemicals giant INEOS has bought a one-third stake in the operation.

INEOS — owned by Britain's richest man, Sir Jim Ratcliffe — became a principal backer of the Mercedes F1 team back in February, and had been in talks about taking a shareholding for several months. While the company takes a one-third share, Wolff's own shareholding increases from 30% to 33%. Mercedes parent company Daimler, which formerly held a 60% stake in the squad, will continue to own the remaining third.

"When we entered Formula 1 earlier this year, we chose to do so with a Mercedes team that had set new benchmarks, and since then we have been in discussions about how we could increase our involvement," said Ratcliffe. "This is a unique opportunity to make a financial investment in a team at the very top of its game, but which still has rich potential to grow in the future."

Wolff had been publicly weighing up whether to continue as Mercedes team principal, saying the role was "taking its toll" after eight years. But the new agreement not only means he remains, but it gives him the scope to step into an executive role in the future. "I haven't committed to a further three years, I have committed for life," he said. "We are three shareholders that own the company today, and irrespective of my own role, I could be team principal, CEO, executive chairman, at any time. But Mercedes is what I do."

Mercedes' seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton said he was "really proud and grateful" to see Wolff continue. "He's such an important leading figure within this team, and the success that we have achieved would not have been possible without him," he said. "He is such a great figurehead, and I think that the team is just better for it, to have that longevity, and it's great to see that commitment from Mercedes."

The announcement leaves only Hamilton's contract still to be finalised for 2021, but he said before Christmas that he and Wolff "plan to do so over the coming days".

LUKE SMITH


ANDRE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Frank Williams stable in hospital

FORMULA 1

Sir Frank Williams was in a stable condition as we went to press after being admitted to hospital before Christmas.

In September, following its sale, Williams relinquished his role as principal of the team he founded, bringing to an end more than 40 years in F1.

The Williams family announced that Sir Frank, 78, had been admitted to hospital, but that his "medical condition is a private matter, and therefore the family will not be releasing any further details at this time. We ask for you to respect the family's privacy."

The Williams team, meanwhile, has a new CEO in the form of ex-Volkswagen Motorsport chief and McLaren F1 CEO Jost Capito. The German headed up VW's dominant rally team before joining McLaren, but was ousted after just five months in the role.

Williams chairman Matthew Savage said Capito "understands the Williams heritage and will work well with the team in pursuit of our objective to return to the front of the grid". Simon Roberts becomes team principal after serving on an interim basis.

LUKE SMITH



Aston Martin pulls out of WEC for 2021



WEC

Aston Martin has axed its factory assault on the World Endurance Championship for next season and will defend neither its GTE Pro titles nor its Le Mans 24 Hours crown.

A manufacturer ever-present in GTE Pro since the rebirth of the WEC in 2012, Aston has opted to "switch the strategic focus of its Vantage GT motorsport programme to concentrate on customer operations", according to its statement. The decision to call time on the factory race programme with Prodrive follows the takeover of the British manufacturer by Formula 1 team boss Lawrence Stroll and the rebranding of his Racing Point squad as Aston Martin.

Aston stated that its success in the 2019-20 WEC meant it had "achieved every target" set for the second-generation Vantage GTE. It said that from 2021 it will be "targeting blue-riband endurance events with partner teams" in series such as the Intercontinental GT Challenge and the GT World Challenge Europe.

It has also been announced that Aston has reached "a new and revised" multi-year deal with Prodrive to continue manufacturing and selling its range of front-engined GT cars, which include Vantages for the GTE, GT3 and GT4 categories.

Aston Martin Racing president David King said: "This year has been one of unprecedented success for Vantage in international motorsport. At all levels, from GTE, through GT3 to the entry-level GT4, we have experienced significant championship success. But there is more to come from [the] Vantage, which is why we have concluded that now is the time for us to shift the weight of factory support to our partners as we go in pursuit of success in the most important events in GT racing."

Aston is still likely to be represented in the WEC in the GTE Am class. The TF Sport squad is working on several options to remain in the series, potentially with two cars, although Salih Yoluc is set to switch to LMP2 with the team, most likely in the European Le Mans Series.

GARY WATKINS

Corvette mastermind Fehan stands down



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

LE MANS/IMSA

Doug Fehan is handing over the reins of Corvette Racing after nearly a quarter of a century. The programme manager of Chevrolet's factory team since it arrived in the GT battleground in 1999 oversaw eight class victories at the Le Mans 24 Hours and 12 North American drivers' titles in 22 years.

The American was the "glue" that held the General Motors programme together over a such a sustained period, according to long-time Corvette driver Oliver Gavin.

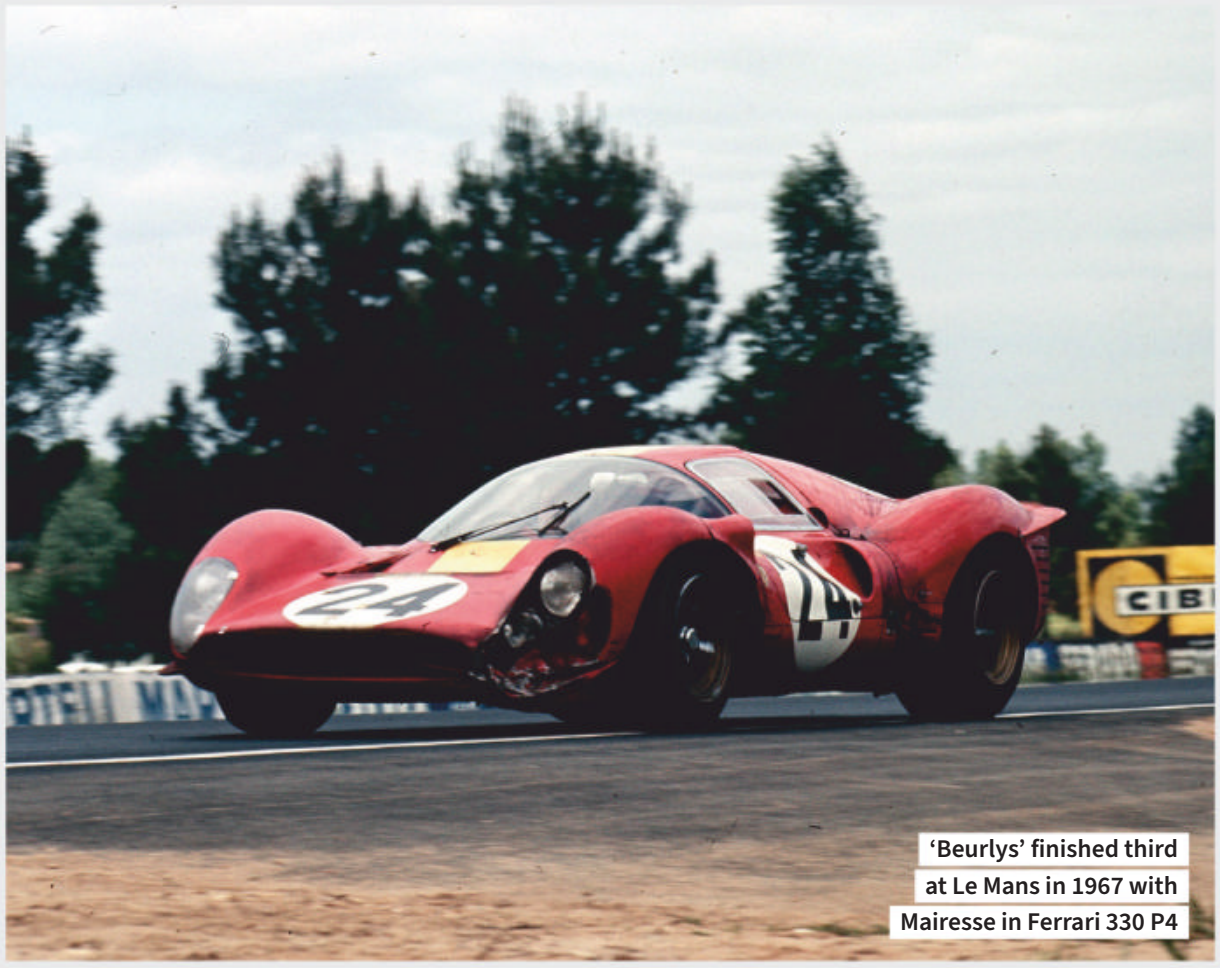
"Doug was so important in so much at Corvette Racing," said the Brit. "He made the big decisions on the choices of driver and the pairings, but he also played a big role in the relationships with the higher-ups at GM.

"He never pulled his punches. I remember when I was still fairly young and starting to throw my weight around, he took me to one side and told me unequivocally how it was going to be. He knocked me down a peg or two."

Arguably Fehan's greatest achievement was keeping Chevrolet racing after GM went into chapter 11 administration during the economic downturn of 2008-09. "Doug, as far as I could see, had a massively important role in keeping it all going," added Gavin.

A replacement for Fehan has yet to be announced.

GARY WATKINS



'Beurlys' finished third at Le Mans in 1967 with Mairesse in Ferrari 330 P4

Jean 'Beurlys' Blaton 1929-2020

OBITUARY

Jean Blaton, who has died aged 91, was once described as the "quintessential gentleman driver". Yet that description doesn't do justice to a career at the Le Mans 24 Hours that spanned 14 starts, five overall podiums and four class wins.

The words were uttered by Jacques Swaters, boss of the Ecurie Francorchamps and Equipe Nationale Belge teams for which Blaton drove in 10 of his Le Mans participations. The partnership yielded all five of his podiums aboard a variety of Ferraris, including the 250 GTO he took to second place in 1963 alongside Gerard Langlois van Ophem.

Blaton, who raced under the 'Jean Beurlys' pseudonym, was born into a wealthy family involved in construction and was able to indulge his passion for fast cars. He became a customer of Swaters's Garage Francorchamps, the Ferrari importer for the Benelux countries.

A Le Mans debut in 1958 with Equipe Nationale Belge aboard a Ferrari 250 TR shared with Alain de Changy was followed by a first podium and class victory with 'Elde', real name Leon Dernier, the following year. His second place in 1963 was sandwiched by a further two thirds in 1962 and 1965. A final podium came in 1967 driving a 330 P4 with Willy Mairesse.

There was also a victory for Blaton in the Coupes de Paris at the Montlhery circuit in 1960 driving a 250 GT. He finished second and third respectively in the 1958 and 1965 editions of the Reims 12 Hours, both times sharing with Mairesse.

Blaton bought a Ford GT40 to race at Le Mans in 1968, the car entered by Belgian Claude Dubois. After a seven-year hiatus from the French enduro, he returned in 1975 driving a self-entered Porsche 911 Carrera RSR in which he finished sixth, sharing with Britons Nick Faure and John Cooper. He fielded a Porsche 934 and a Ferrari 512BB in his final three Le Mans starts in 1976, 1978 and 1979.

GARY WATKINS

IN THE HEADLINES

HAMILTON'S BBC AWARD

Formula 1 world champion Lewis Hamilton was named BBC Sports Personality of the Year on 20 December, the second time he has won the accolade. Hamilton, who also triumphed in 2014, has been runner-up four times in the public poll, but this time beat footballer Jordan Henderson, jockey Hollie Doyle, snooker legend Ronnie O'Sullivan, cricketer Stuart Broad and boxer Tyson Fury.

BUTTON ENTERS THE DTM

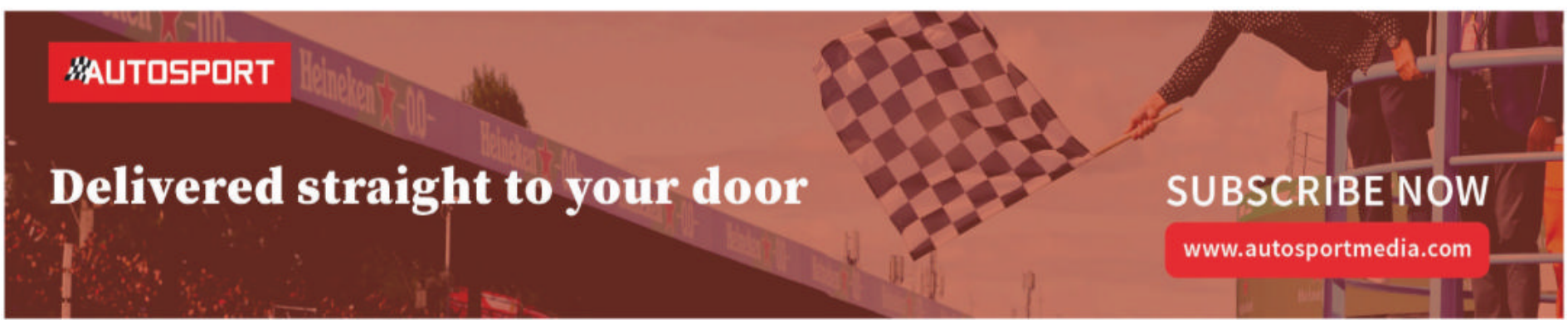
The new GT3 era of the DTM continues to gain traction, with Jenson Button's GT team and Audi loyalist Abt Sportsline the latest to commit for 2021. Jenson Team Rocket will join the fray using the McLaren 720S, although the number of cars it will enter is unknown. "I've always loved DTM and it's exciting to see the series evolve into this new chapter with GT3," said Button. "I've known Gerhard [Berger, DTM boss] for a long time and I'm sure he will ensure they put on a great show!" Abt, ever-present in the modern DTM, will run a pair of Audi R8 LMS cars.

LECLERC JR GETS F3 SEAT

Formula Regional European Championship runner-up Arthur Leclerc, the younger brother of Ferrari F1 star Charles, will graduate to the FIA Formula 3 Championship in 2021 with Prema Racing, as predicted by Autosport. Leclerc, a Ferrari protege himself. also competed with Prema in FRegional. Another F3 recruit for 2021 is Matteo Nannini. The nephew of Alessandro Nannini will switch from Jenzer Motorsport to HWA Racelab for his second season.

DALY NAILS CARPENTER RIDE

Conor Daly will remain with Ed Carpenter Racing for the road and street-course IndyCar rounds next season, plus the Indy 500. As usual, team boss Carpenter will undergo and oval-only schedule.



IN THE HEADLINES

DOUBLE-HEADERS FOR WTCR

The World Touring Car Cup will switch from triple to double-headers in 2021, delaying a move that was scheduled for 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic forced organisers to cram in as many races to as few weekends as possible. Race two of each event will remain a reversed-grid counter. An eight-round schedule has been drawn up, spearheaded by 'glamour' races at the Nurburgring Nordschleife, Vila Real and Macau.

ZENDELI INTO F2 WITH MP

FIA Formula 3 Championship race winner Lirim Zendeli is to move up to Formula 2 next season. As expected, the German has joined MP Motorsport after taking part in the post-season Bahrain test with the team.

CARLIN BACK UP IN LIGHTS

British single-seater leviathan Carlin is returning to the Indy Lights ranks in 2021, after an absence of three years. The team has recruited Tasmanian FIA F3 frontrunner Alex Peroni as its first driver. Carlin will also serve as the top rung of Jay Howard Driver Development scheme, which has been highly successful in US junior ranks in recent seasons.

MALONEY RACES AT R-ACE

Zane Maloney, the Barbadian who won the 2019 British F4 title, has joined R-ace GP for next season's Formula Regional by Alpine series. Maloney makes the move from Carlin, where he raced in F4 and this year in Euroformula Open.

F1 COMPETITOR'S F3 CAMEO

Ex-F1 backmarker Sakon Yamamoto made a surprise return to F3-level competition last weekend in the Super Formula Lights finale at Fuji – as did ex-F1 test driver and Formula Nippon champion Satoshi Motoyama. Each appeared in Dallara-Spiess machinery run by B-Max, with both veterans taking a best result of seventh from the 12-car field. Toyota protege Ritomo Miyata clinched the title.

LEXUS OUT OF EURO GT3

Lexus has ended factory support of its RC F GT3 programme in Europe, where it was represented this year in the GT World Challenge Europe by Tech 1 Racing. Independently funded teams could continue with the car, which Lexus will still support in Super GT and the IMSA SportsCar series.



Ingram leaves Speedworks

BTCC

The British Touring Car Championship's longest-running partnership between a driver and a team not set up by his own family is at an end. Tom Ingram, 16 times a race winner with Toyotas run by Speedworks Motorsport, and with four consecutive championship top-six positions under his belt, is on the move after seven seasons with the squad.

Commercial considerations are at the root of the split, which comes as Speedworks upgrades from a single-car team to two Corollas for 2021.

Speedworks boss Christian Dick (below) told Autosport: "When Tom joined us we hadn't achieved a great deal, and our partnership has been really strong. There's no animosity, no fallout. The team's commitments to our commercial partners are growing, and so are Tom's with his, and it's been increasingly difficult to satisfy all their needs. From our side we're going to go to two cars, and the intention is that it looks uniform with Toyota Gazoo Racing."



Although neither Speedworks nor Ingram wanted to comment about the 2020-21 'silly season', the BTCC grapevine insists that Rory Butcher will move from the Motorbase Performance Ford team to lead the Speedworks line-up, while Ingram will take his personal backing from Ginsters and Hansford Sensors to spearhead the four-car Excelr8 Motorsport Hyundai attack.

"It's the norm for drivers to switch left, right and centre, so ours is a really special story of the BTCC," said Ingram of his Speedworks relationship. "It's the story of a driver and team moving forward together. I know it sounds like a cliche, but we could never have realised what a journey we'd go on. Christian and I will still be friends.

"But we have to look after our interests, and every so often you get to a crossroads where you're after the same thing from a branding point of view."

The BTCC silly season is set to explode into life over the new year, although it appears that reigning champion Ash Sutton will stay put in the Laser Tools Racing Infiniti line-up. LTR is forming a technical partnership with Team Hard and, using the two TBL entrants' licences of Hard regular Carl Boardley, will expand from two to three Infinitis in 2021, with Hard running four of its new Cupra Leons.

BTCC returnees Aron Taylor-Smith and Glynn Geddie were announced in the run-up to Christmas as joining Jack Goff in the Hard line-up. Another driver confirmed was Jack Butel at Excelr8.

MARCUS SIMMONS



Yamamoto (nearest camera) battles Hirakawa. Winning this fight was key to title

ISHIHARA

Yamamoto snatches third SF title at the last gasp

SUPER FORMULA

Naoki Yamamoto has become a three-time Super Formula champion after edging out title rival Ryo Hirakawa in a tense battle during the season finale at Fuji Speedway the weekend before Christmas.

Fifth place, one spot ahead of Hirakawa, was enough for Dandelion Racing Honda man Yamamoto to become the first driver to win the Super Formula and Super GT titles in the same year for a second time, following his first 'double' in 2018.

The race win went to Sho Tsuboi. The Toyota-powered Inging racer outdragged poleman Tomoki Nojiri to Turn 1 at the start and never looked back, becoming the only repeat race winner of the season.

Outside title contender Nojiri's bid had already taken a knock with a slow pitstop before the Team Mugen driver's hopes were extinguished when he suffered a front-right puncture while running a net third.

Nick Cassidy started from the back of the grid after being pinged for track limits in qualifying, and charged up to fourth for TOM'S in his final Super Formula outing, after leaving his mandatory pitstop late.

As well as Formula E-bound Cassidy, it's understood that Hiroaki Ishiura will not be back in Super Formula next season. The two-time champion (2015, 2017) did not drive for his usual Inging team in the post-season test that followed the Fuji race.

Yamamoto made a surprise switch to Nakajima Racing for the so-called 'rookie test', in which Super Formula Lights regulars Ritomo Miyata, Sena Sakaguchi and Shunsuke Kohno all participated at the wheel of Toyota-powered cars. Enaam Ahmed, on the sidelines since splitting with Carlin in FIA F3 earlier this year, was in action for B-Max Racing as he weighs up a return to the Japanese scene for 2021.

JAMIE KLEIN

Latvala replaces Makinen at helm of Toyota



McKLEIN

WRC

Former World Rally Championship runner-up Jari-Matti Latvala has become team principal of the Toyota Gazoo Racing squad.

With Tommi Makinen stepping down as team boss at the end of the 2020 season to become Toyota's motorsport advisor, Latvala has been selected by Toyota president Akio Toyoda to replace his fellow Finn.

Latvala will "bring a driver's perspective" to its management team of project director Yuichiro Haruna, sporting director Kaj Lindstrom and technical director Tom Fowler.

Toyota also confirmed an unchanged driver line-up of seven-time WRC champion Sebastien Ogier, 2020 runner-up Elfyn Evans and rising star Kalle Rovanpera.

"I am really honoured to be taking on this position with the team, and by the trust that Akio Toyoda has shown in me," said Latvala.

"I'm really excited to continue the work he started together with Tommi, having been a part of this team from the beginning as a driver.

"I want to use what I have learned as a driver and work together with the directors to make this team as successful as possible."

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Well done F1, but what next?

Organisers worked wonders to make the 2020 F1 season happen in a year of crisis. But their event management skills look certain to be tested once again in the new year

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

The 2020 Australian Grand Prix was cancelled on 13 March. Nine months later, on 13 December, the season concluded in Abu Dhabi. In between, Formula 1 reorganised an entire calendar, with only nine races from the original keeping their places and just three taking place on their pre-COVID assigned dates.

As F1's regulator, the FIA swung into action "really at the start of April", F1 race director Michael Masi tells Autosport, to work on a plan to get motorsport going again. It took World Health Organisation guidelines, as well as the advice of epidemiologists and other specialists (safety and risk management regarding sporting events), plus an in-house team of seven to eight people to work on establishing protocols that would enable an F1 season to take place. This team worked in parallel with F1's own organisational team, as well as dedicated legal and medical experts.

"Our group worked almost day and night for some weeks to establish this protocol," explains FIA operations director Bruno Famin, with most of the work completed through May and June when F1 concentrated on reorganising the first part of its schedule.

From 19 June, the FIA's COVID-19 Code of Conduct was established, with its 'Return to Motor Sport' guidelines released a week later. The protocols established for F1 were adapted for other series and were enshrined in regulation by the FIA's new Appendix S for the International Sporting Code.

"We are working towards having a 'normal' year, but there are elements out of our control"

F1 personnel faced a regime of regular testing after undergoing a pre-event test (these were the only ones the FIA did not pay for) and keeping to social distancing requirements at the venues, where the RTMS guidelines identified how to reduce personnel levels to allow this while keeping to existing safety standards.

The FIA was impressed with the cooperation it received from F1's teams, who all had their sporting managers involved in helping the governing body establish the COVID-secure protocols. But there was no chance to test the new rules before the season started, which it eventually did in early July at the Red Bull Ring.

This venue played a key role in getting F1's season going. Red Bull owning and promoting the venue in Austria, and being "quite powerful", says Famin, was fundamental. He suggests that the rules were "90%" ready, but the Austrian double-header got them firmly established, and they were transported to the other 11 countries F1 then visited. Some specific local rules were respected as additions, but the FIA protocol remained the same — apart from the requirement to get tested 24 hours after arrival at each race, which came in for October's Portuguese GP.

This followed Lance Stroll missing the Eifel GP with what was later established as COVID, but Famin says "there's no relation [or] connection with the Stroll incident".

He adds: "When we restarted in July, we were really on the lower [ebb] of the pandemic. I think we had our first positive case in Hungary — event number three. After [that] you can see in the weekly figure we had an average of let's say 10, minus two, plus two, positive cases per normal week, which is normal."

After one positive coronavirus test stopped the Melbourne race, the new system was built in such a way that Famin says F1 was "able to manage positive cases" and keep the season rolling on.

Potentially every level of motorsport was at risk thanks to the pandemic. That F1 and other championships got seasons in was remarkable. "As an industry, as a sport collectively, we should be very proud of what we've achieved," says Masi.

F1's nature means travelling. Silverstone, slightly tongue-in-cheek, offered to host 12 races this year to help the championship fulfil its lucrative broadcast contracts — but that is not F1. It has to travel, and travel has obviously been extremely difficult in 2020. Getting all the required kit transported around while countries were changing their lockdown status — particularly towards the end of the campaign — was a real challenge.

That nomadic nature is the biggest barrier to returning to 'normal' F1. We now have multiple vaccines available but, as has been all too obvious in the UK in recent weeks, the pandemic is far from over. Further and ongoing restrictions are likely.

F1 has announced a 23-race calendar for 2021 that returns to the venues that would have made up the original 2020 schedule — plus the controversial new race in Saudi Arabia and one TBC slot. The opening race is less than three months away, which is a key consideration for F1's immediate future.

The COVID protocols work. But the travel restrictions may yet impact the 2021 calendar in a big way. Suggestions that the Melbourne race is looking to implement a similarly strict biosphere to the one that worked successfully in Abu Dhabi are all well and good, but that race actually takes place within a city...

"We're working towards trying to have a 'normal year' — let's put it in inverted commas — in 2021," Masi concludes. "But there are elements that will be out of our control."

So, we can expect the unexpected once again in 2021. But the season just gone has proved there is a successful way to go racing — and it will likely be relied on for a while longer yet.



The car is a woman

That's what the laws of language dictate. So why does motor racing continue to betray half of humanity, even in this supposedly enlightened modern age?

SARA ESPOSITO

"L***'automobile è femmina"***, "the car is a woman". That's what Gabriele D'Annunzio, Italian writer and poet, wrote in a letter to Senator Agnelli back in 1920, about the Fiat 4 he had the chance to drive on one of his expeditions.

As many of you probably know, nouns in Italian (and other romance languages) have genders. They can either be masculine or feminine. At the time, there was a bit of a debate over the gender of the car; only men could drive it, men had invented it, men took care of the parts, men were the leaders on the iron horse — surely it should be a masculine noun. The French, the original inventors, were calling it a *he*.

But then this letter changed everything: "She has the grace of a woman, the agility of a woman, the charm of a woman; moreover, she possesses a virtue that is completely unknown to women: perfect obedience. But like a woman, she fights obstacles with innate ease." And then "*inclinata progreditur*" — "she moves on her own".

The first person to complete a long-distance haul in a car was a woman — Bertha Benz, less-known wife of well-known Karl Benz, who in 1888 drove just over 60 miles, from Mannheim to Pforzheim, in a Benz Patent Motorwagen No3.

If modern cars have four tyres it's thanks to Louise Sarazin, who also directed Daimler Motors after the death of her husband. Margaret Wilcox, a mechanical engineer, is to be thanked for the invention of the first car heater. Mary Anderson, an entrepreneur, for that of windscreen wipers. Florence Lawrence, an actress and car enthusiast, created the first rudimentary turn-and-stop indicators. Dorothy Levitt, journalist, author, activist and racing driver, is to be credited for the introduction of rear-view mirrors.

"As a woman who has been watching F1 for most of her life, it sucks – in fact, it f**** hurts"**

The list goes on. And yet — and yet we still think of this industry, of motorsport, as a world created by men, for men. A world where female journalists are judged by their looks — their knowledge, insight, inquisitiveness under the unfair scrutiny of doubt and sexist mistrust.

As a woman who has been watching F1 for most of her life — who, as a child, as a teen, sat every Sunday in front of the telly with her dad who kept telling her *never* to let men treat her like "those drivers" were treating the grid girls, *never* to let anyone tell her that girls couldn't be professional because they "had tits", *never* to let anyone judge her for liking "cars and boy's stuff", who still gets judged now in 2020 because "girls only watch F1 for the hot guys" — it sucks. In fact, it f****** hurts.

Granted, F1 has made huge progress in the past 20 to 10 years. I could see it, could see the change. Baby steps, but still in the right direction. First they got rid of grid girls, although not without complaints from their male audience and even participants (including drivers). Then they encouraged the teams (or was it the teams that forced the organisation to change?) to employ more women (engineers, media personnel, etc). Then it was the teams, the drivers, that started to actively promote equality with different social initiatives. Then the FIA (#WeRaceAsOne) rushes to catch up, partners with Ferrari (my favourite team, always has been, so that makes it even more special to me) for the 'Girls on Track' talent programme, and puts the W Series on the F1 calendar for eight support races in 2021. All good stuff, right? Surely women can't complain about "equality" now?

Wrong. Because as proven by recent events, all it takes is one driver being "exposed" for his misogynistic, abusive, homophobic, violent acts to go back to the "'tis a men's world" narrative, to show that when money is involved, stuff like "equality" and "respect" get flushed right down the toilet. That F1 doesn't care about the integrity of the sport — about the dignity of it, of its fans, the people who participate in it — is underlined when they give people like Nikita Mazepin a platform to promote his behaviour.

When they race in countries like Saudi Arabia.

When they investigate a man for asking for justice with a T-shirt, but not someone who openly objectifies and vilifies women on social media.

And yet I keep reading that we should just accept it. That we're "overreacting". That this is just how the world works, and F1 "has always been about selling luxury cars in places where they can afford to buy them". Nothing about it is ever going to change, so shut up about it, will you? Shut up about women in the sport, about people of colour in the sport, about human rights, about any right, really. It's all just a facade. Money is money and money moves the world.

But just like D'Annunzio did, 100 years ago, I want to write a letter. A letter to F1, to the fans, to the people in charge, about these cars I've loved all my life, I really adore.

And to them, parroting a poet, I want to say: money is money, and money moves the world — but the car is a woman, and she moves on her own. So follow *her*.

YOUR SAY

As both Russell and Perez demonstrated in Bahrain, great drivers will always shine through, take their opportunities and bring us joy with their demonstrations of talent

TOM MARTIN

Great drivers need great cars to do great things

Rather than devaluing the sport and Lewis Hamilton's achievements by putting George Russell's stunning performance in the Sakhir Grand Prix down to the car, can't we just see it for what it is: a potential champion finally giving the world a chance to show what he can do. The Mercedes is the dominant car, but it also needs a special driver. Lewis is one of the greats, but who is to say that in seasons to come we won't see Russell in the same light.

Mika Hakkinen came into McLaren after years in a poor car and he beat the great Ayrton Senna in qualifying. Was Senna suddenly reassessed and downgraded from legend status? No, Hakkinen's performance was lauded for what it was, something special. A future two-time champion taking his chance in a winning car.

Senna couldn't win the championship before he was at McLaren, Michael Schumacher needed Ferrari to step up to be able to dominate. Great drivers need great cars to do great things. Many dream of a 'level playing field', but this really wouldn't be the F1 we know. The cars and the differences between them go a long way towards creating the sport we love. The challenge for F1 is to embrace this while also allowing drivers to create a difference and sometimes produce the shock result the fans desire.

As both Russell and Sergio Perez demonstrated in Bahrain, though, great drivers will always shine through, take their opportunities and bring us joy with their demonstrations of talent. This race was a showcase for how stunning F1 can be, how the cars can drive the human narrative: one driver taking his chance to shine in one of the greatest cars the sport has known, while another who has fought with midfield machinery for so long finally had his day in the spotlight.

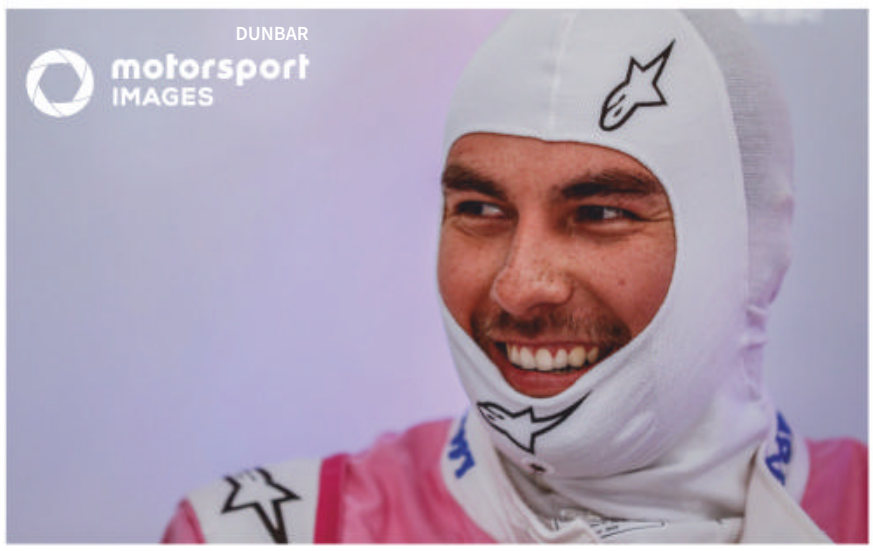
Tom Martin
Cardiff

So glad Perez is on the 2021 grid

So glad to see that Sergio Perez has got the Red Bull drive. It would have been an absolute farce if F1's newest race winner had not made it onto the 2021 grid. Hopefully, he'll have plenty of opportunities to pass Sebastian Vettel in his old car.

It is a shame that Nico Hulkenberg was not able to secure a seat, which is an indictment on the sport and not his ability. Hopefully, the supersub will get more opportunities to shine brightly enough for the decision makers to take notice.

Richard Newell
By email



Don't rest on laurels over F1 safety

The narrative following Romain Grosjean's crash in Bahrain is that there is no need for further debate about the halo. My fear is that the more vividly the halo demonstrates its unarguable effectiveness against large objects – barriers, other cars, flying wheels – the more likely it becomes that the danger from smaller objects might be forgotten.

The objects that killed Ayrton Senna and could have killed Felipe Massa would probably not have been deflected by the halo ('Halo's potential weakness', Your Say, 13 December, 2018). Even a piece of gravel made Grosjean think he had sustained a fracture at the Eifel Grand Prix.

In discussing the halo, Alex Kalinauckas (3 December) points out that "questioning anything on reasonable grounds should be allowed". I hope the halo qualifies; it is not a panacea.

Brian Simpson
Cardiff

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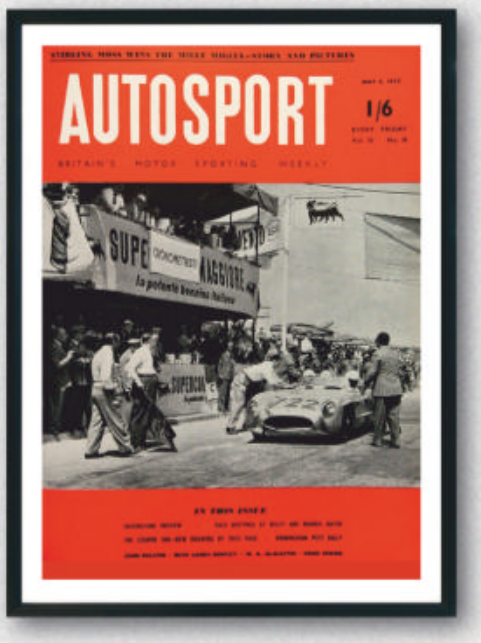
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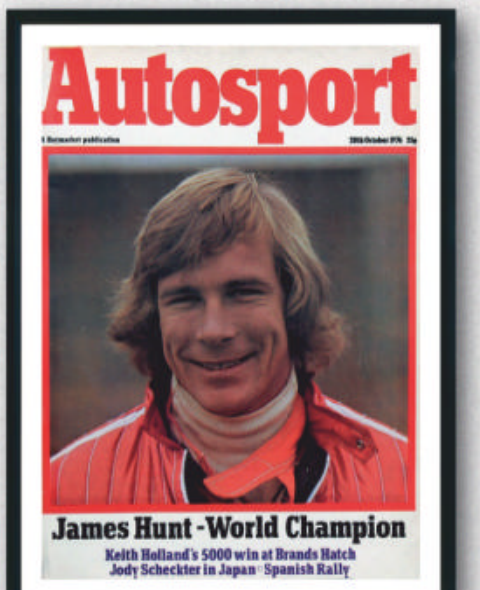
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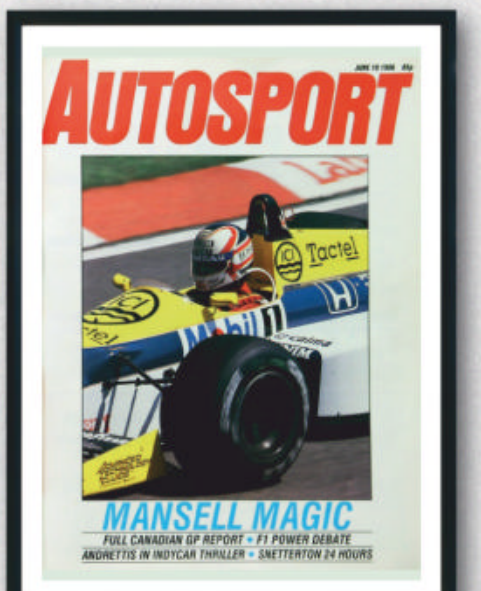
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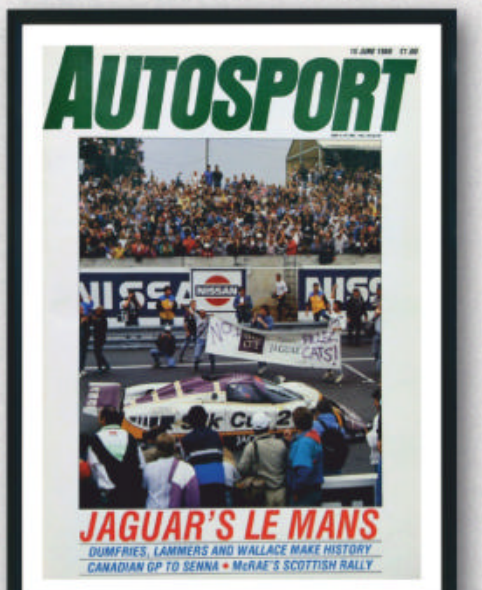
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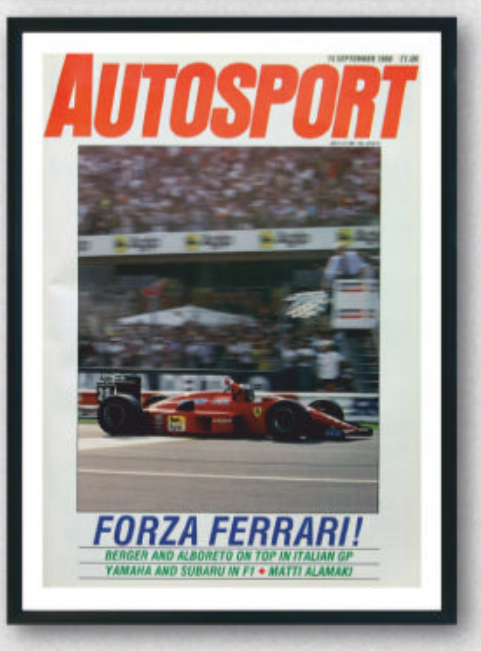
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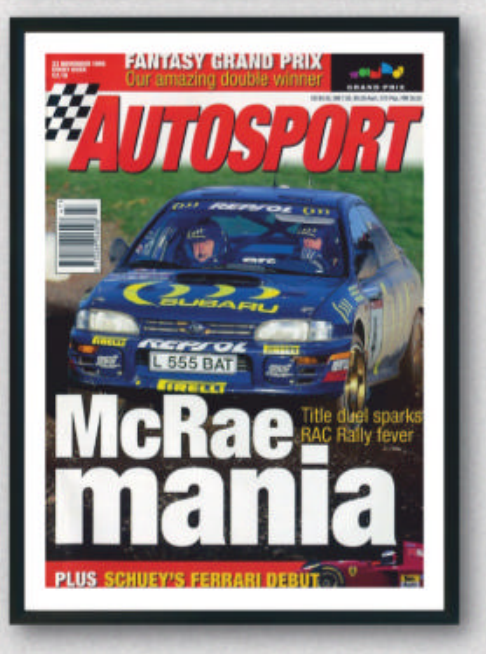














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F1 season review

2020



Overview

The factors that led to Hamilton's and Mercedes' record-breaking 2020

The delayed start to the season aided F1's all-conquering squad, the opposition's efforts fell short, and the greatest driver of his era found yet more ways to up his game

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

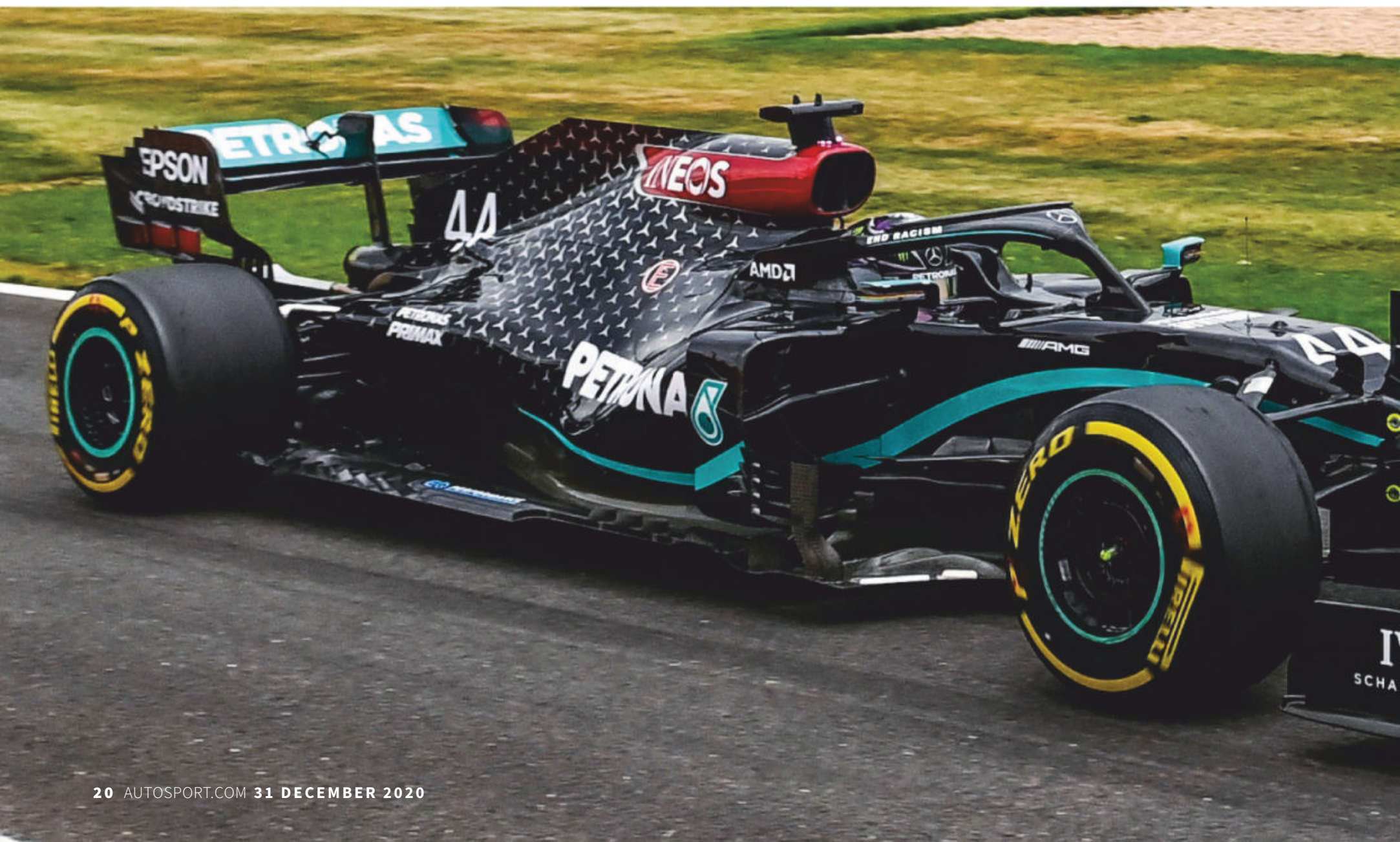
The COVID-19 pandemic changed so much of 2020. In Formula 1, it swept away the expected calendar, had the teams making incredible contributions to saving lives, and ultimately brought about a consensus that has so often been missing among them. It brought the championship to new tracks and race names, impacted the sporting rules, and had the competitors living in challenging ways.

The 2020 F1 season will forever go down as the pandemic campaign, as, we hope, future seasons return to normality given the recent vaccination breakthroughs. But its result was no different to the three before — Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes triumphed.

They did so at a canter with a car that took Mercedes away from its traditional silver colours, the W11s painted all black to promote a cause the world champion cares about deeply, and which he has been instrumental in promoting: global racial equality. The Silver Arrows became the Black Arrows, but remained F1's dominant force.

There were multiple reasons behind this. The engineering teams at Brackley and Brixworth combined to produce a car that, for most of the season at least, restored Mercedes' advantage over its opposition to levels not witnessed since the early years of the turbo-hybrid era. Then there was the opposition itself, reduced in 2020 thanks to Ferrari's woes. What opposition remained again failed to provide a sterner test, not helped by the pandemic removing some of the tracks where Mercedes has previously struggled.

Hamilton found new ways to keep ahead of a charging, rapid team-mate, while also staying out of reach of the young superstars, who would like nothing more than to usurp him as F1's benchmark. He addressed weaknesses, continued honing old advantages, and




SUTTON

Delayed start to 2020 helped Mercedes sort woes…


ANDRE

…but Ferrari's issues ran rather deeper

did everything he could to win the title as early as possible, aware of the virus's threat, which got to him in the end.

Opposition from Ferrari disappears in testing

In the glorious, pre-pandemic days of early 2020, F1 returned to Barcelona for a pair of three-day tests. And it was evident from the outset that Ferrari was in trouble.

The SF1000 that was supposed to deliver the next round of the Charles Leclerc-versus-Sebastian Vettel fight at the front of the field had had downforce packed on. This was to try to compete with Mercedes on a greater spread of tracks compared to its predecessor, which excelled when power was the overriding factor.

But the new Ferrari was slow, especially in a straight line. The FIA technical directives released at the end of 2019 had pegged it back considerably. The team's dramatic performance deficit to Mercedes at the 2019 US Grand Prix was suddenly baked in. At the very end of testing, the governing body announced it had reached a settlement with Ferrari over its controversial 2019 power unit — suspected of deploying clever, sensor-defying advantages in fuel flow — which confirmed there would be no miracle turnaround for Ferrari's 2020 pace. The car lacked the grunt to overcome all that extra drag on the straights, and also couldn't work the aerodynamic parts properly in the corners.


SUTTON

Hamilton and the W11 proved unstoppable, taking 11 wins and 10 pole positions

Mercedes, meanwhile, was clearly on top with what was then the silver-coloured W11. The team had reacted to Ferrari's string of wins in 2019's summer by committing to several bold development options for its 2020 challenger. Dual-axis steering was the standout, but there was also the adventurous new rear-suspension layout, and the team had to be careful to make sure the plan wouldn't actually end up causing it unforeseen pain.

"We thought, 'Hang on. Now we've locked all these exciting things into the W11 and we've got to deliver them'," said Mercedes chief designer John Owen. "Which at that point we hadn't done. They all came good in the end but there were some pretty big challenges in the car, and a few things were a bit worrying at times."

Engine reliability was one. The High Performance Powertrains division had also reacted to Ferrari's previous engine advantage by developing "every single system", according to HPP's Andy Cowell. But there was serious cause for concern with reliability dramas in testing, despite Mercedes comfortably topping the times.

In fact, the team needed the extra time the initial global lockdowns afforded, once the 63-day (49 for engine divisions) spring factory shutdown required by the hastily updated regulations had passed, to address this weakness before taking the expected early-season development package to the new opening race. This was home turf for what was now Mercedes' only real rival.

Red Bull starts slowly – again

Red Bull went into the season opener at the Red Bull Ring with high hopes. Max Verstappen was starting alongside Valtteri Bottas after Hamilton's qualifying penalty, with the same tyre strategy he had used to win the 2019 Austrian GP.

A power-unit problem ended Verstappen's race after 11 laps, but it was the gap to the Mercedes pair at the following Styrian GP that really laid bare just how far behind Red Bull found itself. Verstappen had hung on gamely during the early stages, but by the chequered flag he was 33.698 seconds adrift of winner Hamilton.

Red Bull had been testing's dark horse, and how things might have been different, had it been able to capitalise on any early Mercedes reliability gremlins during the scheduled start to the season, will never be known. The RB16 had looked a handful during winter testing, with Verstappen and Alex Albon having several spins. The team remained tight-lipped during the early races, those spins »

brushed off as the drivers 'finding the limit', but over time the veneer cracked as it became apparent that the RB16 had an inherent balance problem — it was an oversteer-happy car that needed supreme control to command. Generally, only Verstappen could really excel.

"We are pushing hard, of course, to close [the gap to Mercedes]," Verstappen said recently. "But we know there are some weaknesses in the car that we can't fix this year, so we have to wait until next year."

This led to a repetitive campaign for Verstappen. So often, he qualified third behind the Mercedes pair — at one stage he joked he had taken out a "subscription" to the third-place chair in the FIA's press conference set-ups, all held on Zoom post-Melbourne. He would chase them over a race, but came up short. There were glittering aberrations to this pattern, but they were the exceptions rather than the rule.

It had been evident when the RB16 was launched that Red Bull needed to start strongly if it was going to have any hope of toppling Mercedes in 2020, given that the rules had remained stable over the winter. But it failed, and now heads into 2021 pondering the same problem, as the F1 rule-changing fallout from the early stages of the pandemic means the current designs will be carried over into next season, albeit with an attempt to cut downforce by 10% with changes to the floor. This is mainly to reduce speeds, as 2020 was also the year when F1's fastest-ever machines set about rewriting the lap records at many tracks — provided they had managed to stay on the reformed calendar.

Hamilton's slow start is short

It's probably an overblown F1 cliche that Hamilton starts seasons slowly, building to a crescendo over the course of the year, dominating as a campaign goes on. But there was further evidence to support this theory in 2020.

"We are pushing hard, of course. But we know there are some weaknesses in the car that we can't fix this year"

At the season opener, Hamilton produced what was probably his scrappiest weekend display as his qualifying penalty cost him second on the grid, and his late-race clash with Albon cost him second behind Bottas — with Leclerc and Lando Norris benefited to form a shock Austrian GP podium, after a race where Mercedes was somewhat shaken by reliability concerns over vibration damage to its gearboxes. But Hamilton hit back immediately at the second Red Bull Ring race, his massive 1.216s advantage over the rest in the wet qualifying an instant reminder of his class ahead of a race that he went on to win.

Then came the Hungaroring, where Bottas established a trend of poor starts in the W11. He fell down the order leaving the startline, where most attention had been on Verstappen given Red Bull's sensational grid-repair job after his recon-lap shunt. Hamilton was serene in the lead, winning by 8.702s — a margin that actually flattered his pursuers given he made a late stop for soft tyres to chase (and secure) the fastest lap bonus point.

"Round one was multiple different punches that I wasn't perhaps ready for," he said after leading Verstappen home. "But I refocused, which I try to do between every race, and the last two have been fantastic. I think [I was] on point throughout the weekend, so I need to keep this up."



Hamilton again underlined his wet-weather pace with dominant Styrian GP pole

DUNBAR

Bottas's luck changes – for the worse

Hamilton certainly did keep up his form following his triumphs in the final two races of the first of what would be four triple-headers for the rescheduled season. The opening phase of the campaign comprised nine races in 11 weeks — a brutal stretch that did not leave margin for the slightest slip, as Racing Point found out at the venue for Hamilton's next win: Silverstone.

Sergio Perez's unfortunate positive COVID test ruled the Mexican out of the British and 70th Anniversary GPs, and although he wasn't the last driver to contract the virus and miss a race — even within his

Race by race



ETHERINGTON

Austrian GP

1 Bottas 2 Leclerc 3 Norris

The race at the front is reduced to the Mercedes duo by Verstappen's power-unit problem, with winner (from pole) Bottas and Hamilton warned to avoid kerbs that were violently shaking their gearboxes. A late safety car lets Albon attack Hamilton, who clips the Red Bull and gets a penalty, boosting the chasing Leclerc and Norris.



COATES

Styrian GP

1 Hamilton 2 Bottas 3 Verstappen

Hamilton hits back after dominating the soaking qualifying session. Verstappen is able to hang around to pose a threat this time, but fades back over the course of the race as Mercedes enjoys its first 1-2 of the year in crushing style. Ferrari's race is over by the third corner as Leclerc wipes out Vettel.


ETHERINGTON

Hungarian GP

1 Hamilton 2 Verstappen 3 Bottas

A good race follows behind dominant winner Hamilton, who leads all but one lap from pole. Bottas gets a bad start and falls to sixth by the end of the damp first lap. This lets Verstappen, who has embarrassingly crashed on the way to the grid, ease into second, which he holds to the end. Hamilton takes points lead.



Verstappen lacked the package to truly challenge



Silverstone puncture was just part of Bottas's bad luck

DUNBAR

own team, as Lance Stroll later missed the Eifel GP — it was a stark reminder of the threat the pandemic posed.

And for 49 laps of the British GP, Perez's absence and the fallout from the ruling against Racing Point regarding the design process for its Mercedes-inspired brake ducts were the biggest talking points of the weekend. But that all changed when Bottas's left-front tyre blew out, dropping him from a comfortable second to 11th. Carlos Sainz Jr suffered the same fate, as did Hamilton — but crucially his happened on the final tour, and he was able to hang on for a famous and thrilling win in what had been an otherwise lifeless event. A five-point gain over Bottas suddenly became 30.

And Bottas shipped more points to Hamilton at the next race — F1's celebratory event — despite being the faster of the pair. Bottas had taken pole and led the early stages, but it quickly became clear that Verstappen was the driver to beat. Red Bull had gone for an aggressive starting-tyre strategy given that the second Silverstone race featured a compound range a step softer, and conditions were hotter overall compared to the British GP — it got Verstappen through Q2 on the hards, while Mercedes took mediums. The resulting offset gave the Dutchman the upper hand from the off, with his progress eased by quickly passing supersub Nico Hulkenberg to take third off the line.

Verstappen harried the Mercedes pair, forcing them to consume their rubber at a faster rate, the W11's ultra-high-downforce nature resulting in a bizarre disadvantage when it came to keeping the tyres alive through Silverstone's demanding turns. And so Verstappen was able to inflict Mercedes' first defeat of the season, with Bottas losing out to Hamilton as the world champion's long middle stint gave him an advantage for the finish that he did not waste.

Hamilton addresses an unexpected weakness

Bottas made another poor start in Spain, where Hamilton produced one of his best drives of 2020 to win ahead of Verstappen, his closest rival in the standings since the previous event. But the Spanish race was a processional affair, which was repeated the next time out at Spa — the start of the third triple-header.

Hamilton led Bottas home at the Belgian GP, winning from pole, which he had taken by a massive 0.511s — the second highest margin between the duo in dry sessions all year (Russia was the highest at 0.652s). But the pair had both been able to show off the best of the W11's handling and pace superiority by flinging their cars around the famous track.

After the race, Hamilton explained how he was pleased with the results of the effort he had made to improve his qualifying record after scoring a 'paltry' five poles in 2019 (compared to his average of 11.25 over the previous four years).

"I've had to make a couple of adjustments and on top of that, with this car, [it] seems to work quite well," he explained. "So now I'm back to being able to produce qualifying laps that I was [not] able to do before last year, and on a more consistent basis." »



HONE

British GP

1 Hamilton 2 Verstappen 3 Leclerc

A dull race is enlivened in the closing laps by tyre failures, two of which strike the leading Mercedes pair. Bottas's puncture drops him from second to 11th, while Hamilton has to complete the last lap on essentially three wheels. Verstappen chases after a late stop to secure the fastest lap but falls short.



HONE

70th Anniversary GP

1 Verstappen 2 Hamilton 3 Bottas

Mercedes suffers its first defeat of 2020. Verstappen starts on the advantageous hard tyres and is able to push polesitter Bottas and Hamilton into eating through their mediums. He passes Bottas immediately after his first stop and roars clear to win, as a long middle stint helps Hamilton beat his frustrated team-mate.



COATES

Spanish GP

1 Hamilton 2 Verstappen 3 Bottas

Hamilton again crushes his opposition as he wins from pole, finding a "clear zone" of form to come home a massive 24 seconds in front of Verstappen. Bottas makes another poor start and can't get back on terms with the Red Bull driver over a generally lifeless race in which all bar the top three are lapped.



Hamilton sweeps around outside of Bottas to retake the initiative in F1's first race at Mugello

SUTTON



DUNBAR

Feel-good win came for Gasly in Italian GP

Double chaos in Italy

At the season's halfway point, the first unfamiliar F1 2020 venue loomed into view: Mugello. But before reaching the Tuscan MotoGP paradise, F1 enjoyed its traditional visit to Monza, which provided a thriller.

And the delightful chaos was all caused by Hamilton and Mercedes making mistakes. The champion missed the boards warning of the pitlane's closure during the safety-car period, and the team failed to spot the FIA's notification until it was too late. Pierre Gasly and AlphaTauri took that shock advantage, reinforced by Stroll wasting his front row alongside the penalty-addled Hamilton at the grid restart that followed Leclerc's race-stopping Parabolica crash, and ran to another famous Monza win for the former Minardi squad, following Vettel's 2008 Italian GP win when it was in its Toro Rosso guise.

Hamilton had secured F1's fastest ever lap in qualifying, had commanded the early stages from pole, and now recovered from last to seventh. This was only two spots behind Bottas, who had made yet another poor getaway at the original start and made barely any progress back through the pack from sixth.

Verstappen was eliminated from the Monza race by another engine problem, having had a bruising weekend to that point, the RB16's power weakness exposed again in qualifying. It got worse at Mugello, where another Honda power problem may well have caused his retirement, had the clash between Kimi Raikkonen, Gasly and Romain Grosjean not knocked him out on the opening lap.

Bottas had actually seized the lead from Hamilton off the line at the Ferrari-owned track, where Ferrari was celebrating what it had determined was its 1000th world championship race.

But where Hamilton paid for a slight twitch before the lights going out at the first start, he reversed things at the second getaway – after the first red-flag period, caused by a shocking pile-up on the main straight at a safety-car restart that eliminated four cars. Despite a brake fire, Hamilton leapt off the line to take the lead around the outside into the first corner, and for the rest of F1's first Tuscan GP he brought his old tyre-management advantage over Bottas to bear. There was a third grid start after Stroll's massive Arrabbiata 2 crash, where Bottas slipped behind Ricciardo but was able to recover, while Albon also passed the Australian to claim his first F1 podium. »

Race by race



HONE

Belgian GP

1 Hamilton 2 Bottas 3 Verstappen

Another processional race at the front as Hamilton nails qualifying and then hangs on at the start – the only time he's really vulnerable given the long run between La Source and Les Combes. Verstappen trails home third again but is closer to Mercedes, despite pressure from Ricciardo's charging Renault late on.



SUTTON

Italian GP

1 Gasly 2 Sainz 3 Stroll

Hamilton leads early on but then fails to spot that the pitlane is closed during the safety car, with Mercedes also noticing too late. Leclerc's massive Parabolica crash halts the race, after which Hamilton serves his stop/go penalty, which promotes Gasly to the lead after Stroll has a slow restart. Sainz pressures, but Gasly prevails.



TEE

Tuscan GP

1 Hamilton 2 Bottas 3 Albon

Hamilton loses out to Bottas on the first start, which is followed by a lap-one pile-up and the mass crash at the safety-car restart. On the second start, Bottas loses out to a bold Hamilton and the race runs as normal until Stroll crashes heavily. Bottas and Albon battle past Ricciardo following the third start.

The driver market and Hamilton's future

The 2020 Formula 1 silly season took an unexpectedly winding path.

This time a year ago, Ferrari locked Charles Leclerc down (in the days when that phrase was less negative for most people) to a deal that will keep him in red until at least 2025, with Red Bull then securing Max Verstappen's services until the end of 2023 just into January. Those moves appeared to restrict the chance of major seat-swapping at the big teams for 2021, but that all changed when Ferrari opted not to continue with Sebastian Vettel. A fresh deal had previously been thought likely.

Ferrari quickly moved to announce Carlos Sainz Jr as Vettel's replacement. This triggered a knock-on impact at McLaren, which signed Renault's Daniel Ricciardo. A two-month gap occurred before the Australian's replacement was revealed to be famous 'young driver' Fernando Alonso (who topped the one-day post-season test at Abu Dhabi with the team – to be known as Alpine from 2021 – where he won his two world titles). Valtteri Bottas's latest one-year contract extension at Mercedes came a month later, and Vettel subsequently agreed to join Racing Point, pushing Sergio Perez out of the squad he had helped save two years earlier.

But one major contract story that never got resolved throughout all of that, and even now at the time of going to press, concerned the world champion.

Lewis Hamilton had entered 2020 with one year remaining on the deal he had agreed in 2018, but even before the start of the scheduled season a fresh extension was expected fairly imminently. Ferrari and Red Bull nailed their colours to Leclerc, Sainz and Verstappen, with Red Bull later saving Perez from F1 oblivion while demoting Alex Albon to test and reserve driver for 2021, limiting Hamilton's options.

And that's even assuming he ever really wanted to leave the team that has now brought him six world titles, and level with Michael Schumacher on seven overall. He did have some contact with Ferrari, but said at the Bahrain GP "it just wasn't meant to be". Nevertheless, Hamilton's new Mercedes deal kept on being expected, but never arriving.

"Hamilton did have some contact with Ferrari, but said 'it just wasn't meant to be'"


SUTTON

When will Hamilton and Wolff do a new deal?

The pandemic undoubtedly played a part. For a start, it stopped Hamilton and Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff from sitting down together as they had done previously to quickly hammer out final contract details. Wolff was known to fear his drivers contracting COVID-19 from such close contact. Plus, Hamilton was aware of how announcing a well-paid new deal might look at a time when many people face unexpected economic hardship.

He threw a curveball to the press after winning at Imola in November by saying there was "no guarantee" he'd be on the 2021 grid, but by the season finale he explained he hoped to get the deal sorted "before Christmas". When Wolff's time as team principal was extended by three years along with an announcement that he, petrochemicals giant INEOS and Mercedes would become equal-parts owners of F1's dominant squad, this became "at the latest before we go testing", said Wolff.

Hamilton's positive COVID test had derailed the chance to start negotiations once the title had been sealed – something both sides were keen to wait for to avoid adding unnecessary distractions in what has already been a stressful year.

"I plan to be here next year; I want to be here next year," said Hamilton, who in 2020 set out what he says will be the most important part of his legacy: increasing diversity at all F1's levels and areas.


Vettel: "Oi, Carlos, my new car's quicker than your new car"

SUTTON


HONE

Russian GP

1 Bottas 2 Verstappen 3 Hamilton

Bottas wins a controversial race as polesitter Hamilton gets into trouble for completing his practice starts too far down the pit entry. This earns him a pair of five-second penalties, which drop him into the pack behind Verstappen, but he's able to climb back to third by the finish, with Bottas in control up front.


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Eifel GP

1 Hamilton 2 Verstappen 3 Ricciardo

Disaster strikes polesitter Bottas when an MGU-H problem causes his retirement. But even before then, he's gifted Hamilton the lead by locking up and going off at the same spot where he'd seen off a firm Turn 1 attack. Ricciardo takes third after the late safety car ends Perez's chances of making a tyre offset pay.



ETHERINGTON

Portuguese GP

1 Hamilton 2 Bottas 3 Verstappen

Hamilton takes F1's all-time wins record by triumphing over Bottas. But he has to pass his team-mate on track after the medium tyres on which the Mercedes have started fail to fire up in the early drizzle. Sainz leaps up to lead for McLaren before the Black Arrows, chased as ever by Verstappen, roar back.

Bottas can't exploit Hamilton's other weak points

The Mugello retirement had all but extinguished Verstappen's already faint hopes of championship success, and the next phase of the season swung things even more firmly towards Hamilton, despite the world champion becoming vulnerable at times.

He didn't help himself in Russia, where his slip off the road late in Q2 cost him the chance to start on the advantageous mediums. This handed the initiative to Bottas, even though Hamilton recovered extremely well to score pole. Then came the practice start controversy, from which there was essentially no chance that Hamilton could stop Bottas taking a second win. The Finn had passed Verstappen at the start, getting such a good run that he so nearly overcame Hamilton on track too.

Bottas kept his momentum up by taking pole at the Nurburgring, and outmuscled Hamilton during their fine wheel-to-wheel battle at the Eifel GP's first corner. But a lock-up and slip off the road 12 laps later swung Bottas back to misfortune, which he never really escaped until Hamilton had claimed the crown. Hamilton led the race thereafter, with Bottas retiring with an MGU-H issue.

At the Algarve Circuit, Hamilton fought back from behind his team-mate after being "overly cautious" in the slippery early laps, and his victory in the revived Portuguese GP took him clear of Michael Schumacher's all-time F1 wins record.

Imola was another massive chance for Bottas, as he converted pole into the early race lead, while Hamilton made a slow start and dropped behind Verstappen (who would later make it three DNFs in Italy when a dramatic tyre failure put him off). But running over a piece of Ferrari bodywork cost Bottas performance, and he might well have fallen behind Hamilton even without the virtual safety car gifting the Briton seconds for his first stop, given Hamilton's strong pace on an extended opening stint. In the final laps after the safety-car period that followed Verstappen's retirement, the two Mercedes drivers simply cleared off at the front, their pace advantage over the pack devastatingly clear with their regular challenger gone.

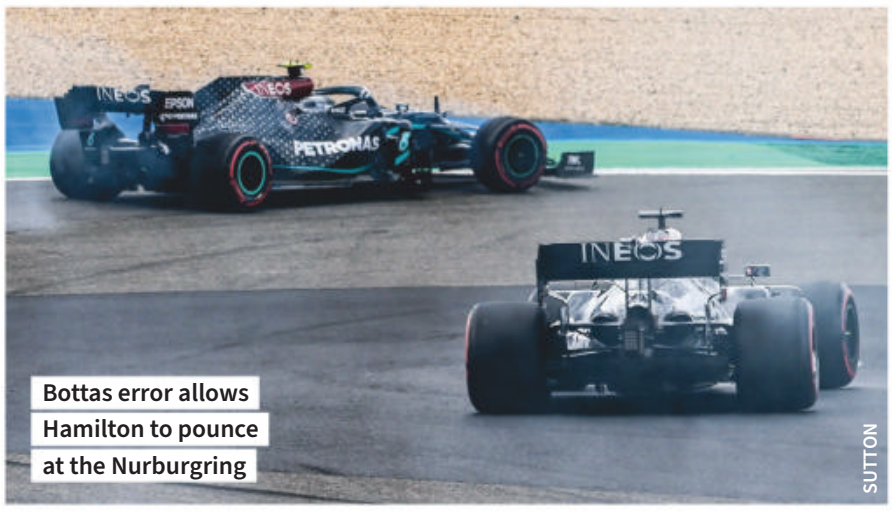
"Congratulations to Lewis. He deserves this title completely: he was the better one of us this year overall"

Turkish GP drama seals the drivers' title

The Imola 1-2 sealed Mercedes' seventh consecutive constructors' title, and Hamilton wrapped up the drivers' championship at the next race. But that wasn't exactly guaranteed pre-race given that the Black Arrows had lost the perfect 2020 qualifying record as Hamilton and Bottas struggled on Istanbul Park's new track surface.

The race was one for the ages. Racing Point and polesitter Stroll led the most laps, but Hamilton showed his supreme wet-weather talent as things began to dry. His tyre-management skills came to the fore again as he adapted his style to take a single set of inters to make history at the finish line. Bottas spun six times and eventually finished a chastened (and lapped) 14th.

"Congratulations to Lewis," he said magnanimously. "He deserves this title completely: he was the better one of us this year overall and seven titles is a very impressive achievement."



Bottas error allows Hamilton to pounce at the Nurburgring

Bottas's misfortune continues

Hamilton won the first race of the final triple-header with a controlling drive in the Bahrain GP, chased again by Verstappen. But Bottas's start woes continued, just before Grosjean's horrifying accident. He then suffered two punctures in the race, coming home eighth.

The build-up to the penultimate race was dominated by Hamilton's positive COVID-19 test, which forced him out of the Sakhir GP and gave George Russell a shock call-up. While Mercedes played down the idea of the race being a shootout for a 2022 drive alongside Hamilton, it did not go Bottas's way. Another poor Bottas start gave Russell the chance to make an

Race by race


ETHERINGTON

Emilia Romagna GP

1 Hamilton 2 Bottas 3 Ricciardo

Bottas leads from pole, but a piece of Ferrari bodywork lodged in his floor costs him pace. Hamilton extends his first stint after making a poor start to jump Verstappen, then gets his team-mate too during the VSC. Verstappen passes Bottas before a puncture puts him out, after which the Mercedes duo shoot clear of Ricciardo.



HONE

Turkish GP

1 Hamilton 2 Perez 3 Vettel

Stroll leads from pole ahead of team-mate Perez, while Verstappen spins attacking the second Racing Point. Hamilton eventually starts to close on the leaders, passing Perez just after Stroll stops (and fades afterwards). Hamilton surges clear on ageing inters to win, while a late slip from Leclerc costs him second and boosts Perez and Vettel.



TEE



Grosjean escaped the most dramatic F1 crash for years in the Bahrain Grand Prix

instant impression – which he had done in any case by qualifying just 0.026s off pole – and he took it.

The 22-year-old Williams regular led most of the race on the Bahrain 'outer loop' layout and, although Bottas was coming back towards him in the second stint, Mercedes' calamitous safety-car pitstops cost both drivers. But Russell's brilliant pass on Bottas, as he mounted a bit to catch eventual winner Perez that ended in heartbreak thanks to his late puncture, left a significant impression.

F1 lost the chance to see the pair square off again in the season finale, but it did at least get to welcome back the world champion as Hamilton recovered rapidly from his illness, finishing third behind Bottas in the Abu Dhabi race. But despite the Mercedes drivers performing now-traditional celebratory post-season donuts, the real spoils went to Verstappen.

The Red Bull star got the pole he had coveted all season in the last qualifying session, and then led every lap of the Yas Marina race to take only the second on-merit win over Mercedes in 2020.

It was an excellent ending for Red Bull, which pointed towards a closer battle between the two squads in 2021. But this suggestion comes with warnings. Red Bull had continued to develop the RB16 right up to the final race, where it ran with a new rear-wing mounting. Mercedes, meanwhile, stopped adding performance updates to the W11 at Spa in August and felt it had underperformed in Abu Dhabi, failing to get the tyres working as it usually does so well.

Behind the top two came McLaren, scoring its highest constructors' position since 2012 as it emerged as the winner of a captivating battle for third that Ferrari's drop down the grid had created. Racing Point was left to rue the 15 points lost thanks to the brake-duct ruling, although it of course benefited from the Mercedes W10-inspired RP20's overall performance level, while Renault ended up fifth, but could at least look back on a pair of fine podiums for the departing Ricciardo.

Ferrari's disappointing season came to an almost merciful end with sixth, which meant it just hung on as the best Italian F1 squad, with AlphaTauri riding Gasly's consistent brilliance (and flashes thereof from Daniil Kvyat) to take seventh.

Alfa Romeo and Haas also suffered considerably from Ferrari's engine deficit as customer squads of the team. It was Alfa that came away as the resounding 'Class C' winner in eighth, as Haas battled with a car that was barely developed all season. Williams brought up the rear again, point-less this time, but it at least closed the gap significantly to the midfield and made progress with what was an altogether more raceable car.



Bahrain GP

1 Hamilton 2 Verstappen 3 Albon

The race is quickly halted after the initial start, where Bottas was slow away alongside Hamilton, due to Grosjean's enormous, fiery accident. Hamilton has to soak up pressure from Verstappen throughout the two-stop affair after a puncture thwarts Bottas's recovery, with Perez losing a certain podium to an MGU-K problem late on.



Sakhir GP

1 Perez 2 Ocon 3 Stroll

Bottas is slow away again and Russell seizes the lead. Russell then dominates, building a big lead during the stops as Bottas runs long. Just as he is coming back, Mercedes badly fluffs its double-stack safety-car stop. A puncture prevents Russell's comeback and Perez, last on lap one after a tap from Leclerc, takes an emotional win.



Abu Dhabi GP

1 Verstappen 2 Bottas 3 Hamilton

Verstappen leads every lap from pole as Mercedes has an unusually subdued weekend. The Red Bull driver leaps clear off the line and the following Bottas then struggles with understeer. Perez's MGU-K-induced retirement puts most on the same strategy after the safety-car period, with Verstappen easily pulling clear after the restart.

Top 10 Drivers

Charting the rise and fall of the F1 movers and shakers

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES



SUTTON

10

Lando Norris

Down 1

Norris achieved something remarkable in 2020 – he managed to star even while there was no racing to be done as a result of the coronavirus delaying the start of the season. The Briton's entertaining antics while streaming his virtual racing exploits won him fans and deserved attention, which he used to raise money for the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund when fulfilling a promise to shave his head.

When the real racing started, he lived up to the hype and delivered a stunning first F1 podium by taking third in the season opener, charging on the final lap to get close enough to Lewis Hamilton that he could take advantage of the Mercedes driver's time penalty.

That was as good as results got, but he seized a chance when the big teams left openings – something more experienced drivers missed. He also performed well in qualifying at that Austrian GP, taking fourth (and starting third) – a result he replicated in the season finale with what he reckoned was his best lap in F1 so far. That Abu Dhabi weekend was his strongest performance in 2020, a season during which starts and getting stuck in traffic regularly hampered him. But bad luck also played its part, such as his engine-related retirement while battling at the Nurburgring.

His results looked to be taking a negative slide as the season concluded, but he arrested that with a charging fourth in the Bahrain GP and then that excellent fifth in Abu Dhabi.

9

Carlos Sainz Jr

Down 5

Sainz's 2020 changed dramatically when it was revealed that he would leave McLaren at the end of the campaign to join Ferrari as Sebastian Vettel's replacement alongside Charles Leclerc. This is quite a stunning turnaround for a driver who was briefly staring at the F1 exit as a result of the Daniel Ricciardo/Renault deal in the summer of 2018.

But joining McLaren rescued Sainz's career in motorsport's top flight, and he paid the team back again this year, departing on good terms and with Ricciardo actually coming in as his replacement.

It was also a campaign that featured rotten luck, such as the tyre failure at Silverstone when he had been running fifth for so long; his non-start thanks to engine issues at Spa when he had been set to start seventh; and his brake problem in qualifying in Bahrain. But he'd quickly shown his class by qualifying third for the Styrian GP in atrocious conditions, and was also impressive to rise from 15th to fifth in the wet in Turkey. These performances edged him above team-mate Norris in our ranking.

He put in charging drives at the Nurburgring and in the Sakhir GP, but his best result – and overall weekend performance – came at Monza. He matched his Styrian qualifying result behind the Mercedes drivers, then ran second after Valtteri Bottas's poor start. He was showing no signs of losing that place when the race developed into a thriller around the safety car and red flag, and he came home only just adrift of eventual winner Pierre Gasly.



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7

Valtteri Bottas

Down 2

Another intriguing yet exasperating season for Bottas, who is tasked with beating one of F1's best-ever drivers in the same machinery. Again, he came up short, but not for want of trying, and his ability to recover from devastating defeats and horrendous luck should not be underestimated.

He was incredibly strong in qualifying again, taking five poles and finishing just over a tenth shy of Lewis Hamilton on average (in dry sessions). But he pleased himself with his race performances versus the world champion, even if wretched luck ruined several races.

His season-opening win was followed by the tyre failure in the British GP, retirement from the Nurburgring race with an MGU-H issue, and picking up the piece of Ferrari while leading at Imola. These problems inflated the points gap to Hamilton massively and unfairly given Bottas's efforts, but they were accompanied by plenty of issues of his own making.

There were the poor starts at the Hungaroring, Barcelona, Monza and in both Bahrain races, plus that miserable six-spins day in the wet in Turkey. But the major problem that Bottas still needs to solve if he is to have any chance of beating Hamilton to the 2021 title (and maybe save his Mercedes drive beyond next year, given George Russell's stunning effort against him at the Sakhir GP) is that he still comes up short on tyre management, and cannot produce the kind of charging recoveries along the lines of Hamilton's after being penalised at Monza.



TEE

8

George Russell

No change

An intriguing campaign from an F1 up-and-comer. Russell continued to improve and impress at the back with Williams, then made his time at the front pay by scoring his first points on his one-off Mercedes outing.

He took Williams out of Q1 for the first time since the 2018 Brazilian GP at the Styrian GP, a feat he repeated on eight further occasions. This meant he was often starting further forwards than the FW43 arguably deserved to be – particularly early on, as Williams developed strongly compared to new 'Class C' rival Haas – and had to battle hard to keep his positions. This didn't go massively well initially, as Russell felt he lacked experience coping with the way racing in the pack impacts handling in F1 cars, because the aerodynamic balance suddenly changes. This explains his off early in the Styrian GP, which he had started 11th.

But Russell improved considerably in combat over the season, enjoying several fights with Sebastian Vettel, which he felt fast-tracked his learning. The result could be seen in his Mercedes one-off in the Sakhir GP, with his decisive pass on Bottas as he desperately tried to rescue the race he had impressively controlled from the off. He felt his tyre management could be inconsistent, as were his starts, but he had it under control when it mattered.

There were also a few big errors – most notably his crash under the safety car at Imola – which cost him a points score for his regular squad.

6

Sergio Perez

Up 1

The 2020 season was remarkable for Perez. He started off disappointingly when Racing Point needed to capitalise on the pace of its controversial RP20, missed two races to COVID-19, found his form on return, and improved dramatically from there despite losing his drive at the team. And then he finished the year as a race winner and a Red Bull driver.

The opening races were curious because Perez compared relatively weakly against team-mate Lance Stroll in qualifying, and cost himself a good result in the Styrian GP by clashing with Albon. The Racing Point's potential deserved better than the results he delivered early on.

Again, he produced impressive tyre-management displays, but these were often needed to overcome underwhelming qualifying results, such as his fourth place at the Nurburgring. It was the same at the next race at Imola where, were it not for Racing Point's decision to pit under the safety car, he might have finally reached the podium.

But he did manage that at the next race in Turkey, where he mirrored Hamilton's winning strategy to finish second, and he was brilliant in the first Bahrain race. His sensational win in the Sakhir GP and then retirement in Abu Dhabi summed up his bittersweet season.

But the victory will go down as one of the greats given that he had to recover from the lap-one assault from Charles Leclerc, nurse damaged tyres over 46 laps, then charge to the finish.



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5

Daniel Ricciardo

Up 1

After his tough first year with Renault, Ricciardo was able to enhance his reputation thanks to a fine season, at the end of which he departed for McLaren. But he did so on good terms, after Renault had initially, and understandably, reacted coldly to his decision to depart before a wheel had been turned in anger thanks to the pandemic delays.

Things improved from Ricciardo and Renault from the off, as the Australian felt the team's development had worked a treat in practice for the Austrian GP. Essentially, Ricciardo gained much more confidence in the rear of the RS20, but results were still hard to come by in the opening races as Renault had cooling reliability troubles and struggled to break out of the crowded midfield.

Then came the two Silverstone races. In the first, Ricciardo finished fourth, not far off the impressive Leclerc at the flag after rising from eighth. But the second featured a more significant moment, even though he spun during his slide from fifth to 14th: Ricciardo and Renault made a set-up breakthrough, which they used to secure a series of strong results in the season's second half.

There was his charge to finish fourth in Belgium, which just shades his pair of fine third places at the Nurburgring and Imola, because at Spa he didn't need one of the leading trio to retire to get his result. Ricciardo also comprehensively vanquished the highly rated Esteban Ocon in qualifying.

4

Charles Leclerc

Down 1



Leclerc headed into the 2020 season knowing he was Ferrari's latest love, with a long-term contract and team-mate Vettel ushered to the exit. He lived up to the team's expectations this year, with an excellent campaign overall despite the significant limitations of the car, which is why he's rated so highly considering he also made some major mistakes.

He got the year off to a fine start with second in the chaos of the Austrian GP – boosted, of course, by Hamilton's time addition – but showed this wasn't a fluke by getting back on the podium with third at the British GP. Again, he was helped there by Bottas's tyre failure, but deserves credit for working to put himself in the right position to capitalise.

The two Silverstone races were two of his finest race drives of the season, with the second just edging it as he showed impressive tyre management – something he'd struggled with in Hungary – and speed to finish fourth in seriously challenging hot conditions.

His form against the clock was also strong. Leclerc's quartet of fourths on the grid highlighted his speed impressively – most notably at the Sakhir GP, despite the power circuit not suiting the SF1000.

But we need to cover his significant errors, particularly the two early-race crashes at the Styrian and Sakhir GPs, the first made worse because he wiped out Vettel. Leclerc felt these were down to his need to overcome his car's shortcomings, but he could have displayed better judgement. His late slip in Turkey was also costly, undoing what had been a fine race.

Those who missed the cut



Daniil Kvyat produced a strong overall season for AlphaTauri, but his campaign was peppered with regular down days and he struggled to match team-mate Pierre Gasly in qualifying. His high points were great, though, such as his charging drives in the Styrian and Emilia Romagna GPs and on home soil in Russia.

Kimi Raikkonen displayed excellent racing skills, as well as producing some brilliant TV moments via his team radio. The Alfa Romeo C39 was held back by the Ferrari engine deficit, which meant Raikkonen was not a consistent points contender. He battled excellently on his finer days, but there were high-profile mistakes too.

Antonio Giovinazzi edged team-mate Raikkonen in qualifying and in the number of points finishes he racked up. He took advantage of the chaos of the season opener to get on the board immediately and capitalised again at Imola, while he often had to cope with Alfa splitting its strategies. He crashed hard at Spa, but shone at the Nurburgring.

Sebastian Vettel's time at Ferrari ended in underwhelming fashion. He failed to reach Q3 for every race after the British GP, as he struggled for confidence in Ferrari's disappointing SF1000. He showed his class in the wet in Turkey, but was too often outshone by Charles Leclerc's brilliance and let down by his own mistakes.

Esteban Ocon's return to F1 was low-key at first, but he built momentum as the season wore on, admitting that it took longer to get back up to speed than he'd expected. He was defeated 15-2 by Renault team-mate Daniel Ricciardo in qualifying and had to let his team-mate past several times in races. Second in Sakhir provided a positive ending.

Alexander Albon's second F1 season featured two podium finishes, but that's just not enough for a Red Bull driver. His absence from the lead fight meant his team could not deploy the alternative tactics Mercedes could with two cars, and qualifying was a struggle as he was eliminated three times in Q2.

What was probably Kevin Magnussen's final year in F1 was always going to be a struggle given Haas's undeveloped car and the Ferrari engine deficit. But he nevertheless shone where he could – often a threat to escape Q1 and excellent on opening laps. Hanging on for a point in Hungary was the highlight.

Lance Stroll had an up-and-down campaign. He excelled on occasion – in qualifying in Hungary, and of course with pole and leading in Turkey – but had many poor days. He blew the restart at Monza and lost a win shot, then struggled for several races after crashing hard at Mugello thanks to a puncture.

The end of Romain Grosjean's F1 career will never be forgotten given his horrific crash in the first Bahrain race, and it was so wonderful that he walked away. His season overall was tough. He showed well against Magnussen in qualifying but was generally down on race pace. But his fine drive to ninth at the Nurburgring provided a final highlight.

Nicholas Latifi was F1's only rookie in 2020 and he improved over the course of the campaign. Qualifying pace remained a consistent weak point, and he had a particular problem in making mistakes at key moments in the sessions against the clock, but his race drives showed promise and Williams was pleased with his progress.



HONE

3

Pierre Gasly

Re-entry

Gasly's season story was one of the best in 2020. The year may have started with the AlphaTauri rebranding, but it was actually the first time in his single-seater career that he'd really stayed with a team over an off-season. This paid off big time as Gasly got better integrated with the Italian squad and emerged as a real leader. He also came into the season feeling better prepared than ever and kicked on from there.

His qualifying performances were consistently excellent and he regularly beat faster cars, although he did have a couple of disappointing Saturdays, such as Mugello and Istanbul Park (where AlphaTauri struggled to switch the tyres on in the wet). He also produced several battling displays to score big results early on, which boosted his momentum and helped when things got tricky. He was seventh in the season opener and lost a potentially better result when he suffered damage at the start a week later. After showing speed on a Hungaroring weekend wrecked by reliability damage, he charged once more in the British GP, again finishing seventh. He kept himself in the points battle after that, with his best results coming in the season's second half, including a brilliant drive on a tricky soft-medium strategy at Algarve Circuit, where his overtaking skills were on full display.

His 2020 season will forever be remembered for that Monza win. He did benefit significantly by the race suspensions, but showed impressive fortitude to hold off the marauding Sainz to take a glorious victory.

2

Max Verstappen

No change

Another excellent season from Verstappen, who was Mercedes' only real threat for so much of the year. Twice he bested the Black Arrows, taking a famous win by executing a better tyre strategy in the 70th Anniversary GP at Silverstone, and then ending the season on a high with a dominant victory from pole position in Abu Dhabi.

The Red Bull RB16 was a difficult car to handle – its inherent aerodynamic weakness meant it was unpredictable at times and prone to oversteer, which Verstappen was able to cope with much better than team-mate Alexander Albon.

But the car's deficit to Mercedes for much of the season meant Verstappen generally started behind his rivals and had to punish his rubber keeping up, although he was typically able to keep his pace high and showed his skills in battle whenever he got a chance.

There were mistakes this year too. He struggled in qualifying for the Hungarian GP, not helped by the unpredictable car, and spun out of the battle for the lead in the Turkish GP rain, costing himself the chance of a famous wet-weather win.

But Verstappen continues to shine at the top level in F1, although he remains unproven in a title battle. The key thing to test this will be Red Bull providing a car to enter such a fight.



SUTTON



ETHERINGTON

1

Lewis Hamilton

No change

Hamilton wasn't bulletproof in 2020. His COVID-19 illness showed that he is just as vulnerable as the rest of us to the accursed virus, which forced him to miss a grand prix for the first time in his (now) 266-race career. But being bulletproof isn't the overall aim that Hamilton works towards each year in his bid to avoid handing over his crown for the first time since 2016 – instead, it's to get as close to it as possible so that the unexpected can be overcome.

And he nailed that again this year.

In the end, it didn't matter that he missed the Sakhir GP and was sub-par in the season finale, where it was impressive to return at all, given the horrible nature of the virus. Hamilton had already secured the 2020 title through a potent mixture of relentless speed, clever decision-making and good fortune.

He brushed aside his defeat in the season opener – probably his scrappiest overall weekend in 2020 – to go on a run of five wins in the next six races. And even on his worst days he was able to rescue results, which title rival and team-mate Bottas could not. These down days came in the 70th Anniversary GP, the Italian GP and in the Russian GP, but on the first occasion he still beat Bottas home, and on the other two he finished just two spots behind him.

Missing the pitlane-closure boards at Monza and slipping off the Sochi road in Q2 – plus his practice-start gaffe there – were his biggest mistakes of the year, but Hamilton bounced back well each time. At Sochi, he shrugged off his qualifying error, which compromised his race strategy, to take pole position by a massive 0.563s over Verstappen.

Overall, Hamilton's 2020 season was masterful, rewarded with 11 wins to go with his seventh title. If he's to go on and better Michael Schumacher's title-haul record with an eighth crown in 2021, it'll surely be down to the same approach that paid off so well again this year. Hamilton identified a weakness – in 2019, this was his qualifying record – and worked to turn it back into a strength, which he did with 10 poles (five more than in 2019 and five more than Bottas's next-best tally). He also honed his typical advantage in tyre management and used it to devastating effect on several occasions. This was best shown during the 'normal' phase of the Mugello race, where he pulled away from his struggling team-mate. He also aced the starts far more often than Bottas, although there were slips in this area, such as the first time of asking at Mugello and at Imola.

The Turkish GP, where he clinched the championship, summed up Hamilton's continuing quality. At an event were Mercedes was struggling, he kept himself out of trouble and still in the game during the tough opening laps on the full-wet tyres, then basically came into his own after the switch to intermediates and when the track began to dry. While others were spinning out of contention or losing ground on pace, Hamilton adapted his lines, kept his tyres hot and alive – and made history.

P35 HOW THE BOSSES – AND OUR READERS – RATED THEM

AUTOSPORT

WIN

WORTH MORE THAN £1000

LEWIS HAMILTON GLOVES



THE PRIZE

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

QUESTION

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

A) The Eifel Grand Prix

B) The Portuguese Grand Prix

C) The Turkish Grand Prix



TO ENTER

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

TERMS AND CONDITIONS 1. To enter, visit https://www.autosport.com/competition. Competition closes at 23:59 28 January, 2021. 3. This competition is open to UK residents aged 18 or over. 4. No cash alternative. 5. Prizes are non-transferable. 6. Only one entry per person. 7. Winner will be selected at random from the correct entries. 8. The prize is to win a pair of Puma race gloves signed by Lewis Hamilton in a frame worth more than £1000. The Promoters: Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG & PUMA SE, Puma Way 1, 91074 Herzogenaurach, Germany
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Ratings

The bosses' top 10

JONATHAN NOBLE

Who voted



Toto Wolff
Mercedes



Christian Horner
Red Bull



Andreas Seidl
McLaren



Otmar Szafnauer
Racing Point



Cyril Abiteboul
Renault



Franz Tost
AlphaTauri



Fred Vasseur
Alfa Romeo



Gunther Steiner
Haas



Simon Roberts
Williams

Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen have topped the annual team principals' ranking of the top 10 drivers for the fifth straight year.

In what has become a long-standing tradition, Autosport asked each of the team bosses to pick their top 10 drivers of the year. The individual results are kept secret — so they can answer honestly — and the tally totted up using F1's points structure that goes from 25 for first down to one for 10th.

Hamilton's run to a seventh world championship title edged him ahead of Verstappen in the final tally, but the gap was reduced to 15 points compared to 23 last year. The two drivers have dominated the rankings over recent years, finishing as the top two since 2016.

Charles Leclerc had his share of frustrations this year with an uncompetitive Ferrari, but he still ended up third in the rankings for the second consecutive year. Daniel Ricciardo's strong second season with Renault moves him back up the ratings to fourth, while Sergio Perez appears in the top 10 for the first time since 2016. Italian Grand Prix winner Pierre Gasly is the only new entry.

How the team chiefs voted



1 171PTS
Lewis Hamilton
No change



2 156PTS
Max Verstappen
No change



3 132PTS
Charles Leclerc
No change



4 95PTS
Daniel Ricciardo
Up 4



5 92PTS
Sergio Perez
Re-entry



6 79PTS
George Russell
Up 3



7 52PTS
Lando Norris
Up 3



8 38PTS
Carlos Sainz Jr
Down 1



9 27PTS
Valtteri Bottas
Down 5



10 25PTS
Pierre Gasly
New entry

Past two seasons

	2018	2019
1	Hamilton	Hamilton
2	Verstappen	Verstappen
3	Vettel	Leclerc
4	Alonso	Bottas
5	Ricciardo	Vettel
6	Leclerc	Albon
7	Raikkonen	Sainz
8	Bottas	Ricciardo
9	Ocon	Russell
10	Hulkenberg	Norris

Readers' driver ratings

How Autosport readers scored the drivers across the 17-race season, taking the average race rating for each driver. Excludes Nico Hulkenberg, Jack Aitken and Pietro Fittipaldi.

1 Hamilton 8.6
2 Verstappen 8.2
3 Ricciardo 8.0
4 Gasly 7.9
5 Sainz 7.6
6 Perez 7.6
7 Norris 7.6
8 Leclerc 7.3
9 Russell 7.1
10 Bottas 6.8
11 Kvyat 6.8
12 Raikkonen 6.8
13 Ocon 6.6
14 Magnussen 6.2
15 Giovinazzi 6.1
16 Latifi 5.7
17 Albon 5.7
18 Stroll 5.7
19 Grosjean 5.6
20 Vettel 5.5



The Mercedes W11 set new levels of excellence, and included the clever DAS system

GIORGIO PIOLA

Teams react to moving goalposts

Mercedes led the technical arms race once again, but like every team on the grid in 2020 it faced unexpected challenges as F1 adapted to a world in turmoil

GIORGIO PIOLA AND JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

With a simplified aero formula in the offing, the rules remained relatively static for the 2020 season. Before the coronavirus pandemic took Formula 1's best-laid plans and cast them aside with little regard for their content, the idea was for 2020 to be the final season run under the current formula before transitioning to the overhauled, ground-effect aero for 2021.

Owing to the mandatory lockdowns and cost concerns, those plans were shuffled back a year, meaning that 2020's cars will remain in use for another season, and giving the teams a reason to continue their development.

A few trends emerged throughout 2020, notably the willingness of a greater range of teams to adopt the thinner, tapered noses used to great effect by Mercedes to reduce the aero blockage to the floor, along with a greater effort to shrink-wrap the bodywork. Compared to the start of the hybrid era, where bodywork was significantly bulkier amid cooling concerns for the early iterations of the current power-unit formula, today's cars are considerably more svelte.

There's been further development in the high-yield areas of the cars too; diffusers and bargeboards look increasingly complex and intricate as the engineers seek to milk every single drop of performance from the floor area, while the regulations governing the new breed of front wings set out in 2019's rules continue to be exploited in increasingly creative ways.

Although there will be a few tweaks to 2021's rules, most notably around the floor and diffuser area in a bid to trim away downforce, the majority of 2020's innovations will be carried forward for another year — except one particularly controversial piece of kit enclosed within this year's runaway title winner.



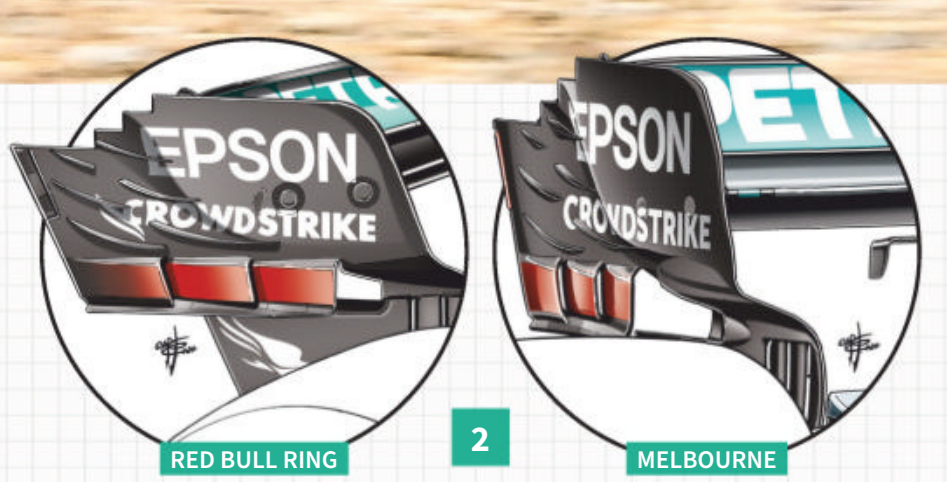
Mercedes turns it up to W11

This might be the very last time that we write about Mercedes' dual-axis steering (DAS) system in the context of a contemporary season. The push-and-pull toe-changing device, used by Mercedes' drivers to introduce more heat into the front tyres on a warm-up lap, dominated the column inches for early-season controversy.

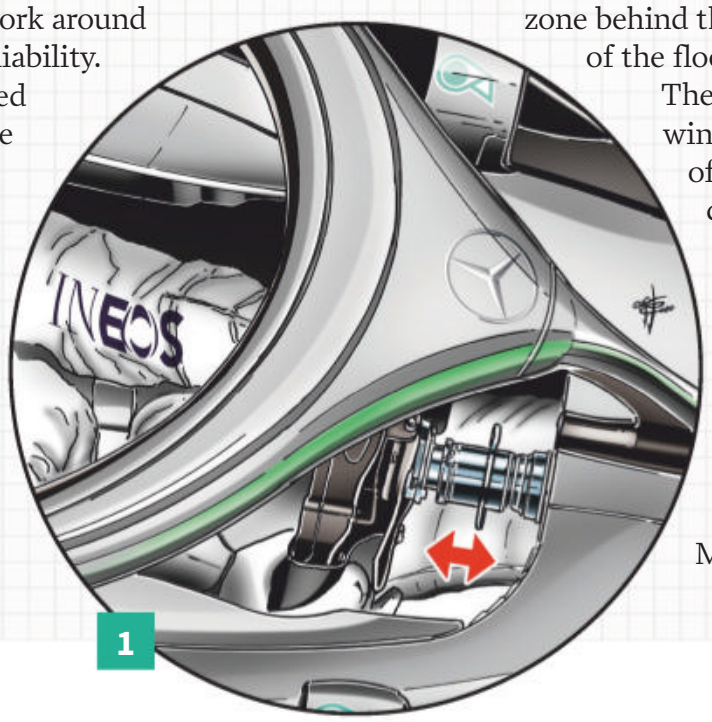
Although DAS **(1)** was designed with full transparency granted to the FIA, Red Bull launched an official protest against it with the claim that no suspension changes could be made to the car while in motion. Mercedes countered that it was part of the steering system, which the FIA upheld, although all agreed that the design would be banned at the end of the season to quell any possible arms race.

Prior to the 2020 season's delay, Mercedes was in a spot of trouble with its power unit and had to work around factory shutdowns to find some extra reliability. Arguably, Melbourne's cancellation helped the team out of a spot of bother, and gave it time to install a fix. The team had also planned a set of updates for the aborted Dutch Grand Prix, and so instead brought them to the eventual season opener at the Red Bull Ring.

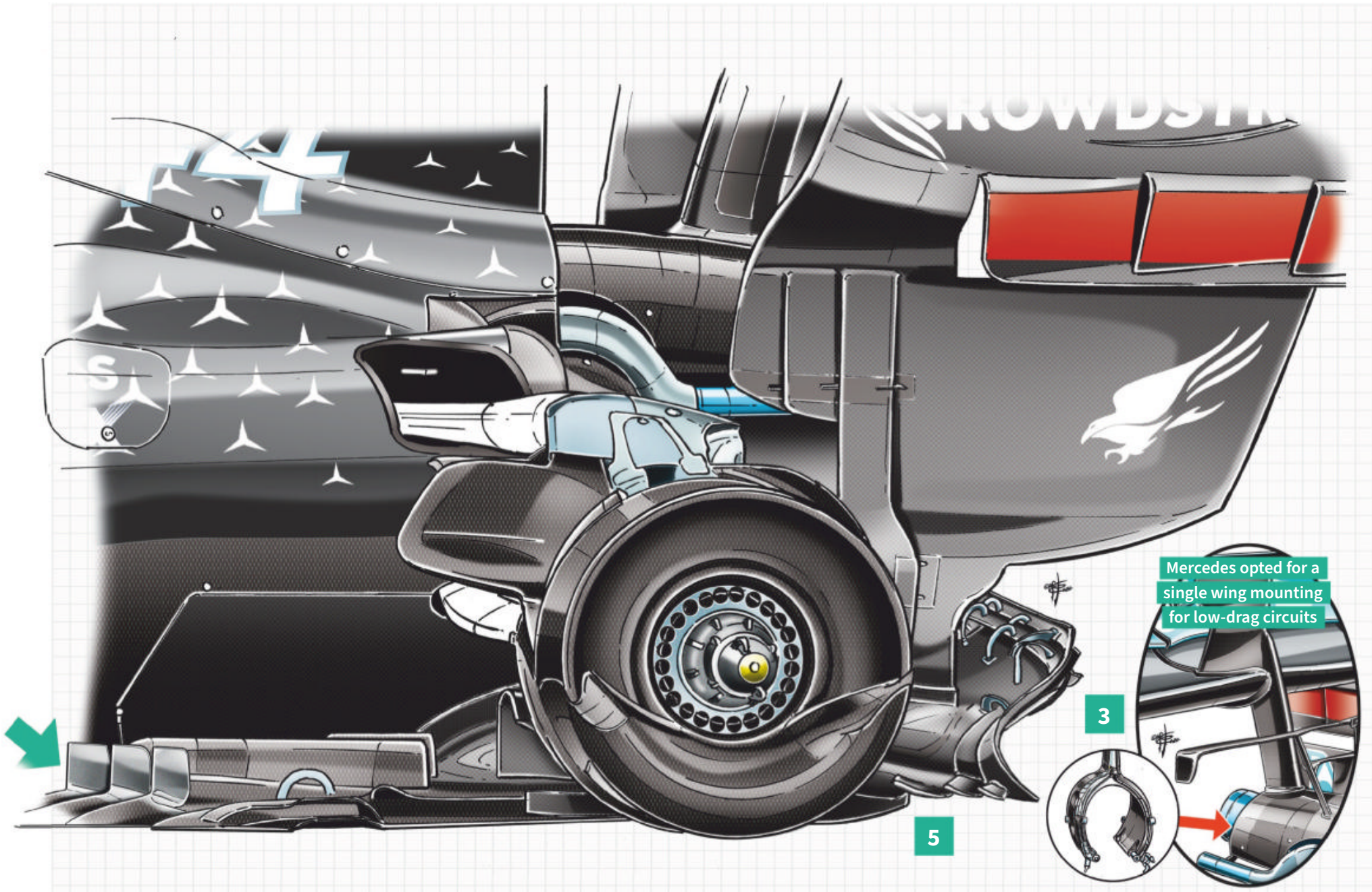
This was wrapped within its new black paint scheme, the face of the team's new efforts to improve the overall diversity within its workforce and make a stand against racism in response to numerous unsettling global events — including the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police — during the zenith of the pandemic.



Mercedes had brought a new rear-wing endplate **(2)** to the Austria double-header, in a bid to bolster its already-impressive package, shuffling the strakes further forward to create a more gradual transition to bring airflow outwards. In doing that, the car's diffuser has a bigger effective volume as the low-pressure zone behind the car — which increases the suction of the floor — is widened.



The team also experimented with a single wing-mounting strut in the earlier parts of the season. In modern F1, all teams currently opt for the double swan-neck rear-wing mounts to keep the suction surface of the main plane free, developing a much cleaner low-pressure zone underneath to reduce the effect on downforce. But this increases the frontal area of the car and, to reduce this for the lower-drag circuits where top speed is key, Mercedes opted for single mounting »



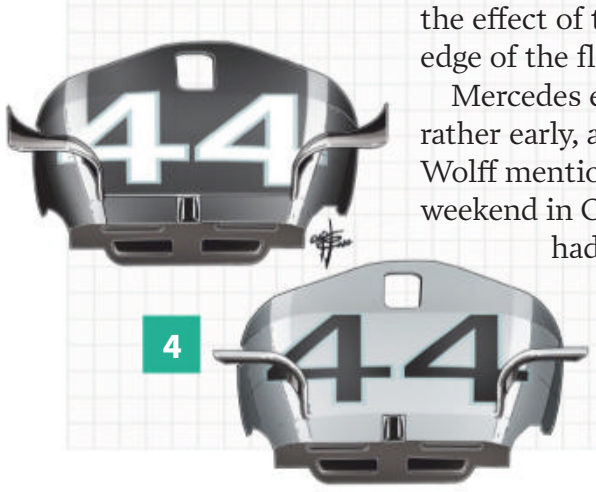
– incorporated with the DRS housing – to trim some of the drag away. **(3)**

After running its W11 in a relatively raw form in the opening six races, Mercedes added a number of upgrades for the Belgian GP in August to extend its performance advantage – and in good time too, as the team was predicted to lose out in qualifying as a legacy of the engine-mode restrictions that came into play for Monza.

On top of the chassis bulkhead, Mercedes reprofiled its nose fins to improve their interface with the fins **(4)** on the sides of the chassis. The tips trailed back further, like those on the Red Bull RB16, which presumably create a tighter tip vortex that can then drop down to the bargeboard area.

The team also switched up its bargeboard package, removing one of the horizontal pieces mounted to the sidepod vane to free up space underneath to add a different pair of floor-mounted elements. There were also added fins to the floor, as seen in the illustration, to assist the outward transit of airflow. One bank of fins was mounted around the centrepoint of the floor, while the next bank was positioned just ahead of the rear tyre to improve the effect of the slots on the edge of the floor. **(5)**

Mercedes ended work on its W11 rather early, and team principal Toto Wolff mentioned during the Eifel GP weekend in October that the team had finished its upgrades "a long time ago" and diverted its attention to 2021. Ominous.



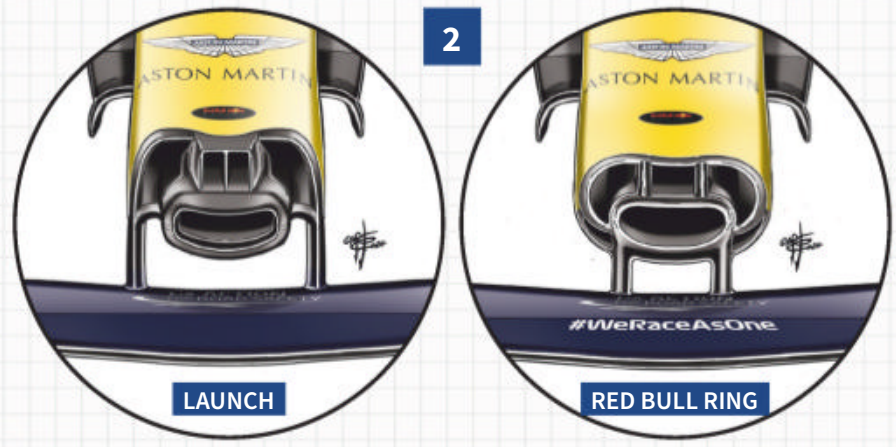
Red Bull not-so-sweet RB16

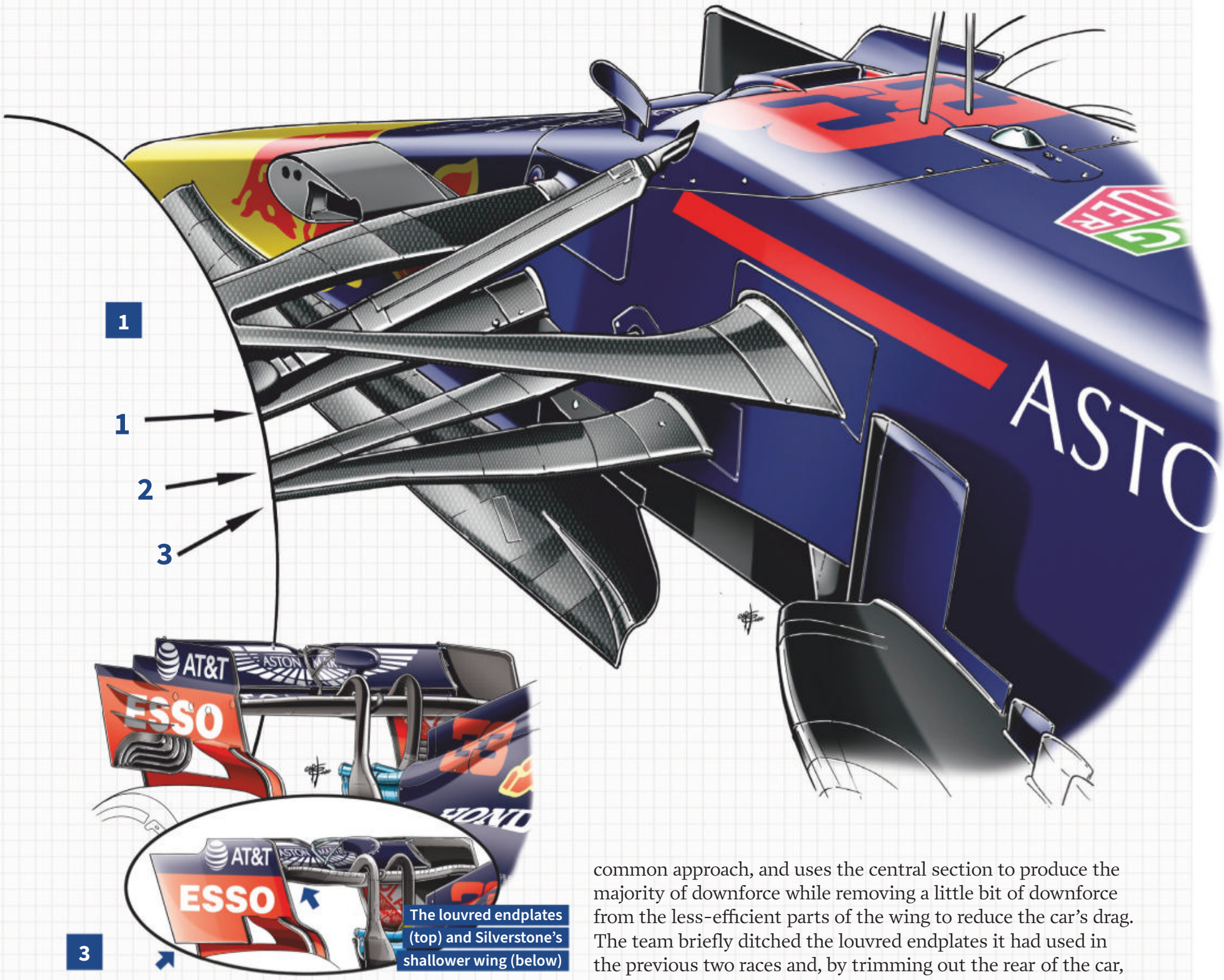
In the hands of Max Verstappen, Red Bull's RB16 was always amid the frontrunners, but that disguised the skittishness that the Dutchman could handle, while Alex Albon struggled to tame the bucking bronco.

One visible change to the Red Bull car this year was introducing a thinner nose, tapering in the bulkhead at the mounting point to fit new geometry. The team also played with its front suspension **(1)**, opting for a multilink lower wishbone and creating a suspension element that fitted within the chassis as a continuous element. The multilink upper wishbone, used last year, was gone from the Red Bull – but found its way into 2020's AlphaTauri.

While retaining the snorkel-like crash structure at the front, it also added a range of openings around it to open up the underside of the nose to a greater supply of clean airflow, increasing the efficiency of the floor.

The team had attempted to make a change to the nose for its 'home' race in Austria. The new nose moved the mounting





3

The louvred endplates (top) and Silverstone's shallower wing (below)

pylons to the front wing closer together, and they now fitted on the underside, meaning that the team had more freedom to reshape the array of nostrils, presumably to get the flow paths of the air more to the designers' taste. But for some reason, Red Bull reverted to the default version. Verstappen ran the redefined nose during the first race but it ended up on the cutting-room floor until the Abu Dhabi season finale, where the rounder nose returned to the car.

Its rear-wing-endplate update, brought in next time out at the Styrian GP, enjoyed greater longevity. It featured curved slots in the endplate overhang, which assists the airflow expansion at the rear to draw more performance from the diffuser and rear wing. Those slots also condition errant turbulence from the tyres, cleaning it up and ensuring no unpredictable flow structures enter that expansion space.

Red Bull experimented throughout the season with new parts in its bid to close the gaping chasm it had between itself and Mercedes. The team's new-for-Silverstone rear wing **(3)** certainly helped Verstappen cement his place between the Mercedes drivers and the rest of the field during the British GP, and ultimately helped him to overhaul Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas for victory in the 70th Anniversary GP, also at Silverstone.

For Silverstone, the team turned up the outboard ends of the main plane to slash the drag produced. This is a common approach, and uses the central section to produce the majority of downforce while removing a little bit of downforce from the less-efficient parts of the wing to reduce the car's drag. The team briefly ditched the louvred endplates it had used in the previous two races and, by trimming out the rear of the car, was not subject to the same degree of tyre wear as the two Mercedes drivers, meaning Verstappen could pressure the pair and eventually claim the win.

Having dropped its nose updates, Red Bull instead turned its attention to the front wing **(4)**. The team added four tiny holes to boost the front-end performance, where two tiny outlets (inset) were set into the trailing edge of each front-wing endplate. This was fed by a large slot within the underside of the wing. This draws air through the construction of the wing and releases it at the point where air is being turned around the front of the wheel.

By transferring the airflow from a larger inlet underneath to a smaller outlet, this will accelerate the airflow coming out – as per Bernoulli's principle. In response, the fluid pressure within will drop. It seems this strengthens the airflow released off the top corner of the endplate, which will further assist the outwashing characteristic that the curvature of the endplates provides.

Yet again, Red Bull started the season well behind Mercedes and only caught up through greater development. The team will hope to stop that trend next year, when everyone continues with what are essentially the same cars. »



The midfield arms race

The battle for third was a significant story of 2020: Racing Point, Renault and McLaren were all evenly matched on pace, while Ferrari dropped back and AlphaTauri enjoyed some exquisite form. If only all were as closely matched as the midfield...

Racing Point's RP20 was the most controversial technical talking point of the season, and peeled out of the pits during testing at Barcelona bearing more than a passing resemblance to the previous year's Mercedes. Its rear-brake ducts courted a large amount of early-season attention, and were subject to a weekly protest from Renault. It was alleged that they were direct copies of the Mercedes designs from the previous year amid controversy over the new listed-parts regulations.

Racing Point eventually copped a 15-point penalty, and the team could never completely shake off the 'Pink Mercedes' tag. Nonetheless, Racing Point introduced a new bodywork package with sloping sidepods (1) to post the airflow passing over the top down to the top of the diffuser to find a little extra downforce.

Aside from its protest gamesmanship, Renault became another team to settle for the tapered-nose construction, and had also touted a triple-upgrade package for Austria, having pooled the planned updates for the early flyaways. There, the team appeared with a new front wing (2). The upper-wing flap on the new wing was reworked with a smaller chord length on the outside compared to the old wing, reducing the overall downforce but improving the outwash characteristic that aerodynamicists crave. This was augmented by a square cutout in the endplate, while the footplate was flattened to also fit a small fin to assist with that outwash – a design choice that has become increasingly popular within the current regulations.

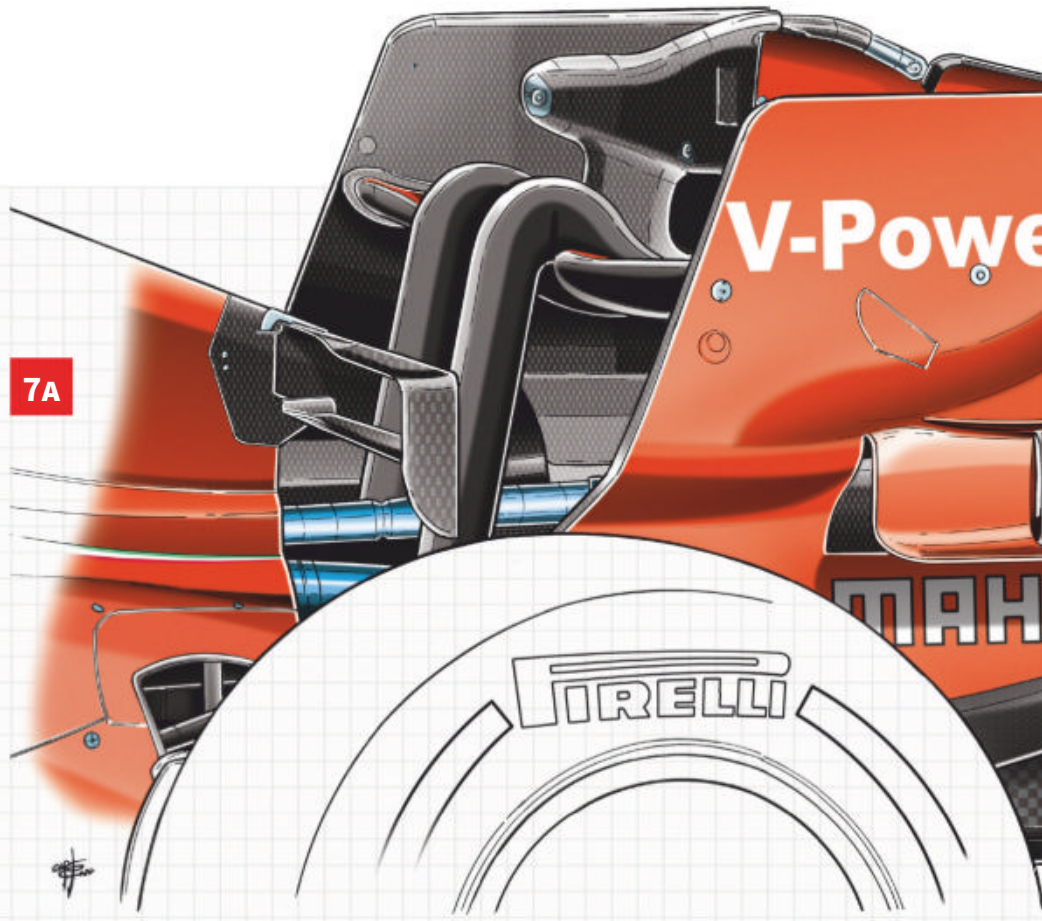
Renault's small but frequent updates helped the team on a heady progression in the middle part of the season, particularly with the outgoing (and out-going) Daniel Ricciardo, and will hope to capture the same impetus when Fernando Alonso returns for his third stint with the team.

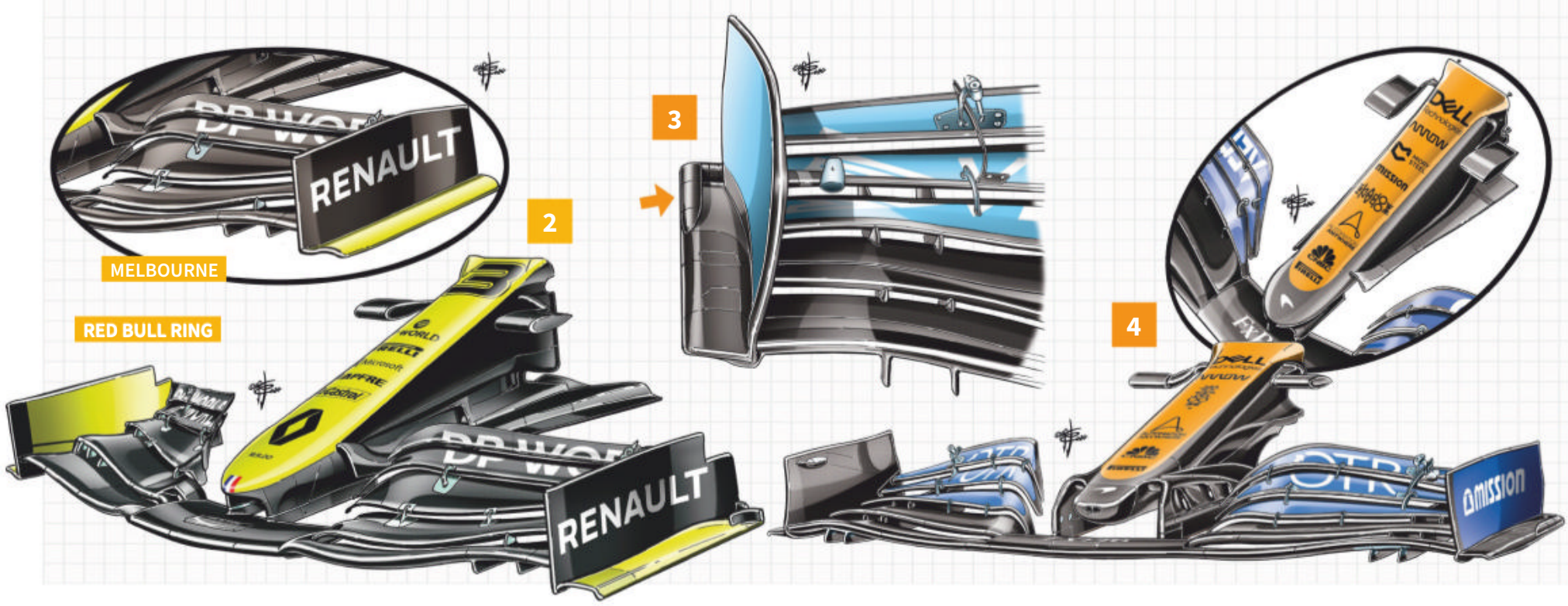
McLaren began the season as the third-place contender in the best form, as the Austrian GP heroics of Lando Norris helped the team begin the year with a podium. The team has developed sensibly under the watchful eye of team principal Andreas Seidl, and introduced an interesting front-wing solution; in testing, the MCL35 featured a small lip (3) that could release airflow around the front tyre to improve the outwash effect of the front wing.

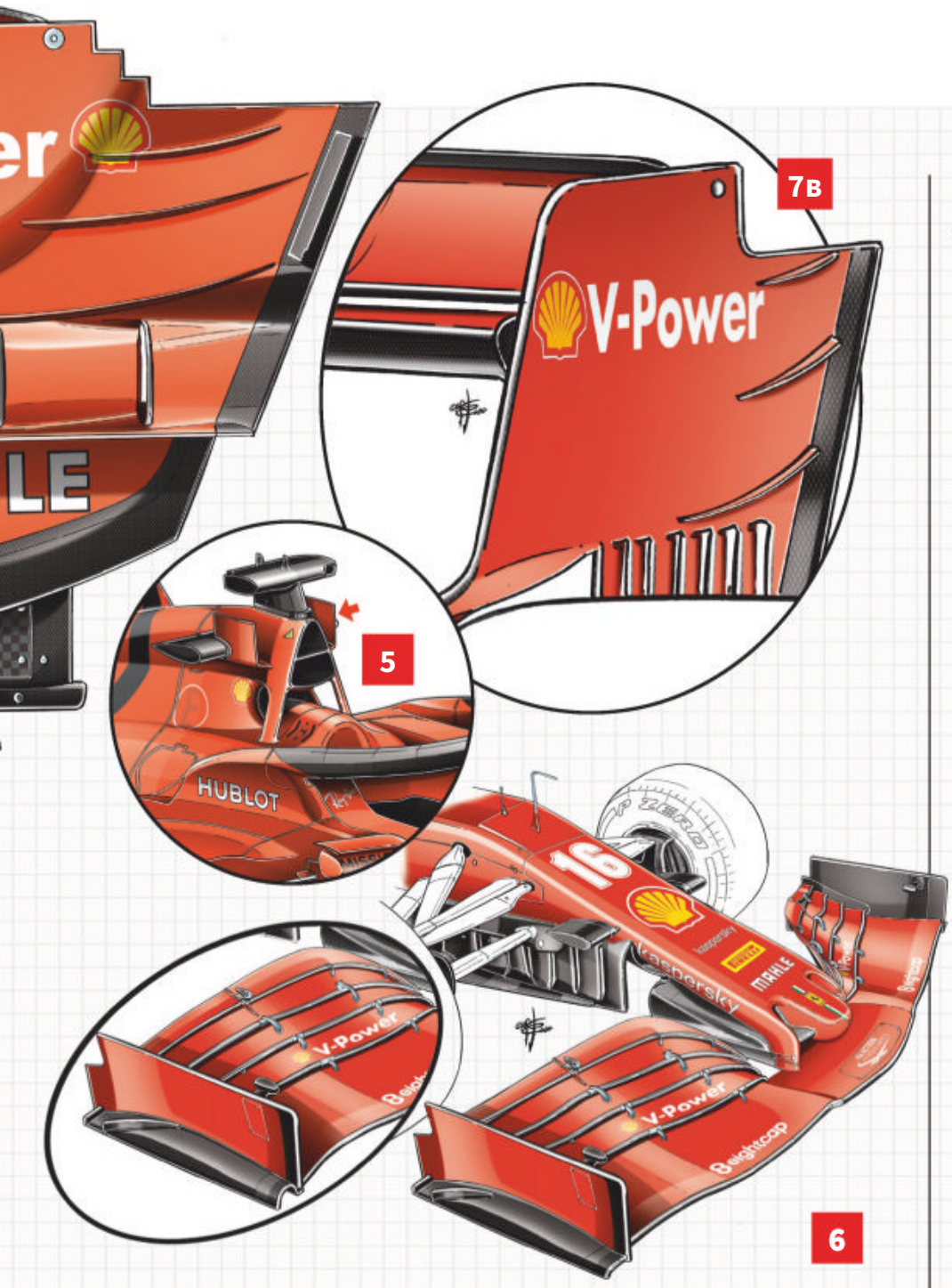
The team also tested a Mercedes-inspired nose during the Tuscan GP's first practice session in September, later opting to introduce it for the second half of the season. This gave McLaren the chance to expand on the size of the 'cape' attached either side to interact with the airflow shed from the front wing (4). Although McLaren's changes took time to work, further exploration with them helped the team find fresh energy in the all-important fight for third.

Ferrari, after an impressive 2019, was brought down to earth with a bump. Team principal Mattia Binotto alluded to the underperformance of its SF1000 as a legacy of the previous year's technical directives, plus the addition of an extra fuel-flow meter to stop the alleged circumvention of the 100kg/h limit.

The team introduced a number of changes throughout the year to try to bleed out some of the drag from this year's car, which featured two antlers on the rollhoop (5) to straighten out the airflow heading towards the rear wing.





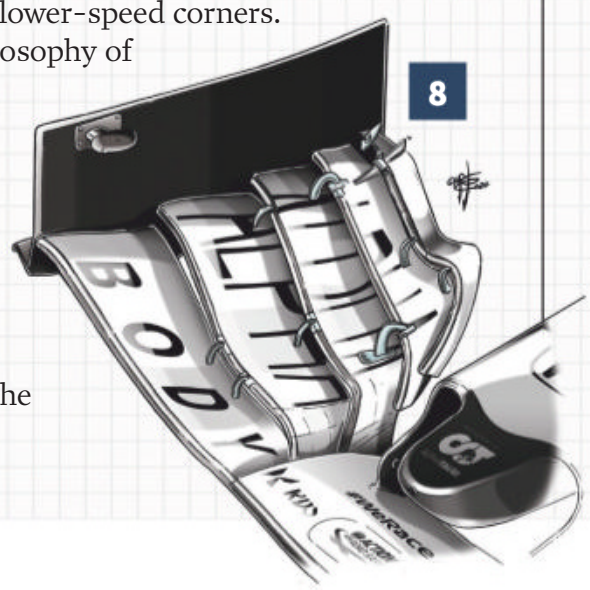


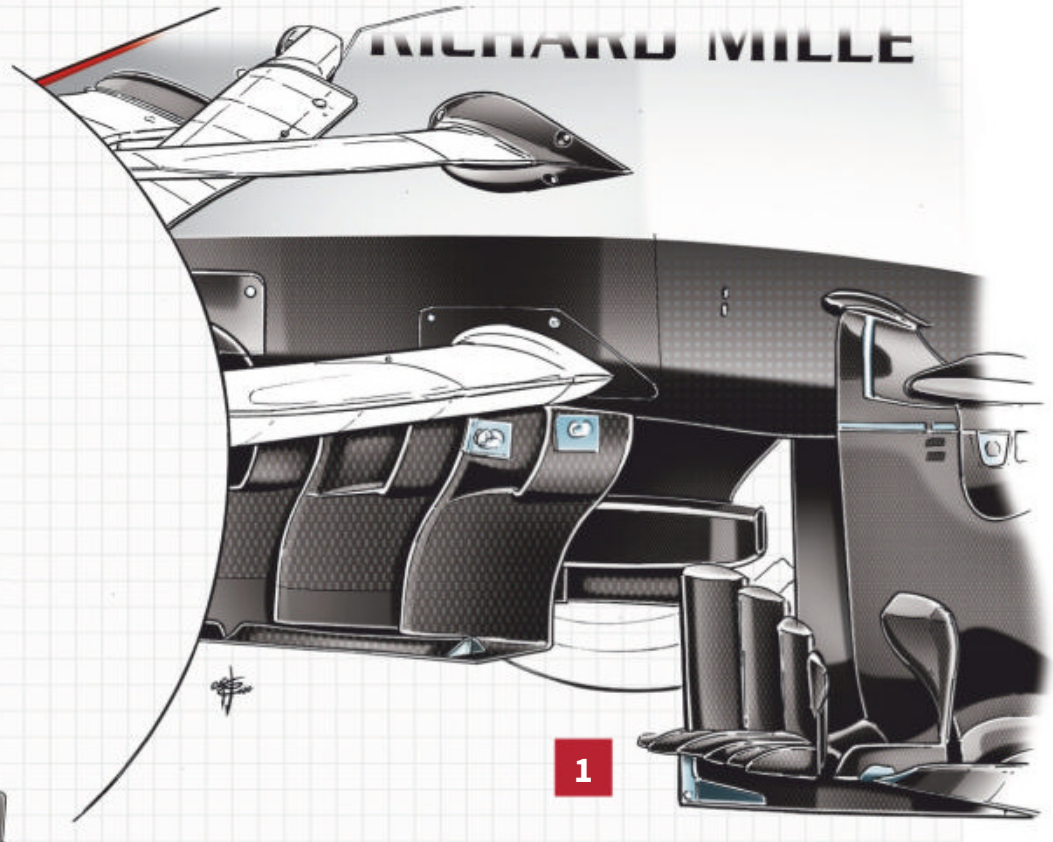
Ferrari, one of the teams to introduce the radical front-wing constructions in 2019, made detailed changes to the inclination of the front-wing **(6)** elements for the Austrian GP to try to eradicate the nervousness of the SF1000 in the slower corners. Compared to the old design, the new arrangement has wing elements with a more gradual transition to the endplate, with a reduced amount of twist.

Ferrari also arrived in Sochi at the end of September with a smattering of updates. At the front, the SF1000 sported new turning vanes mounted to the nose, with a reprofiled cape to redirect airflow around the wheels. The team also added new rear-wing endplates **(7)**, reprofiling the overhanging strakes in a manner similar to the design Mercedes developed earlier in the season.

AlphaTauri developed well throughout the year, and Pierre Gasly even took the AT01 to an unlikely victory at Monza during a season in which he starred. In that race, the team looked to the previous year's front-wing concept and reworked it for the new season **(8)**, trimming it out to the maximum but with the inboard part raised to give the wing enough downforce for the lower-speed corners.

Continuing with its philosophy of using year-old Red Bull components where it can, AlphaTauri already has a workable base for 2021, and it will remain to be seen whether the team accepts 2020-spec suspension parts or sticks with the 2019 formula as the AT01 is carried forward.

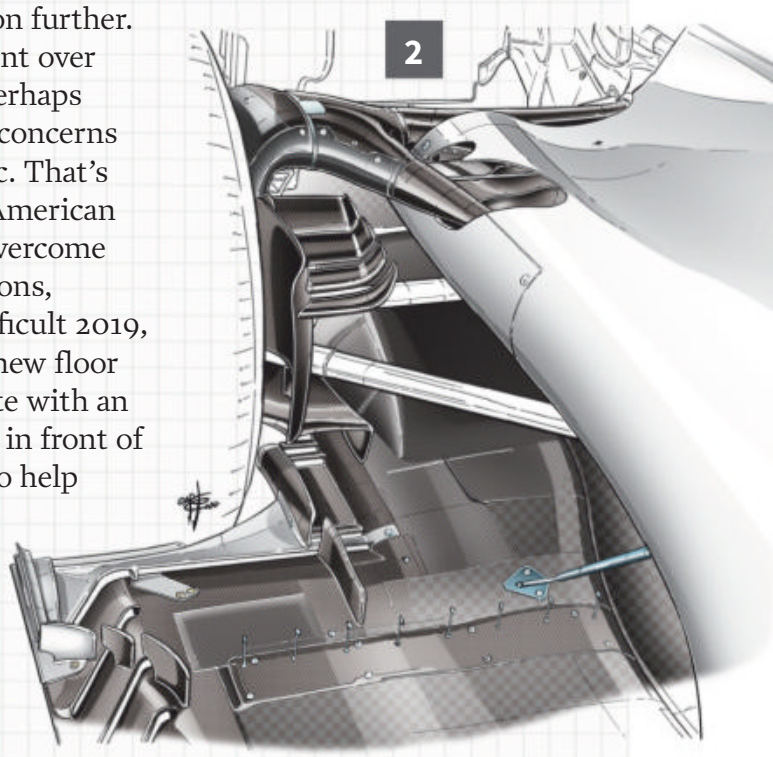




...and those in 'Class C'

Alfa Romeo, Haas and Williams were all embroiled in the battle to avoid winning the wooden spoon, with Alfa and Haas hindered by the neutered Ferrari power unit and Williams fighting to overturn its worst season in F1.

The best weekend for Alfa Romeo came at Imola in November, on the back of extending the contracts of Kimi Raikkonen and Antonio Giovinazzi for another year. By the end, the two had also bagged a double-points finish for the first time since last year's Brazilian Grand Prix. The team had new turning vanes **(1)** underneath the front of the monocoque to try to boost the interaction with the bargeboards further down the car. At the trailing edge, there was a very small raised triangular section to trip the airflow up and outwards to assist that interaction further.



Haas's development over 2020 was limited, perhaps owing to budgetary concerns during the pandemic. That's not to say that the American team didn't try to overcome the VF-20's limitations, especially after a difficult 2019, and it introduced a new floor **(2)** early on, complete with an intricate rear corner in front of the rear tyre to try to help divert airflow outwards.

Williams's disadvantage to the other teams was far reduced over the off-season, with George Russell stitching together a number of qualifying efforts to lift himself into Q2 throughout the year. The car concept developed in 2019 was always supposed to be a two-year project, and the team will hope to find an extra year's worth of development in it, especially now with funding in place thanks to the Dorilton Capital mid-season buyout.



Red Bull

‘Nearly’ is not enough

This was supposed to be the season when Red Bull gave Mercedes a run for its money. Instead, the next-best team fell short — until the final race of 2020 in Abu Dhabi

JONATHAN NOBLE

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

Red Bull bounded into the 2020 Formula 1 season full of confidence that it was going to fight for the world championship.

A stable set of regulations meant there would be no curveballs like in 2019, when new front-wing rules hindered its prospects with the RB15. There was consistency of engine manufacturer, with Honda hoping to build on the momentum that had delivered the partnership three wins over the previous season. And in Max Verstappen, the team had a maturing superstar who was ready to take on the challenge of becoming a thorn in the side of Lewis Hamilton.

To help ensure it hit the ground running with its new RB16, Red Bull also changed the philosophy of how it approached the build-up to the season. Rather than waiting until the last minute to unleash its car, thereby maximising the amount of development time possible, it chose instead to sign things off much earlier. It was hoped that this would be beneficial in ensuring the team fully understood the car, and wasn’t playing catch-up in the early races while dealing with last-minute surprises. Before heading to pre-season testing, Red Bull team boss Christian Horner was in no doubt about its readiness for the campaign ahead. “We feel better prepared than we certainly have for the last five years,” he declared.

But it didn’t take long for the first alarm bells to ring as the RB16 hit the track in pre-season testing at Barcelona. While the car had not looked slow — indeed, Ferrari was more publicly in big trouble

MAIN PIC: COATES



Pre-season spins rang alarm bells about RB16 handling characteristics

DUNBAR



ETHERINGTON

All arms and elbows: Verstappen lost out to Bottas by nine points

with a down-on-power and too-draggy SF1000 — a number of spins for Verstappen and team-mate Alexander Albon suggested that all was not right with the car. Verstappen brushed off talk that the spins were anything out of the ordinary as he suggested that it was simply a matter of trying to find the limits of the car. "By having a few spins, I knew where the limit was," he said.

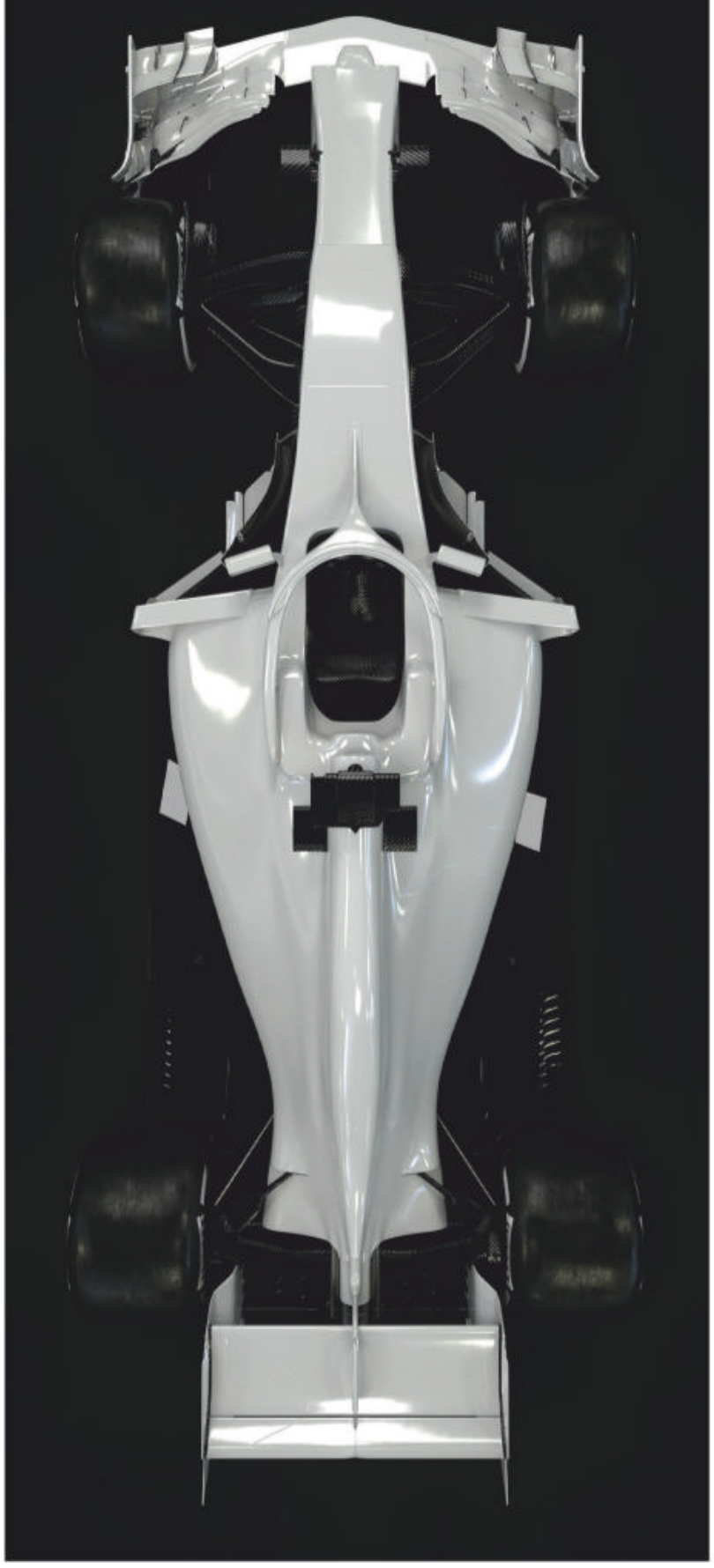
Asked if fans should be worried about the nature of what appeared to be a skittish RB16, Verstappen replied: "They don't drive the car, so they don't know. I'm not worried at all. That doesn't mean that we don't have to keep pushing and improving."

But by the time the delayed season got going in July, it was clear that there was more to the pre-season wobbles than just working out where the boundaries were. Although Albon came close to winning the season-opening Austrian GP after a late-race safety car, and Verstappen pulled off a strong run to second in Hungary, the alarm bells were ringing at Milton Keynes.

First, there was the overall performance deficit to Mercedes, with the two Black Arrows in a class of their own on pace. And there were mounting concerns at Red Bull about its car's characteristics after both drivers had suffered a spate of spins through the first races, proving that what had been seen in winter testing was representative. The balance of the RB16 was not ideal, and Albon in particular was struggling with the very unpredictable rear end. Even for Verstappen, who was better able to hustle the car as it moved around on the limit, it was not easy to find a set-up that was both fast and comfortable. "I think we've got something misbehaving »

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The RB16 proved a handful, especially early in the season

aerodynamically," said Horner after the Hungarian GP. "It's obviously a matter of understanding that and addressing that."

Initially the team tried everything to get a handle on the issues. That ranged from splitting updates and development concepts across its two cars to work out which route was best, or even busting a curfew joker in Hungary to make a dramatic overnight set-up overhaul. Slowly and surely, those imbalances were ironed out. Sure, the car was never a match on comfort for the quite neutral (perhaps a tad understeery) Mercedes, but the feeling inside the cockpit was much better.

Verstappen's win at the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone was proof that the car was not that bad. He felt the aero issues were amplified more by those outside the team than within it. As he quite rightly said, it was hardly a crisis if Red Bull had produced the second fastest car. "I think that's made bigger in the media," he told Autosport. "We have the second fastest car. I think there are a lot worse cars to drive out there.

"We had a few spins in pre-season and stuff. But all the time, when you drive on the limit, a car's not easy to drive. Maybe ours is a bit more difficult compared to Mercedes, but probably nicer than the Williams. So I think it's a bit overdone what people said in the media, I never really felt like that. It definitely did improve through the year, especially from, let's say, the first two race weekends to the middle of the season."

But the aerodynamic anomalies were not the only problem Red Bull faced in 2020. Engine supplier Honda had felt confident about progress over the winter too, and introduced an updated powerplant for the start of the season, only to discover that, relative to Mercedes, it had actually taken a step back. Mercedes had unleashed a beast in the back of the W11, as the push to raise its game in the wake of Ferrari looking a clear step ahead in 2019 had produced an impressive hike in horsepower.

While Red Bull was able to work on overcoming its aero problems throughout 2020, the power deficit to Mercedes was ever-present.



Crew rush new front wing to grid after pre-Hungarian GP prang for Verstappen



HONE

Verstappen scored a win at Silverstone, but a title bid was out of reach

"We are lacking top speed. On a track where there are so many straights it's a bit painful sometimes"

The biggest issue was running out of full battery deployment over the course of a lap. This hurt, especially in the races, as the power packs could not replenish themselves quickly enough.

"We were also lacking top speed, especially in the race," added Verstappen. "The clipping is a bit more than Mercedes. I think our car like I had, for example, in Bahrain, wasn't bad at all. But on a track where there are so many straights it's a bit painful sometimes."

Honda's mid-season announcement that it was departing F1 could have erased any hope of Red Bull ever getting on top of matters, but the silver lining from that cloud is the Japanese manufacturer has elected to bring forward what was originally meant to be its 2022 engine to next season. Initial indicators from the dyno are of a step forward in performance, which could help bridge some of the remaining gap to Mercedes.

By the end of the 2020 campaign, Red Bull certainly appeared to have closed the gap to Mercedes as Verstappen regularly threatened for the top spot, and he finally pulled it together in Abu Dhabi for the most clinical pole-and-win double of his F1 career.

But was that Abu Dhabi performance a blip, caused by a combination of Mercedes turning its engines down amid MGU-K reliability concerns and failing to get on top of the soft tyres? Or was it a genuine sign that Red Bull had finally unlocked the magic from its RB16? Horner felt it was the latter.

"Actually our pace in Bahrain [for the Sakhir GP] was very strong. It was just a shame that we lost Max at the fourth corner. He missed out on the pole by five thousandths of a second, and left Bahrain feeling somewhat frustrated. We have just been chipping away at the car and I think that over the last third of the year we've made genuine progress. We were unlucky at Imola, Turkey didn't go our way. The first Bahrain was decent. Second Bahrain, we were unlucky. And to beat Mercedes [in Abu Dhabi] in a straight fight and be the first team to beat Mercedes at that circuit, since winning ourselves in 2013, is a great achievement. It gives the team a huge amount of energy, as we head into what will be a short winter." »

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Verstappen and Red Bull ended the season on a high note in Abu Dhabi

But the question remains: how much of Red Bull's progress over the second half of the campaign was genuine? While the lap times showed that the gap had indeed been cut to Mercedes, that could be a false indicator of where things stand. Mercedes openly admitted that it stopped development of its W11 quite early to throw resource towards the 2021 challenger, with aero tweaks still allowed next season despite a chassis freeze.

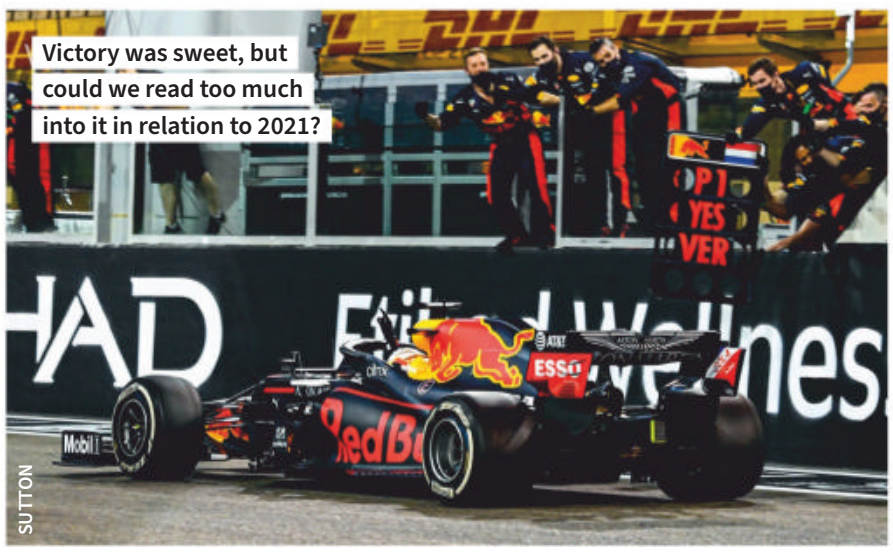
Asked whether there was a danger of Red Bull getting carried away with the strong Abu Dhabi performance, considering Mercedes had not been improving its car in recent races, Horner said: "The only thing I'd say is that there's obviously significant amounts of carry-over, whether it be gearbox, chassis or elements of the suspension. So a large part of the car is fixed and it's mainly aerodynamics that can be altered for next year. Our philosophy has been that whatever you learn this year, you carry into next year anyway.

"Mercedes are a very strong team, they have great strength in depth. We've seen that they have been bringing in some components to the car, so we expect them to be very strong next year. But I think if we can build on this [Abu Dhabi result] and this momentum, hopefully we can give them a harder time."

Whatever the reality of that gap between Red Bull and Mercedes heading into 2021, one assurance the team takes into the winter is the handling of the RB16 was much improved by the end of the season. The way that Verstappen controlled things so effortlessly in Abu Dhabi, with Albon too finally feeling a degree of confidence, showed that the difficulties that dogged the car at the start of the year had been eradicated.

"Yes, we've improved the car significantly," asserted Horner. "We've understood what those issues are, and hopefully that can be further addressed as we go into next year. We need a car that performs at a whole variance of circuits, which Mercedes have been very good at producing."

There is another factor that needs to be taken into consideration ahead of 2021, and it's unclear which teams could be helped or hindered by it. The technical regulations have been changed to



Victory was sweet, but could we read too much into it in relation to 2021?

SUTTON



“Mercedes are very strong. But if we can build on this momentum, hopefully we can give them a harder time”

try to cut downforce, in the face of worries about tyre failures or the necessity to mandate higher pressures, which is not popular. Key to these changes are simplified floor structures around the rear wheels, getting rid of many of the complex slots and holes that have become a focal point of team development.

There were some initial fears that losing the ability to develop this floor area would most hurt Red Bull’s high-rake concept, but there is now a growing viewpoint that it could hinder Mercedes more, because its longer wheelbase means its use of the floor to produce downforce is particularly critical.

After a year where it has faced battles to understand its initial aerodynamic anomalies, the carry-over of the current car, allied to the floor tweaks, could be the cocktail Red Bull needs for a flying start for 2021.

But it felt that way as this season got under way, so is history going to repeat itself?

Verstappen in no man’s land



In a season where Lewis Hamilton broke the record for Formula 1 wins and equalled Michael Schumacher’s tally of seven titles, there was intense debate about how much dependence there is on the car for success in the sport. With the Mercedes W11 so dominant, many cynics were quick to suggest that Hamilton was only winning because he had the best machinery underneath him.

That feeling was perhaps amplified by a season where Max Verstappen, the man who many expected to knock him off his throne, had a Red Bull that wasn’t quite good enough to let him do it. This season was the last chance for Verstappen – already F1’s youngest ever driver and race winner – to become F1’s youngest world champion.

And, while there were many Saturday and Sunday afternoons where he kept Mercedes on its toes – and even won at Silverstone and in Abu Dhabi – all too often he found himself in no man’s land, clear of the cars behind, yet not quick enough to challenge Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas. It was hard therefore to judge exactly how good Verstappen’s season was, especially considering he suffered a spate of retirements, through power-unit problems, tyre failures or crashes.

He could have grabbed second place in the drivers’ championship, ending up just nine points short, but the only thing Verstappen cares about is winning. Asked how he judged his own season, he said: “Better than last year. Just a bit more consistent, I think.

“This season was better than last, more consistent. But at quite a few races I’ve been on my own”

But at quite a few races I’ve been on my own… I just like to follow Mercedes!”

He kept a brave face on it, but by season’s end you could sense a desperation to break out of the mould of being the nearly man, as he joked about taking home the third-place press-conference chair he often sat in on Sunday afternoons.

But perhaps as a sign of growing maturity, he never tried to overreach. “I wasn’t frustrated, just a bit powerless sometimes,” he reflected.

The end of Vettel's Ferrari mission

Sebastian Vettel ended his six-year spell at Ferrari with a painfully difficult season, while team-mate Charles Leclerc made the best of an underperforming F1 car

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

"The mission is still there and the target is still there to achieve the mission — to win with Ferrari."

Sebastian Vettel spoke those words only nine months ago, during the aborted Australian Grand Prix weekend. At the time, just before the COVID-19 pandemic brought Formula 1 and the world to a standstill, it looked near certain that he would be re-signed to a fresh Ferrari deal and continue striving to achieve his dream: winning in red, just like his childhood hero, Michael Schumacher.

But eight weeks later, Vettel's Ferrari exit was announced, and Carlos Sainz Jr revealed as his replacement. The dream was to end, the mission in mortal peril.

This time 12 months ago, Ferrari signed Charles Leclerc to a long-term contract, sealing his place at the team until the end of 2024. His star had risen tremendously since he replaced Kimi Raikkonen at the start of 2019, his heartbreaking near-miss in Bahrain and victories at Spa and on Ferrari's home patch at Monza quickly kickstarting his tale at Maranello. Leclerc's rise brought him level with Vettel and conflict was coming, culminating in *that* crash between the pair in Brazil.

But despite that, ahead of the expected start of the 2020 season, when observers were eagerly awaiting the next intra-Ferrari eruption, team boss Mattia Binotto was still calling Vettel the team's "first choice" when it came to joining Leclerc beyond 2020. By the time of Vettel's Melbourne words, both sides were insisting that talks over a new contract had yet to really get going.



COATES

Vettel at Ferrari

Starts 118

Wins 14

Poles 12

Fastest laps 14



Ferrari career became a wreck for Vettel in his final season at the team

MAUGER



SUTTON

Mattia Binotto chose not to offer Vettel a new contract

Once the news of Vettel's exit had broken during the ensuing spring lockdown, it was later revealed that he was never even offered a contract. He'd insisted during that Melbourne interview that his future happiness was a more important consideration than anything to do with money, with suggestions following the news of his upcoming departure that Vettel had wanted a firm and lasting commitment from Ferrari, which was not forthcoming. Such a preference is understandable – at 33, Vettel is entering the swansong years of his illustrious career. But Ferrari had found a new star, and new love.

Leclerc is the team's latest hope for returned F1 glory, Vettel the latest high-profile signing to fail to recreate the success steamroller that Schumacher brought to the team at the turn of the century. Vettel, Fernando Alonso – even Kimi Raikkonen, Ferrari's most-recent world champion, who won with the team arrangement that had taken Schumacher to his five titles in red – were cast aside in favour of a bright new hope.

The divorce was announced, the replacement already secured, but Vettel's mission had one last chance of succeeding in the 2020 campaign. The problem was it was already a faint chance at best.

In pre-season testing, the SF1000 had been exposed as severely lacking compared to its 'Class A' rivals. In fact, the car was so far behind Mercedes and Red Bull that it would be a midfield challenger at best. It was slow on the straights, and the "extreme" design the team had outlined at its launch – a bid to match Mercedes' downforce levels and make Ferrari a challenger on a greater range of tracks than in the previous seasons, when it had relied on its controversial power unit making the difference – was creating drag problems.

The Melbourne withdrawal meant F1's 2020 campaign did not »

"Everything that happened, happened for a reason. The main thing is to make sure I learned from it, and I think I have grown with it"

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The 'Seb spin' has become a thing in F1 during Vettel's latter years at Ferrari

TEE


Vettel picked up a final Ferrari podium in Turkey

ETHERINGTON

kick off on time, and so the true scale of Ferrari's deficit was not fully revealed until July, when the season finally got going at the Austrian GP. In qualifying at the Red Bull Ring, Leclerc led the way in seventh, Vettel dumped out in Q2 — 11th. A year before, Leclerc had taken pole by 0.259 seconds over Lewis Hamilton, and only narrowly lost the race to Max Verstappen. The distance Ferrari had fallen was stark.

The biggest single reason behind its sudden pace deficit was down to its power output. What had once been Ferrari's key strength was suddenly gone — removed by a series of FIA technical directives at the end of 2019, with the governing body announcing in the final moments of 2020 testing that it had reached a private settlement with the team regarding that year's engine.

"The aero intricacies that Ferrari added to go faster in the corners lacked the grunt to overcome drag"

The power problem had a knock-on effect. The aerodynamic intricacies that Ferrari had added onto the SF1000 to go faster in the corners suddenly didn't have the grunt required to overcome the drag they added on the straights, or make them work to their best in the turns. It was a vicious circle that Ferrari could not escape before the season got under way.

When it did, Leclerc immediately rescued something from what would be a painful season overall with his stunning second place in the season opener (aided by Hamilton's penalty). In the same race, Vettel came home 10th after making another unforced error — he spun while running behind Sainz, an unfortunate twist of fate given the upcoming crossing of their Ferrari paths.

It was the latest in a long line of Vettel mistakes that had blighted his F1 record in recent years. And it wasn't the last in 2020. He spun at the first corner of the 70th Anniversary GP, after which former team-mate Daniel Ricciardo would call his own unforced loop-around later in the same race a "Seb spin", which rather sums things up. Vettel produced another one while running behind Antonio Giovinazzi's Alfa Romeo in the Eifel GP as they scrapped over 10th — a legacy of works and customer Ferrari-powered cars grappling with the engine deficit down the order. And Vettel also crashed in qualifying for the Russian GP when he couldn't catch the rear coming around, wiping the right-front off his car ahead of a race he would go on to finish in a lapped 13th.

A new, negative feature of Vettel's final Ferrari campaign was his underperformance in qualifying. He was of course hindered by the engine deficit, but only once, at the Hungaroring, a track where power is not the decisive factor, did he break into the top five in qualifying (it should be noted that Vettel finished a creditable sixth in the race too, as he kept his tyres in better shape than Leclerc, who finished out of the points).

It was against the clock that Leclerc was able to show his class »



Early Ferrari win at Sepang in 2015 was a Vettel highlight

TEE



TEE

again in 2020, despite the car problems, which Ferrari attempted to cure with a trickle of updates it knew would not be a magic-bullet fix. At the first Silverstone race, the Nurburgring, Algarve Circuit and the second Bahrain event he took fine fourth places, the first and last coming on tracks that very much did not play to Ferrari's strengths. In the British GP, he was able to hold his position — a rare thing overall given the Ferrari was very vulnerable on the straights when it qualified ahead of its midfield rivals running other power units — which became his second shock podium of the season when the late-race tyre dramas hit Mercedes and McLaren. He also drove magnificently to go from eighth to fourth in the 70th Anniversary GP, executing a one-stopper so fine that he was unable to explain why he was so fast, a result he repeated in Portugal.

But Vettel, who struggled throughout the year to generate much confidence behind the wheel of his SF1000, failed to make it through to Q3 on 14 occasions. This may have been a more accurate reflection of where the 2020 Ferrari deserved to be against its new rivals in the pack, with Leclerc able to elevate it on occasions — much like Verstappen could do against the Mercedes — but it also condemned Vettel to regular battles to make the points. There were places squandered to slow pitstops, which Ferrari blamed on wheelnuts being too easily stripped during tyre changes and equipment it needs to upgrade. But on several occasions Vettel came home rather anonymously. At the end of the year, he trailed his replacement as Ferrari's new love by 65 points in the standings — Leclerc was eighth, Vettel 13th.

But there was at least one final moment of glory for Vettel to take away from his six-year spell in red. This came at the Turkish GP, a thrilling race where the low-grip track surface and wet race conditions let the best shine. Vettel started 11th but finished third — his 55th podium result for Ferrari. The key was a brilliant start, and he then kept eventual winner Hamilton behind for a long time, finally sealing third when Leclerc slipped wide three corners from home while battling Sergio Perez.

As 2020 draws to a close, Vettel's time with Ferrari will fade into memories. He completed 118 races for the famous marque — behind only Schumacher, Raikkonen and Felipe Massa. But when it comes to considering his Ferrari legacy, Vettel says he "doesn't work like that".

"I'm not so worried about myself and don't take myself so

Ferrari's (not so) new hope

As Sebastian Vettel heads for the exit, there's no doubt who is Ferrari's star driver now: Charles Leclerc.

In what was a tough third year in Formula 1 for the 23-year-old, given Ferrari's struggles, he enhanced his reputation with a series of starring drives on his way to eighth in the standings. Next season, he will be joined by Carlos Sainz Jr and together they will embark on the latest chapter in Ferrari's quest to recapture the glory years it enjoyed most recently – and nearly 20 years ago now – with Michael Schumacher.

Great drivers find a way to deliver excellent results in inferior cars, which Leclerc certainly did in 2020. But there were mistakes too.

The biggest one came at the start of the Styrian Grand Prix, where Leclerc managed to take out Vettel in a badly botched first-lap move. Something similar happened at the start of the Sakhir race, after Leclerc had delivered a brilliant fourth in qualifying at a track that really exposed Ferrari's power problems. But at least on this occasion he *only* eliminated himself, tapped eventual race winner Sergio Perez around, and contributed to Max Verstappen's exit on the outside.

Leclerc put those two crashes down to his desire to ace the starts and early stages, clearly trying to make up for his car's shortcomings where he could. "I gained a lot in some of the races in the first lap, which helped me to gain a lot of points this year," he explained.

"When I look back at the year compared to 2019 I'm a lot more satisfied with the job I've done"

"And it happens that sometimes it just didn't go my way."

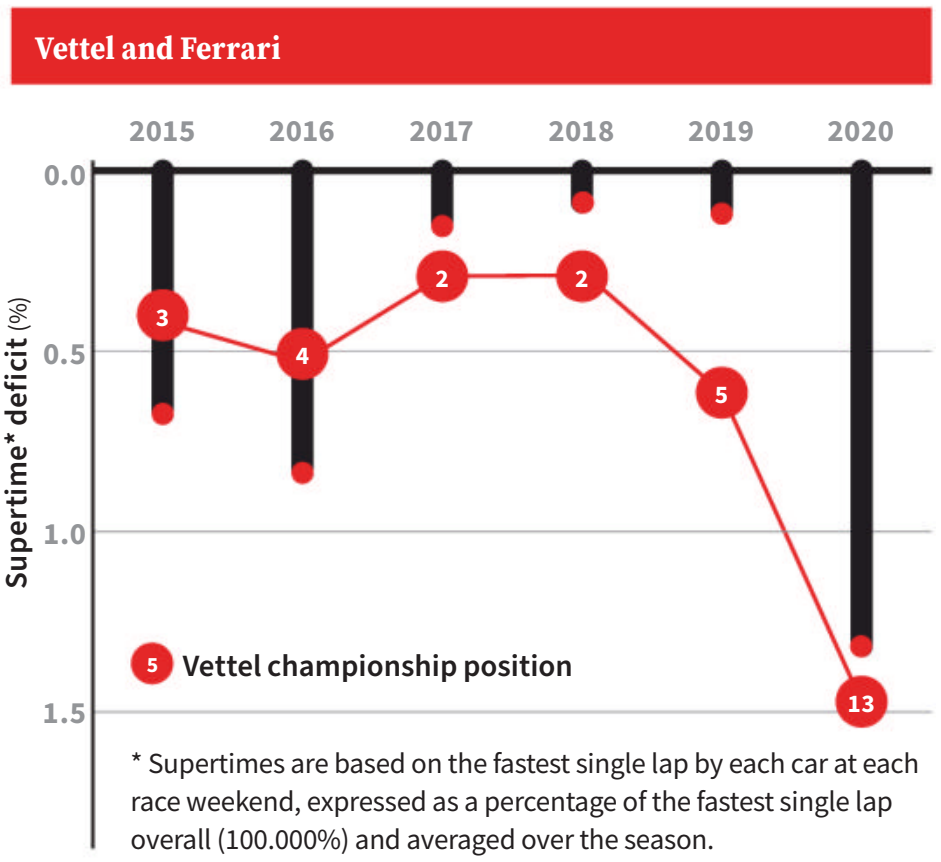
Another painful moment slightly undid another brilliant race performance in Turkey. Here, Leclerc's aggressive tyre strategy set off the race's two rounds of pitstops, and he seized the initiative to rise from 12th (after a rare 2020 underperformance in qualifying where he couldn't switch on the tyres in the wet) to a brief second, which he lost with his late slip battling Perez that dropped him to fourth.

"You can always do things better and I think with all the mistakes that I've done, I've learned from them," Leclerc said of his 2020 campaign, where he was again brutally honest in his self-assessments. "And if I look back at the year compared to when I looked back at 2019 at the end of the season, I'm a lot more satisfied with the job I've done this year."





Ferrari crew gave Vettel a guard of honour to bid farewell in Abu Dhabi



seriously," he said ahead of the Sakhir GP. "I don't want to sound arrogant saying, 'I don't care how I will be remembered'. But I think the people who know me – they will remember and will remember the good and also part of the bad, I guess.

"I've no regrets. I think it was a privilege to drive for the team, to work with the people who have such a high level of passion for the brand, and for their job. It's always a privilege to work among very excited people, excited about what they do in their lives, and I've learned a lot. Coming out of Ferrari, I'm for sure further up than coming into Ferrari and the results are only one measure. But I think in life there are more measures than just results.

"I will miss those people but the good thing is that I will not lose these people. They're still around and I know how to get to them if I want to. I've never worked on a colour basis in this regard. You put the people first. And that's why, for me it's not that important how I will be remembered. The key people that I have let into my head or in my heart, I think they know. So, I don't think there's anything to state or to prove there."

The main takeaway from Vettel's Ferrari tenure is that together they were unable to unseat Mercedes as F1's top team. Four times the squad finished as runner-up in the constructors' championship, while Vettel trailed Hamilton in 2017 and 2018. That latter season is one that really got away, with Vettel leading at the halfway point before sliding back, famously going off while leading in the wet at his home race in Germany.

He has hinted at having fights he should not have had behind the scenes. There has also been plenty of change in the make-up of the team during Vettel's time – and only really in two seasons, 2018 and 2019, did it manage to produce the car package capable of possibly stopping Mercedes.

It's little wonder that he calls his Ferrari career a "rollercoaster ride over the years with a lot of things happening". But when looking back on that golden opportunity in 2018, he doesn't single out the Hockenheim off as the one moment that swung his Ferrari destiny ultimately to an earlier exit than he perhaps desired.

"In terms of momentum in that year it wasn't helping," he said ahead of his final Ferrari race. "The mistake was a little mistake, but a huge outcome, and a huge penalty. But I think there were definitely more things happening in the 2018 season.

"We had the passing of Mr [Sergio] Marchionne, the change in leadership from Maurizio [Arrivabene] to Mattia, so maybe the 2018 year was a decisive year for many things. But I don't know if you can really break it down to only one thing.

"Obviously in 2016 we parted ways with James [Allison, who went on to join Mercedes], because of personal conflicts at the time. And I think that looking back there were a lot of things that we should have and could have done better.

"But everything that happened, happened for a reason. The main thing I think, on my side, is to make sure that I learned from it, and I think I have grown with it. Some moments were on the track. Other moments were off the track. So overall, I think I feel much more comfortable or in a better place now than those years ago, but certainly at the time, it hasn't always been easy and straightforward."

Vettel's final Ferrari season might have finished with the four-time world champion down in 13th in the drivers' standings – of the 'Class B' drivers, only AlphaTauri's Daniil Kvyat finished behind – but his F1 career will continue into 2021. Vettel joins Racing Point and hopes to "contribute as much as I can to help the team grow" as it transitions into its Aston Martin guise.

As his Ferrari era drew to a close, Vettel selected his first win for the team (Malaysia 2015, his second race in red), Monaco 2017 and the following year's Canadian GP as his best moments with the team. "We had a couple of wins to choose from," he concluded. "Not enough."



SUTTON

Carlos Sainz Jr has left McLaren to join Leclerc at Ferrari for 2021

Class B

How McLaren won Formula 1's 'Class B' battle

Three years ago the famous Woking squad finished ninth in the constructors' standings in disarray. This season its recovery continued in fine style

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

Off the back of its recovery to fourth place in the constructors' championship in 2019, McLaren entered this season braced for a tougher challenge to head Formula 1's midfield. The emergence of Racing Point's 'pink Mercedes' in Barcelona and a strong showing from Renault throughout testing left some McLaren team members fearing it could drop as low as sixth or seventh in the standings.

Yet what followed was the best season in McLaren's recent history. Rarely did the team have the third-fastest car (on raw pace it was fifth, just behind Ferrari), yet it was able to beat its faster rivals to snare third in the standings, its best finish since 2012.

It was further validation for the recovery plan that has been formulating ever since McLaren's divorce with Honda after the 2017 season, and proved the strength of a balanced driver line-up in Lando Norris and Carlos Sainz Jr, who eagerly capitalised on opportunities that presented themselves.

Combined with off-track movements, 2020 could end up being one of the most significant years in McLaren's history.

Following the cancellation of the season opener in Australia and the surge in the COVID-19 pandemic, thoughts of a bid for third position seemed a long way off for McLaren, as its attention turned to self-preservation. The team was one of the first to furlough staff, with the wider McLaren Group announcing a plan to lay off 1200 of its employees, and secured a £150million loan from the National Bank of Bahrain to ease short-term cashflow problems.



Andreas Seidl (left) was cautious about his team's midfield hopes

The return to racing at the start of July in Austria gave fresh impetus to McLaren, but it still anticipated to be fighting for fourth at best. Even as Ferrari started to talk down its own chances, knowing the difficulties to come, team principal Andreas Seidl scoffed at talk that McLaren could be ahead of the Italian giant, even for a brief period at the start of the season.

"The gap we had last year to Ferrari was huge," Seidl said ahead of the first practice session of the season. "We definitely did a good step forward with our car over the winter, which we could confirm at the winter testing in Barcelona. But I don't think the step is big enough to be close to even a bad Ferrari car."

Seidl was wrong. A bad Ferrari car and bad Ferrari power unit was the catalyst in upping the stakes for F1's 'Class B' battle, making the race for fourth actually a race for third in the standings – and ultimately podiums, poles and wins that would fall the way of F1's midfield squads in 2020.

"For all the midfield teams, it gave the possibility to actually finish P4 [in races], because Max [Verstappen] and Lewis and Valtteri [Bottas] are in a different league," says Sainz. "The year changed immediately. After the first three races, we realised we were going to be fighting for third in the constructors', and possibly fourth in the drivers' championship."

"After the first three races, we realised we were fighting for third in the constructors' and possibly fourth in the drivers'"

A taste of things to come for McLaren came in the chaotic season opener in Austria. When both Red Bulls retired and Lewis Hamilton was slapped with a penalty, two podium spots were opened up. Charles Leclerc was able to give Ferrari a sliver of hope with a faultless drive to second, but it was Norris who really stole the show. A remarkable final lap meant that, after the five-second penalty was applied, Norris scored his first F1 podium.

Proving his late charge at the Red Bull Ring was not a one-off, Norris pulled a similar trick at the Styrian Grand Prix the very next week, passing Daniel Ricciardo, Lance Stroll and Sergio Perez in the final two laps to grab fifth. 'Last Lap Lando' was born.

"It showed not to give up in any way," says Norris. "There can be times in a race when you're completely on your own, and you just feel like there's nothing you can do to achieve much more. In the beginning of the season, there were more circumstances where people had problems and issues or penalties. Continuing to push every lap when there was nothing to achieve maybe

Norris and Sainz clinched third for McLaren in Abu Dhabi

TEE

within that lap, that's where it all paid off."

It gave McLaren a big boost at the start of the season, but things took a dip at Silverstone in August. Even with Racing Point receiving a 15-point penalty over its brake-duct design — concurrent with much mudslinging between McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown and Racing Point boss Otmar Szafnauer — McLaren was struggling to get both cars into the points, unlike its rivals.

A late puncture robbed Sainz of fifth place at the British GP, and he ran as high as fourth before a wheelgun failure dropped him out of the points. "I lost immediately 30 to 40 points off the back of the first five or six races," says Sainz. "That kind of set the tone a bit for the rest of the year." After the Spanish GP, Racing Point had moved ahead in the constructors' championship, with Sainz's failure to start the next race in Belgium marking another missed opportunity.

McLaren's peak was about to come, but it was a story largely overshadowed at the Italian GP by Pierre Gasly's remarkable victory.

As Red Bull retreated deep into F1's midfield, McLaren emerged as the second-fastest team at Monza. Sainz stuck his MCL35 third on the grid, edging out Perez in the Racing Point in qualifying, and passed the struggling Bottas on the opening lap to sit second. With Norris just behind him and the gap to Perez growing, a double podium was on the cards.

But when Leclerc crashed heavily at Parabolica and brought out a red flag, resetting the race and affording a number of drivers a free stop, Sainz lost out. He dropped back to sixth, leaving him to battle past slower cars on the restart if he wanted to regain a podium spot.

Hamilton's penalty for entering a closed pitlane put Gasly into the lead and, by the time Sainz had recovered second, the gap to the front was more than four seconds. He chipped away gradually, gaining DRS with two laps to go, but fell just short of being McLaren's first race winner in eight years.

"It was an intense final few laps, probably the most intense of my career," says Sainz. "But looking back at it, I don't feel like I could have done anything differently. I think just due to the circumstances, that day, I couldn't win the race.

"But I drove my heart out. Finishing four tenths behind the winner, and that winner being Pierre, makes it feel like a win escaped from us. But at the same time, if you put everything into context, actually the race was the best I could have done."

If McLaren thought Monza would herald a change in fortune, it was wrong. Sainz retired from the next two races, his silly crash in Russia also ruining Norris's race, and a power-unit problem sidelined Norris when on course for fourth place at the Nurburgring in October. Not only was Racing Point now back in front in the »

Ricciardo champion without F1's 'big three'



Ricciardo scored two real podiums in 2020, but five 'Class B wins'

COATES

The balance between Carlos Sainz Jr and Lando Norris was crucial in clinching McLaren third place, yet neither were regularly at the head of the midfield.

Sergio Perez finished 20 points clear of Sainz in the drivers' standings, with Daniel Ricciardo six points behind the Racing Point man. But had F1 been run without the 'big three' of Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari (which scored three podiums, remember), then Ricciardo would have come out on top (see page 57).

Norris started the season strongly with 'victories' in the two Austria races, but didn't then top the midfield until Bahrain in November, causing him to lose out in our theoretical title fight.

The high points of Ricciardo's season were the podiums at the Nurburgring and Imola, yet he was already leading Renault's recovery as early as the British GP, where he took his first 'win'. He also headed Class B at Spa and Mugello, and trailed only Perez in Sochi, before adding two more successes to take his fictional win tally to five.

Even with a dip towards the end of the year that saw Ricciardo finish no higher than 'third' in a race, he still held on to clinch the 'title' by 26 points. Perez – third, 33 points behind Ricciardo – paid for his two-race Silverstone absence after contracting COVID-19.

The discrepancy to the real world championship shows how Perez's season was built on consistency and regular points hauls, even when the leaders did not hit trouble. Ricciardo's peaks tended to come more when Mercedes and Red Bull were out of the picture, his

"Even with a dip towards the end of the year, Ricciardo still held on to clinch the 'title' by 26 points"

podiums at the Nurburgring and Imola following issues for Valtteri Bottas and Max Verstappen respectively.

In the teams' standings, it's a familiar story: McLaren would have still beaten Racing Point and Renault, again thanks to driver consistency. Even with three 'wins', Stroll's miserable form from Mugello onwards costs him again, while Esteban Ocon never once topped the Class B field and would have finished seventh in the championship even with the 'big three' removed.



Sakhir GP win for Perez, but Racing Point lost a 10-point lead in the finale

standings, but Renault's surge in form led by Daniel Ricciardo meant the fight for third was wide open.

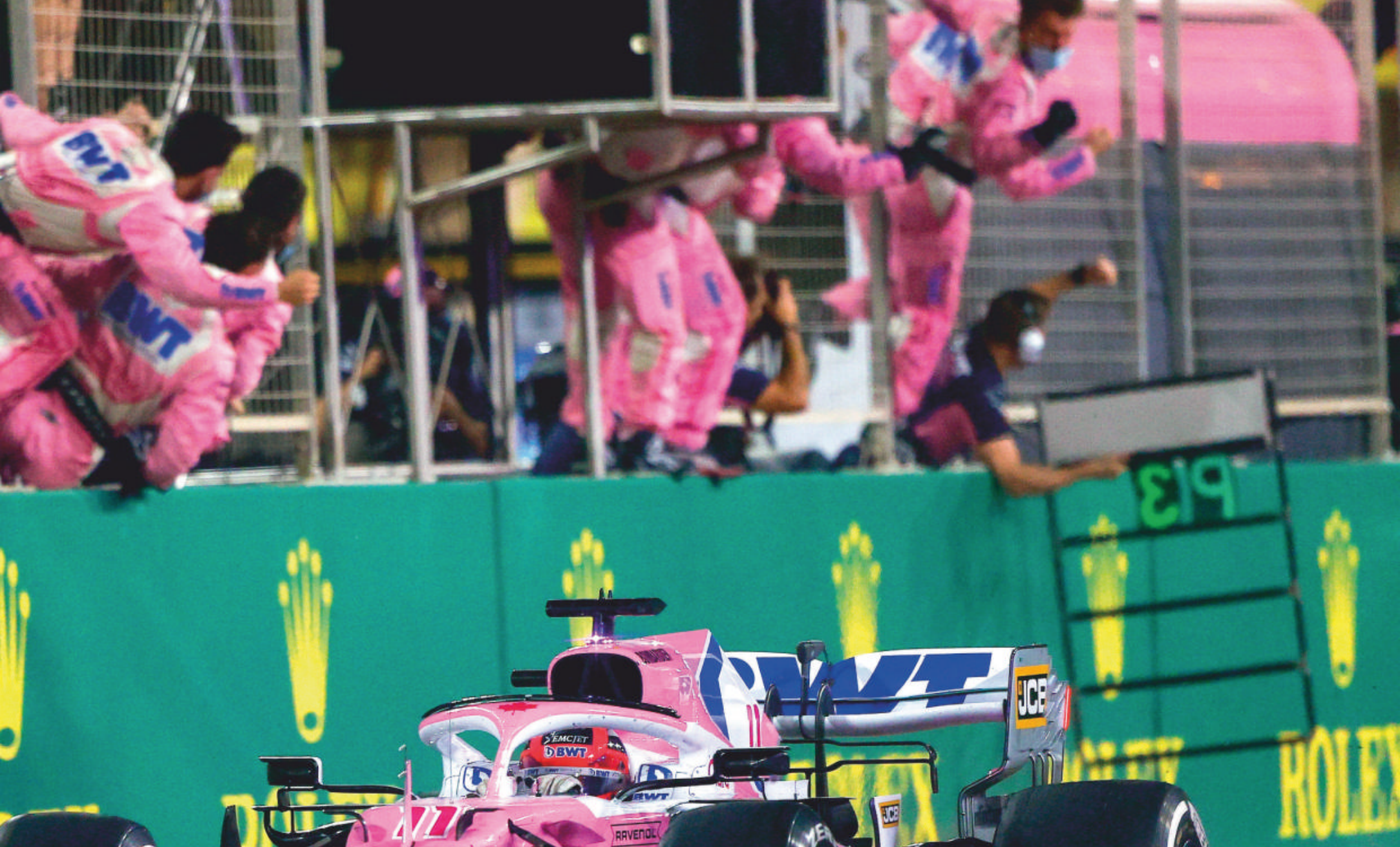
By the Turkish GP in November, McLaren's bid for third appeared to be hanging by a thread. Ricciardo had scored two podiums in three races for Renault, while Racing Point took pole and third on the grid at Istanbul Park. Seidl was fairly honest of McLaren's chances, saying Racing Point could "damage our ability to stay in the fight for P3" in Turkey.

"I still think there's a chance, because we always have two drivers who are able to score good points to stay in this fight for P3,"



Sainz just missed out on a maiden F1 win at Monza

TEE



HONE

he said ahead of the race. "But obviously we depend a lot on what's happening tomorrow. We will not give up this fight, as long as we can stay in the points gap."

As front-wing damage ended Lance Stroll's win hopes, McLaren left Turkey having lost just five points to Racing Point. Astonishingly, it pulled out 14 on Renault, which scored one point.

Another bullet was dodged in Bahrain. An MGU-K failure on Perez's car denied him a surefire third place, handing Norris fourth and Sainz fifth, the Spaniard having battled his way from 15th on the grid. Stroll's early roll left Racing Point scoreless, catapulting McLaren into a 17-point advantage in the fight for third with two rounds to go.

The pace advantage Racing Point had by now carved meant it was still a fragile lead, proven emphatically in the Sakhir GP. As Mercedes floundered and Lewis Hamilton substitute George Russell was dealt a lesson in F1 heartbreak, Perez and Stroll were able to capitalise, bringing home a 1-3 finish and 40 points. Had it not been for a stop under the virtual safety car, Sainz may yet have been leading the queue of cars behind the Black Arrows, making it another missed chance for McLaren.

The 10-point deficit to Racing Point entering the Abu Dhabi season finale left McLaren sceptical of its chances, even with Perez landing a back-of-grid penalty for a power-unit change. Norris put in a stunning qualifying lap to sit just two tenths off pole and bag fourth on the grid but, with Stroll qualifying eighth, pressure remained.

But when it mattered most, McLaren's great strength — two evenly matched, regular points-scoring drivers — came good. After seeing Perez retire early due to a power-unit issue, Norris and Sainz delivered a convincing race to cross the line fifth and sixth. A dithering Stroll ruined his race by failing to make easy work of Sebastian Vettel, and was passed on the last lap by Esteban Ocon to resign him to 10th place. The swing meant McLaren clinched third by seven points.

"We had a competitive car, an all-rounder, always starting in positions where we were able to fight for good points"

Despite all of the missed opportunities and the frequent pace deficit to its rivals, McLaren had managed to win the fight for 'Class B'. But how? One great quality of the McLaren MCL35 was that it ran fairly well on all circuits, unlike the Renault. And while the same can be said of the Racing Point RP20, that car was often let down by reliability woes — which proved especially costly in the final knockings — and race execution.

"We had a competitive car throughout the season, a bit of an all-rounder," says Seidl. "We were always in a position to get into Q3, and always started the races in positions where we were able to fight for good points. We had a great team out there at the track as well, which was simply very good in terms of execution of racing, qualifying sessions, strategy. Reliability was outstanding. On the team side, we didn't have a single DNF this year, which is a big step forward compared to last year. »



Sainz signed off from McLaren in style ahead of his move to Ferrari

SUTTON

"And last but not least, our two drivers did a sensational job. They made us, scoring all these great points."

That is where the true difference was made for McLaren. Norris and Sainz ended the year 9-8 in qualifying (8-8 if you exclude Sainz's mechanical issue in Q2 in Bahrain), and were split by just eight points in the drivers' standings, making their contributions largely even. In contrast, Racing Point was carried by Perez, who outscored Stroll by 50 points. Stroll's poor run of form after his Mugello crash — in part down to his illness — was costly. The same rang true for Renault as Ricciardo wiped the floor with Ocon over the course of the season, the gap between them standing at 57 points. Had either Stroll or Ocon replicated their team-mate's form, it would have transformed the fight.

The 15-point penalty for the brake-duct design also cost Racing Point in the end, although few would argue its approach to reverse-engineer last year's Mercedes title winner was therefore a mistake. Without such an approach, it is unlikely that the team would have scaled such dizzy heights this year after finishing seventh in 2019.

There is also the luck factor to consider. Racing Point would likely have snared third had it not been for Perez's Bahrain issue, while Turkey was a chance missed for Renault after the first-lap spin for Ocon caused by his team-mate. But then that can be countered by Sainz's Silverstone puncture and his DNS at Spa, or Norris's Nurburgring issue.

But Norris reveals that the MCL35 has hardly been an easy car to drive. Quite the opposite, in fact. "I've almost felt less confident," he says, comparing it to the 2019 McLaren. "It's not like we have a very easy car to drive or anything, and we can go out and nail it every weekend. It's a fast car, but it's one that is still very tricky to understand."

"It's not like we have a very easy car to drive. It's a fast car, but it's one that is still very tricky to understand"



Team boss Zak Brown roars in joy at that valuable third place

It is further testament to the performances Norris and Ferrari-bound Sainz produced through 2020. Even with the deck stacked against it, facing a faster car in the Racing Point and a manufacturer such as Renault, McLaren was able to rise up and seize the chances that came its way when it mattered most.

With fresh investment now arriving from the US, Mercedes power units on the way, and the signing of seven-time grand prix winner Ricciardo for 2021, the future looks bright for McLaren. The fashion of its underdog victory in the fight for third this year, even if it failed to win a race, should not be underestimated when it comes to charting what that future may look like.

Autosport's 'Class B' championship statistics

Our unofficial 'Class B' championship is based on recalculating qualifying and race results with Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari removed.



Daniel Ricciardo showed why he is still top class

SUTTON

'Class B' drivers' standings

POS	DRIVER	AUT	STY	HUN	GBR	70th	ESP	BEL	ITA	TUS	RUS	EIF	PRT	EMI	TUR	BHR	SAK	ARE	PTS
1	**Daniel Ricciardo**	R	4th	3rd	**1st**	8th	6th	**1st**	5th	**1st**	2nd	**1st**	5th	**1st**	5th	4th	5th	3rd	**256**
2	**Lando Norris**	**1st**	**1st**	7th	2nd	4th	5th	3rd	4th	3rd	9th	R	7th	5th	3rd	**1st**	7th	**1st**	230
3	**Sergio Perez**	3rd	2nd	2nd	-	-	2nd	6th	8th	2nd	**1st**	2nd	3rd	3rd	**1st**	12th	**1st**	R	223
4	**Carlos Sainz Jr**	2nd	5th	4th	7th	7th	3rd	DNS	2nd	R	R	3rd	2nd	4th	2nd	2nd	4th	2nd	198
5	**Pierre Gasly**	4th	11th	R	4th	6th	4th	4th	**1st**	R	5th	4th	**1st**	R	8th	3rd	8th	4th	164
6	**Lance Stroll**	R	3rd	**1st**	5th	**1st**	**1st**	5th	3rd	R	R	-	R	9th	4th	R	3rd	6th	163
7	**Esteban Ocon**	5th	R	8th	3rd	3rd	8th	2nd	6th	R	3rd	R	4th	R	6th	5th	2nd	5th	147
8	**Daniil Kvyat**	8th	6th	6th	R	5th	7th	7th	7th	4th	4th	11th	13th	2nd	7th	6th	6th	7th	118
9	**Kimi Raikkonen**	R	7th	9th	11th	9th	9th	8th	11th	5th	8th	8th	6th	6th	9th	9th	10th	8th	59
10	**Antonio Giovinazzi**	6th	10th	11th	8th	11th	11th	R	13th	R	6th	7th	9th	7th	R	10th	9th	10th	39
11	**George Russell**	R	12th	12th	6th	12th	12th	R	12th	6th	12th	R	8th	R	10th	7th	-	9th	29
12	**Nico Hulkenberg**	-	-	-	DNS	2nd	-	-	-	-	-	5th	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
13	**Kevin Magnussen**	R	8th	5th	R	R	10th	11th	R	R	7th	9th	10th	R	11th	11th	11th	12th	24
14	**Romain Grosjean**	R	9th	10th	10th	10th	14th	9th	10th	7th	11th	6th	11th	10th	R	R	-	-	23
15	**Nicholas Latifi**	7th	13th	13th	9th	13th	13th	10th	9th	R	10th	10th	12th	8th	R	8th	R	11th	21
16	**Jack Aitken**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12th	-	0
17	**Pietro Fittipaldi**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13th	13th	0

REVISED 2020 CALENDAR **1** Austrian Grand Prix (Red Bull Ring); **2** Styrian Grand Prix (Red Bull Ring); **3** Hungarian Grand Prix (Hungaroring); **4** British Grand Prix (Silverstone); **5** 70th Anniversary Grand Prix (Silverstone); **6** Spanish Grand Prix (Barcelona); **7** Belgian Grand Prix (Spa-Francorchamps); **8** Italian Grand Prix (Monza); **9** Tuscan Grand Prix (Mugello); **10** Russian Grand Prix (Sochi); **11** Eifel Grand Prix (Nurburgring); **12** Portuguese Grand Prix (Algarve); **13** Emilia Romagna Grand Prix (Imola); **14** Turkish Grand Prix (Istanbul Park); **15** Bahrain Grand Prix (Sakhir); **16** Sakhir Grand Prix (Sakhir); **17** Abu Dhabi Grand Prix (Yas Marina)

Pole positions

DRIVERS	
Perez	5
Norris	3
Stroll	3
Sainz	2
Ricciardo	2
Hulkenberg	1
Gasly	1

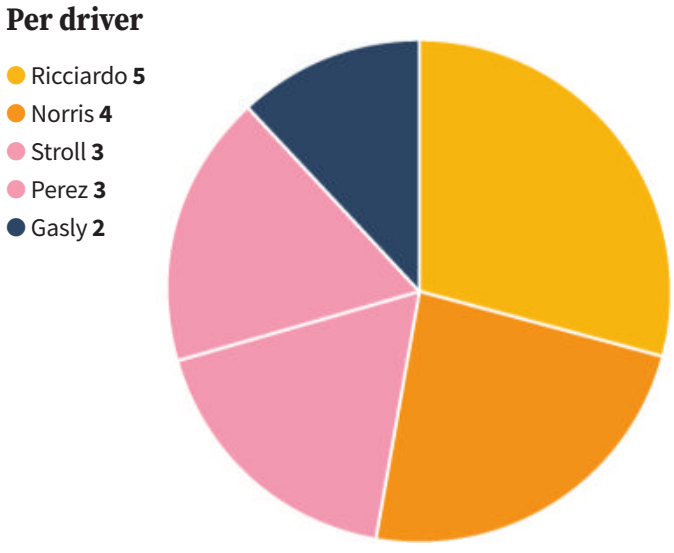
CONSTRUCTORS	
Racing Point	9
McLaren	5
Renault	2
AlphaTauri	1



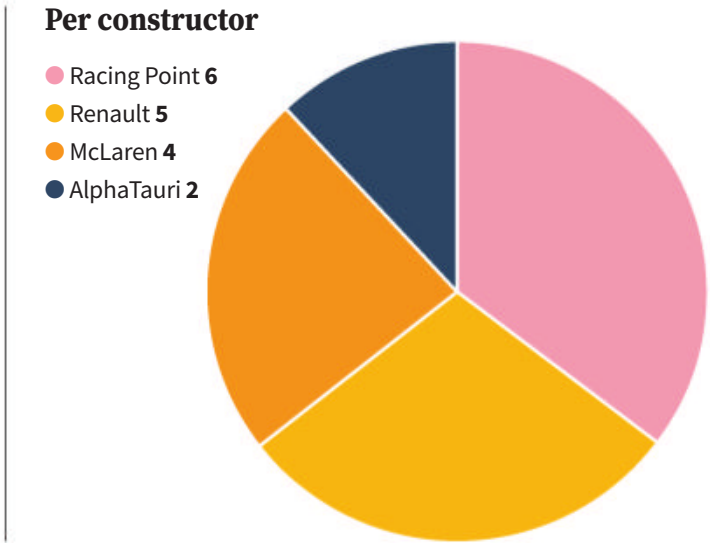
ETHERINGTON

Wins

Per driver



Per constructor



Constructors' standings

POS	CONSTRUCTOR	PTS
1	**McLaren**	428
2	**Renault**	403
3	**Racing Point**	399
4	**AlphaTauri**	282
5	**Alfa Romeo**	98
6	**Williams**	50
7	**Haas**	47

AlphaTauri

How Gasly resurrected his career in 2020

Dumped by Red Bull during 2019, the Frenchman became one of the star performers with AlphaTauri – and it wasn't just about his Monza win

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES



The glitzy rebranding of Toro Rosso as AlphaTauri ahead of the 2020 Formula 1 season represented the start of a new era for the squad. It should no longer be regarded simply as a B-team to Red Bull Racing, with its foremost task to act as a first step into F1 for the energy-drinks giant's young drivers. Instead, AlphaTauri was now a 'sister' team with a fresh look and higher expectations.

In his first full season back at the Faenza-based squad, Pierre Gasly took everything in his stride and delivered the most surprising result in F1 this year. A little over 12 months after his first race back at Toro Rosso following his demotion from Red Bull, he became an F1 race winner in the Italian Grand Prix.

And yet to simply highlight Gasly's Monza victory would overlook a number of other outstanding displays throughout the season that made him one of F1's top performers in 2020.

"You could see this was another Pierre," says AlphaTauri team principal Franz Tost. "Especially in the second half of last year, he improved a lot, but also during the winter months, he worked very hard in every aspect. When he started this season, he made another big step forward on his performance. He has increased his level of experience enormously and, for me, he belongs among the best drivers in the field."

Gasly's return to the team last summer required a lot of readjustment. Crestfallen after a brutal 12-race run at Red Bull, he had to gel with a new engineering team around him as he looked to bounce back. His maiden F1 podium in Brazil last year was a huge statement, proving that Gasly was comfortable back in his old surroundings, but there was still work to do for 2020.

"Communication with the team was really a clear factor," Gasly says when asked to highlight the key elements in his



Victory in the Italian Grand Prix one of the standout events of the season

SUTTON

“He has a good engineering team, but he’s also getting better as a driver. We feed off that and it’s motivating”

improvement this year. “It was about really understanding and finding compromise — what I want, what they can give me, what I can give them to really maximise everything in the car, and understanding each other.

“Last year, coming in the middle of the season, I was thrown there with new people around me. So you have to learn about each other race after race, and things get better and better all the time. But this year, I really feel we made another step.”

AlphaTauri technical director Jody Egginton credits Gasly’s attitude upon returning to the team in paving the way for his 2020 success. “He had his Red Bull experience, came back, and he got straight down to work,” says Egginton. “That’s a credit to him. It’s also a credit to the environment in the team. It’s a good environment compared to a lot of teams.

“Pierre has got a good engineering team around him. But he’s also getting better as a driver. We’re feeding off that and it’s motivating. He gives 110%, and you can’t really ask for more than that.”

Gasly started the season well with a run to seventh in Austria, avoiding trouble as the quicker midfield runners dropped the ball, but had difficult weekends in the Styrian and Hungarian races due to factors outside his control after making Q3 at both races. »



AlphaTauri AT01's broad operating window has given Gasly scope to shine

HONE

Why Gasly didn't return to Red Bull



MAUGER

Gasly was surprised he wasn't bumped back up to his old Red Bull seat

As Pierre Gasly flourished through 2020 and his Red Bull replacement, Alex Albon, encountered similar struggles to his predecessor, momentum gathered for a possible swap back. Gasly said in the wake of his Monza victory in September that he felt "ready" for a return to Red Bull if he got the call, adding: "I guess the strong results should be rewarded with something."

But less than a week after the shock win, Red Bull had poured cold water on the idea, with team principal Christian Horner making clear that the focus was on getting things right with Albon.

"I think as far as Red Bull Racing's seats are concerned, we're focused on Alex Albon," Horner said ahead of the next race at Mugello. "It wouldn't make sense to switch the drivers back. AlphaTauri is now a sister team rather than a junior team. I believe Franz Tost is happy with Pierre."

It spoke of the new status and project that AlphaTauri represents, placing Gasly at the heart of it. Yet the Frenchman admitted he was "surprised I was not really considered" for a move up.

AlphaTauri announced shortly before the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix that Gasly would be remaining

"If a driver is competitive like Pierre, then of course other teams will want to know when he is available"

for 2021, when he will partner Honda youngster Yuki Tsunoda as he steps up from F2, and the team-leader role will be all the more crucial for Gasly to fulfil.

Naturally, Gasly's strong performances will have piqued outside interest as attention already starts to turn towards the 2022 driver market. But it's something team boss Tost is ready to manage, and he doubted Red Bull would want to let such a strong asset go easily.

"If a driver is competitive like Pierre, then of course other teams will ask about the contractual details, because they'll want to know eventually when a driver is available," Tost says. "But he has a Red Bull contract. I don't think Red Bull will set him free at such an early stage. They invested a lot of money to build him up, and sooner or later they want to get his fruits back and good results with him – to win races, and also championships."


HONE

Team's supportive culture has helped spur Gasly's success

"I remember every single second of that race and the celebrations. It's something that will never go away"

At the British Grand Prix, he fought to seventh once again, and brought home points in both Spain and Belgium. A mid-race safety car at Spa denied him a possible top-five finish, but he was still able to make 10 overtakes through the race en route to eighth.

And then came Monza. "I remember every single second of that race and the celebration," Gasly recalls, beaming. "It's something in my mind which will never go away."

The images of Gasly sitting on the Monza podium, drinking in the enormity of his achievement, are some of the most evocative we have seen in F1 this year. It was a true giantkilling performance, the like of which has been largely absent in recent eras.

"It was something quite incredible," adds Gasly. "When I'm in Italy in my apartment, in the same place I had my breakfast before my win, I see the trophy. It feels pretty special. Every morning, I take my coffee with the trophy in front of me, and think, 'Yeah, we've done it'.

"It's not impossible, even though we were a midfield team. That should be motivation for all of us in the team to try to repeat strong performances like we have had in Sao Paulo or Monza as much as we can."

But it's not just Sao Paulo and Monza that stand out among Gasly's performances since returning to the team with which he made his F1 debut in 2017. After his win, he produced a brilliant drive at the Nurburgring to grab sixth after starting 12th, nailing his two-stop strategy, and was then sublime at Algarve Circuit as he fought through to fifth on a day when the top four were out of reach (see page 69). Had it not been for an early loss of water pressure at Imola, where he qualified fourth, Gasly could well have snared a second 2020 podium there.

He regularly featured in the thick of the points, not simply confined to the fringes of the top 10. It's a level of consistency that Gasly was eager to find, particularly after his Red Bull struggles.

"I believe I'm performing better," he says. "This was a target for myself, to be more consistent, being on top of balance, strategy, tyre deg — to be better at reacting to all these factors, and to get a more consistent performance through the season.

"I'm really happy about it. We have had many top-10 finishes, many Q3s as well. We've been consistently maximising the performance with the car we have."

It's a world away from the rocky spell Gasly had at Red Bull. The less-pressurised setting has certainly contributed to his rise, with Egginton highlighting the "good, caring environment" at AlphaTauri.

But for Tost, the key was the car. "It's good that a driver feels at home and feels accepted," he says. "You can have the best atmosphere in the team, the best family — but if the car is a shithouse, you simply don't see the success. Then people are not happy, and not in a good atmosphere, and then it will change the other way around."

The forgiving nature of the AlphaTauri AT01 brought out the best in Gasly. The struggles of his successor at Red Bull, Alex Albon, serve as proof of the difficulties most drivers will face when handed a car with such a narrow window of performance. It is something Egginton was always keen to avoid.

"We've tried to increase the operating window that the car works in, to make it easier for the driver," Egginton explains. "On top of trying to put more downforce on the car, we're saying, 'What's the window we have to operate in? How flexible can we be?' If it's a windy day, we can still make the car work. We give them a lot of corner-entry support and things. We've been chipping away at that, and he's responding to that."

Tost sees AlphaTauri's future as being "oriented and concentrated" around Gasly, letting him set the direction it takes. "The team listens to the technical feedback of the driver," Tost says. "The designers or the engineers, they keep the consideration of all technical feedback from such a good driver so that they make next year's car fit with the driving style of this driver. To make the car simply faster, that's the normal way, yes."

Gasly ended the year with 75 points — the same total he had after 17 races in 2019, and more than double the score of outgoing team-mate Daniil Kvyat. Red Bull was swift in announcing that he would be staying at AlphaTauri for next year, viewing him as a long-term leader for the team as it grows into its new sister-team status.

It's a challenge Gasly relishes. "They have big ambitions," he says. "I'm really happy and excited to be involved in this project. We know in F1, things don't change from one year to another, so it takes time to build that sort of project, and to really be at the top.

"But next year, I'm happy to take more responsibilities. I want to perform. I want to fight at the front, and that's what I will be pushing the team to do. I've really seen the difference from when I joined in 2017, and the team that AlphaTauri is now in 2020.

"Things are really going in the right direction. I want to take this team as high as possible."

He's already stood on the top step of the podium. So how much further can AlphaTauri go? With Gasly at the helm, a no-blame team culture and a forgiving approach to car design, there could be yet more silverware to follow.


COATES

Gasly is comfortable and confident in the role of team leader

End of an era but the start of a new hope

The Williams family bid farewell to close an F1 chapter, but fresh investment and new leadership offer genuine belief that a revival in form is possible

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY **WILLIAMS RACING** AND motorsport IMAGES



In four decades as a Formula 1 constructor, the Williams family had controlled the team that bears its name. In that time, founders Frank Williams and Patrick Head oversaw seven drivers' titles, nine constructors' championships, and 114 wins. But the team's 43rd season as an F1 constructor will go down as unique in its long, illustrious history — 2020 was the year the Williams family exited F1.

In April, the team announced that it had secured future resources by refinancing its corporate borrowings with loans and the funds from selling its Williams Advanced Engineering division the previous December. But seven weeks later, the news dropped that it had split with its title sponsor and that the partial or full sale of the squad was being considered.

The team unveiled a new livery ahead of the belated 2020 season opener in Austria, and took it racing in the opening rounds with new line-up George Russell and Nicholas Latifi. As they got to grips with finally unleashing the FW43s in anger, the team committed to F1's new Concorde Agreement — its position in the championship cemented until 2025 along with the rest. Then, just after the Spanish Grand Prix in August, it was announced that US private investment firm Dorilton Capital would be the new owner.

Founder and team principal Frank Williams, his daughter and deputy Claire, and CEO Mike O'Driscoll chose to step aside in the weeks that followed, saying an emotional farewell at the Italian GP. But the Williams name and culture will live on. "Dorilton don't want to shift that lovely feel that exists within Williams, that family spirit and friendliness," says Williams's new team principal Simon Roberts, who only joined as F1 managing director in June.

One of F1's great dynasties is no more. It leaves behind a team that remains in F1's rough waters at the back of the grid, but is no longer in the doldrums. The team remained 10th and last in the constructors' championship in 2020, this time without scoring a single point, but it is pretty firmly on the up.

"We're a whole team, we can do everything," says Roberts, who was previously McLaren's operations boss. "We're just not in the right place on the grid right now. That's the mission — to get ourselves back where we should be."

And the reasons for optimism were clear in winter testing — an age ago now, or so it feels — when Russell, who stayed on for a second (nearly full) year after impressing as a rookie in 2019, said: "We've definitely reduced the gap."

The FW43 may not have got the point its predecessor somewhat lucked into at the 2019 German GP, but Williams has had an easier time unlocking its potential. Back at Barcelona, Russell noted the car's handling was much better, less scary to drive, which naturally increased driver confidence.

"There's no doubt it's a much better car — definitely," says Williams head of vehicle performance Dave Robson. "The best thing about it is it responds to set-up changes and it behaves much more like a proper Formula 1 car than the car last year. We can at least use it and manipulate it.

"Obviously, it's still not terribly quick. It needs more work. And we'd like it to have been faster by [the end of the season]. But it is considerably better than 12 months ago."

At the season opener, the team qualified 17th and 20th — both drivers out in Q1. In the chaotic race, Russell's fuel pressure loss-related »



Claire Williams bade farewell after the sale, at the Italian GP

WILLIAMS RACING

MAIN PIC: WILLIAMS RACING

retirement caused the late safety-car-restart drama, while Latifi came home 11th — last of the finishers — on his F1 race debut. The F1 pack stayed in Austria for a second go, which featured torrential weather on the middle day of track action. But in the gloom and the pounding precipitation, Williams gained two important things.

The first was Russell's 12th place in qualifying, the team's first Q2 appearance since the 2018 Brazilian GP. But the second was early indications of how to improve the FW43, which the team got more of from further wet weather at the subsequent Hungarian GP.

"It becomes obvious when you get more extreme conditions — when it rains, for example — that pushes the rear wings harder, and you start to get an idea of how close to the edge they are," Robson says of the key aerodynamic part that Williams tweaked twice in 2020 to unlock more performance.

"It allowed us to refresh the rear-wing design and not only make them more stable, but also improve their performance. That's actually been quite good and a fruitful area to work on the car."

Russell's qualifying magic didn't really stop all year, not even when Mercedes came calling for the penultimate round. He got out of Q1 on eight further occasions in 2020 for Williams, which gave a boost to the squad that has not had all that much to celebrate during its years of sliding to the back of the pack.

But Williams did not give up, even when 2020 threw up some particular challenges. At the Turkish GP, 26 of its race personnel, plus Roberts, were impacted by several positive COVID-19 tests and ensuing contact-tracing isolations. The team was forced to draft in temporary replacements from its factory-based car-build staff, some of whom were even substituted into the pitstop crew. The stops were "still extremely good", according to Robson.

"That was a standout moment for me," says Roberts, who is yet to meet everyone in the team in person because of the pandemic restrictions requiring some to continuously work from home. "I'm so proud of what everybody did. But actually, that's what Williams is like — I really mean that. The team is about the people and what they can do, and it's amazing. We're really proud of everybody here."

"Williams is about the people and what they can do, and it is amazing. We are really proud of everybody here"



Sophomore Russell was not error-free but still impressed the team

The next stage of life for the famous marque will be its first year fully under Dorilton command. Upon taking over the team, it was announced that a transitional period would take place to allow it to review the business, and just over a week before Christmas it was confirmed that Roberts would remain as full-time team principal. Joining him in February as the new CEO will be Jost Capito, 62, the vastly experienced former head of Volkswagen's motorsport division who briefly held the same role at McLaren in 2016. "It is an honour to be a part of the future of this storied team, and one that carries such a poignant name in the sport," he said, "so I approach this challenge with great respect and with a huge amount of relish."

The 31 December cost-cap deadline — today — is firmly in mind, after which Williams and its F1 rivals can 'only' spend $145million (£107m) in 2021, and ahead of this date investment has been made in factory upkeep, windtunnel maintenance and general facilities.

"Beyond that, we're very open minded, and Dorilton are very open minded," says Roberts. "What we haven't done yet is set the next three to five years. Aspirationally, this is a five-to-ten-year plan with Dorilton. That really helps when we're making these investments."

Williams repeated Latifi's 11th-place finish in three more races — the Canadian in the frenzied Monza and Imola races, plus Russell taking his own at Mugello. But it couldn't quite get over the line into the top 10, with Russell's poor third start at Mugello and his crash behind the safety car at Imola costing the team its best two chances of scoring a point.



Wet-weather running helped Williams hone its FW43, says Robson



WILLIAMS RACING

Sochi offered a rare chance for Russell to battle with old rivals Albon and Norris

The FW43 had an inconsistent start procedure as the team found it tough to estimate the expected grid grip, and it struggled when it came to being loaded up with fuel and the knock-on impact that has on tyre management in races. This somewhat explains the pace imbalance the team suffered from all year, usually slipping backwards from its decent grid spots.

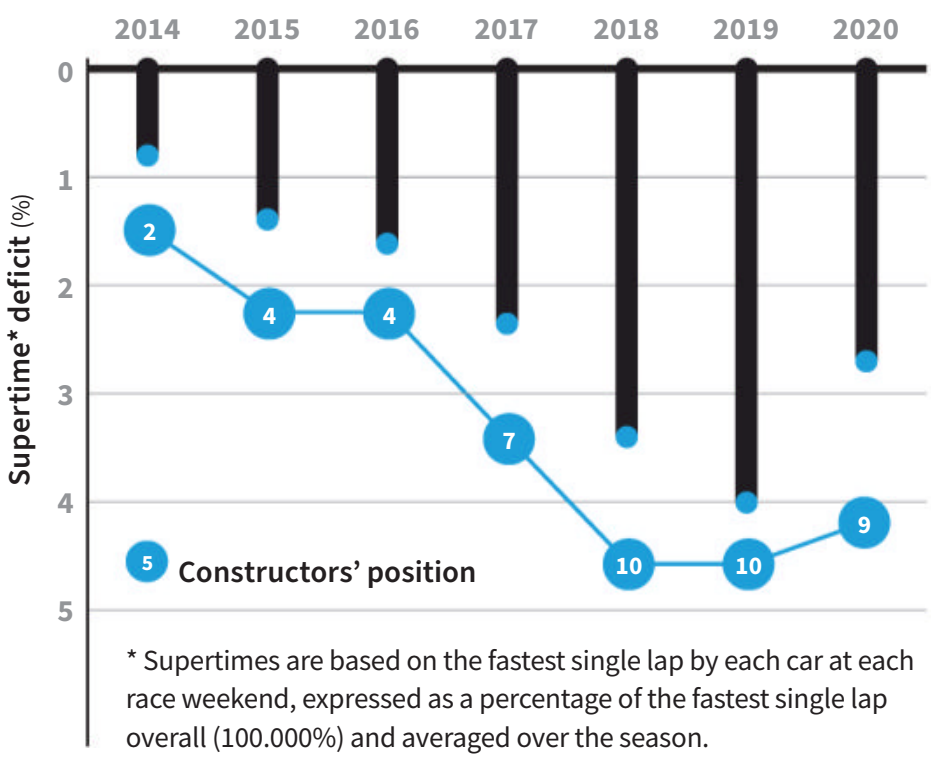
"We've got a better idea [of why that was], but there's probably a little bit more work to go there," says Robson.

But the work on the rear wing and changes the team made to the car's drag levels helped it improve in end-of-straight speed, which had been another reason for its in-race struggles. Towards the final European races, Williams got more of a handle on this and Robson says it "made a difference and improved our Sunday performance".

Looking onwards into 2021, "some development" of the largely carried-over FW43 will take place. This will generally be focused on the required floor changes and working the new tyres – "a case of continuous development in all the areas that the aero regs allow", according to Robson.

Of course, the spectre of 2022 looms, and before too long that development focus will be redirected fully on F1's latest rules revolution. Williams will be hoping the new technical regulations, and the playing field-levelling aims of the cost cap, will help it climb back towards its former F1 glory. But the team can at least reflect on 2020 as having closed the gap to the rest and got involved in some scraps at times.

Williams pace during the turbo-hybrid era



* Supertimes are based on the fastest single lap by each car at each race weekend, expressed as a percentage of the fastest single lap overall (100.000%) and averaged over the season.

Russell continues his rise



MAUGER

George Russell and Nicholas Latifi formed Williams's fifth different driver line-up in five years, with Russell staying on board from 2019.

That changed the dynamic for the young Briton, who, before Mercedes drafted him into its line-up for the Sakhir Grand Prix as Lewis Hamilton's stand-in, was the (relatively) experienced incumbent now paired with a rookie.

Russell led the way in qualifying, claiming all of Williams's prized Q2 progressions and remaining unbeaten against Latifi in the 16 sessions they completed together. But without his Mercedes call-up it is likely that he would have finished behind his team-mate in the final standings, given Latifi's three 11ths to Russell's one.

Nevertheless, Williams was pleased with what it saw from its returning star, who is set to be back for a third year in 2021.

"He was clearly strong last year, but the car didn't allow him to show that and he still had an awful lot to learn," says Dave Robson. "Between us and him, we've built on that. He's been getting steadily better every race. What we saw [of him in the Mercedes being] actually very close to Valtteri [Bottas], hopefully that's justification of our faith in his ability. But also the work we've done with him and the work he's done himself over the past 18 months. He's been outstanding all year. He just continually improves. He's very good."

Robson says Latifi is "such a nice, quiet guy, you kind of forget that actually rooted there is a ruthless racing driver, as you'd hope and expect". But Williams is pleased with the progress Latifi made, which could be seen in his qualifying and race performances later in the year. One repeated feature was his tendency to make mistakes at key moments, such as final qualifying runs.

"George has been outstanding all year. He just continually improves. He is very good"

"He's coming along very well," says Robson. "He was obviously in a slightly different role [for the final races] and he led more of the team's progress in George's absence, which is really good to see. He's getting better, learning the ropes, and he's doing a very good job."

DUNBAR

Starring roles



No trophy, but fourth place at Silverstone felt like a win for Leclerc last summer

SUTTON

The best race drives of 2020

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES





Charles Leclerc

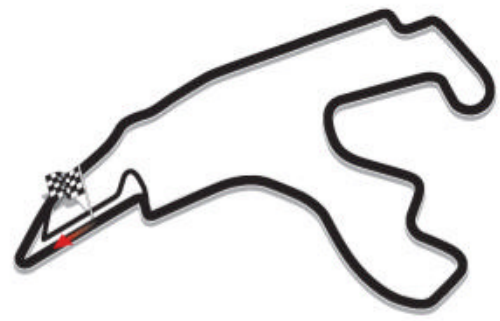
70th Anniversary GP (4th)

Either of Leclerc's drives at Silverstone could have made this list but, although his British Grand Prix podium was the better result overall, the Ferrari driver needed a massive slice of luck to rise from fourth, which he was holding just in front of Daniel Ricciardo.

His drive the following week edges it, despite the lack of a trophy, because Leclerc executed a one-stop strategy on tyres that were a step softer, in hotter conditions, on the same demanding track. The 70th Anniversary GP also came two races after Leclerc had struggled to keep his rubber alive in Hungary, but this time he was masterful as the lead one-stopping driver.

Leclerc's drive also featured a recovery, as he lost two places to Lando Norris and Alex Albon on lap one, falling to 10th from his starting spot of eighth. The key was keeping his hard tyres alive once he'd run to lap 18 of 52 on his starting mediums – the joint second-longest opening stint on the softer rubber (no drivers started on the softs) – as he gained when others pitted again. Leclerc had no explanation for his strong pace, but described his result as "like a victory".





Daniel Ricciardo

Belgian GP (4th)

This race did not end with Ricciardo's best result of 2020, which was third – achieved twice, at the Nurburgring and Imola. But both of Ricciardo's podiums required one of F1's leading trio to hit trouble, and at Spa he nearly beat one of them – Max Verstappen – on pace.

Ricciardo had sealed his best qualifying result of the season with fourth, and at the start was able to challenge his former Red Bull team-mate through the race's opening corners before ceding ground running wide at Les Combes. He dropped back slightly in the opening stint, and then got caught behind the yet-to-stop Pierre Gasly and Sergio Perez after the safety car for the Antonio Giovinazzi/George Russell crashes.

This proved to be crucial later on in the race as the Renault star closed in again on Verstappen's third place with a string of stunning laps in the final stages, cutting the gap by more than 10 seconds in the final four laps to finish just 3.422s adrift. He also set the race's fastest lap on the final tour on 33-lap-old tyres.

While Verstappen was easing home, Ricciardo's close presence throughout the race stopped Red Bull trying an alternative strategy to attack the mighty Mercedes duo.



HONE





Nico Hulkenberg

Eifel GP (8th)



We really had to include Hulkenberg somewhere in the story of F1 2020 considering his 'supersub' appearances at Racing Point. His two events at Silverstone in place of Sergio Perez ended with a non-start and a creditable seventh place, which followed a starring drive to third in qualifying, but it was his race at the Nurburgring for the same team, this time in place of Lance Stroll, that earns his place on this list.

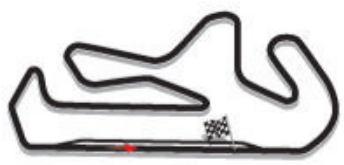
And it's because of the last-minute nature of his call-up. Stroll was only ruled out after missing FP3, with Hulkenberg – expecting to cover the Eifel GP for German TV – rapidly reporting to the track to get a negative COVID test confirmed less than an hour before qualifying started.

Given his lack of practice compared to the Silverstone weekends (although FP1 and FP2 at the Nurburgring were washed out for his rivals), Hulkenberg finished last against the clock, but his race was brilliant.

He executed a long opening stint on the softs, never exactly easy, taking advantage of incidents and retirements to climb the order. Then the late safety car meant he could pit again and take more softs, which he used to seal a remarkable eighth.







Pierre Gasly

Portuguese GP (5th)

Gasly's sensational Italian GP victory was our Moment of the Year, but his battling fifth in Portugal also deserves to be recognised.

The Frenchman's weekend got off to a tough start when his AlphaTauri caught fire in FP2, but he nevertheless qualified ninth. The race will be remembered for the action-packed opening laps, as light drizzle fell, and the Mercedes drivers struggled to fire temperature into their harder tyres and were swamped by the pack.

Carlos Sainz Jr and Lando Norris slipped back after their fast starts on the softs, but Gasly kept the red-walled rubber alive in a way most others could not. This helped him to put moves on Alex Albon, Kimi Raikkonen, Daniel Ricciardo and the McLaren pair in the opening 20 laps to rise to fifth.

Stopping for mediums – ultimately the better race tyre, which enabled Charles Leclerc to take a fine fourth by starting on it – meant Gasly had to battle back again. But he did so with aplomb, not even overly ruffled by Sergio Perez's aggressive defensive swipe late on, with Gasly making the pass stick to take fifth for good one lap later.





Lewis Hamilton

Turkish GP (1st)

Of Lewis Hamilton's 11 2020 wins, his victory at Istanbul Park stood out, because for once Mercedes was really struggling ahead of the race.

Even in dry practice for the first F1 event in Turkey since 2011, the Black Arrows were in trouble. Like most, the team was having a hard time getting its tyres up to temperature on the new, oily and gripless track surface, which had only been finished less than two weeks before. The rain in qualifying compounded the issue, with Hamilton taking his worst grid spot of the season – sixth.

For much of the race it was hard to see how Hamilton might prevail, given the early stages were dominated by Racing Point, and Max Verstappen had been looking rapid before his spin when attacking Sergio Perez. But when it started to dry, Hamilton came into his own.

As most of the rest pitted for fresh intermediates, Hamilton, who had been gaining massively on the leaders while adapting his driving to keep his tyres alive, stayed out. He passed Perez for a lead he would not lose and romped home in a class of his own to seal his seventh title.





Politics

United, yet disunited

They 'raced as one', and drew praise for helping fight COVID. But the F1 teams couldn't help themselves when they got back to competition

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

As the chequered flag flew at the end of pre-season testing in February, Formula 1 prepared for the opening race in Melbourne with three political battles already brewing. In the space of nine days, controversies had emerged concerning Mercedes, Ferrari and Racing Point that left teams preparing to duel off-track upon touchdown in Australia.

But when not a single car took to the track for the season opener and the COVID-19 pandemic surged, it became clear that F1 had a wider, existential battle that required a level of collaboration rarely seen before in the series' 70-year history. But once it made its welcome return in Austria to kick-start a 17-race season, such unity quickly broke down as the traditional infighting returned through a number of sagas, some of which proved crucial to defining F1's long-term future. F1's #WeRaceAsOne mantra rang true in many ways, but nothing could stop the fierce competition between the teams from spilling over at points.

The longest-running fight of the year started on the opening day of pre-season testing at Barcelona, when Racing Point rolled out its new RP20 for the first time. The similarities to last year's title-winning Mercedes were immediately noticeable, and explained as the team claimed it had reverse-engineered the 2019-spec W10 using photographs. With just one year to run on the regulations, and plentiful resources thanks to Lawrence Stroll's takeover, it could afford to take the risk and adopt a 'Haas Mk2' approach.

But as Sergio Perez set the pace on the opening day of pre-season testing, Racing Point's rivals were less than impressed by the 'pink Mercedes'. Renault executive director Marcin Budkowski called it a "concerning evolution" for F1, believing it could muddy the waters regarding customer cars, and the extent to which parts and IP are shared. By the end of testing, the routes to protest Racing Point's



Taking the knee (or not) showed an inconsistent response to anti-racism

car were starting to be considered, with Renault leading the call.

Renault was not alone in considering action against another team. Mercedes came into its rivals' crosshairs after introducing an innovative steering device, dual-axis steering (DAS), on the second day of testing. Mercedes expressed its confidence that DAS was legal, and the FIA confirmed it was satisfied that it was safe, but Red Bull plotted action on the grounds that it was part of the suspension system because of the way it moved the front wheels.

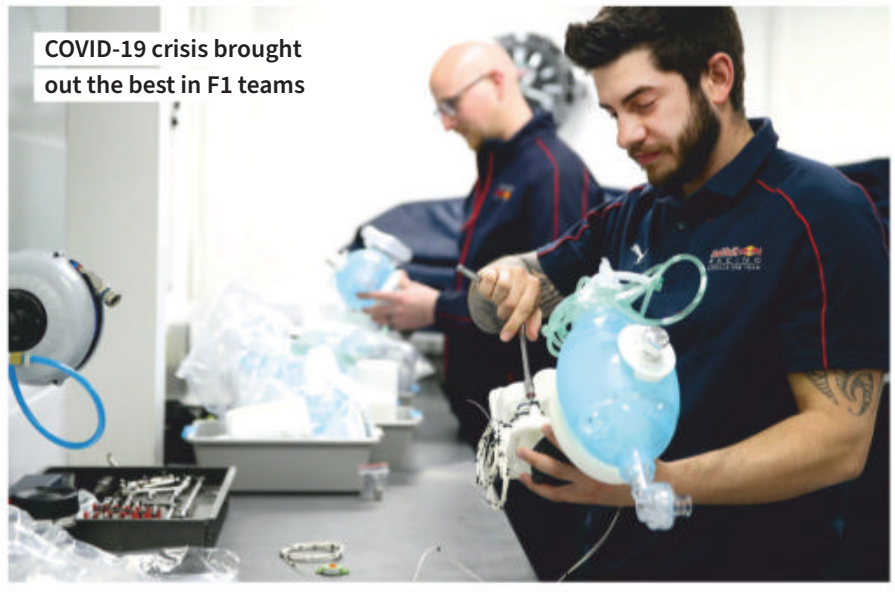
A final bombshell dropped in the final hour of pre-season testing when the FIA announced it had reached a "private settlement" with Ferrari over its 2019 engine, which was suspected to have used a fuel-flow trick to provide a power boost. With neither the FIA nor Ferrari willing to say any more, the seven non-Ferrari-powered teams announced they were considering legal action.

Heading to Melbourne, the knives were already out, but such acrimony soon fell by the wayside when the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact F1. McLaren withdrew from the Australian Grand Prix on the eve of opening practice after one of its crew members tested positive, throwing the running of the race into doubt. Teams remained fiercely split on the matter, with three — Red Bull, AlphaTauri and Racing Point — still eager to go ahead with the weekend behind closed doors. Facing the prospect of just six cars on track, F1 cancelled the grand prix altogether a couple of hours before practice was due to begin.

As an aside, in the talks that raged through the night in Melbourne, Mercedes chief Toto Wolff informed the other six teams opposing Ferrari and its secret deal with the FIA over details concerning its 2019 engines that his squad would be stepping away from the battle, with parent company Daimler fearing the damage that could be inflicted by a long-running case. There was still a desire for clarity, but Ferrari's refusal to reveal the details of the settlement, citing concerns about giving away its IP, meant the fight was realistically over.

The paddock soon upped sticks from Australia and waited for news on when the season could begin, but the cancellations only mounted up. The races in Bahrain and Vietnam joined China — which had been cancelled back in February — in being scrapped and, as global air travel ceased and lockdowns came into force, it became clear F1 was facing a greater crisis. As F1 tried to piece together a calendar, teams entered shutdown and ceased operations until they had a start date for the new season. But work for a greater cause was commenced as F1's engineering nous shifted to helping the fight against COVID-19.

Less than two weeks after Australia's cancellation, the seven UK-based F1 teams launched 'Project Pitlane', joining forces to help design and manufacture ventilators to assist patients suffering from COVID-19. Mercedes-AMG High Performance Powertrain worked with University College London to reverse-engineer a CPAP device in less than 100 hours, while many team members found themselves in rival factories working 18-hour days. "At that point your competitive spirit goes out the window, and it's about coming up with solutions," said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner. "We had people from Renault working in our factory, in their own team kit, in our race bays, in our facility — unthinkable under normal circumstances!" »



COVID-19 crisis brought out the best in F1 teams


The 'pink Mercedes' was eventually docked 15 constructors' points

DUNBAR

The collaboration also extended to meetings between F1's leaders – all on Zoom, naturally – as they tried to safeguard the series' future. Knowing there would be a massive shortfall in F1 revenue due to the reduced calendar, all teams swiftly agreed to measures to cut costs. The introduction of the new technical regulations was postponed until 2022, allowing for a majority carry-over of the existing cars into next year. Once Ferrari dropped its opposition to a reduced budget cap in order to maintain the best interests of the sport, it was reduced from $175million to $145m from 2021.

"After the pandemic started, there was an understanding that we cannot continue like we are and we need to make changes," Haas F1 boss Gunther Steiner reflected at the end of the season. "By F1 standards, the changes were agreed pretty quickly. We said that nobody can sustain this. People will be leaving and there'll be nothing left if you continue like this. It was agreed pretty quickly to lower that budget cap. But F1 is fast-moving in other ways. Now it seems again that everybody is just looking after themselves."

F1's promotional team put plans in place for the season to start in Austria, kicking off with a run of European races to bolster the calendar. An initial goal to still race in Asia and the Americas had to be abandoned, but the final 17-race schedule, featuring old classics such as Imola and the Nurburgring, plus new additions at Mugello and Algarve Circuit, was something most thought unthinkable in the dark days of March.

"It cannot be praised enough what the FIA and FOM have done with the various circuit promoters and the bubble around COVID," said Wolff. "We're one of the very few sports in the world that have started very early, that have managed to put a calendar together of 17 races with some very new exciting race tracks. I must really take my hat off for what has been done for the sport."

But as the paddock reunited under the 'new normal' of F1's biosphere for the season opener at the Red Bull Ring at the start of July, self-interest was quick to return. Red Bull launched a protest against DAS after Friday practice, which was quickly thrown out by the FIA stewards. Renault began its crusade against Racing Point, focusing on the RP20's brake ducts, which as a listed part had to be designed by each team independently.

By the time of F1's celebrations at the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix, there were multiple battles brewing. The stewards reviewed four races' worth of protests against Racing Point and deemed it had


Steiner and Binotto: allies in all off-track political skirmishes

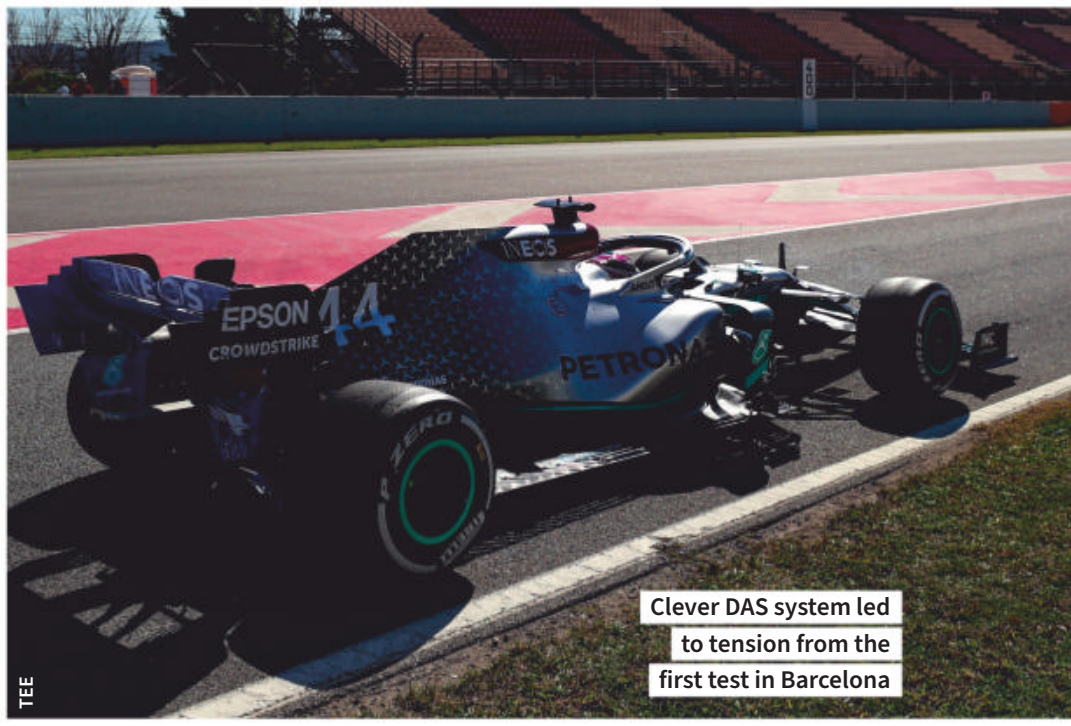
HONE


Toto Wolff found himself at the centre of most controversies in 2020

FIA POOL


Details of private deal between Ferrari and FIA might never be known

DUNBAR


Clever DAS system led to tension from the first test in Barcelona

TEE

"The camaraderie and spirit is here. But let us not be under any illusions: we are all fierce competitors"

designed its brake ducts by illegal means. The team received a 15-point penalty and a €400,000 (£368,000) fine, but could continue to use the part for the remainder of the season. That was a decision that pleased no one. Ferrari, Renault, McLaren and Williams all lodged intentions to protest in pursuit of a harsher penalty, while Racing Point planned similar action to clear its name. Team owner Lawrence Stroll made a rare public statement, blasting rivals for "dragging our name through the mud". Wolff tried playing peacemaker to quell the "little revolution", only to get dragged into the saga more as Ferrari and Red Bull started to question Mercedes' involvement in the case.

Wolff was fighting another fire at Silverstone as talks over the new Concorde Agreement fell into discord. As F1 moved to hasten an agreement and light a fire under Mercedes with the deadline looming, Wolff stood firm. He said his team would be the "biggest victim" under the revised commercial terms, and hit out at the others for being "up the arse" of Liberty Media in public while wanting change privately. F1 responded by saying it would not be delayed any longer in agreeing new commercial and governance terms, leaving the series and its dominant team in a stand-off.

But suddenly on all fronts, there was ceasefire. Within a week, Wolff's tune had changed over the Concorde Agreement as he accepted the compromises, allowing the heavily revised financial structure to be ratified and signed to keep all 10 teams on the grid. The Racing Point saga also petered out as the FIA moved to clamp down on reverse-engineering cars from 2021, satisfying those aggrieved by Racing Point's actions to ensure it would never happen again.

The final proper scrap (the frustration over Fernando Alonso's young-driver test inclusion was really a storm in a teacup) came in the wake of Honda's decision to quit F1 at the end of 2021. Red Bull expressed its wish to continue using the Japanese manufacturer's power units beyond that date on the condition that engine development was frozen, which received support from Mercedes. Ferrari was against the plan, but then switched sides after agreeing to bring forward the next generation of engines by one year to 2025, only for Mercedes to then oppose a plan for a convergence mechanism between the power-unit manufacturers, leaving the proposal in the lurch once again.

Bearing the scars of battle, the political landscape of F1 is now vastly different to how it looked before the start of the year. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a wake-up call in many ways, driving home the importance of making F1 financially sustainable. It has paved the way for a cheaper, fairer future for all teams.

The level of collaboration this year was greater than ever, but it had to be. As soon as the teams could revert to prioritising their own interests and chasing competitive advantages, they did so immediately. "I think we have seen two extremes," said Renault boss Cyril Abiteboul. "When things became extremely serious, for the world, for the economy, for the sport, for the health and safety of our personnel, the community, the camaraderie and spirit is here. There is no question about that. But let's not be under any illusions: we are all fierce competitors. If we are in this position, there is no coincidence — it's simply because we want to win."

McLaren chief Zak Brown felt all teams had quite clearly recognised what fights to pick and where it was best to unite. "The politics that relate to on-track activities remain as high as ever," he said. "The teams have done a good job of separating what's sporting politics versus what's good for the sport when we all need to work together. There's a clear line that has divided between those two situations."

Like all sporting series, F1 has been rattled by the COVID-19 pandemic, helping it realise a few unwelcome home truths and put measures in place to give it the chance to celebrate many more anniversaries beyond its 70th. Through its awareness of the bigger picture and, particularly through Project Pitlane, the greater good, F1 was praised for its ingenuity, and this reflected wonderfully on all 10 teams. But such unity was never going to come at the sacrifice of their political sharpness and willingness to wage war against each other — for better or for worse.


Red Bull and Honda are united, but now only until the end of 2021

HONE

Top stories

Top 10 Formula 1 autosport.com stories of 2020

A run-through of the most-read stories of the year from across the Formula 1 world, accurate as of 16 December 2020

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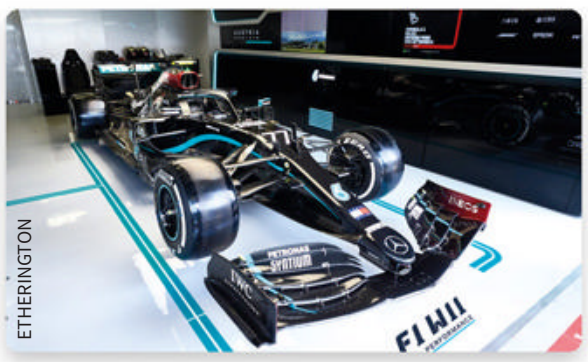
1 Australian Grand Prix cancelled by coronavirus

While the coronavirus pandemic dominated global headlines, it made its mark on F1 when the opener was cancelled just hours before the start of practice for the Australian Grand Prix. McLaren initially withdrew after one of its team members tested positive, which led to the cancellation of the event and postponement of the season until July.

2 Sainz replaces Vettel at Ferrari

Amid the suspended F1 season, the driver market continued rumbling on as Ferrari signed Carlos Sainz Jr for 2021 and axed Sebastian Vettel. As Sainz left with McLaren's blessings, the Woking-based team duly swooped for Daniel Ricciardo, leaving Renault to turn to a returning Fernando Alonso.


DUNBAR


ETHERINGTON


SUTTON

5 Racing Point drivers get COVID-19, Hulkenberg becomes supersub

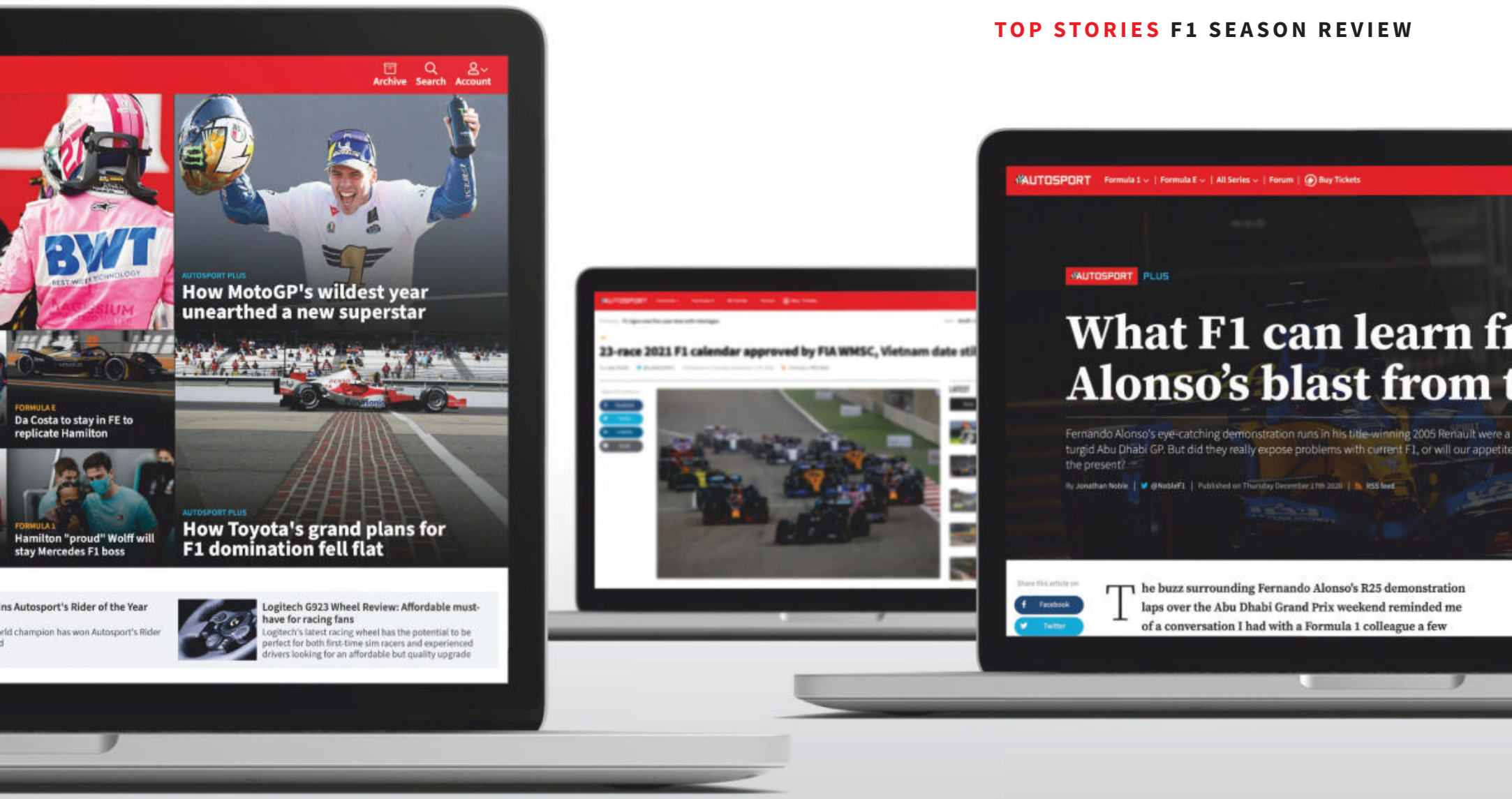
Racing Point had both its drivers miss races due to COVID-19, but Lance Stroll's condition was initially explained as a stomach bug at the Eifel GP. Having previously stood in for Sergio Perez, Nico Hulkenberg again returned. Only after the race did Stroll test positive for coronavirus, which put the team's protocols into question.

6 Silver Arrows turn into Black Arrows

An initial livery tweak with a flash of red to incorporate new sponsor INEOS was unexpectedly overshadowed in July by Mercedes' transformation into the 'Black Arrows'. The switch from silver to an all-black livery as part of its statement against racism and discrimination also signalled the team's plan to increase diversity within its ranks.

7 Racing Point to become Aston Martin in 2021

Another F1 transformation was announced in January, with Racing Point set to become the Aston Martin F1 team from 2021 in a deal between the iconic British marque and team owner Lawrence Stroll, who also bought a stake in the manufacturer. It meant 2020 also marked the end of Aston Martin's title sponsorship of Red Bull.







3 Vettel lands at Racing Point

After losing his place at Ferrari, Vettel initially looked short of options to stay on the F1 grid in 2021. But after extensive contract talks, Racing Point used its option to cut short Sergio Perez's existing deal to make space for the four-time F1 world champion at the team that will soon become Aston Martin.

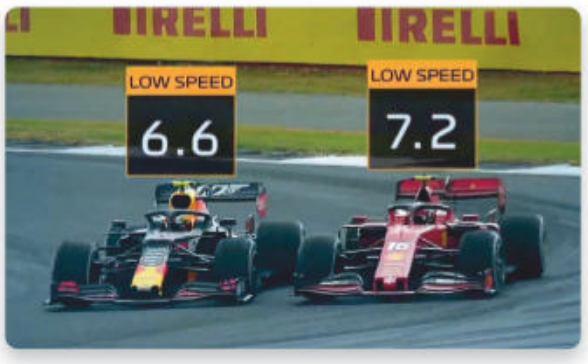
4 Hamilton warned of 'consequences' of Kaepernick F1 helmet

Lewis Hamilton revealed he was advised against racing with a Colin Kaepernick tribute helmet at the 2017 United States GP due to "potential consequences". The American footballer made the taking-a-knee gesture, which most F1 drivers have adopted this year, famous in 2016.



8 F1 puts together reshaped 2020 race calendar

After a four-month suspension and numerous cancellations, F1 pulled together a 17-race calendar spread over 23 weeks racing at predominately empty circuits. Double-headers at the Red Bull Ring, Silverstone and Bahrain plus surprise visits to Mugello, the Nurburgring, Algarve Circuit, Imola and Istanbul Park created a unique season fixed around COVID-19 protocols.



9 F1 introduces new TV graphics

Formula 1 aimed to bring more information to fans through new television graphics, but the fresh visuals were met with a mixed reception from the general public. The innovations included a new Car Performance Score based on statistical data and an Ultimate Driver Speed Comparison to measure up past and present drivers.



10 Silverstone offers to host 12 F1 races in 2020

During the season restart planning phase, radical ideas were offered to bulk out a full F1 campaign, including holding 12 races at Silverstone, in order to reach the minimum number of races needed for the FIA to declare a world championship. A speculative idea that was dismissed by track bosses was to run the second Silverstone race in reverse.

Statistics

The year in numbers

COMPILED BY FORIX.AUTOSPORT.COM

Drivers' standings

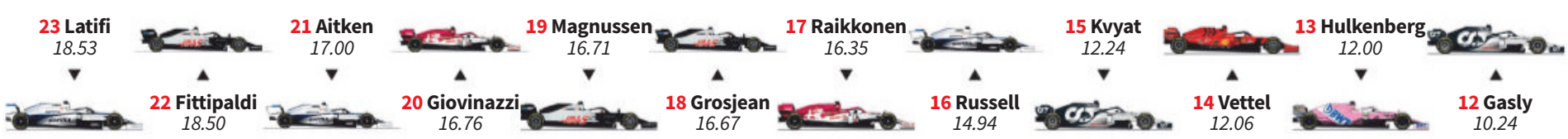
POS	DRIVER	AUT	STY	HUN	GBR	70th	ESP	BEL	ITA	TUS	RUS	EIF	PRT	EMI	TUR	BHR	SAK	ARE	PTS
1	**Lewis Hamilton**	4th	**1st**	**1st**	**1st**	2nd	**1st**	**1st**	7th	**1st**	3rd	**1st**	**1st**	**1st**	**1st**	**1st**	-	3rd	**347**
2	**Valtteri Bottas**	**1st**	2nd	3rd	11th	3rd	3rd	2nd	5th	2nd	**1st**	R	2nd	2nd	14th	8th	8th	2nd	**223**
3	**Max Verstappen**	R	3rd	2nd	2nd	**1st**	2nd	3rd	R	R	2nd	2nd	3rd	R	6th	2nd	R	**1st**	**214**
4	**Sergio Perez**	6th	6th	7th	-	-	5th	10th	10th	5th	4th	4th	7th	6th	2nd	18th	**1st**	R	**125**
5	**Daniel Ricciardo**	R	8th	8th	4th	14th	11th	4th	6th	4th	5th	3rd	9th	3rd	10th	7th	5th	7th	**119**
6	**Carlos Sainz Jr**	5th	9th	9th	13th	13th	6th	DNS	2nd	R	R	5th	6th	7th	5th	5th	4th	6th	**105**
7	**Alexander Albon**	13th	4th	5th	8th	5th	8th	6th	15th	3rd	10th	R	12th	15th	7th	3rd	6th	4th	**105**
8	**Charles Leclerc**	2nd	R	11th	3rd	4th	R	14th	R	8th	6th	7th	4th	5th	4th	10th	R	13th	**98**
9	**Lando Norris**	3rd	5th	13th	5th	9th	10th	7th	4th	6th	15th	R	13th	8th	8th	4th	10th	5th	**97**
10	**Pierre Gasly**	7th	15th	R	7th	11th	9th	8th	**1st**	R	9th	6th	5th	R	13th	6th	11th	8th	**75**
11	**Lance Stroll**	R	7th	4th	9th	6th	4th	9th	3rd	R	R	DNS	R	13th	9th	R	3rd	10th	**75**
12	**Esteban Ocon**	8th	R	14th	6th	8th	13th	5th	8th	R	7th	R	8th	R	11th	9th	2nd	9th	**62**
13	**Sebastian Vettel**	10th	R	6th	10th	12th	7th	13th	R	10th	13th	11th	10th	12th	3rd	13th	12th	14th	**33**
14	**Daniil Kvyat**	12th	10th	12th	R	10th	12th	11th	9th	7th	8th	15th	19th	4th	12th	11th	7th	11th	**32**
15	**Nico Hulkenberg**	-	-	-	DNS	7th	-	-	-	-	-	8th	-	-	-	-	-	-	**10**
16	**Kimi Raikkonen**	R	11th	15th	17th	15th	14th	12th	13th	9th	14th	12th	11th	9th	15th	15th	14th	12th	**4**
17	**Antonio Giovinazzi**	9th	14th	17th	14th	17th	16th	R	16th	R	11th	10th	15th	10th	R	16th	13th	16th	**4**
18	**George Russell**	R	16th	18th	12th	18th	17th	R	14th	11th	18th	R	14th	R	16th	12th	9th	15th	**3**
19	**Romain Grosjean**	R	13th	16th	16th	16th	19th	15th	12th	12th	17th	9th	17th	14th	R	R	-	-	**2**
20	**Kevin Magnussen**	R	12th	10th	R	R	15th	17th	R	R	12th	13th	16th	R	17th	17th	15th	18th	**1**
21	**Nicholas Latifi**	11th	17th	19th	15th	19th	18th	16th	11th	R	16th	14th	18th	11th	R	14th	R	17th	**0**
22	**Jack Aitken**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16th	-	**0**
23	**Pietro Fittipaldi**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17th	19th	**0**

2020 CALENDAR **1** Austrian Grand Prix (Red Bull Ring); **2** Styrian Grand Prix (Red Bull Ring); **3** Hungarian Grand Prix (Hungaroring); **4** British Grand Prix (Silverstone); **5** 70th Anniversary Grand Prix (Silverstone); **6** Spanish Grand Prix (Barcelona); **7** Belgian Grand Prix (Spa-Francorchamps); **8** Italian Grand Prix (Monza); **9** Tuscan Grand Prix (Mugello); **10** Russian Grand Prix (Sochi); **11** Eifel Grand Prix (Nurburgring); **12** Portuguese Grand Prix (Algarve Circuit); **13** Emilia Romagna Grand Prix (Imola); **14** Turkish Grand Prix (Istanbul Park); **15** Bahrain Grand Prix (Sakhir); **16** Sakhir Grand Prix (Sakhir); **17** Abu Dhabi Grand Prix (Yas Marina).

Constructors' standings

POS	CONSTRUCTOR	AUT	STY	HUN	GBR	70th	ESP	BEL	ITA	TUS	RUS	EIF	PRT	EMI	TUR	BHR	SAK	ARE	PTS
1	**Mercedes**	**37**	**43**	**41**	**25**	34	**41**	**43**	17	**44**	**41**	**25**	**44**	**44**	**25**	**29**	7	33	**573**
2	**Red Bull**	0	27	28	23	**35**	22	23	0	15	19	19	15	0	14	34	8	**37**	**319**
3	**McLaren**	26	13	2	10	2	9	6	30	8	0	10	8	10	15	22	13	18	**202**
4	**Racing Point**	8	14	18	2	14	22	3	16	10	12	16	6	8	20	0	**40**	1	**195***
5	**Renault**	4	4	4	20	4	0	23	12	12	16	15	6	15	1	8	28	9	**181**
6	**Ferrari**	19	0	8	16	12	6	0	0	5	8	6	13	10	27	1	0	0	**131**
7	**AlphaTauri**	6	1	0	6	1	2	4	**27**	6	6	8	10	12	0	8	6	4	**107**
8	**Alfa Romeo**	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	**8**
9	**Haas**	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	**3**
10	**Williams**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**

* Racing Point deducted 15 points

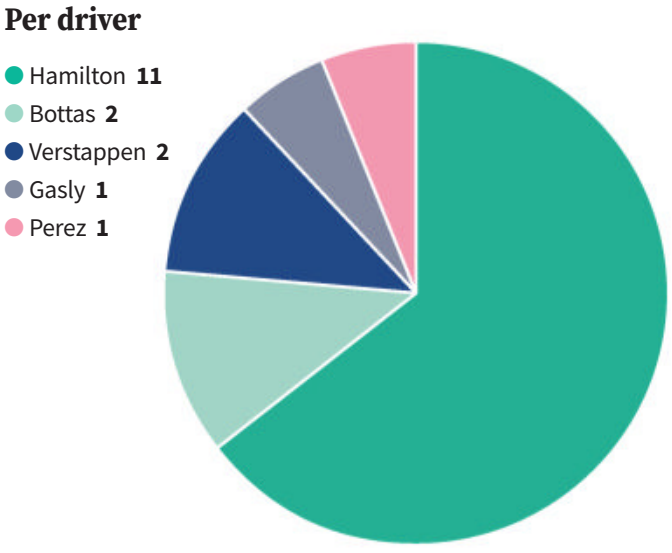


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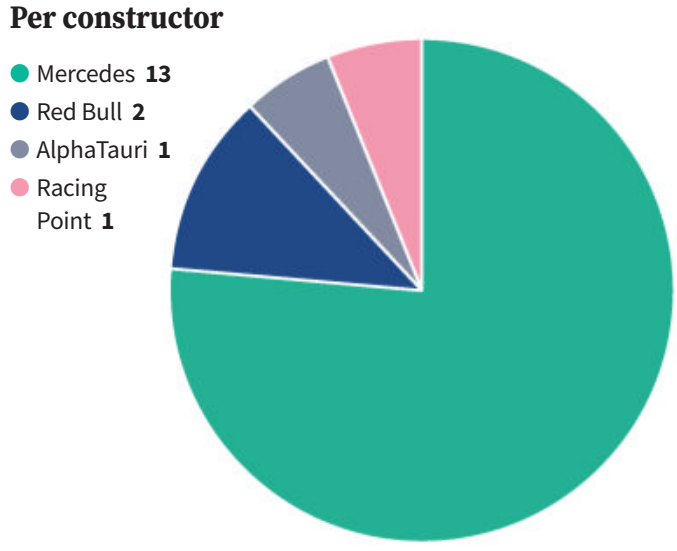
Motorsport Stats is the pre-eminent provider of motorsport data to media owners, rights-holders, bookmakers and sponsors. Its data services are founded on the world's largest repository of racing results dating back to 1897. For more information contact sales@motorsportstats.com

Wins

Per driver

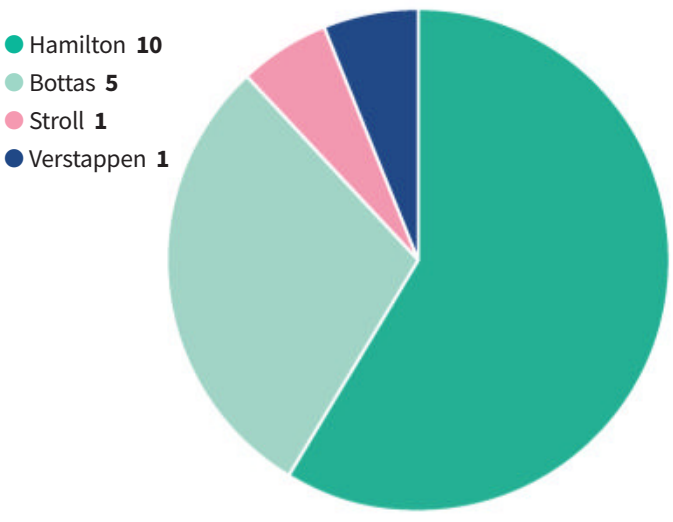


Per constructor

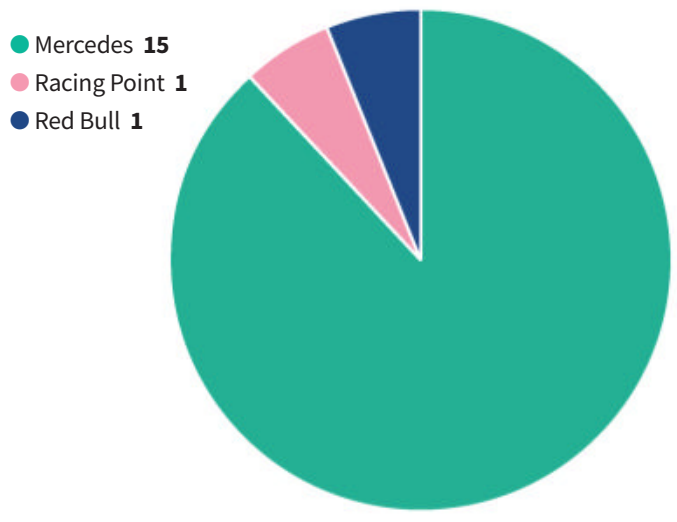


Pole positions

Per driver

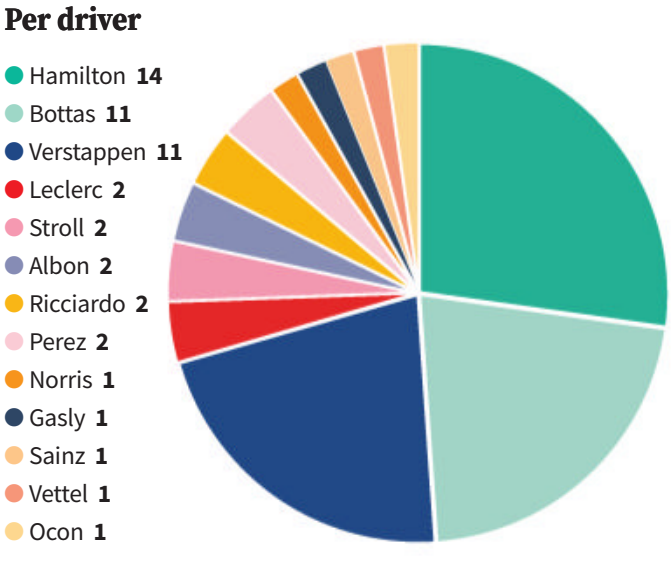


Per constructor

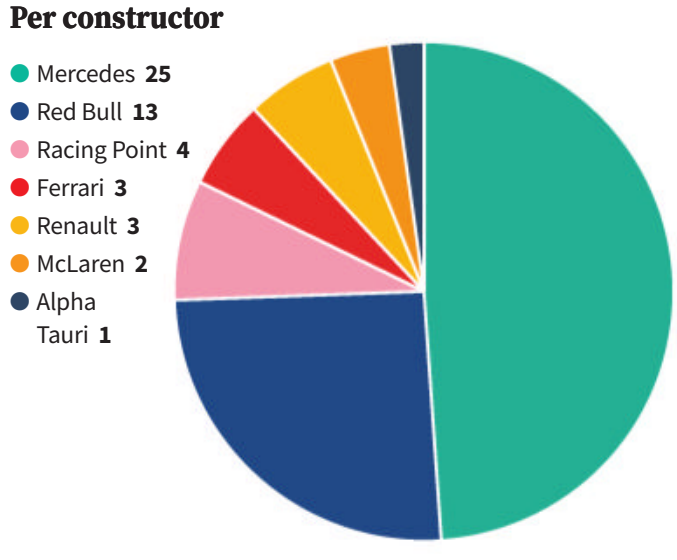


Podium finishes

Per driver



Per constructor



Driver supertimes

DRIVER	SUPERTIMES (%)
Hamilton	100.171
Bottas	100.179
Verstappen	100.638
Perez	101.300
Leclerc	101.401
Albon	101.422
Stroll	101.523
Norris	101.553
Sainz	101.585
Gasly	101.675
Ricciardo	101.695
Ocon	101.894
Kvyat	101.924
Vettel	102.103
Russell	102.677
Giovinazzi	102.991
Raikkonen	103.013
Magnussen	103.137
Grosjean	103.215
Latifi	103.502

Driver supertimes are based on taking each driver's fastest single lap of each weekend, expressed as a percentage of the overall fastest time, averaged over the season. Substitute drivers as follows: Hulkenberg (102.239); Aitken (102.838); Fittipaldi (103.456).

45

Giovinazzi gained more places on first laps in 2020 than any other driver



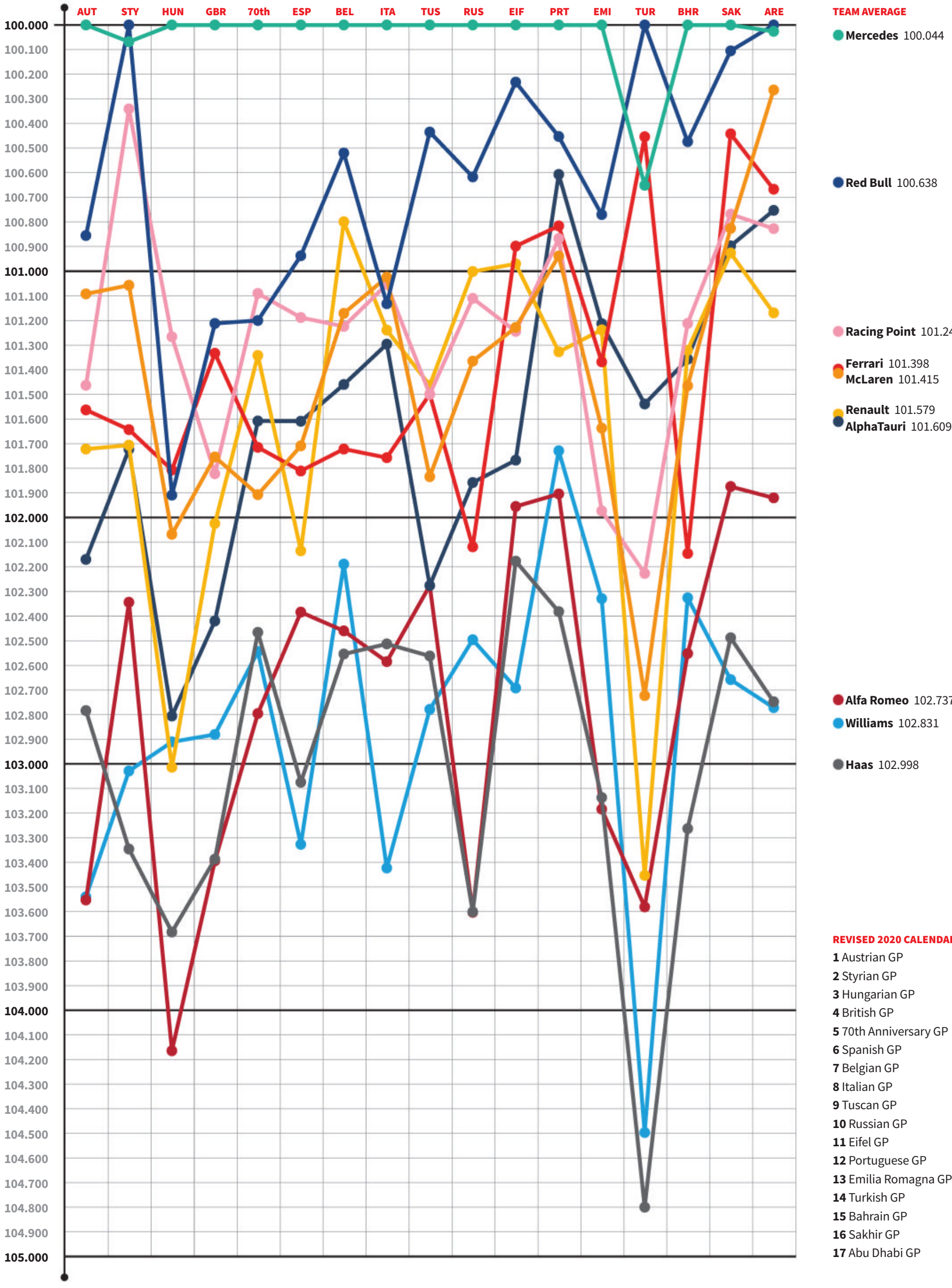
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AVERAGE GRID POSITION



The average grid position of all drivers

Team supertimes



TEAM AVERAGE

Mercedes 100.044

Red Bull 100.638

Racing Point 101.246

Ferrari 101.398

McLaren 101.415

Renault 101.579

AlphaTauri 101.609

Alfa Romeo 102.737

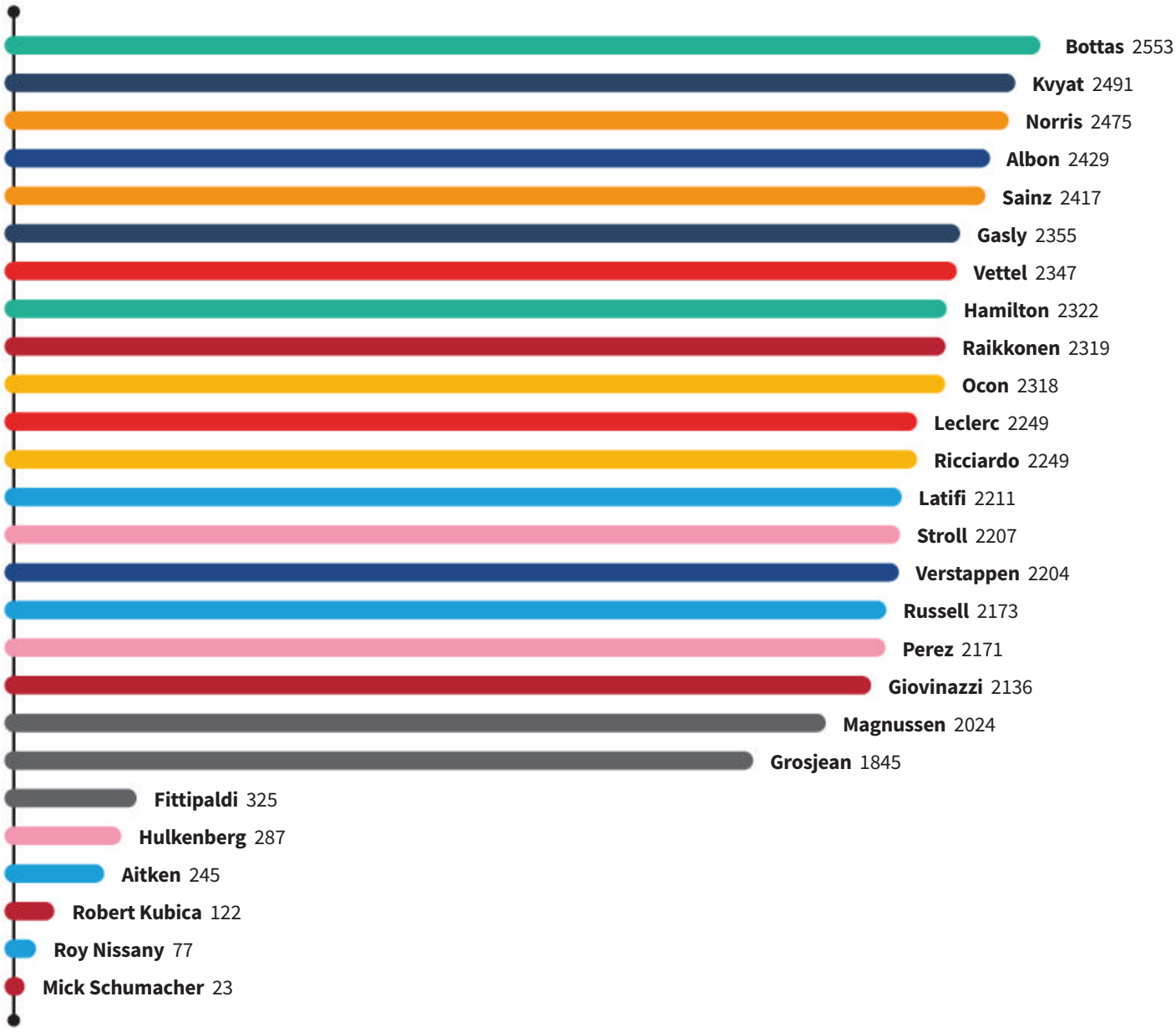
Williams 102.831

Haas 102.998

REVISED 2020 CALENDAR

1 Austrian GP
2 Styrian GP
3 Hungarian GP
4 British GP
5 70th Anniversary GP
6 Spanish GP
7 Belgian GP
8 Italian GP
9 Tuscan GP
10 Russian GP
11 Eifel GP
12 Portuguese GP
13 Emilia Romagna GP
14 Turkish GP
15 Bahrain GP
16 Sakhir GP
17 Abu Dhabi GP

Total race-weekend laps completed per driver



Fastest laps

DRIVER	
Hamilton	6
Verstappen	3
Norris	2
Bottas	2
Ricciardo	2
Sainz	1
Russell	1

CONSTRUCTOR	
Mercedes	9
McLaren	3
Red Bull	3
Renault	2

Laps led

DRIVER	
Hamilton	613
Bottas	188
Verstappen	87
Russell	59
Stroll	32
Gasly	26
Perez	26
Sainz	5
Albon	1

CONSTRUCTOR	
Mercedes	860
Red Bull	88
Racing Point	58
AlphaTauri	26
McLaren	5

Qualifying segments

DRIVER	Q3	Q2	Q1
Bottas	17	0	0
Verstappen	17	0	0
Hamilton	16	0	0
Albon	14	3	0
Norris	14	3	0
Ricciardo	14	3	0
Sainz Jr	14	3	0
Perez	12	2	1
Leclerc	11	6	0
Gasly	11	5	1
Stroll	11	5	0
Ocon	8	9	0
Kvyat	4	10	3
Vettel	3	13	1
Giovinazzi	1	3	13
Hulkenberg	1	1	1
Raikkonen	1	3	13
Russell	1	9	7
Magnussen	0	3	14
Grosjean	0	3	12
Latifi	0	1	16
Fittipaldi	0	0	2
Aitken	0	0	1

Note: drivers who did not participate in qualifying are NOT considered as eliminated in Q1



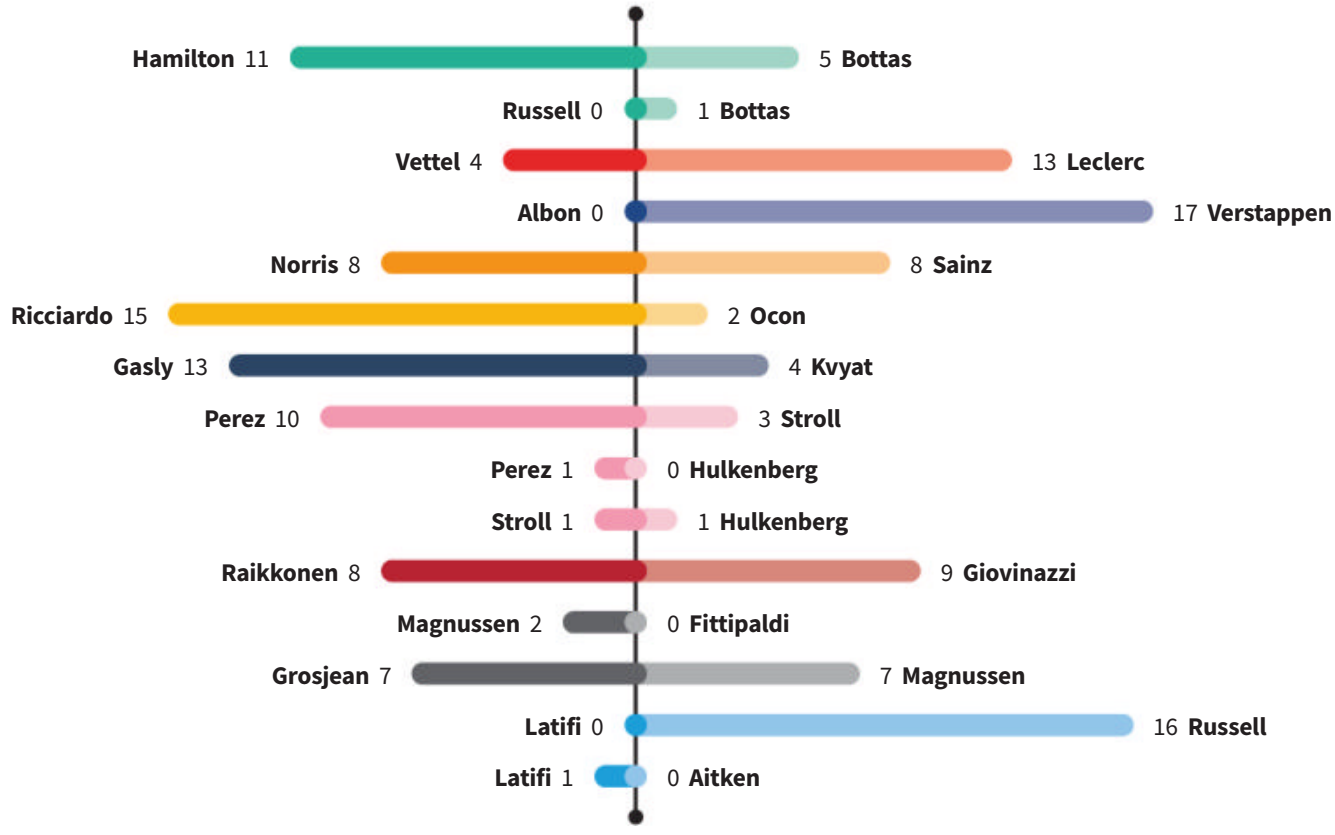
TEE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

33

Albon, Bottas, Raikkonen and Russell had the most pit visits during races

Qualifying head-to-head

Anomalous occurrences, such as when mechanical problems intervened, are disregarded



SEASON REVIEW

OGIER PIPS EVANS AS THE WRC WEATHERS THE 2020 STORM

The World Rally Championship was hit hard by the pandemic, but everyone pulled together to deliver an enthralling campaign that produced five winners and a shock finale

NICK GARTON

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY **McKLEIN**

The 2020 World Rally Championship bestrode all 12 months of the Gregorian calendar, and in terms of the competition it was a cracker. Moreover, it was an inspiration in dark days for the world and our industry.

Britain dared to dream of seeing its first world champion crowned for 19 years but, such was the intensity to the competition, almost everyone had their moment in the sun.

It all began back in January, with six-time champion Sebastien Ogier claiming the first stage win in Monte Carlo on his first event for Toyota. Many harboured fears of witnessing another demonstration run for the Frenchman when armed with such a potent weapon as the Yaris, which Ott Tanak had used to finally end Ogier's sequence of titles in 2019.

But on the very next stage, Hyundai's Thierry Neuville decided to go all Walter Rohrl on us and beat everyone by more than 25 seconds. Then Elfyn Evans, the perennial understudy at M-Sport, powered his new Toyota to the lead of the rally. And then reigning champion Tanak flew off a mountain in his Hyundai.

The magnitude of the Estonian's accident, from being launched into the treetops and then plunging 100 feet to the road below, should never be underestimated, and both he and co-driver Martin Jarveoja needed serious physio to get through Rally Sweden the following month. "It was a quite a high-speed accident," said Tanak. "Obviously the safety equipment did its job so I believe we are happy to be here and no injuries so it's nice!"

Nine-time champion Sebastien Loeb was also in a Hyundai on the Monte, an event he had made his own for a decade. Loeb's guest appearances with Citroen and latterly Hyundai have only occasionally brought back the old magic, though, and his Monte was downbeat. "It has been a difficult one all weekend and it seems the planets were not aligned for us," he said, somewhat more forlornly than anyone in the WRC is used to. "We just had to complete the rally, conserving our tyres to make it to the end. It's not nice to tackle stages in that way but it was all we could do."

In the end, victory fell to Neuville. It was a moment that he had been longing for and which had been denied in 2019 by a sticky throttle on the final morning. His battle with Evans and Ogier in 2020 provided the most entertaining Monte in years. "It was like in a fight: you give some punches and then 'bam', you get a big one back and you say, 'OK, how am I going to manage this one now?'" the Belgian said.

Sadly for Neuville's championship hopes, similar celebrations were not forthcoming in 2020. Like many, he was ill-prepared for the absence of snow in Sweden. Only Evans and co-driver Scott Martin had completely rethought their approach to the rally and it paid dividends.



Julien Ingrassia and Ogier celebrate another title, this time with Toyota

"I think the first thing is the mindset because there's so much chatter going on about the event still being cancelled, whether they can't run or stages being shortened, and I think the first thing was just to block all that out," said Evans, who took his second WRC career victory. "We decided to write all-new pacenotes, not to reuse those from previous years."

These notes will become highly valued as Sweden's temperature aligns with that of northern France over the next decade. Evans, meanwhile, rose to the championship lead, delighting his team boss, four-time champion Tommi Makinen.

Sharing in the celebrations was Toyota's new star, Kalle Rovanpera, who won the powerstage and took his first WRC podium. "In 2016 we arranged a drive day for Esapekka »



“IT WAS LIKE IN A FIGHT: YOU GIVE SOME PUNCHES AND THEN ‘BAM’, YOU GET A BIG ONE BACK”


Tanak's season started with huge Monte crash


Neuville and Sordo compare Hyundai notes


Tough year for M-Sport but Suninen was third in Rally Mexico

Lappi, Teemu Suninen and Kalle as well," said Makinen of his rising star. "Three drivers with our Yaris test car... and the first time Kalle jumped into the car and he was fastest. I could see immediately, 'OK now we are talking about driving flat-out!'"

With so much hope for the future, the increasing whispers of a curious and deadly virus from China were incongruous. By the time the circus set off for round three in Mexico in March, the whispers had become a clamour and nobody felt more alarmed than the WRC's leading light, Ogier.

"It was difficult for me to be in the race to be honest this morning – I almost didn't sleep last night," he said before the start in Guanajuato. "I was just, I don't know, concerned with this whole world situation at the moment and I really hope that what we do this weekend is right. I really hope that we don't bring any more danger here in a place where the cases are supposed to be lower."

Ogier was able to compartmentalise these concerns and delivered his most dominant performance of the year, one that moved him back ahead of Evans.

We can now look back on the naivety of that last pre-COVID weekend; at the Mexican fans who were disappointed that Ogier, wearing a mask at all times, refused to shake proffered hands or sign their goodies. Hopefully they will all still be there when the WRC returns.

Initially there was wry disbelief among the travellers about what 'Chinese bat-flu' might have in store, but the sober reality was brought home by team members who had come from parts of the world where the pandemic was already starting to kill. As things turned bleaker by the hour, the support on offer to every member of the WRC community from the local event team and the FIA in particular was exemplary. We all got home safely – and then began the long months of silence.

The Toyota and Hyundai teams have enjoyed some insulation from COVID because their budgets are signed off years in advance. For M-Sport and the privateers who populate the rest of the entry at every WRC event, however, no such arrangement exists.

M-Sport had already suffered a grievous loss in Mexico when Lappi's Fiesta burned to the ground, taking hundreds of thousands of pounds with it, and then its world froze on the spot. We can but hope that the team will be able to bring back the talent that it has been forced to shed from its workforce during 2020.

Team principal Richard Millener has redefined the word 'stoicism' time and again, but his rewards were scant from a squad numbering Lappi and Suninen together with young Brit Gus Greensmith. Only the Finns threatened the podium and, while Lappi's star often burned brightest, it seldom lasted for the duration of an event.

In contrast, Suninen showed admirable tenacity and reached the podium in Mexico after a brilliant tussle with Tanak. But there was also frequent Finnish gloom. The low points came when any advantage that was won by inspired tyre choice or balls-out brilliance was wiped away by the big boys after a stage or two. This would admittedly sap anyone's spirit, but when his head dropped you could hear Millener's stress levels go up.

During lockdown, the world made sourdough and watched apocalyptic box sets on Netflix, but WRC Promoter was working furiously to find a means with which to restart the 2020 season. Even before COVID, Chile had been abandoned because of political unrest. The pandemic then put paid to the return of the Safari, to

ROUND BY ROUND

Monte Carlo Rally
1 Thierry Neuville
2 Sebastien Ogier
3 Elfyn Evans

For the majority of its long history, the joy of Monte Carlo has come through anticipation of the spectacle of crystal-blue skies, endless hairpins and snowy summits while the rally itself all too often becomes a bit of a trudge, where 30-second gaps rapidly establish themselves up and down the order. But not this year. Ogier, Neuville and Evans go at each other with a fury and, while each is capable of leaving the others wide-eyed on a single stage, the cumulative effect is a showcase for the WRC.

Rally Sweden
1 Elfyn Evans
2 Ott Tanak
3 Kalle Rovanpera

Two stars emerge from the mud and thunder of snow-free Sweden: points leader Evans and teenaged sensation Rovanpera. The Welshman quietly rethinks the rally from start to finish with Scott Martin's assistance, developing unique notes and ignoring everything they'd learned about this event in years past. Rovanpera has no such baggage and just goes about his business in the only way he knows – very, very rapidly. It's a lottery for the rest of the field but Evans gives them a masterclass in preparation.

Rally Mexico
1 Sebastien Ogier
2 Ott Tanak
3 Teemu Suninen

We don't half have some shriekers in the WRC press brigade. Whoops are emitted on the subject of Sweden and global warming, whether the Safari would be 'real' and whatever else. But nothing got them going quite like Ogier's 'Worst. Start. To. The. Season. EVER!' And then Rally Mexico happens, where he has so much in hand that he could have diverted mid-stage and sought out some local nibbles, were it not for his grave misgivings about the potential to unleash COVID-19 upon the locals. Wise man. And very fast.

Rally Estonia
1 Ott Tanak
2 Craig Breen
3 Sebastien Ogier

The magnitude of seeing World Rally cars in action again after six uncertain months of global crisis is, frankly, life-affirming. For them to do so in a country as appreciative, committed and passionate as Estonia, which moved heaven and earth to make the event happen, is all the more special. Yes, there are way too many punctures and, yes, experience helps the two leaders to keep their rubber in good shape. But the emotion provoked by Tanak's home victory is undeniable.



Where's the snow? Evans made the best of Rally Sweden conditions

"RALLY SWEDEN WAS A LOTTERY FOR THE REST, BUT EVANS GAVE THEM A MASTERCLASS IN PREPARATION"

Japan, to Argentina, Portugal, Finland, New Zealand and Germany. In Britain, Formula 1 racing was allowed to happen but rallying was not. Thus when the WRC resumed it broke new and unexpected ground in Estonia in September. This was a highlight for all but, while Tanak celebrated an emotional home win and moved into third in the points and Craig Breen saw the first green shoots of a career revival, the rest of the field was plagued with broken wheels and delaminated tyres on rough and unfamiliar stages.

It was a similar story in Turkey, where at least the majority of runners had some experience, and Loeb returned to crown what may well be his last works WRC outing with his 119th podium in 180 career rallies.

Victory fell to the ever-cautious Evans, who described his performance as "pretty average, really". His second win of the year, however, moved him 18 points clear of Ogier, who picked up his first (and only) non-score. It was another curiosity of a rally, but was followed almost immediately by a classic encounter in Sanremo.

Ogier brilliantly took the fight to the Hyundais of Dani Sordo, Neuville and Tanak as all three sought to outdo each other and carried their team to the cusp of the manufacturers' trophy. Sordo won, and the WRC's huge Spanish fanbase roared, while Evans's »

Rally Turkey

1 Elfyn Evans
2 Thierry Neuville
3 Sebastien Loeb

Rally Turkey begins with the return of Loeb to the top of the leaderboard at the end of the first day. With swirling dust between the trees on Friday, most of the frontrunners take a cautious approach, but Loeb and co-driver Daniel Elena could drive these stages blindfolded and effectively do. They fall foul of what proves to be another tyre lottery, as do so many others, while Ogier's engine and transmission blow in unison, allowing Evans's caution to prosper.

Rally Italy

1 Dani Sordo
2 Thierry Neuville
3 Sebastien Ogier

Sardinia is where Andrea Adamo earns his manufacturers' title (though not clinched – that comes at Monza) and the admiration of the entire service park, not to mention that of his South Korean employers. All three of his drivers seem to be marching to a different tune and he alone is left to try to create an ensemble piece. While Hyundai Motorsport briefly resembles a comic opera, Ogier hurls his Yaris around with every ounce of his skill on an event where the Toyotas are out of sorts. Rally of the year.

Rally Monza

1 Sebastien Ogier
2 Ott Tanak
3 Dani Sordo

And so the long and winding road finally leads to the door of the Autodromo Nazionale di Monza: a venue steeped in history and featuring lockable gates, which come in handy when trying to hold a rally in a COVID hotspot. It is true that the 'cathedral of speed' is home to the triumph and tragedy of motorsport, but its service roads are hardly the place for a world-class event. But we get a result, probably the same result that would have come from an uninterrupted 2020 season at that.





Tanak took an emotional win as campaign restarted with round in Estonia

fourth place — one spot behind Ogier — meant he had a 14-point advantage. With the rest of the calendar still uncertain — the Ypres Rally appeared on it, then was cancelled — that was a handy gap to have going into what was the final of the seven-round season, Rally Monza.

Mathematically, Ogier, Neuville and Tanak were all a threat to points leader Evans, but in the end only Ogier was in a position to strike when his team-mate skittered off on the final full day as the changing conditions caught out many.

Thus the crown was Ogier's once again — a seventh crown with a third team — while Hyundai retained its cherished manufacturers' title.

"Obviously my mistake put a spanner in that job as well," said Evans after retiring. "So I'm really sorry for the team. We've had a fantastic car, a fantastic crew all year. I'm obviously disappointed for myself but also very sorry and disappointed for them as well."

Evans's heartbreak was felt keenly by team-mate Ogier. Between this and the ongoing pandemic, he was reserved in his celebrations. "Right now we are living in a time that a lot of people are suffering all over the world and you have to be decent," he said, summing up the curious atmosphere at Monza perfectly. It's understandable that Ogier has now delayed his retirement to the end of 2021, after what everyone hopes will be a more normal season.

If 2020 has had any theme at all, it is that you simply never know how life is going to turn out. Also, for regular readers of Autosport's WRC coverage, you never know which analogy might be coming next.

So let's put it this way: in 1968, John Lennon shut himself in the kitchen after a furious argument and scribbled down a poem

"I'M REALLY SORRY FOR THE TEAM. WE'VE HAD A FANTASTIC CAR, A FANTASTIC CREW ALL YEAR"

about words pouring like rain into a paper cup, creating the beatific masterpiece that is *Across the Universe*.

The motorsport industry has weathered a terrible time in 2020: one from which we will only be able to assess the damage in a year or two at the earliest but, after shutting itself away, the WRC was also able to create something meaningful from this chaos. Thanks to the tireless industry of those who manage it, and the dedication of those who deliver it, our heroes in the cars were able to create an inspiring, competitive and often brilliant 2020 season that will be talked about for years to come.

Unlike any other sport except cycling and marathon running, rallying is out there in the raw, on real roads with real fans and exposed to the elements. To have conjured any kind of a season was a mindblowing achievement by the FIA, WRC Promoter, the event organisers and the teams.

It was imperfect but then so is life. Hopefully it will help to guide the sport's way out of the physical and financial impact of this disease.

Or, to paraphrase Lennon, *Jai guru deva*, nothing's gonna change my world...

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	CAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	PTS
1	**Sebastien Ogier** (FRA)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT	Toyota Yaris WRC	2	4	1	3	R	3	1	**122**
2	**Elfyn Evans** (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT	Toyota Yaris WRC	3	1	4	4	1	4	25	**114**
3	**Ott Tanak** (EST)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	R	2	2	1	17	6	2	**105**
4	**Thierry Neuville** (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	1	6	16	R	2	2	R	**87**
5	**Kalle Rovanpera** (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT	Toyota Yaris WRC	5	3	5	5	4	R	5	**80**
6	**Esapekka Lappi** (FIN)	M-Sport Ford WRT	Ford Fiesta WRC	4	5	R	7	6	R	4	**52**
7	**Teemu Suninen** (FIN)	M-Sport Ford WRT	Ford Fiesta WRC	8	8	3	6	R	5	R	**44**
8	**Dani Sordo** (ESP)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	-	-	R	-	-	1	3	**42**
9	**Craig Breen** (IRL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	-	7	-	2	-	-	-	**25**
10	**Sebastien Loeb** (FRA)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	6	-	-	-	3	-	-	**24**

11 **Gus Greensmith** (M-Sport Ford WRT Ford Fiesta WRC) 16; 12 **Pontus Tidemand** (Toksport WRT Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo) 14; 13 **Takamoto Katsuta** (Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT Toyota Yaris WRC) 13; 14 **Jari Huttunen** (Hyundai i20 R5) 9; 15 **Andreas Mikkelsen** (Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo) 8; 16 **Kajetan Kajetanowicz** (Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo) 8; 17 **Oliver Solberg** (Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo) 8; 18 **Nikolay Gryazin** (Hyundai Motorsport N Hyundai i20 R5) 6; 19 **Pierre-Louis Loubet** (Hyundai 2C Competition Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) 6; 20 **Marco Bulacia Wilkinson** (Citroen C3 R5) 5; 21 **Mads Ostberg** (PH Sport Citroen C3 R5) 4; 22 **Adrien Fourmaux** (M-Sport Ford WRT Ford Fiesta Rally2) 2; 23 **Eric Camilli** (Citroen C3 R5) 2; 24 **Ole-Christian Veiby** (Hyundai 2C Competition Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) 1.

WRC2 champion Mads Ostberg (PH-Sport Citroen C3 R5). **WRC3 champion Jari Huttunen** (Hyundai i20 R5). **Junior WRC champion Tom Kristensson** (Tom Kristensson Ford Fiesta R2).

Manufacturers' championship 1 Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT 241; 2 **Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT** 236; 3 **M-Sport Ford WRT** 129; 4 **Hyundai 2C Competition** 8.

AUTOSPORT'S TOP 10 DRIVERS



SEBASTIEN OGIER

1 In an era when only two manufacturers are committed to the WRC at any one time, Ogier has managed to drive for four in the space of five years. Whatever else this may say about him, that fact must be depressing for his pursuers to know that only a car as poor as the Citroen C3 WRC can make the Frenchman beatable. In 2020 Ogier's nearest challenger was a man who has been studying his consistent approach for season after season and learning diligently. Therein lies the answer they seek.



THIERRY NEUVILLE

2 Whether it's his powerstage prowess, his mission to donate to local causes at each rally or the gleeful way he just blurts out what he's thinking in the service park, Neuville illuminates the WRC. Nobody feels those emotions more keenly than his Hyundai team, from the joy of winning in Monte Carlo to the agonies his Monza retirement caused to their manufacturers' title hopes. His speed and spectacle are peerless, but he must discover the pleasures of the middle ground in 2021 to match Ogier over a season.



ELFYN EVANS

3 In the year we lost Sir Stirling Moss, it was fitting that a new British contender for world championship honours distinguished himself with speed, yes, but also decency. The corner on which Evans crashed out of championship contention was all but impossible at speed and, rather than let Ogier follow him into the ditch, he ran back up the stage to warn him. A gentleman, then, but one who can also summon up steel when required, and in 2021 he gets to do it again with valuable lessons learned.



DANI SORDO

4 It is impossible to overstate the importance of Sordo's role towards getting the manufacturers' title in the bag for Hyundai in 2020. Team leadership, such as was thrust upon him in the Mini days, never really sat easily. Instead, Sordo is a team player whose love of the sport is seemingly brought into sharpest focus by contributing towards bigger goals than his own. His win in Sardinia was from the top drawer, and his battle with Ogier delivered the biggest highlight of Monza's finale.



OTT TANAK

5 It seems harsh to put the reigning champion below a team-mate who only started three rallies, but there are mitigating circumstances. We don't yet know the potential of Tanak at Hyundai because COVID-19 robbed him of the chance to build relationships with the team and his understanding of the i20. Victory in Estonia was euphoric, undoubtedly the highlight of the season in terms of what it meant to both Tanak and the WRC to be back in action, but 2020 can only be defined as the prelude to his Hyundai career.



KALLE ROVANPERA

6 There is nothing about the young Finn that fails to impress. We can only hope that his eagerness to take on every aspect of life in the WRC, from the fun bits on the stages to hanging around until the bitter end of a media session, will not wane. Something suggests that it will not. For a learning year, Rovanpera's season was sensational and, while he was lucky to walk away from his Sardinia accident, even this experience will be carefully logged. Ogier needs to be on his mettle in 2021.



CRAIG BREEN

7 "The car is just giving me so much confidence, I feel like I've started my career all over again." Estonia saw the perennially overlooked Breen receive one of those longed-for breaks that can define a career in any discipline. He started out with an uncertain schedule, then got his WRC campaign under way amid much hoo-ha after replacing Sebastien Loeb in Sweden. That round was a lottery but in Estonia he was the right man to deliver manufacturer points, which will be rewarded with more outings.



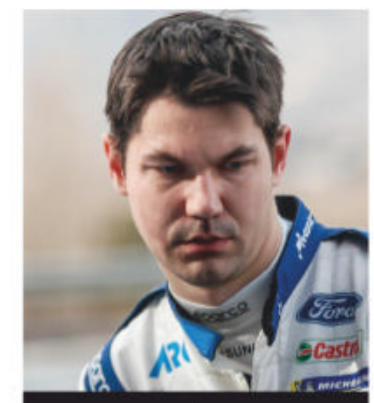
MADS OSTBERG

8 Here is the problem with top-flight rallying at the present time. At the very top of the tree you have Ogier, Neuville and Tanak, with Rovanpera doing the teenaged sensation bit and Sordo the salty veteran. Then you have this rich seam of talent and experience who you instinctively know could get the job done in the right equipment but are left playing musical chairs. When the music stopped for 2020, Ostberg was without a WRC seat, but had enough talent and funding to make WRC2 his fiefdom.



OLIVER SOLBERG

9 If it seems premature to put a WRC3 driver in the top 10 overall, don't worry – his first movie is already 18 months old, so Autosport cannot be accused of jumping the gun here! And the thing is that Solberg Jr is already quite often in the top 10 overall on the WRC leaderboard. Affable and engaging out of the car, he is exactly the sort of personality that rallying needs in uncertain times. The prospect of Solberg versus Rovanpera in 2030 is one to look forward to with relish.



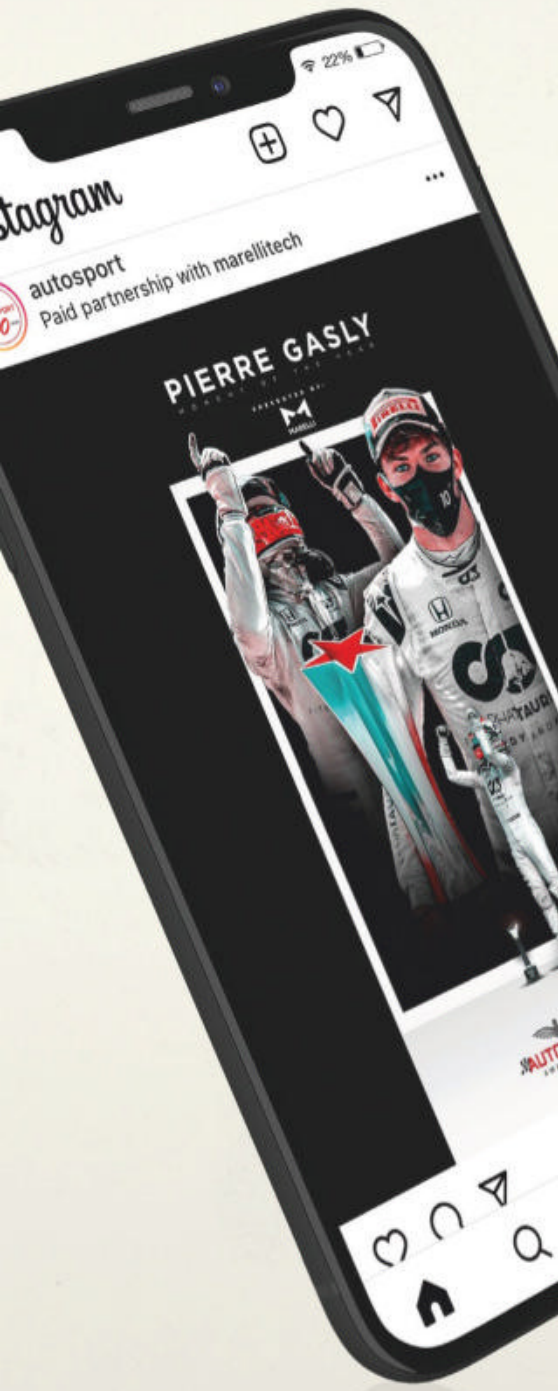
TEEMU SUNINEN

10 M-Sport's Finns were all-but inseparable in terms of pace and equally bewildered by what fate was handing out to their team at times. In the end, Esapekka Lappi seemed more fragile, while Suninen just dug his chin into his chest and carried on. The widening gulf between the works teams and M-Sport was dispiriting pre-pandemic, and the virus hit staff levels and morale badly. But the fury of Suninen's battle with Tanak in Mexico and the points he brought in Estonia and Sardinia gave his team hope.

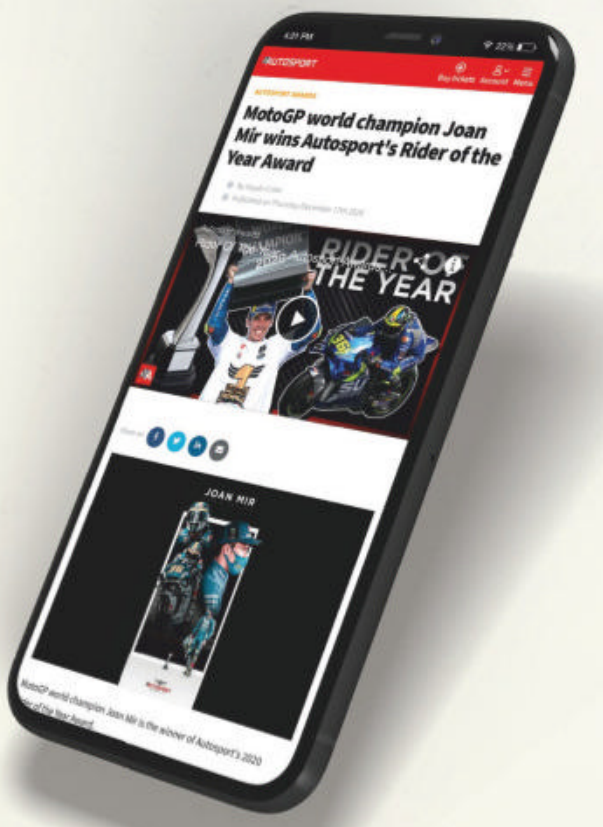
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The 2020 edition of the Autosport Awards was like no other. The annual celebration of the motorsport year, which first took place in 1982, was held online at the end of November and start of December.

Due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the Awards night could not take place at its traditional venue, Grosvenor House hotel on Park Lane, but the key awards were voted for and the winners announced across multiple digital platforms, including autosport.com and social media.

Autosport.com subscribers and Autosport magazine readers selected their favourite competitors from four nominees in each of 10 categories, which included the inaugural Esports Driver of the Year presented by Motorsport Games.

Seven-time Formula 1 world champion Lewis Hamilton scooped the International Racing Driver of the Year Award presented by Pirelli for the eighth time, McLaren star Lando Norris won British Competition Driver of the Year, and Pierre Gasly won the Moment of the Year presented by Marelli for his Italian Grand Prix victory for AlphaTauri. All accepted their awards with video messages, as did most of the winners.

Sebastian Job won the Esports Driver of the Year Award, while Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Harry King inflicted a rare defeat on British Touring Car stars to win the hotly contested National Driver of the Year Award.

A special panel also selected the Pioneering and Innovation Award presented by Marelli, won by the 24 Hours of Le Mans Virtual.

To find out more about this year's Autosport Awards winners, go to **autosport.com/awards**



INTERNATIONAL RACING DRIVER OF THE YEAR
LEWIS HAMILTON

PRESENTED BY PIRELLI

In the year he matched or broke many of Formula 1's biggest records, Lewis Hamilton was voted Autosport's International Racing Driver of the Year for an unmatched eighth time.

The award, which has been running since 1982, is open to professional racing drivers competing at international level. Hamilton beat Red Bull F1 ace Max Verstappen, IndyCar champion Scott Dixon and Formula E title winner Antonio Felix da Costa in our poll.

Hamilton continued his remarkable domination of F1 this year by securing his seventh drivers' world title, matching the record set by Michael Schumacher. The Mercedes star also surpassed Schumacher's all-time F1 wins record during the 2020 campaign, and holds the record for the fastest pole position in world championship history, having averaged 164.3mph at Monza for the Italian Grand Prix.

"A huge thank you to Autosport for continuing to support me all these years and for all you do for the sport," said the 35-year-old. "And to all the fans who have voted for me – I'm always blown away by the support I receive, through thick and thin. Thank you to you all.

"I know this year will have been such a difficult year but I hope you're staying positive and that 2021 is a great year for you all."

ROLL OF HONOUR

1982	Keke Rosberg	**1995**	Michael Schumacher	**2008**	Lewis Hamilton
1983	Nelson Piquet	**1996**	Damon Hill	**2009**	Jenson Button
1984	Niki Lauda	**1997**	Jacques Villeneuve	**2010**	Sebastian Vettel
1985	Alain Prost	**1998**	Mika Hakkinen	**2011**	Sebastian Vettel
1986	Nigel Mansell	**1999**	Mika Hakkinen	**2012**	Sebastian Vettel
1987	Nigel Mansell	**2000**	Michael Schumacher	**2013**	Sebastian Vettel
1988	Ayrton Senna	**2001**	Michael Schumacher	**2014**	Lewis Hamilton
1989	Jean Alesi	**2002**	Michael Schumacher	**2015**	Lewis Hamilton
1990	Ayrton Senna	**2003**	Juan Pablo Montoya	**2016**	Nico Rosberg
1991	Ayrton Senna	**2004**	Jenson Button	**2017**	Lewis Hamilton
1992	Nigel Mansell	**2005**	Kimi Raikkonen	**2018**	Lewis Hamilton
1993	Nigel Mansell	**2006**	Fernando Alonso	**2019**	Lewis Hamilton
1994	Damon Hill	**2007**	Lewis Hamilton	**2020**	**Lewis Hamilton**



BRITISH COMPETITION DRIVER OF THE YEAR
LANDO NORRIS

McLaren star Lando Norris won this award in 2019, and an even more impressive second year in Formula 1 helped him to defeat World Endurance champion Mike Conway, Formula E race winner Oliver Rowland and fellow rising F1 ace George Russell in the Autosport vote.

Norris and his experienced team-mate Carlos Sainz Jr were evenly matched and played their part in McLaren's successful battle with Racing Point and Renault for third in the constructors' championship. Thanks to a superb late charge in the season-opening Austrian Grand Prix, Norris also scored his maiden F1 podium.

"It's my first win of the year, which is great!" said the 21-year-old. "Big thank you for all the support and I'll keep trying to enjoy my life in F1 and entertaining everyone.

"I feel I improved my weaknesses from last year this season, but there are still some small things, such as nailing the qualifying laps every weekend.

"I've got to go for my first podium in F1 as my highlight of the year. It's hard to believe it's going to happen and we weren't expecting anything like that."

Previous winners of the award, which is open to British drivers competing in categories at international level, include F1 world champions Nigel Mansell, Damon Hill, Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton (now exempt).



NATIONAL DRIVER OF THE YEAR
HARRY KING



The National Driver award is usually the domain of British Touring Car stars but your votes acknowledged Harry King's sensational rookie season in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB.

The 19-year-old Porsche Junior took 12 wins from 16 races in the BTCC-supporting category and was only beaten in qualifying once during the 2020 campaign. King secured the title with one event to go and is targeting a step up to the Porsche Supercup next year.

King defeated BTCC title rivals Ash Sutton and Colin Turkington, plus British GT pacesetter Phil Keen, to scoop the award, which is open to drivers competing in the BTCC or British GT packages, or at FIA Formula 3 level.

"I certainly didn't think I would [win] being up against the heavyweights, like the touring car boys," said King. "I knew it would be tough against Ash and Colin and also Phil Keen from British GT so it's a nice award to take into the winter, as well as the championship.

"It's quite a special award and it's nice to gain recognition for the hard work that has gone into this year. I'm grateful for each and every vote, I'm satisfied that people recognised the hard work, and I think the best way to repay the favour to them is to give them entertaining racing."



RIDER OF THE YEAR
JOAN MIR

Only one rider had won this award since it was introduced in 2016: Marc Marquez. But the Spaniard was forced to sit out the 2020 season following a crash in the opening round. That opened the door for others to shine, and it was Joan Mir who won both the MotoGP title and our vote.

In an incredibly hard-fought and unpredictable season during which nine riders took victories, Mir's consistency lifted him above the opposition. He took his first win in November's European Grand Prix at Valencia and clinched the crown with a round to spare, in just his second MotoGP campaign. The Mallorcan is also the first Suzuki rider to lift motorcycle racing's top crown since 2000.

Autosport readers voted Mir the best rider of the season, ahead of fellow MotoGP title contenders Franco Morbidelli and Alex Rins, plus World Superbike dominator Jonathan Rea.

"It feels great, thank you to all the people that voted for me," said the 23-year-old. "I think we were the surprise of the year. We didn't have the fastest bike, but we got an opportunity and we took it.

"Since my first podium in Austria [in August] I was able to be on the podium on every track, in different circumstances, and this was the key. In Aragon [in October] I thought, 'Maybe we can get this.'"

MOMENT OF THE YEAR
PIERRE GASLY'S ITALIAN GRAND PRIX WIN

PRESENTED BY MARELLI



Pierre Gasly's shock victory for AlphaTauri in the Italian Grand Prix took the 2020 Moment of the Year honours.

In a dramatic Formula 1 race, Gasly rose from 10th on the grid and took advantage of a rare mistake by Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes to move into the lead at Monza. The 24-year-old Frenchman then held off the charging McLaren of Carlos Sainz Jr to win by 0.4 seconds.

It was Gasly's maiden F1 win, on his 55th start, and was also the first win for a team other than Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari since 2013.

"I think the fact no one really expected us to be there [at the front] makes it a more powerful moment," said Gasly. "You obviously plan for the best, but objectively we don't go to every weekend expecting to win.

"In France it was huge. Not having a winner for 24 years – I was quite shocked about the impact it had there."

The award is open to standout moments from international-level motorsport. Last year's winner was Jean-Eric Vergne for becoming the first driver to take back-to-back Formula E titles. Gasly's Italian win beat KTM's first MotoGP success, Antonio Felix da Costa securing the FE crown, and Hamilton breaking Michael Schumacher's F1 wins record at the Portuguese GP.

INTERNATIONAL RACING CAR OF THE YEAR
MERCEDES F1 W11

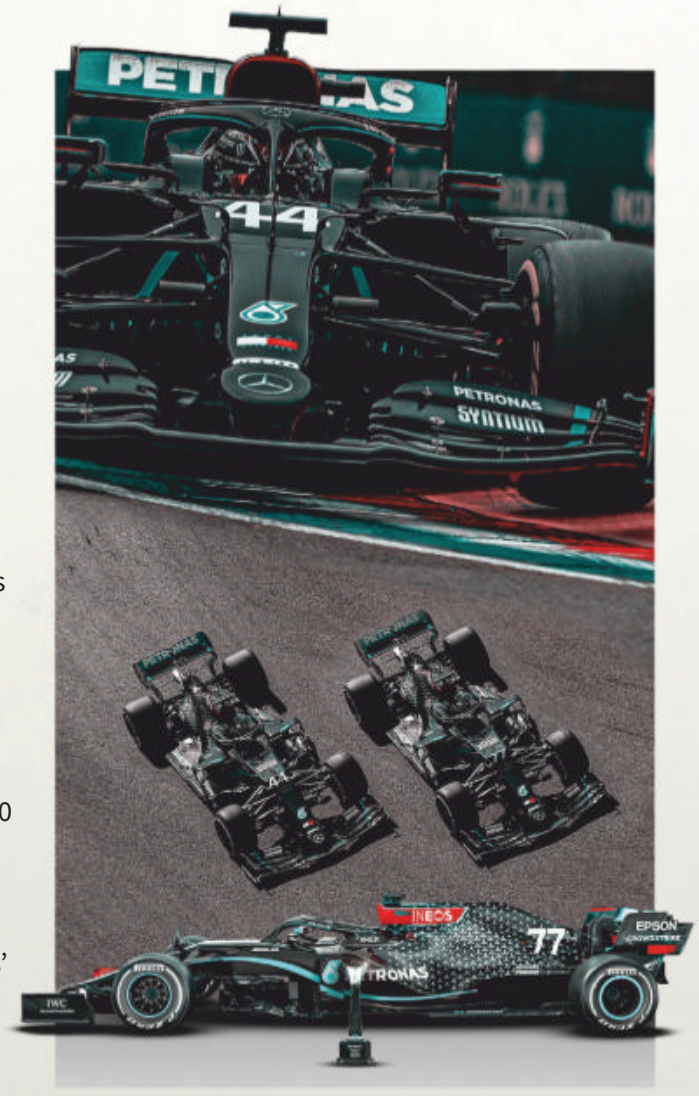
Is this the least surprising of our 2020 award winners? Mercedes hasn't lost the International Racing Car of the Year Award since the beginning of Formula 1's turbo-hybrid era, and the W11 is arguably the team's finest creation yet.

The W11, which ran in black to promote racial equality throughout the season, continued the Mercedes domination of F1, winning the German manufacturer its seventh consecutive constructors' championship and helping Lewis Hamilton match Michael Schumacher's record of seven drivers' crowns. The W11 was also innovative, despite the tight F1 regulations, including unusual features such as dual-axis steering.


COATES/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Mercedes designer John Owen said: "There were ideas we'd had sat around that were pretty radical, and we decided that we were just going to do everything we could. There were some pretty big challenges in the car, but they all came good in the end. It's the fastest-ever Mercedes."

The award is open to racing cars competing in any class of circuit racing, and the other 2020 nominees were the Le Mans 24 Hours-winning Toyota TS050 HYBRID, the DS E-Tense FE20 that took the drivers' and teams' titles in the 2019-20 Formula E campaign, and the DTM-dominating Audi RS5.



RICHARD MILLE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR
OSCAR PIASTRI

PRESENTED BY RICHARD MILLE

"I keep having to remind myself that this was a rookie season!" said FIA Formula 3 champion Oscar Piastri, perhaps revealing why he topped our Rookie of the Year vote.

The Renault Sport Academy driver stepped up to F3 after taking the Formula Renault Eurocup crown in 2019. Despite never qualifying on the front row, the Australian scored two wins with Prema Racing and took the title by three points from fellow rookie Theo Pourchaire.



Piastri defeated LMP2 star Paul di Resta, World Rally Championship golden boy Kalle Rovanpera and F2 race winner Yuki Tsunoda to scoop our laurels.

"The compact calendar put everyone to the test," added the 19-year-old. "It took its toll mentally and physically, but I'm very happy to have walked away with the championship.

"Winning the championship meant I got the opportunity to test a Formula 1 car with Renault. That was the coolest day of my life so far and hopefully there will be more of those."

The award, which is 20 years old, is open to professional racing drivers in their first season in their respective categories. Previous winners include Jenson Button, Juan Pablo Montoya, Mark Webber, Lewis Hamilton, Sebastian Vettel, Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc.



RALLY CAR OF THE YEAR
TOYOTA YARIS WRC

For the second season in a row, Toyota was beaten to the World Rally manufacturers' title by Hyundai. But for the second successive year, the Yaris WRC defeated the i20 Coupe WRC in the Autosport vote.

The Yaris was victorious on four of the seven World Rally Championship rounds this year, helping Sebastien Ogier and Elfyn Evans to first and second in the drivers' standings. The car, developed and run by four-time World Rally champion Tommi Makinen's team, has now won 17 WRC events since its debut in 2017.

The award is open to rally cars competing from national to international level, with the Ford Fiesta WRC and Dakar Rally-winning Mini JCW Buggy X-Raid the other 2020 nominees. It is the fourth time a Toyota has scooped the prize.

Previous winners of the accolade, which was one of the first Autosport awards introduced in 1982, include the Audi Quattro, Peugeot 205 T16, Lancia Delta HF Integrale and Subaru Impreza.



INTERNATIONAL RALLY DRIVER OF THE YEAR
ELFYN EVANS

Welshman Elfyn Evans came closer to the World Rally title than anyone expected in 2020, only an unfortunate accident in the finale to deny him. He nevertheless topped the International Rally Driver vote.

In his first WRC season with Toyota, Evans scored two wins from the first six events. That meant he went into the Rally Monza finale with a 14-point lead over Sebastien Ogier. He looked on course until being caught out by a sudden change of conditions and crashing. Instead of despairing at his misfortune, Evans climbed out and walked back up the stage to warn following drivers, including Ogier, who went on to secure the title.

Autosport readers voted Evans the best rally driver of the season, ahead of Ogier, 2019 WRC champion Ott Tanak and Hyundai star Thierry Neuville.

"This award is a brilliant way to round off what has been a very special year for me," said Evans. "My thanks go to all the Autosport readers who voted for me. I can't wait for the new season to get under way and hope that I can achieve more success for Toyota and our fans."

It is the first time Evans has scooped the award, which has been running since 1982 and is open to professional or semi-professional rally drivers competing at international level.



PIONEERING AND INNOVATION AWARD

24 HOURS OF LE MANS VIRTUAL

PRESENTED BY Mahindra RACING

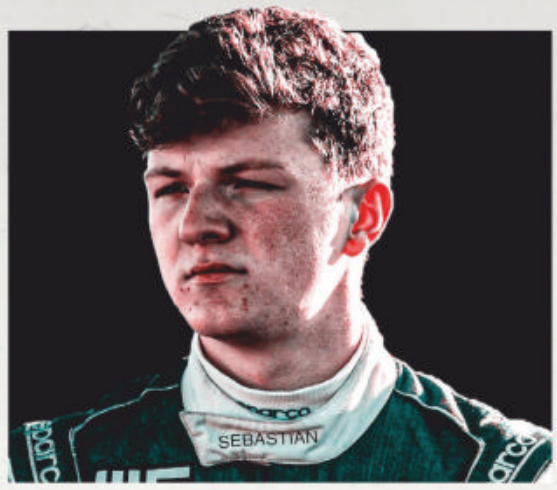
The 24 Hours of Le Mans Virtual won Autosport's 2020 Pioneering and Innovation Award presented by Mahindra.

When global lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic forced conventional motorsport to halt, many promoters turned to video games and Esports to fill the void. Few, if any, managed to reach the same heights as the Le Mans Virtual. Its collaboration between sim competitors and real drivers, and the quality of the production, ensured that it was well received by fans of both real and virtual motorsport, reaching over 63 million people on the same weekend that the Le Mans 24 Hours normally takes place.

Formula 1 stars Charles Leclerc, Max Verstappen, Lando Norris, Pierre Gasly and Fernando Alonso, as well as many leading endurance competitors, were among the 200 drivers participating.

Gerard Neveu, the outgoing CEO of the FIA World Endurance Championship, said: "This is a big recognition for the huge job that the people from the virtual Le Mans team achieved in June."

It is the second time in the history of the award that the victory has gone to a gaming project, the last time being for GT Academy in 2013.



ESPORTS DRIVER OF THE YEAR

SEBASTIAN JOB

The Esports Driver of the Year is Autosport's newest award, introduced in recognition of this growing branch of motorsport, which experienced a boost during 2020.

Sebastian Job won the inaugural vote, ahead of Dutch Formula 1 Esports Series champion Jarno Opmeer, versatile Esports competitor Josh Rogers and Williams racer Nikodem Wisniewski.

Job won the 2020 Porsche TAG Heuer Esports Supercup World Championship in dominant fashion. His impressive winning margin over 2019 champion Rogers cemented him as one of the year's top performers in virtual motorsport. Over the 20 races he competed in, Job's tally included six wins and 13 podiums, and he was only out of the top five on two occasions.

"2020 was an amazing year for me in sim racing," said the 20-year-old. "I took a huge step forward in terms of performance. The season overall was almost as good as I could have hoped for, with just one bad round out of 10, showing how important consistency is at the top level.

"The key moment of the season was the first round of PESC – it was great to start the season showing the rest of the grid how much we had improved as a team. From that point on the confidence was very high and I think that is one of the major keys to success."



PRESENTED BY motorsport GAMES



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2. Sweden (20 Feb)
3. Mexico (19 Mar-**NG**)
4. Estonia (10 Sept-**NG**)
5. Turkey (24 Sept-**NG**)
6. Italy (15 Oct-**NG**)
7. Monza (10 Dec-**NG**)

WTCR

1. Zolder (17 Sept-**DS**)
2. Nurburgring (1 Oct-**DS**)
3. Slovakia Ring (15 Oct-**DS**)
4. Hungaroring (22 Oct-**DS**)
5. Motorland Aragon (5 Nov-**DS**)
6. Motorland Aragon (19 Nov-**DS**)

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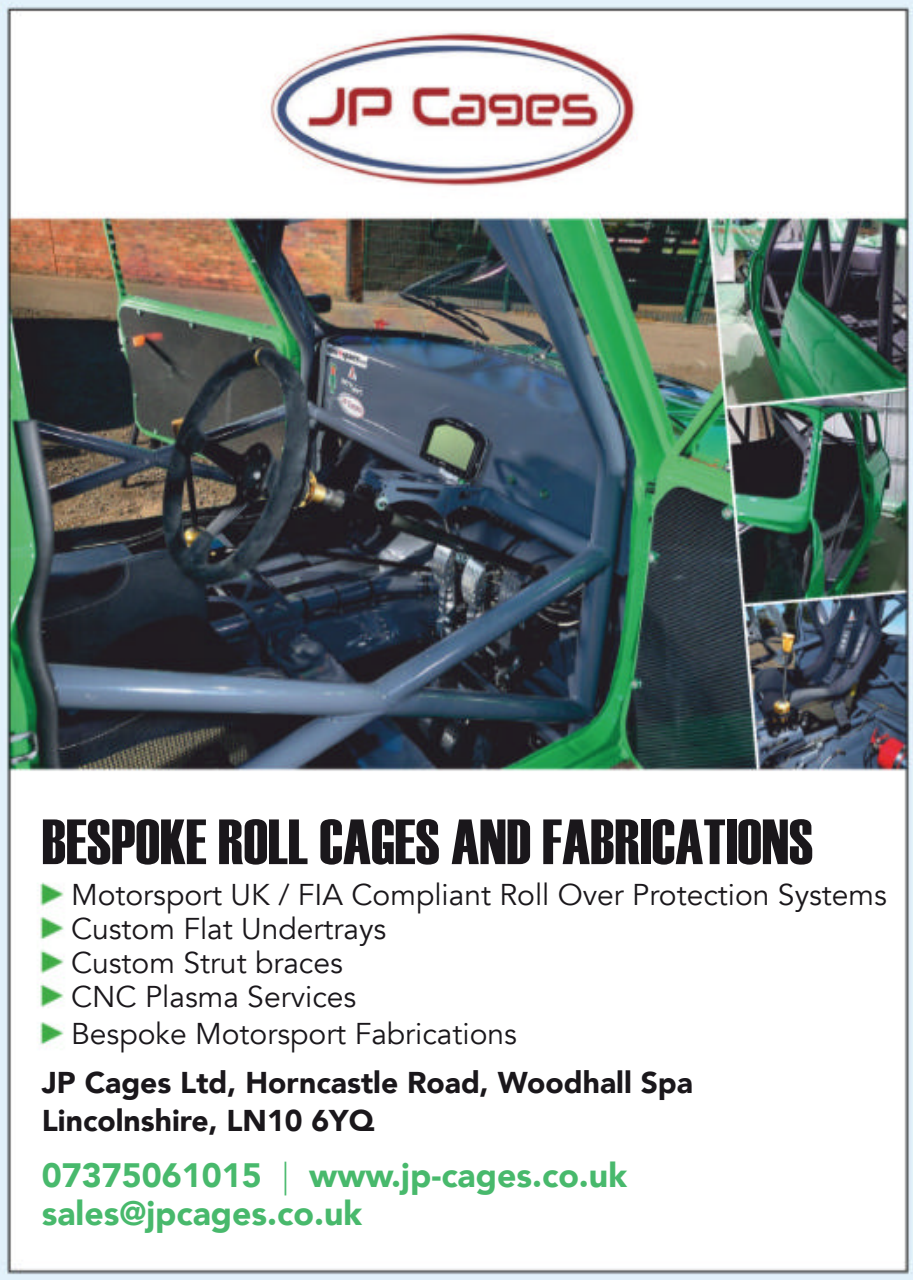


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RSR will continue to operate Clio championships in France, Spain and Italy

BONILLA/DPPI

RENAULT SPORT RACING SAYS NO CLIO CUP UK IN '21

CLIO CUP UK

There will be no Clio Cup in the UK next year after Renault Sport Racing decided there were too many "uncertainties" to launch a championship – the latest twist in a two-year on/off saga for the category.

Back in December 2018, Renault UK announced it would withdraw its support from the popular Clio Cup after the 2019 season, meaning it looked like the end of the road for what was the unofficial feeder series for the British Touring Car Championship.

But Renault Sport Racing then revealed that it would back a UK championship for 2020, which would feature the new, fifth-generation Clio and would race on the British GT support bill, rather than alongside the BTCC.

However, the coronavirus pandemic led to the start of the season being delayed and then cancelled altogether. RSR has now decided not to relaunch a series in the UK next year – its sporting manager Tarik Ait Said telling Autosport that COVID-19 "makes things difficult".

"The UK is not part of our 2021 plan," he explained, adding RSR is "always reviewing" its strategy. "It's very frustrating – we've been doing Clio Cup in the UK for so many years so it's very frustrating we couldn't launch it this year. There were too many uncertainties with all the clients and customers, we decided it was better for them not to invest in new cars at the start of a season that would be very problematic."

Instead of running a UK series, RSR is instead operating championships in France, Spain, Italy and Central Europe as well as a new European contest, where drivers' scores from any 10 of the national series weekends count to the title.

"We thought about putting one race meeting in the UK, but it wouldn't have been good," Ait Said continued. "People in the UK wouldn't buy a car to do one race meeting [and the rest in Europe]."

Ait Said refused to rule out a future series in the UK, particularly as Renault has altered its strategy to give the Alpine brand prominence in its racing activities. "I believe we're going to return to the UK in the future," he said. "It's not a market that can be ignored."

Richard Colburn, boss of long-time Clio Cup squad Westbourne Motorsport, says the decision was to be expected as the pandemic continues to have a major impact on manufacturers.

"It's a great shame," he said. "Hopefully it will come back at some point or we all have the opportunity to race in Europe with it. It would be nice if they had a European championship that includes the UK.

"With the uncertainty, trying to start something new would be a difficult thing to do. It's difficult for teams to invest in the cars, and for organisers to invest in the events. We've got to wait for a period of normality and see [if it can return]."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Star of Mallory Formula Ford contest revived

BRSCC



Four FF1600 events are planned at Mallory Park

The British Racing and Sports Car Club plans to revive the Star of Mallory Formula Ford 1600 contest next season.

The title will be awarded across four events at the Leicestershire venue, which will form part of the Northern FF1600 championship. Two of these will be at British Automobile Racing Club meetings, where the clubs will share track time, one will be at a BRSCC event and the other will be at an Aston Martin Owners Club-branded, BRSCC-run fixture.

The Star of Mallory will also benefit from a £2000 prize fund supplied by the circuit itself and Daly Systems, while Mallory will run a prize draw at each weekend to win a free test day.

"Speaking to a number of Formula Fordsters who are relatively local, there's a tendency for people not to want to commit to travel all over the country," explained BRSCC chairman Peter Daly. "What I wanted to do was take a look at Northern Formula Ford and see if we could slip some Mallorys in.

"We've got four dates at Mallory and at least two of them have testing on the Friday and racing on the Saturday. Stuart Hicken of Real Motorsport is keen for us to bring Formula Ford to Mallory Park as it's a crowd favourite and, in return, he's put a prize fund in place."

Daly added none of the dates clash with National FF1600 events, meaning teams could test out new signings. "It's about trying to increase the number of drivers in single-seaters," he said.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

TONY MERRICK 1935-2020

OBITUARY



One of the world's finest restorers of historic grand prix cars, Tony Merrick died peacefully at his home on 16 December, aged 85, having been diagnosed with aggressive lung cancer only in October.

Merrick began restoring the finest cars in 1958 and enjoyed the opportunity to race them from 1960, while preparing ERA R1A, then owned by Sandy Murray. He founded his restoration business in 1972, which provided workmanship to Tom Wheatcroft's Donington Collection and customers worldwide. His attention to detail and empathy with priceless and often delicate machinery made Merrick a formidable opponent on track.

A quiet authority on Ferrari and Maserati, with an avuncular manner and charisma that endeared him to everybody who shared his passion, Merrick was the perfect choice as chairman of the Historic Grand Prix Cars Association from 1996. With wife Yvonne, then as vice-president, he was a wise and genial host when its board met at their charming house. He continued to race his Ferrari Dino until October 1999 when, following a huge startline accident at Imola, he decided to hang up his helmet and goggles.

Apart from the memories of countless friends, Merrick's legacy to historic motorsport is manifold. As well as the cars he saved for future generations to enjoy, the new book *A Life Restoring & Racing Historic Cars* will long be cherished.

MARCUS PYE

IN THE HEADLINES

MORE BRITISH F4 SIGNINGS

Karters McKenzy Cresswell and Thomas Ikin are the latest drivers announced as competing in British Formula 4 next season, with both having already begun a testing programme. British-born, US-raised Cresswell will drive for the JHR Developments squad, while Young Racing Driver Academy member Ikin joins Ginetta Junior graduate Zak Taylor at Arden.

SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Ginetta has chosen two drivers to win its scholarship for the first time, after the Blyton Park final earlier this month was too close to call. Maurice Henry, who has previous junior rallying experience, and Dutch karter Robert de Haan have been selected to receive funded seasons in Ginetta Junior next year. Sixty-five drivers took part in the three-day scholarship event, which featured a range of driving, media and fitness assessments.

BRIAN HARVEY 1933-2020

Brian Harvey, who with wife Rachael founded the world-famous Grand Prix Models emporium in Radlett, Hertfordshire, in 1972, has died following a lengthy illness. Harvey (uncle of British Touring Car champion Tim, whose father David also raced) was managing editor of *Cars and Car Conversions* magazine when they took the plunge, also making the GPM range of kits. He was also an entertaining commentator at race meetings.

FASTEST LAP CORRECTION

In Autosport's 'Fastest racing laps of 2020' feature (17-24 December issue), we inadvertently included the wrong time for Castle Combe. The quickest lap around the Wiltshire venue in 2020 was actually a 1m03.937s (104.16mph) time set by Mike Jenvey (below) in his Jenvey Gunn TS6 machine during the second Sports Car Trophy race on 31 August. We apologise for the error.



Mitchell lands Lambo factory deal and will partner Balon



BRITISH GT

British GT champion Sandy Mitchell will defend his title with Barwell Motorsport next season and has been rewarded with a Lamborghini factory contract.

The 20-year-old Scot won two races alongside British Touring Car Championship convert Rob Collard as the Barwell crew beat RAM Racing pair Sam De Haan and Patrick Kujala to the title.

On his return to the series he'd first contested as a 16-year-old in 2016, after two seasons in Europe, Mitchell impressed with his pace despite carrying 30kg more ballast than established team leader Phil Keen, who will move to WPI Motorsport next year.

Mitchell will now be free of the extra weight running in a Pro-Am line-up with Keen's former co-driver Adam Balon.

"It will be very competitive but I'm really confident that me and Adam will be right up the front," Mitchell told Autosport. "He's always been a frontrunner in his class in British GT, so we'll be a strong Pro-Am pairing. I'm excited to get started with preparations for the new season."

Barwell boss Mark Lemmer said that Mitchell "absolutely deserves" his factory status, adding that Balon was "relishing the prospect of having Sandy" as a team-mate.

"Adam has seen how Sandy works for a year, so all three parties are confident and can't wait to get going to see what we can achieve," he said.

Mitchell and Balon will be joined in Barwell's British GT assault next year by Dennis Lind and Leo Machitski, who won the Barcelona 24H together for Barwell in 2019.

Lind split with WPI following the Oulton Park round last year and is no longer a part of the Lamborghini works driver roster, but Lemmer said the Dane's previous history with Machitski – a two-time Am class GT World Challenge Europe champion – would make for a potent combination.

"We all know that we can work well together, it's not a new combination," he said. "Dennis gets on well with Leo, I get on really well with Dennis and I think that we can get the best out of each other."

JAMES NEWBOLD

O'Sullivan moves up to British F3 with Carlin

BRDC BRITISH F3

British Formula 4 runner-up Zak O'Sullivan will remain with the Carlin squad as he graduates to BRDC British F3 for next season.

He narrowly missed out on taking the F4 title in his maiden single-seater campaign, after a dramatic finale in which half points were awarded as heavy rain arrived while O'Sullivan was leading rival Luke Browning.

O'Sullivan will now make the next jump up the single-seater ladder and believes it is best to stay in the UK, given the current uncertainties surrounding the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think it was a mix of factors," said the 2019 Ginetta Junior runner-up. "Firstly, staying with Carlin seems like a good progression – I felt like I formed a really good relationship with the team. With the uncertainty this year and next year, British F3's a safer bet and it's better for budget as well. It's going to be very competitive."

O'Sullivan has already completed a number of tests in the car and says he has been "pleasantly surprised" by it, particularly with the downforce the new-for-2020 bodywork offers.

A number of his F4 rivals have also been out testing F3 machinery and are likely to make the same move. "A lot will be with the same teams so it's going to be like F4 but 10 seconds faster!" said O'Sullivan.

STEPHEN LICKORISH


F4 runner-up has already been testing with Carlin

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How club racing has changed

As one of our longest-serving contributors prepares to step back from reporting on events for Autosport after almost 45 years, he looks back on his favourite memories

KERRY DUNLOP

Motorsport has changed considerably since 1959 when I persuaded my dad to take me to Brands Hatch to watch my first event, the Kentish 100 Formula 2 meeting. In those days, the calendar was nowhere near as crowded and England was regarded as the epicentre of the sport. Consequently, there were many drivers from overseas among the 45 who turned up to try for one of the 16 places available on the grid. Practice (now called qualifying) was a pretty cut-throat affair, while Jack Brabham (Cooper-Climax) went on to win both races. I managed to get a passable, panned photograph of Stirling Moss in Rob Walker's Cooper-Borgward despite the fact that I was using a pre-war Goerz camera with leather bellows and a pop-up refraction viewfinder. I was hooked!

Drivers were more versatile in those days. At Goodwood's 1961 Easter Monday meeting, Moss drove in the F1 race, the GT event in Rob Walker's Ferrari Berlinetta and then he won the sports-racing encounter in a Lotus 19 Monte Carlo as well. But, for me, the biggest thrill was in the saloon race when a young Mike Parkes took on grand prix drivers Graham Hill, Roy Salvadori, Bruce McLaren and Innes Ireland. On the first lap, the five 3.4 Jaguars suddenly emerged from the drizzle and hammered down towards Woodcote with not an inch of daylight between them. What a sight!

> **"Five 3.4 Jaguars emerged from the drizzle and hammered down to Woodcote. What a sight!"**

The price of admission rose to the dizzy heights of £1 for the 1964 British GP at Brands, where I admired the precision of Jim Clark's driving as he eased away to win from an on-the-limit Hill.

By the late 1960s, my motorsport photographs were appearing regularly in the Kent Messenger Group's papers and in 1972 my photograph of John Gott's fatal crash at Lydden was printed on the front page of the *Daily Express*. My first involvement with Autosport was in 1976, when I captured a sequence of somersaults by Will Gollop's Saab at a Lydden rallycross event. I contacted the mag, sent the film via British Rail's Red Star service and dictated a few words over the telephone. Robin Bradford, the editor for club racing, liked what I did and asked me to cover the 750 Motor Club's race meeting the following weekend. I was up and running!

That very basic method of communication gradually improved via teleprinter and fax machine until there was a quantum leap forward with the introduction of the internet. At that point, Autosport issued each of its regular contributors with an arcane device rather like a stone-age laptop. It had a keyboard and a small screen sufficient to show two or three paragraphs. Having typed your story, you then had to scroll back up to the start, key in the telephone number manually and press a button to transmit. If the connection was successful, said device then emitted a weird noise like a demented Dalek with diarrhoea... It is so much easier these days when digital images can be attached to an email thus avoiding that tedious trip to the train station.

During the 1980s, Lydden became very popular, with a dozen or more club meetings per year. I have very fond memories of Formula Ford frontrunners Paul Sleeman, Colin Stancombe, John Oxborrow, Trevor Stiles and Steve Brown, to name but a few, who returned month after month to renew their intense, friendly rivalry.

In 1993, I was coming up to retirement from my regular job as a sergeant with Kent Police, so I talked my way into weekend work as a tour manager for Motor Racing International. This meant I could follow my dream to all the European grand prix circuits. Once you've heard a Ferrari V10 on full song around the Parabolica at Monza you never forget it. MRI always had a huge hospitality marquee at Le Mans and it was my job to spend the morning before each race on stage interviewing selected drivers. It was a pleasure to bring out the stories of legends like Derek Bell, Brian Redman and Hans Stuck to name just three.

One of the perks of being part of the press pack is the occasional opportunity to 'sit in' and watch an expert driver at work. Two rides at Goodwood, one of my favourite circuits, were by far the most enjoyable. Simon Hadfield's technique in an Aston Martin DB3S was all about precision and consistency: finger-tip steering to hold a trace of oversteer through every corner. David Clark's method with the exotic Project 212 Aston Martin was totally different: throw it in very sideways, catch it on the throttle and then power out. After several corners had been attacked in this fashion, I realised the driver was showboating just for my benefit.

For me, the highlight of the last decade was the return of top-class rallycross to Lydden, the birthplace of the discipline, with all the sizzling, sideways action of the World Rallycross Championship. More recently, I have concentrated on historic racing and I have been working closely with the Classic Touring Car Racing Club. The cars have more power than grip — essential for pure spectacle — and I can even watch some of the cars that were racing in the 1960s.

But, from now on, as a spectator, I'll be back where I started.

THE 2020 CLUB RACING CHAMPIONS

Many did not contest the number of races they usually would during the condensed 2020 season, but plenty of champions were still crowned

COMPILED BY STEPHEN LICKORISH AND STEFAN MACKLEY

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Ryan Smith (MAN TGA)
BRITISH TRUCK RACING CHAMPIONSHIP DIVISION 2
Steven Powell (MAN TGX)
CNC HEADS SPORTS/SALOON CHAMPIONSHIP
Jamie Cryer (Ginetta G20)
GINETTA G40 CUP
Tom Golding
GINETTA GT4 SUPERCUP
Will Burns
GINETTA GT5 CHALLENGE
Josh Malin
GINETTA JUNIOR
Tom Lebbon
JUNIOR SALOON CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Lewis Saunders
KUMHO BMW CHAMPIONSHIP
Sunny Gill (E36 M3)
LEGENDS CARS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
Daniel Clark
MAX5 CHAMPIONSHIP
Paul Roddison (Mk4)



Malin sealed GT5 Challenge crown in dramatic finale

JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

MGOC CHAMPIONSHIP
Fergus Campbell (ZR 170)
MIGHTY MINIS CHAMPIONSHIP
Paul Ogborn
SUPER MIGHTY MINIS
Ian Slark
MINI CHALLENGE – JCW
Nathan Harrison
PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB
Harry King
PORSCHE SPRINT CHALLENGE GB
James Dorlin

BRITISH RACING AND SPORTS CAR CLUB

BMW COMPACT CUP
Steven Dailly
BRITISH F4 CHAMPIONSHIP
Luke Browning
BRITISH GT GT3
Sandy Mitchell/Rob Collard
(Lamborghini Huracan Evo GT3)
BRITISH GT GT4
Jamie Caroline/Daniel Vaughan
(Aston Martin Vantage GT4)
CATERHAM ACADEMY
Green Tom Cockerill
White Taylor O'Flanagan
CATERHAM ROADSPORT CHAMPIONSHIP
Tom Wyllys
CATERHAM SEVEN 270R CHAMPIONSHIP
Lars Hoffmann
CATERHAM SEVEN 310R CHAMPIONSHIP
Greg Monks
CATERHAM SEVEN UK CHAMPIONSHIP
John Byrne



Clark won third consecutive 70s Road Sports title

WALKER



READ

Cooper secured a second Combe FF1600 championship



Kellett again finished as top dog in Irish Fiesta Zetec

CHESTER

CIVIC CUP
Bruce Winfield
FIESTA CHAMPIONSHIP
Sam Watkins
FIESTA JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP
Joseph Loake
FUN CUP
Team Axiametrics
(Riley Phillips/Chris Dovell/Kristian Rose)
MAZDA MX-5 CHAMPIONSHIP
Oliver Allwood (subject to ongoing appeal)
MAZDA MX-5 SUPERCUP
Samuel Smith
NATIONAL FF1600 CHAMPIONSHIP
Neil Maclennan (Spectrum KMR)
NORTHERN FF1600 CHAMPIONSHIP
Neil McArthur (Van Diemen LA10)
PRODUCTION GTI CHAMPIONSHIP
Martyn Walsh (Mk5)
ST-XR CHALLENGE
William Heslop (ST)
SUPER CLASSIC FF1600
Peter Daly (Van Diemen RF88)
TOURING CAR TROPHY/ TCR UK CHAMPIONSHIP
Henry Neal (Honda Civic Type R FK2)
VOLKSWAGEN RACING CUP
Andy Wilmot (VW Golf)

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CASTLE COMBE FF1600 CHAMPIONSHIP
Luke Cooper (Swift SC18)
CASTLE COMBE GT CHAMPIONSHIP
Tony Bennett (Caterham R300)
CASTLE COMBE SALOON CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Mark Sutton (MG ZR)

CLASSIC TOURING CAR RACING CLUB

BLUE OVAL SALOON CHAMPIONSHIP
Piers Grange (Ford Escort Mk2)
CLASSIC AND HISTORIC THUNDER SALOON CHAMPIONSHIP
Andy Robinson (Ford Falcon)
PRE '66 TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Patrick Harris (Morris Minor)
PRE '83 GROUP 1 TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Mike Luck (BMW E21 320)
PRE '93 TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Dave Griffin (BMW E36 M3)
PRE '03 TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
AJ Owen (Honda Civic Type R)

HISTORIC SPORTS CAR CLUB

70s ROAD SPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP
Jeremy Clark (Lotus Elan S4)
CLASSIC CLUBMANS CHAMPIONSHIP
Adrian Holey (Mallock Mk20B)
CLASSIC FORMULA 3 CHAMPIONSHIP
Benn Tilley (March 743)
CLASSIC FF1600 CHAMPIONSHIP
Cam Jackson (Van Diemen RF80)
FORMULA JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP
Cam Jackson (Brabham BT2)
FRONT-ENGINED FORMULA JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP
Ray Mallock (U2 Mk2)
HISTORIC FORMULA 3 CHAMPIONSHIP
Ian Bankhurst (Alexis Mk8)
HISTORIC FF1600 CHAMPIONSHIP
Pierre Livingston (Merlyn Mk20A)
HISTORIC FF2000 CHAMPIONSHIP
Peter Drennan (Reynard SF79)
HISTORIC ROAD SPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP
Antony Ross (Alfa Romeo 1750 Spider)
HISTORIC TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Steve Platts (Singer Chamois)

IRELAND

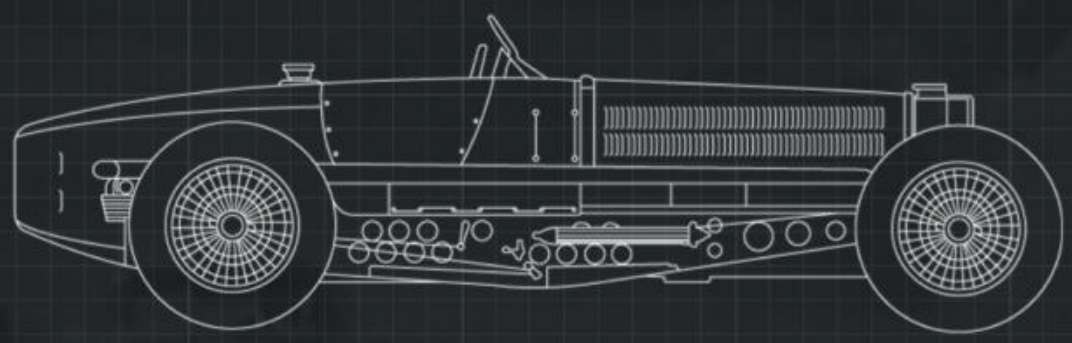
BOSS FORMULA LIBRE IRELAND
Cian Carey (Dallara F317)
IRISH FIESTA ZETEC CHAMPIONSHIP
Alastair Kellett
IRISH FIESTA ST CHAMPIONSHIP
Alex Denning
IRISH FORMULA VEE CHAMPIONSHIP
Anthony Cross (Sheane FV94)
IRISH GINETTA JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP
Jack Byrne
IRISH LEGENDS CARS
Geoff Richardson
IRISH STRYKER SPORTSCAR CHAMPIONSHIP
David Reynolds
IRISH SUPERCARS
Paul Parr
SEAT SUPERCUP IRELAND
Shane Murphy

MG CAR CLUB

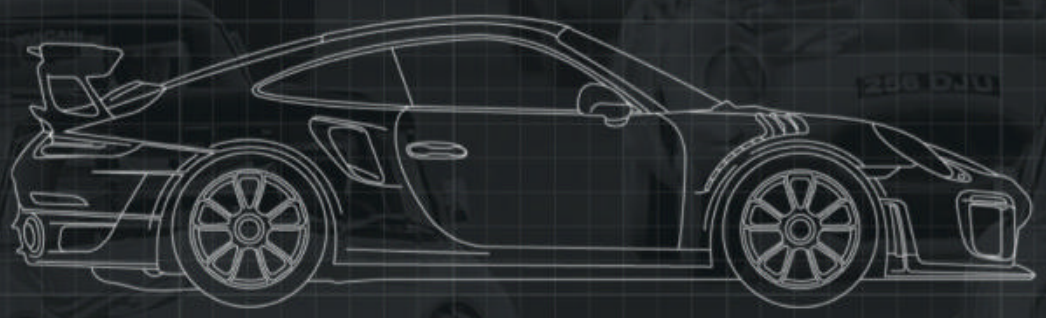
BCV8 CHAMPIONSHIP
Ollie Neaves (MGB GT V8)
COCKSHOOT CUP
Brian Butler (MGF)
MG CUP
Carl Robinson (ZR 160)

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MONOPOSTO CHAMPIONSHIP
Tony Bishop (Dallara F304)
MONOPOSTO TIEDEMAN TROPHY
Geoff Fern (Van Diemen RF94)

MOTORSPORT VISION RACING

7 RACE SERIES
Phil Jenkins (Caterham 420R)
BRDC BRITISH F3 CHAMPIONSHIP
Kaylen Frederick
CLUBMANS SPORTS PROTOTYPE CHAMPIONSHIP
Barry Webb (Mallock Mk16)
ELISE TROPHY
Matthias Radestock (Elise S3)
F3 CUP
Stefano Leaney (Dallara F315)
FERRARI CHALLENGE UK
Lucky Khera
FOCUS CUP
Andrew Godfrey
GT CUP CHAMPIONSHIP
Josh Jackson/Simon Orange (Ginetta G55)
HERITAGE FF1600
Tom Brown (Van Diemen RF91)
MINI CHALLENGE – COOPER S
Rob Austin
MINI CHALLENGE TROPHY
Harry Nunn
MSVT SUPERCUP
NJM Racing (Nick Jackson/Ollie Pidgley, SEAT Supercopa)



O'Connell was again on form in Northern Irish GT

DEMPSTER



Clark picked up the Porsche Club title

HAWKINS

MSVT TRACKDAY CHAMPIONSHIP
Ray Honeybone (Renault Clio)
RADICAL CHALLENGE CHAMPIONSHIP
Marcus Clutton
RADICAL SR1 CUP
James Pinkerton

NORTHERN IRELAND

NORTHERN IRELAND FORD FIESTA ZETEC CHAMPIONSHIP
Mark Stewart
NORTHERN IRELAND FF1600 CHAMPIONSHIP
David McCullough (Van Diemen RF01)
NORTHERN IRELAND GT CHAMPIONSHIP
Gerard O'Connell (SHP Ford Escort)
NORTHERN IRELAND ROADSPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP
Steve Morris (Crossle 42S)
NORTHERN IRELAND SALOON CHAMPIONSHIP
Stephen Traub (Honda Integra)

SCOTTISH MOTOR RACING CLUB

SCOTTISH C1 CUP
Ross Dunn
SCOTTISH CLASSIC SPORTS AND SALOONS CHAMPIONSHIP
Bruce Mitchell (Lotus Europa TC)
SCOTTISH FIESTA ST CHAMPIONSHIP
Dave Colville
SCOTTISH LEGENDS CARS CHAMPIONSHIP
Pino Palazzo
SCOTTISH MINI COOPER CUP
Robbie Dalgleish

SPORTS RACING CAR CLUB

SPORTS 2000 DURATEC CHAMPIONSHIP
Michael Gibbins (MCR S2)
SPORTS 2000 HISTORIC CHAMPIONSHIP
Clive Steeper (Tiga SC80)
SPORTS 2000 PINTO CHAMPIONSHIP
Peter Needham (Van Diemen SR2000)

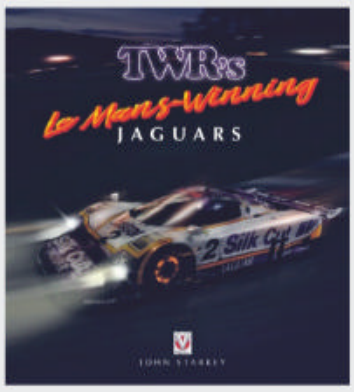
OTHERS

JAGUAR SALOON AND GT CHAMPIONSHIP
James Ramm (XJS)
NORTHERN SALOON & SPORTSCAR CHAMPIONSHIP
Gary Bowers (BMW M135)
PORSCHE CLASSIC BOXSTER CUP
Paul Simpson
PORSCHE CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP
Simon Clark (Cayman S)





UNDER THE SKIN OF WALKINSHAW'S BIG CATS



BOOK REVIEW
TWR'S LE MANS-WINNING JAGUARS
RRP £19.99

Prolific motorsport author John Starkey is no stranger to writing about the most revered and influential sportscar racing programmes of all time. Ford versus Ferrari, the Sauber-Mercedes and Nissan Group C attacks, the Lola T70, Porsches 911 and 935 plus the Tour de France roster from Ferrari: they're all part of the former Donington Park Collection curator's back catalogue.

The latest addition to that growing line-up of volumes comes with *TWR's Le Mans-winning Jaguars*. Despite the title and reasonably concise 140 pages, this isn't a study just of the XJR-9 and XJR-12 designs, which triumphed in the French enduro in 1988 and 1990 respectively. Instead, it's a comprehensive review of the entire lineage. Starting with the (non-TWR) Group 44 challengers of XJR-5 and 7, the family tree spans all the way through to the XJR-16 — including Ross Brawn's mighty XJR-14.

How you review this edition rather depends on what mood you find yourself in. As a book to sit down and read in one go, this is tough going. The narrative is a touch one-note, too dry if we're being harsh. But as a technical study of the developments from each model year to the next, nothing else will do.

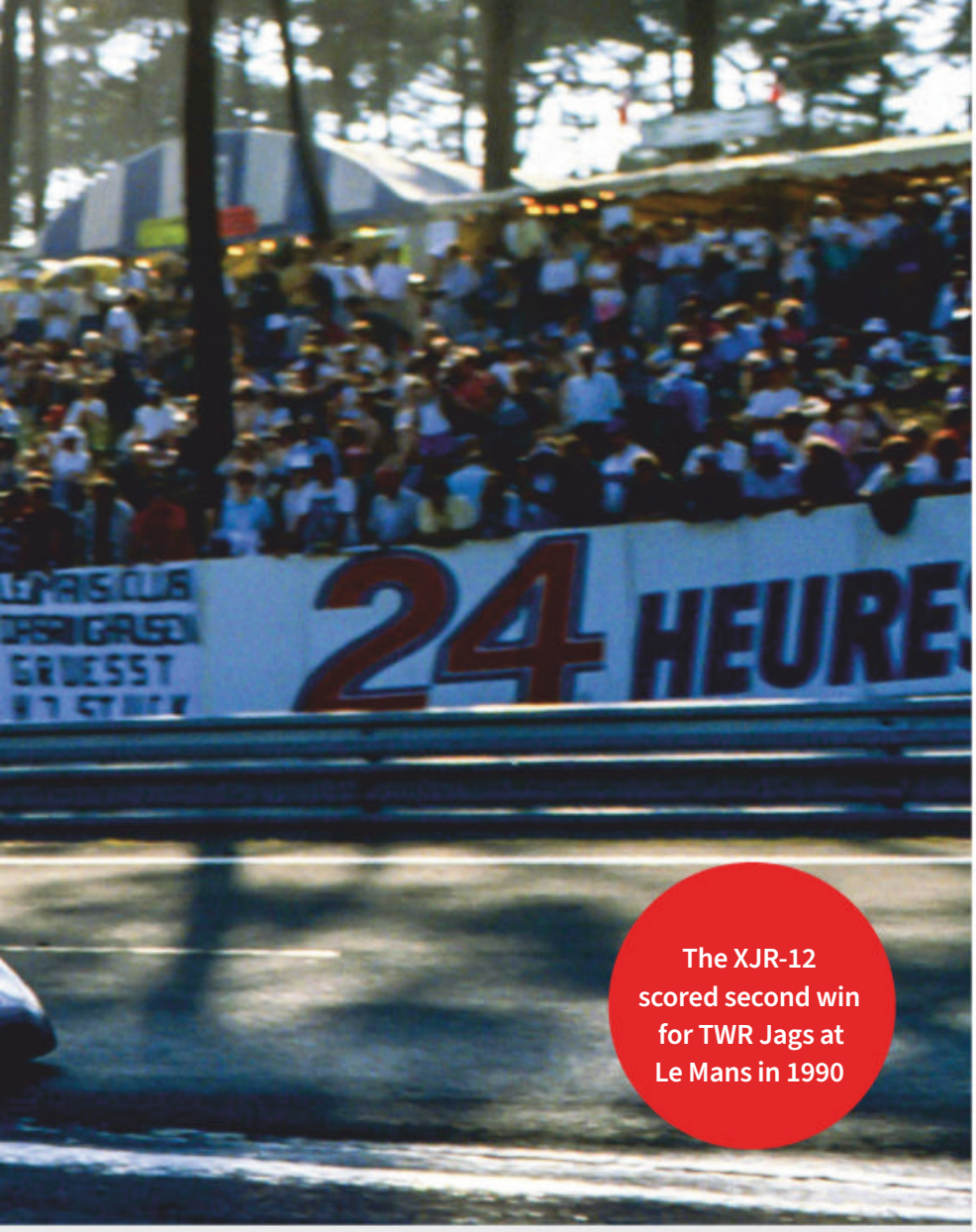
Compression ratios of each V12, switches from fuel tanks to fuel bags, even the inlet tract dimensions are noted. The research is clearly beyond thorough. But, with the exception of the accounts of the Le Mans victories, don't ready yourself for an emotive read that's awash with theatrical embellishment. Most races and results are covered off in little more than a paragraph each. This is definitely a study of the cars and their engineering, not the glory or a biographical account of Tom Walkinshaw. It's whether or not that floats your boat. It's case a of different bores and strokes for different folks.

The admirable collation of facts and figures extends to the compendium of chassis history given at the end of each chapter. Here you'll find a recap of the technical iterations and full race results. As a research guide, it's something of a one-stop shop.

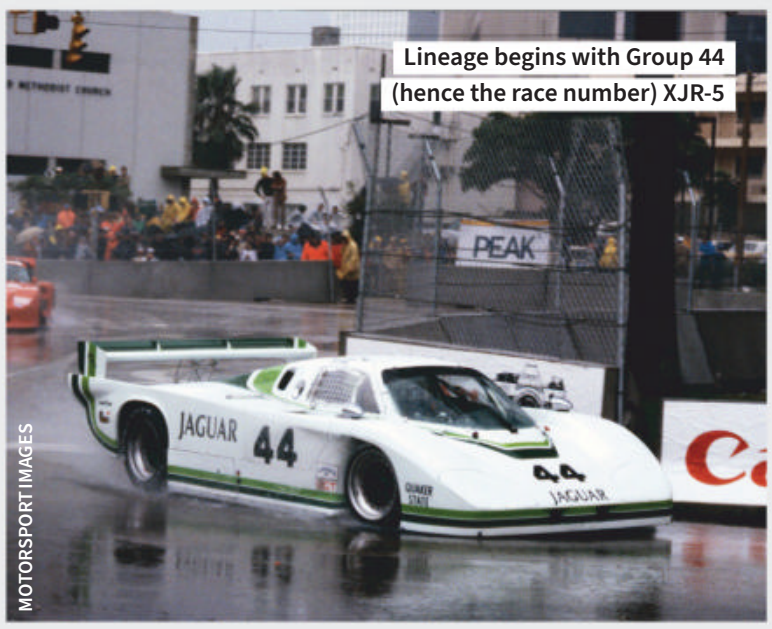
Starkey also keeps the bigger picture close by, with the threat of the evergreen Porsche 956 and 962, plus the emerging talent of the Sauber-Mercedes tilt looming large against Walkinshaw's winners.

How TWR won the Jaguar contract — namely, its success at touring car level with the Rover Vitesse and Jaguar XJS coupe (although, arguably much less of a touring car than its British Leyland counterpart...) — builds into the story of Bob Tullius and how the American, who raced E-types and Triumph TR8s, initially returned the British manufacturer to the sportscar limelight.

Then it's the car histories, the brace of keynote Le Mans wins, the double Daytona 24 Hours success and the hat-tricks of world championship wins for



The XJR-12 scored second win for TWR Jags at Le Mans in 1990



Lineage begins with Group 44 (hence the race number) XJR-5

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

both team and drivers in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The picture choice – of which, pleasingly, there are a couple of dozen for each chapter – piqued Autosport's interest. As spectacular as it will always remain to see stills of these cars on track, many of the images are of the big cats static in the paddock. It's a refreshing change to the norm, and somehow cooler to see the Jaguars lying in state, being pored over by denim-clad engineers, rather than with glowing brake discs – front cover aside.

In this respect, the images match the text to a tee. Starkey's prose and the shots, largely sourced from the archives of Graham Robson and John S Allen, are well suited as greater studies of the engineering and appreciating the cars in themselves, rather than shifting the focus to the on-track trophy hunting.

In short, if this Autosport writer is ever called upon to write about the TWR Jaguars when resident sportscar guru Gary Watkins is preoccupied, Starkey's book will be the first and main port of call for brushing up the knowledge.

But *TWR's Le Mans-winning Jaguars* is probably further down the pecking order for reading on a quiet night in. That said, there's no shame in this at all.

MATT KEW

autosport.com/podcast



The Autosport team, beers in hand, sits down to discuss the 2020 edition of our Top 50 Drivers of the Year. We recall how the list came together, which contenders just missed out and ask a couple of championship correspondents to defend 'their' driver's position.

YouTube youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Autosport analyses why Valtteri Bottas's chances of stealing the Formula 1 title away from Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton were so slim in 2020, following the unluckiest run to second place in the drivers' standings of recent seasons. **Go to bit.ly/Bottas2020**

AUTOSPORT PLUS

How Toyota's grand plans for F1 domination fell flat

A look back at why the Japanese manufacturer spent too much, adapted too slowly, achieved too little, then bowed out too soon in response to the global economic rupture. Go to bit.ly/ToyotaF1



FROM THE ARCHIVE

The Fiat 131 Abarth of Markku Alen carries the scars accumulated on the 1981 Portuguese Rally, an event in which only a quarter of the starters made it to the finish. Early pacesetter Hannu Mikkola retired when the engine of his Audi Quattro expired, then Ari Vatanen ran his Ford Escort off the road, handing the lead to Alen. Henri Toivonen (Talbot Sunbeam Lotus) chased Alen down, closing to within a couple of seconds before he suffered a broken rear hub, but was able to hold on to second place ahead of Bjorn Waldegard's Toyota Celica.

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Alfa stays on top but Ferrari threat rises

29 December 1950

As the year in which we celebrated Autosport's 70th birthday comes to a close, it seems appropriate to look back at the last issue of the magazine from its first year.

The Christmas double special and Top 50 drivers list were still in the future, but there was a review of the season's Formula 1 competition on 29 December 1950.

"It has been another Alfa Romeo year and the wonderful 1500cc 'eights' from Milan, after a year's absence, have won every 1950 race in which they were entered," said Assistant Editor Cyril Posthumus. Chief among those successes were the six grands prix that had counted for the inaugural world championship, shared between champion Giuseppe Farina and Juan Manuel Fangio.

However, Autosport prophetically noted the "challenge to Alfa's supremacy" from Ferrari, whose 4.5-litre V12 machine had "revealed a remarkable turn of speed, and low, time-saving fuel consumption". It was a combination that would finally defeat Alfa Romeo in 1951.

Talbot driver Raymond Sommer was also praised, having driven with "astonishing verve" to briefly lead the Alfas at the Belgian GP. His fatal accident in the non-championship Haute Garonne GP robbed the sport of one of its finest drivers.

Autosport assessed Britain's place in motorsport too, lamenting the lack of a serious F1 contender but pointing to success in F2 and F3. Attention was also drawn to the fine 1950 showings from Aston Martin, Allard and Jaguar in sportscar racing. Jaguar would build on that by winning Le Mans in 1951, but the first world championship F1 success by a British constructor was still nearly seven years away.

A driver who would be key to that made our cover. 'Driver of the year' Stirling Moss was pictured in an HWM at the BRDC *Daily Express* International Trophy, in which he had finished sixth.



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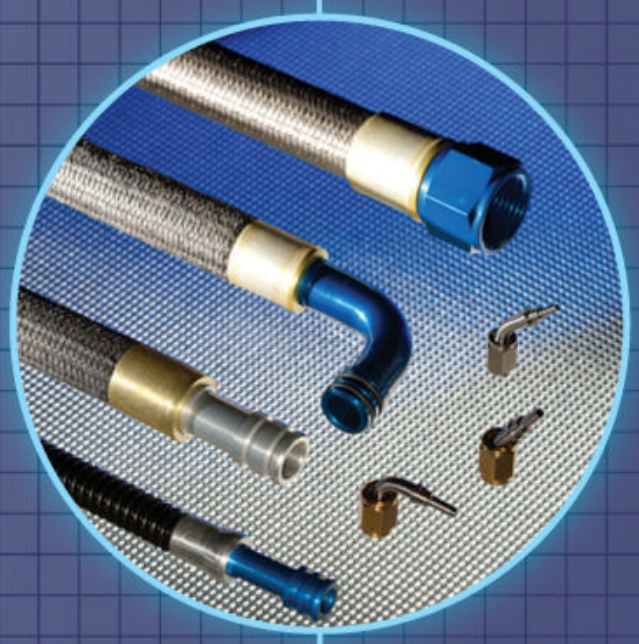
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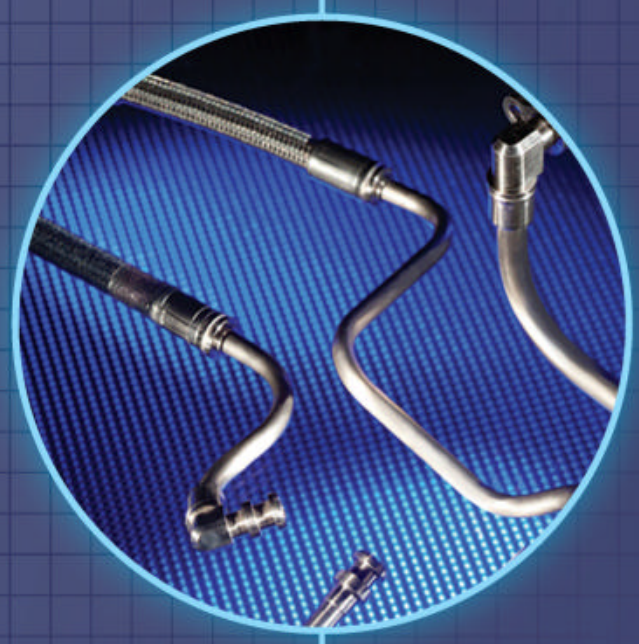
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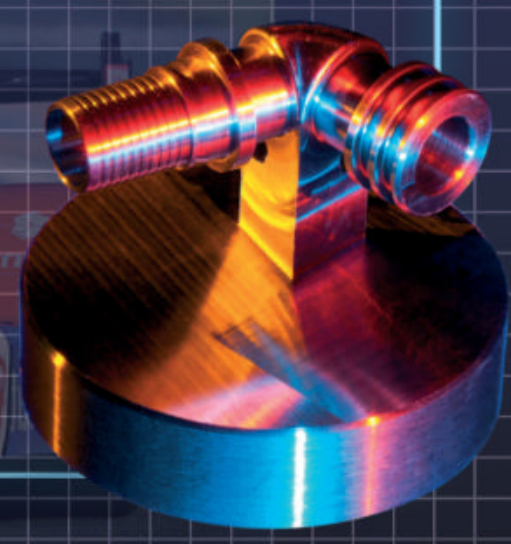
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