Button boost for Williams and Extreme E



AUTOSPORT

BRITAIN'S BEST MOTORSPORT WEEKLY

28 JANUARY 2021

Why the Williams revival is real

'There's a real fighting spirit here'

SIMON ROBERTS

How new owners plan to lift one of the greatest F1 teams

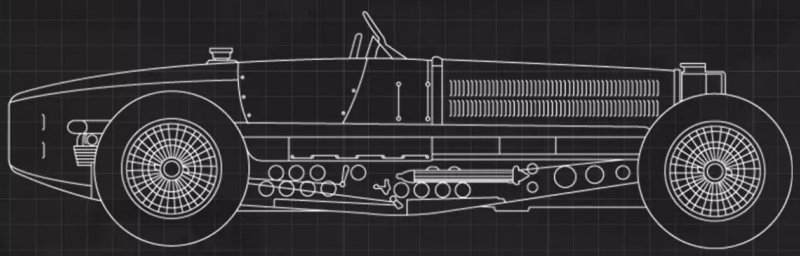


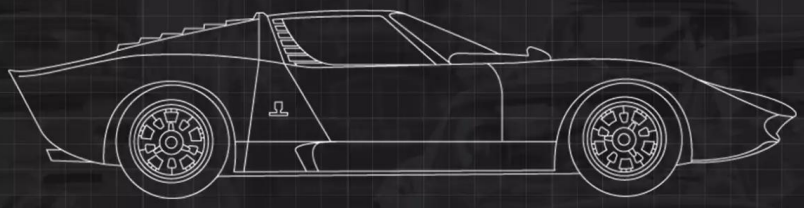
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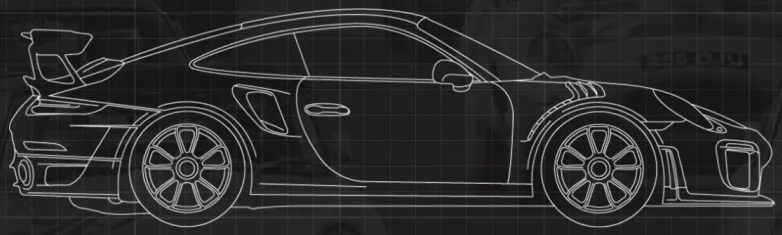
- Ogier makes history on the Monte
- Magnussen on his Daytona adventure

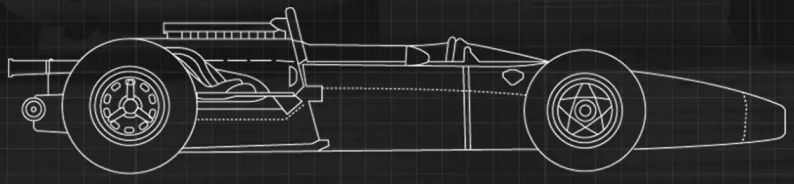
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A Formula 1 recovery we all want to see for a motorsport legend

It's now nearly nine years since Pastor Maldonado scored Williams's 114th world championship Formula 1 race victory. And the team hasn't been a regular frontrunner for over a decade and a half.

But the huge successes Williams scored in the 1980s and 1990s – which means it *still* has more constructors' titles than any team apart from Ferrari – and the way Frank Williams went about his business means there is still a lot of affection for the Grove-based squad.

The Williams family has finally handed over the reins and, as we show on page 14, new owner Dorilton Capital is putting investment and planning in place for a long-term recovery. Just how far Williams can climb will depend on many factors, not least of which is the impact of the 2022 regulations, but the signs are that it will be able to get off the back of the grid, which can only be good for F1.

This week we also look back on Oliver Gavin's brilliant Corvette GT career (p28), preview this weekend's Daytona 24 Hours (p34) and report on the Monte Carlo Rally, where Sebastien Ogier made history (p42).

• Many congratulations to our Grand Prix Editor, Alex Kalinauckas, for winning the 2020 Motorsport UK Young Journalist of the Year Award. Last season was challenging for everyone and the accolade is fine recognition of his remarkable efforts, and continues Autosport's long history of success in the prize's history.





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NEXT WEEK
4 FEBRUARY
McLaren special
Can another great British F1 team continue its revival in 2021?



COVER IMAGES
Motorsport Images/JEP; Mauger

PIT & PADDOCK
4 Button back in F1 at Williams
6 Red Bull gets Le Mans eco project
8 Butcher claims BTCC Toyota seat
10 More stars for F2 in 2021
11 Opinion: Alex Kalinauckas
12 Opinion: Matt Kew
13 Opinion: Marcus Simmons

INSIGHT
14 How real is the Williams revival?
22 Williams's peaks and troughs
25 Top five Williams Formula 1 cars
28 Gavin's Corvette highlights
34 Magnussen on his sportscar switch
38 What to look out for in the Daytona 24H

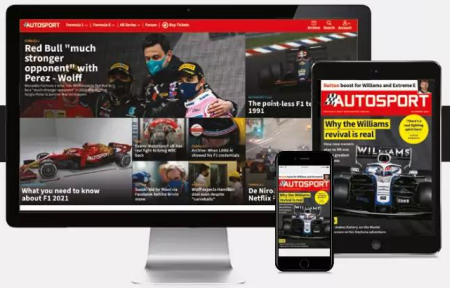
RACE CENTRE
42 Ogier makes Monte Carlo history

CLUB AUTOSPORT
56 Title-winning Imp restored
58 Double R out of British F3 this year
60 Clubmans champ to return in F2
61 Debate: merits of online scrutineering
62 How club racing fared in 2020

FINISHING STRAIGHT
70 What's on this week
72 From the archive: 1979 US GP West
74 In defence of: 2010 German GP orders

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER
24 Special offers for Autosport

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SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



BUTTON RETURNS TO WILLIAMS

FORMULA 1

Almost 21 years to the day since he first signed for the team as a Formula 1 driver, Jenson Button has returned to Williams – this time as a senior advisor.

Button starred in his rookie F1 season with Williams in 2000. He made his final grand prix start in 2017, bringing to an end a top-flight career that included one world title and 15 grand prix wins. Since leaving F1, he has focused mainly on sportscar racing, where he has won Japan's Super GT title, competed in the World Endurance Championship, and backed a team in the Blancpain GT Series and British GT.

Button, whose GT operation is moving into the DTM this year, will "provide advice and guidance to the team at Grove, along with helping support and develop both race and academy drivers," according to a Williams statement. He will be on-site at a number of races with the team through 2021, as well as maintaining his punditry role for Sky Sports F1.

"I am so delighted to once again be able to say that I've signed for Williams," said Button, who also signed for Williams for 2006 before deciding to remain at BAR/Honda. "Back when I was 19 it was a moment that changed my life and, despite the fact it was over 20 years ago, I already feel like I never really left.

"Sir Frank Williams showed faith in me which I will be eternally grateful for, and I am incredibly excited to have the chance to come back and help the team as it strives once more for success.

"There's a lot of hard work to be done but I have no doubt the future is incredibly bright for this fantastic team, and I can't wait to get started."

The arrival of Button is the latest management change at Williams following the team's takeover by Dorilton Capital in August and the departure of the Williams family. Simon Roberts has now taken up the role of team principal full-time, while former Volkswagen motorsport chief Jost Capito has become its new CEO. Williams will also enjoy a closer technical partnership with Mercedes from 2022.

The appointment of a recent driver as a senior advisor is a new step, not just for Williams, but for any F1 team. Michael Schumacher was the last driver to take up such a role at Ferrari following his first retirement at the end of 2006, but it was more of a natural continuation with the team as opposed to a specific appointment.

Button said in an interview with Sky Sports that he was impressed by the approach being taken by Williams's new owners. "They're not afraid of change," he said. "In Formula 1, all of the teams have a set of things that they do, and the way that they work and the way they go about it. I think they're trying to change that, and they're trying to change the sport up a bit.

"They're not afraid to try new things, but the people who are running the team, they are very experienced. They have some great ideas, and there's definitely a good atmosphere in the team. I look forward to working with them, and however much I can help, I will."

...AND HE'S GOING TO RACE IN EXTREME E

Button has also become the third Formula 1 world champion to create a team to contest the inaugural Extreme E season. But unlike his decorated peers Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg, the 2009 title winner will actually race in the fledgling all-electric SUV series.

The JBXE squad, which boosts the field to 10 teams, doesn't have long to prepare. Even with delays resulting from the pandemic, there are only nine weeks until the maiden desert event in Saudi Arabia across 3-4 April.



Button was highly impressive in rookie F1 season with Williams in 2000

AS ADVISOR



An initial render suggests Button's car will carry over the white-and-fluorescent-yellow livery, an homage to his title-winning Brawn GP car, sported by the Jenson Team Rocket RJN McLaren 720S GT3s used in British GT and his truck from the 2019 Baja 1000.

Yet to reveal his female co-driver, Button said: "JBXE has been a long time coming and I'm both delighted and proud to announce its formation and entry into the inaugural Extreme E Championship. I caught the off-road bug a few years back, which led to me entering my own team in a few races including the Mint 400 and even the Baja 1000, and I absolutely loved it!

"It was around the same time I first heard about the plans for Extreme E, which I've followed with great interest, and what they have managed to create is nothing short of incredible. In Extreme E, they've created a product that will offer first-class racing and entertainment to the fans, but also serves to highlight the impact of climate change."

LUKE SMITH AND MATT KEW

P14 NEW WILLIAMS ERA



Nasr leads Cadillac to Daytona 24 Hours pole

DAYTONA 24 HOURS

Action Express Racing claimed first blood at this year's Daytona 24 Hours. Felipe Nasr and Pipo Derani triumphed in the 100-minute qualifying race on Sunday aboard their Cadillac DPi-V.R to claim pole position for this weekend's opening round of the IMSA SportsCar Championship.

The Brazilians triumphed in the new initiative at the end of the official test weekend from the back of the Daytona Prototype international field. Nasr had topped qualifying on Saturday, only for his DPi-V.R to be found to be underweight.

Nasr made quick progress from sixth on a wet track after a short rain shower ahead of the race. He was fourth by the end of lap two, briefly dropped a position before the first of two safety cars, and then quickly moved to the front after the majority of the field switched to slicks during a second yellow period. Nasr took the lead from Tristan Vautier's JDC-Miller Caddy on lap 20 and was nearly four seconds up when he handed over to Derani, who completed a 3.5-second victory.

The Multimatic-run Mazda RT24-P shared by Oliver Jarvis and Harry Tincknell took the runner-up spot. Jarvis ran behind sportscar debutant Kevin Magnussen's Ganassi Cadillac in the opening exchanges before dropping to the back of the DPi field on his in-lap as a result of a vibration caused by a blistered tyre. Tincknell got the car up to third by the second round of stops, before jumping the JDC-Miller car in the pits.

Ganassi lost any chance of victory on its sportscar return when it left Magnussen on wets when everyone else went to slicks. Renger van der Zande brought the car home a distant seventh.

Nick Tandy and Alexander Sims claimed the GT Le Mans win for Chevrolet by 12s from the sister Corvette C8.R shared by Jordan Taylor and Nicky Catsburg.

GARY WATKINS

DAYTONA 24H QUALIFYING RACE

POS	DRIVERS (CAR)
1	**Nasr/Derani** (Cadillac)
2	**Jarvis/Tincknell** (Mazda)
3	**Vautier/Duval** (Cadillac)
4	**Cameron/Pla** (Acura)
5	**Taylor/Albuquerque** (Acura)
6	**Johnson/Kobayashi** (Cadillac)

LMP2

1	**Jensen/Keating** (ORECA)
2	**Habsburg/Andersen** (ORECA)
3	**Aubry/Farano** (ORECA)

GTLM

1	**Tandy/Sims** (Corvette)
2	**Taylor/Catsburg** (Corvette)
3	**Estre/MacNeil** (Porsche)

GTD

1	**Auberlen/Foley** (BMW)
2	**Vanthoor/Robichon** (Porsche)
3	**Bortolotti/Ineichen** (Lamborghini)

LMP3

1	**Hoerr/Kranz** (Duqueine)
2	**Norman/Kvamme** (Duqueine)
3	**Bennett/Kurtz** (Ligier)

P34 DAYTONA PREVIEW



Red Bull's hydrogen car

JEP

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Red Bull Advanced Technologies will partner with French constructor ORECA to produce the chassis for the new hydrogen class set for introduction at Le Mans in 2024.

The sister company of the Red Bull F1 team, and which is also co-developing the Aston Martin Valkyrie road car, joined forces with ORECA to make a successful bid to provide the one-make chassis for the new category of prototypes powered by hydrogen fuel cells. The first task for the British and French companies is to "undertake and provide a detailed feasibility study for the vehicle concept", according to a statement from Le Mans organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest.

An announcement is expected soon regarding the powertrains. It is unclear whether manufacturers will be able to develop their own fuel-cell technology or use a common powertrain.

"RBAT is well qualified to take on the challenge set by the ACO having access to many of the tools used to design and develop the Red Bull Racing F1 car, along with significant experience on other cutting-edge vehicle programmes," said company CEO Christian Horner. "The hydrogen class at Le Mans offers an exciting glimpse into the future of sustainable motorsport and promises both to advance the use of hydrogen in transportation, and deliver exciting racing."

The ACO has been working towards the new class under the Mission H24 banner in collaboration with the GreenGT organisation for the past three years. It has so far tested with two iterations of an LMP3 car built by German constructor ADESS, with a fuel cell providing the power for the car's electric motors. The first car, known as the LMP2H2G (above), ran during a free practice session of a Le Mans Cup round during the ELMS event at Spa in 2019.

GARY WATKINS

Briscoe and Menezes named for Glickenhaus Hypercars

WEC

World Endurance Championship debutant Glickenhaus has named Ryan Briscoe and Gustavo Menezes as the first drivers for its two Le Mans Hypercars. They were listed by the niche manufacturer on the 33-car entry for 2021 published last week.

Former Indycar driver and Daytona 24 Hours winner Briscoe (right) will race one of the Glickenhaus-Pipo 007LMHs after leaving the Wayne Taylor Racing IMSA SportsCar Championship squad last year. Menezes joins after two seasons in LMP1 with Rebellion Racing.

Glickenhaus is due to announce its full roster of drivers, which is expected to stretch to seven names, later this week. Marque founder Jim Glickenhaus has promised "some big names that will surprise a lot of people".

The entry in the new top class of the WEC, known as Hypercar, stretches to just five cars. The two Glickenhaus entries and the pair of Toyota GR010 HYBRIDs have been joined by the Signatech Alpine squad's Gibson-powered ORECA LMP1, a design that formerly raced as the Rebellion R-13. Andre Negrao is the only driver listed against a car now dubbed the Alpine A480.

WEC stalwart ByKolles has not entered with its new LMH contender. Team owner Colin Kolles has insisted that the project is ongoing and that the Gibson-powered machine is on course to test for the first time in February. But the decision not to enter the full series means the car is unlikely to be seen in competition this year. The ability of teams to make race-by-race entries, which ByKolles took advantage of last season, has been removed from the regulations for the top class.

The LMP2 field has grown to 11 from last year's eight cars with the confirmation that the Belgian WRT squad, winner of the Spa and Nurburgring 24-hour GT3 enduros with Audi, has given the green light to its plans to move into prototypes full time. It has named Virgin Formula E driver Robin Frijns for the programme with a solo ORECA-Gibson 07. WRT team boss Vincent Vosse described the former Audi driver, who he brought into sportscar racing in 2015, as "a pure talent who doesn't make mistakes".

Reigning P2 champion United Autosports will run a single ORECA after its plans to expand to two full WEC entries failed to come to fruition, while the Signatech-run Richard Mille Racing has moved up from the European Le Mans Series with Tatiana



LEVITT/MOTORSPORTIMAGES

Calderon, Sophia Florsch and Beitske Visser. Five of the 11 P2 entries have been made in the new pro-am sub-class for line-ups containing a bronze-rated driver.

The GTE Pro class entry stands at four cars — two Porsche 911 RSRs and two Ferrari 488 GTE Evos — in the wake of Aston Martin Racing's withdrawal, but the GTE Am division has grown from 11 to 13. The Iron Lynx squad joins the WEC with two Ferraris, one driven by a second all-female line-up of Rahel Frey, Manuela Gostner and Michelle Gatting. AMR will run a single Vantage GTE for series regular Paul Dalla Lana, while TF Sport fields two, one for Ben Keating and one for Japanese entrant D'Station.

GARY WATKINS

‘Giz’ is a whizz in NZ GP thriller

NEW ZEALAND GRAND PRIX


TAYLER BURKE

Fourteen years since he emerged from single-seaters into tin-tops, Australian Supercars star Shane van Gisbergen (right) returned to the discipline last weekend to take a remarakble win in the New Zealand Grand Prix for the Toyota Racing Series.

Van Gisbergen, one of a handful of Kiwi racing stars added to the grid to fight out the prestige round alongside the country’s up-and-comers, lost out in a wet-dry qualifying session, in which he was 10th fastest of the 16 runners. Things deteriorated further when he accidentally set off the car’s fire extinguisher in the pitlane, so he missed the window to join the grid while the extinguisher was replaced and his car, racesuit and boots were cleaned.

Daniel Gaunt, who beat van Gisbergen to the 2006-07 TRS title, led the race, while his rival from all that time ago started scything his way up the order from a pitlane start. Chris van der Drift, famous for his crash into a Brands Hatch bridge in a Superleague Formula race, challenged Gaunt, but misjudged a move and was sent to the pits for a replacement left-front wing.

Going into the second half of the race, Gaunt was under pressure from Aussie Supercars pair Andre Heimgartner and van Gisbergen, who had dispatched single-seater new boys Matthew Payne and Kaleb Ngatoa. With nine laps remaining, van Gisbergen forced an opening to take the lead from Gaunt, whose lost momentum allowed Heimgartner through to second.

As Gaunt fell down the order, karting graduate Payne took third, with fellow teen Ngatoa fourth and van der Drift fifth, before the 2008 Formula Master champion copped a five-second penalty for an unexplained and not obvious driving infringement.

Van Gisbergen’s win completed a hat-trick on the weekend. He shared the poles with van der Drift for the first two races, and had to work his way past qualifying topper van der Drift to take honours in the opener. Brendon Leitch led the battle for third, but an error allowed Payne to take the position from Leitch.

Van der Drift pressured van Gisbergen in the second race, while a frantic scrap for third ironically ended in a clash between the ultra-experienced Leitch and Heimgartner, allowing car-racing debutant Payne to take a cool-headed third from Ngatoa. Greg Murphy took a best result of ninth, while 79-year-old Kiwi legend Ken Smith also competed.

P13 OPINION


FERRARI

Sainz and Alesi join Ferrari F1 test

FORMULA 1

Carlos Sainz Jr was due to make his first appearance in a Ferrari Formula 1 car this week as part of a seven-driver test at its private Fiorano test track.

Sainz has been working at Ferrari’s Maranello factory since leaving McLaren, but will get just one and a half days in the updated SF21 before his race debut after the cutback in pre-season testing for this year.

In a bid to help Sainz learn more about Ferrari’s systems and work with his new race crew, the team handed him one and a half days in its 2018-spec SF71H at Fiorano this week, starting on Wednesday.

The five-day test started on Monday with Ferrari juniors Giuliano Alesi (left) and Marcus Armstrong enjoyed their maiden F1 outings. Fellow F2 racer Robert Shwartzman, who previously sampled the 2018 car last September, also got a run.

Charles Leclerc recovered from COVID-19 to test on Tuesday before handing over to Sainz.

New Haas recruit Mick Schumacher is due to appear on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning, and test driver Callum Ilott is then set to close out the running on Friday afternoon.

LUKE SMITH





Butcher swaps Ford for lead Toyota seat

BTCC

Multiple British Touring Car Championship race winner Rory Butcher will line up with Toyota team Speedworks Motorsport this season in place of Excelr8 Hyundai-bound Tom Ingram.

Butcher's long-anticipated move was confirmed this week by Speedworks, which is adding a second Corolla for 2021. This will be driven by BTCC returnee Sam Smelt, who campaigned an AmD Audi in 2018, just his second season of car racing. Smelt scored no points that year, but has since performed well in Speedworks' GT4 GR Supra in the British GT Championship.

Butcher, meanwhile, moves on from the Motorbase Ford squad, where he was a title contender until the final round of 2020. "I've known Rory for a long time and he's a real team player," said Speedworks boss Christian Dick. "He's massively enthusiastic with what we're doing, not just in the BTCC but in GT as well. He's done a hell of a lot in a very short space of time in the BTCC. He's quite open to the fact that he's got things to learn, but we'll put him in the best position possible to do that."

Dick added that the plan is for the two Toyotas to take to the track for testing in early March with their new pilots.

Series wins record holder Jason Plato will be among the opposition. The two-time champion and Power Maxed Racing have put out a statement to say that Plato will, as contracted, race a Vauxhall Astra, after sitting out 2020 due to commercial implications from the pandemic. PMR boss Adam Weaver said: "The only reason we felt reason to announce it is I'm sick of people asking me if he's on board this year!"

MARCUS SIMMONS

Algarve replaces dropped Sebring opener

WEC

The opening round of the World Endurance Championship set for Sebring in March has been switched to the Algarve Circuit. The 2021 series will now begin on 4 April with an eight-hour race at the venue near Portimao.

The decision to shift the first round, at which the new breed of Le Mans Hypercars will come on stream, away from Sebring on 19 March followed mounting speculation over the viability of the WEC circus travelling to the US while the COVID-19 pandemic continues to escalate.

"Due to the rapid evolution of coronavirus, as well as various changing directives from governments in different countries including travel restrictions, the WEC did not want to take any unnecessary risks," read a statement from the WEC. "With freight due to be sent to the USA imminently, a decision needed to be made early to help teams prepare for the 2021 season."

The WEC has stressed its intention for the remainder of the six-race WEC in 2021 to run as scheduled, with the series continuing at Spa at the beginning of May, and the Le Mans 24 Hours in its traditional mid-June slot.

GARY WATKINS





ASIAN F3

Massive boom for 'winter' F3

FORMULA 3

The side-effects of the coronavirus scourge haven't been negative for everything: the F3 Asian Championship, which kicks off this weekend at Dubai Autodrome, enjoys a bumper 23-car field, ranging from a pair of Formula 2 race winners to four youngsters from the UK junior scene.

While we mentioned last week that Guanyu Zhou and Jehan Daruvala will take part with Abu Dhabi Racing by Prema and Mumbai Falcons respectively, they will be joined by fellow F2 competitor Roy Nissany, who has been listed on the entry with Hitech Grand Prix.

Meanwhile, three drivers from last year's British F4 field – long-time title contender Casper Stevenson, Roberto Faria and Rafael Villagomez – will be on the grid too, along with British F3 racer Reece Ushijima.

For its fourth season – and its second during the European winter – Asian F3's response to COVID-19 means it has moved from its traditional stomping ground at circuits such as Sepang and Buriram to become an entirely UAE affair, with all five triple-headers taking place in quickfire succession in Dubai or at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit. The compactness of the calendar, along with the unavailability of quarantine facilites in New Zealand causing the rival Toyota Racing Series to effectively close its border to international competitors, has resulted in a boom for Asian F3, which has traditionally struggled to get grids into the mid-teens.

"We are running under the banner of Abu Dhabi Racing and we supply our technical expertise, and of course I try to get some drivers linked to us or close to us for the championship," Prema boss Rene Rosin told Autosport. "Looking at how it's organised, and it being in the UAE, it's a good way to refresh everyone before the season starts [in Europe]. That's why my Formula Regional drivers [Dino Beganovic and David Vidales, who will alternate in one car] are doing it, and why Zhou [a Prema alumnus, who is expected to remain at Virtuosi in F2] is doing it."

Other notable names include new FIA F3-bound Red Bull Junior and French F4 champion Ayumu Iwasa, who joins Nissany, Ushijima and Roman Stanek at Hitech; and European Formula Regional race winners Pierre-Louis Chovet and Patrik Pasma, at Pinnacle Motorsport and Evans GP (alongside Stevenson) respectively.

MARCUS SIMMONS

IN THE HEADLINES

NISSANY STILL AT WILLIAMS

Formula 2 competitor Roy Nissany will remain at Williams this season as official test driver, and will occupy the cockpit for one of the three pre-season test days in Bahrain, restricting George Russell and Nicholas Latifi to just one day apiece. The Williams statement highlighted his 2020 F2 season as his "best to date", including "taking pole position for the sprint race at Spa", which was earned by finishing eighth in the feature race.

DE SILVESTRO BACK AT INDY

Versatile Swiss Simona de Silvestro will return to the Indianapolis 500 this year for the first time since 2015. The 32-year-old will drive for IndyCar newcomer Paretta Autosport, created by Beth Paretta as part of Indy owner Roger Penske's 2020-initiated programme Race for Equality & Change. The car will be operated by females but will enjoy technical support from Team Penske.

GAMBLE MOVES UP TO P2

Tom Gamble, the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner, will graduate to the LMP2 class of the European Le Mans Series this year alongside reigning champion Phil Hanson at United Autosports. The 19-year-old is moving up to the top category of the ELMS to drive of one United's ORECA-Gibson 07s in the wake of winning the LMP3 division with United last year at the wheel of a Ligier-Nissan shared with Wayne Boyd and Rob Wheldon. A third driver will be named at a later date.

ASTON'S NEW PROTEGE

Valentin Hasse-Clot, champion in the GT4 European Series and a class race winner in the GT World Challenge Europe in 2020, has been picked from the Aston Martin Racing Academy scheme to receive career assistance in 2021. The 24-year-old Frenchman follows in the footsteps of Jonny Adam, Ross Gunn and Tom Canning in winning the scheme.



IN THE HEADLINES

FENESTRAZ IN FOR CASSIDY

Toyota has confirmed a little-changed line-up for its flagship Japanese campaigns in Super Formula and Super GT. With Nick Cassidy Formula E-bound, Sacha Fenestraz is swapped from the #36 TOM'S GR Supra to the #37 alongside Ryo Hirakawa, with his place in the #36 taken by Sho Tsuboi. Tsuboi is replaced at Rookie Racing by Kenta Yamashita, whose recent sportscar activities have been in the WEC. Super Formula Lights champion Ritomo Miyata at last gets his full-time SF chance in place of Cassidy at TOM'S.

MORE CALENDAR CHANGES

Chilean capital Santiago has earmarked a 5-6 June date for its postponed Formula E round, which was supposed to take place this month. That has become clear in a letter sent out by the president of the country's motorsport federation requesting officials for that weekend. Elsewhere, the World Touring Car Cup's Hungaroring opener has been postponed until August, meaning the Nurburgring Nordschleife kicks things off on 3-5 June. The Slovakia Ring date is replaced by one at Adria. In IndyCar, the new opener at Barber Motorsports Park is pushed back one week to 18 April to get a better TV slot.

BEARMAN GETS VAR SEAT

Briton Ollie Bearman has joined top Formula 4 team Van Amersfoort Racing for 2021. Bearman, who is still only 15, switches from US Racing, with which he was a race winner in the German and Italian championships last season. The Essex lad is expected to attack the German title plus as many Italian rounds as possible.

GIRLS ON TRACK WINNER

Belgo-Dutch 16-year-old karter Maya Weug has been selected as the winner of the FIA's Girls on Track contest to win a place in the Ferrari Driver Academy. Weug beat three other finalists after a shootout in karts and F4 cars at Paul Ricard. She will get a full season in an FIA-backed F4 series.

CINDRIC'S 500 DEBUT

Reigning NASCAR Xfinity champion Austin Cindric will make his Cup debut in next month's Daytona 500. The son of Team Penske president Tim Cindric, he will drive a Penske Ford as part of a limited schedule before joining Wood Bros for 2022.



Armstrong, Pourchaire… Merhi?

FORMULA 2

To be fair, it's not the most shocking news when highly talented members of Formula 1 junior programmes are confirmed in F2 seats they've been long-rumoured for. So Ferrari protege Marcus Armstrong's (above) move across France from ART Grand Prix to DAMS, and Sauber prospect Theo Pourchaire replacing the Kiwi at ART after starring to take runner-up in his rookie FIA Formula 3 season — both announced in the past few days — are what we expected.

What we weren't anticipating was the name of ex-Marussia Formula 1 driver and DTM Mercedes racer Roberto Merhi (below) appearing in the F2 silly season. The 29-year-old is said to be making another return to the series — following his 2018 campaign — with MP Motorsport.



Merhi was coy on the subject. "There is a small possibility but it's not 100% for sure," the Spaniard told Autosport. "I am looking for options around in everything to be honest. I'm also looking in the States and at the WEC. In two weeks I will understand how is the situation."

He did return to the cockpit of an F2 car for last month's post-season test in Bahrain, where he joined HWA Racelab alongside FIA F3 racer Matteo Nannini. It was a last-minute call, Merhi reporting that he was on his way to the airport for a holiday in Tenerife when he got the call and diverted his plans. "We had big issues with the car breaking down, but the team did a very good job to make sure it was working well," he reported of the test.

Nannini has been confirmed for an unprecedented dual programme in F2 and F3 with HWA, with the series' calendars split this year for the first time. His F2 team-mate will be Alessio Deledda, who has been the slowest qualifier on all bar five occasions over two seasons in FIA F3.

He is therefore unlikely to trouble Armstrong and Pourchaire. Armstrong had a tricky rookie F2 season last year after finishing second in the opening race, while Pourchaire is one half of what is expected to be a very strong ART line-up, with Renault F1 Junior Christian Lundgaard tipped to stay on in the other seat.

ART has also been filling its F3 team. Dane Frederik Vesti, fourth in 2020, has been snaffled away from Prema and has joined the Mercedes F1 junior programme. The team will also retain up-and-coming Russian Alexander Smolyar, who took a pole and a podium in his rookie season.

MARCUS SIMMONS



Where F1 calendar shuffling hurts

While a shake-up of the schedule has the upside of intriguing variety, the absence of traditional flyaway venues deprives new drivers of the chance to fill their databank

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Sometimes, life needs something new, something different. In 2020, one of the very few upsides to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic was that, in terms of the schedule at least, Formula 1 had a dose of variety thrown in. Of course, this came at a cost – the championship's business model thrives on tracks and certain countries paying to host races – but it did provide a variance flavour.

The necessary changes to F1's schedule were painful as 'normality' evaporated, but the variation it provided reinforced its value – which applies across all of sport – as escapism. How excellent it was to wonder what Mugello's brutal nature would provide when F1 rocked up at the MotoGP paradise. The same value came in considering the short-and-simple track used for the Sakhir Grand Prix. It's ultimately trivial stuff, but sometimes, when things look particularly bleak, the trivial is just wonderful.

The 2021 F1 calendar is already different from the provisional version, with Australia moved back to November, China remaining absent and Imola earning another recall. At the time of writing, the UK government is considering enforcing stricter border controls with regards to mandatory hotel quarantine for arrivals. A requirement of this sort would inevitably have a knock-on impact for a necessarily nomadic series.

> **"It's like I'm a rookie and a half, because I'd have had those experiences in my rookie year"**

F1's flexible approach to its 2020 schedule saved the season. And, as painful as it remains given the depressingly drawn-out global health crisis, such malleable methods may be needed again in 2021.

So, if we return to the variation provided by new or unfamiliar F1 venues, we might consider the impact these have for the competitors. Drivers often speak about the value of 'experience'. The clamber to gather knowledge in all F1's aspects provides constant benefits. The cars are faster and far more complex than in the junior formulas, the media spotlight more intense, the pressure much greater. And some of the tracks are unfamiliar too.

In a 'normal' F1 season, the championship would be visiting Albert Park, Shanghai, Montreal, Singapore, Suzuka, Austin, Mexico City and Interlagos – venues that haven't been on the regular single-seater beat, from F4 up to F2. If F1 is forced away from these flyaway venues again in 2021, this will have a knock-on effect for the three rookies on the grid this year, as they will not be able to learn unfamiliar, challenging and famous layouts (although Yuki Tsunoda does know Suzuka from his F4 days) in the real world. Last year, that effect was felt solely by Nicholas Latifi, but he at least started out with the same amount of experience – zero – as the rest of the grid for the three all-new events.

The flipside is that when life does return to normal, these drivers will have additional racing experience to call upon, which should aid them getting up to speed at those returning venues. But any lingering hold created by the need to fully experience an unfamiliar track may still result in a sub-par race performance, which would be judged more harshly with the shroud of rookie status removed.

In 2021, Latifi will lose that designation – although for the reasons outlined, he sees things slightly differently. "Technically," he tells Autosport, "if we've got a bunch of these tracks that I still haven't been to [coming back to the calendar], it's kind of like I'm a rookie and a half, because I would have had these experiences in my rookie year! That's probably the one thing I feel has been a bit robbed from me. But you've got to play with the cards you're dealt."

Latifi was thrown additional curveballs by the pandemic impacting his maiden F1 season. The lockdown-enforced long delay to the season's start meant a four-month gap between testing and the Austrian GP opener. Crucial momentum was lost and Latifi had to work back up to a primed state.

There were typical rookie errors early on, and Latifi never looked like getting Williams into the points during the chaotic races where it could benefit. But Williams was nevertheless pleased with his progress over the campaign, particularly with his race management – the team also felt that his quiet, pleasant personality sometimes disguises the ruthless racing driver within.

As he heads into his second F1 season, there's one area in which Latifi must improve and he knows it: qualifying. Such is the unjust nature of F1, drivers at the back of the pack must shine elsewhere, with little chance of points finishes providing proof of progress. Latifi was rather undone against the clock in 2020. He did well to get out of Q1 in Hungary, but could not repeat that achievement, which George Russell managed nine times. He was very close on several occasions, but mistakes at key moments on his final Q1 runs were costly. But this is the F1 driver learning curve – the path that provides the much-desired experience. Latifi has begun to progress, clearing hurdles created by the pandemic that perhaps he alone will experience in F1.

The disruption looks set to continue for a while yet. But when COVID-19 is a footnote in humanity's history, F1 must reflect on the additional caveats it created for its prized performers.

P14 THE NEW WILLIAMS ERA



Disruptor among the disruptive

Extreme E has enlisted its third Formula 1 world champion to yet more mass-media fanfare. Formula E teams are watching on with envious eyes

MATT KEW

It's remarkable that the maiden season of Extreme E will feature three Formula 1 champions — Lewis Hamilton, Nico Rosberg and now Jenson Button. Only when Hamilton renews his Mercedes contract will F1 itself surpass the title-winning headcount, thanks to the return of Fernando Alonso alongside Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen. As statements go, it's an astonishing feat for XE and comes all before an electric motor has whirred in anger.

Of course, Hamilton and his former Silver Arrows sparring partner Rosberg won't actually race in XE. They're both team owners and will manage the daily operation of their respective X44 and Rosberg Xtreme Racing squads at arm's length. That means it's the news that Button will actually drive for his own JBXE operation that arguably represents the biggest coup of the lot for Alejandro Agag and his battery-powered off-road racing championship. And thanks to Button's relationship with the media and XE's broadcast deals, the announcement gained a slot on the Sky Sports and BBC Sport website homepages on a day when Chelsea sacked Frank Lampard.

It's not all been sweetness and light for XE up to this point. Legal action is threatened over intellectual property rights, there's been the quiet withdrawal of two teams, and the pandemic has forced the maiden round to move continent and be delayed twice. But still, the positive headlines have landed thick and fast. That puts pressure on its EV counterpart. By virtue of the two being powered by electricity, comparisons between XE and Formula E are inevitable. The relationship goes further than a shared system of propulsion. FE has a minority investment in XE and, in non-working-from-home times, the two share an office wall. And while FE is not exactly an old hand — it's about to embark on only its seventh season — XE is already addressing a key issue that's created a disquiet among FE teams: media exposure.

> **"XE is enjoying the sort of launch that the acceleration of an electric drivetrain provides"**

Annual team budgets have quadrupled up to around £40million in FE's short history. That's why some form of cost cap is necessary and must come on top of changes to powertrain homologation cycles and the restrictions on consumables. Now exaggerated by recent events, manufacturers are questioning whether they're getting value for money. That's particularly pertinent when it comes to the media exposure FE provides, or lack thereof.

Reading too much into a press release comes with a health warning. But when the deal for Button to join XE was announced, Agag said: "I'm thrilled to welcome another major name... He is one of the most popular drivers in the business... Jenson, alongside his peers, will give further weight to our mission..."

A "major name", "most popular", adding "further weight" — those soundbites all reinforce the same point: XE is gunning for repeated and weighty good-news stories that have a big audience. Contrast that to FE, which has had to face the announcements that Audi and BMW will leave the series at the end of this season. It's also had to postpone four races all before the new term has kicked off. The sceptics have enjoyed a field day lambasting a series they never liked in the first place. While XE teams can ride the crest of a media wave, their FE counterparts have instead issued statements confirming their commitment to the championship.

This column isn't an exercise in kicking FE while it's down. It's more a case of highlighting how XE is learning from one of the areas of current plight faced by its next-door neighbour. As Agag told Autosport, he went to Hamilton and his people to initiate a conversation about joining XE; Hamilton didn't come to him. There's no shame in admitting that. Given that the X44 team is only around 900 Twitter followers down on XE as a whole (19.8k plays 20.7k), it shows how much exposure one F1 world champion, let alone three, can offer to this fledging motorsport series.

So far, Agag and his colleagues have been right to be front-footed and pursue announcements worthy of coverage in the mass media. It draws more exposure to a championship that wants to promote its local environment-benefiting 'Legacy' projects. And since the standardised ODYSSEY 21 car's powertrain will be very familiar to those working in FE, when the XE rules open up, and amid the SUV boom, it might even draw manufacturers away from its sister series if XE is seen as a better prospect by the OEMs' marketing heads.

That's all in the future, albeit not necessarily too far away. But for now, XE is enjoying the sort of launch that the instant acceleration of an electric drivetrain provides. It's matching torque with talk.

And Button aside, the roll call of XE drivers includes Sebastien Loeb, Carlos Sainz Sr, Mattias Ekstrom, Jamie Chadwick and Johan Kristoffersson. It's a formidable line-up awash with kudos.

Electric cars as an entity represent disruptive technology. Now, XE could very well become a disruptor in among the disruptive. It's putting pressure on FE in its own way. And, for the minds behind the nascent SuperCharge electric series and the hydrogen-powered Hyraze — to name but two alternatively fuelled championships in the pipeline — they face an unenviable task to create quite so much hype around their arrival.



Kiwis' efforts bear racing fruit

The New Zealand Grand Prix's mix of rising talent and big-name stars thrilled the crowds (yes, remember crowds?) and left distant observers craving a repeat

MARCUS SIMMONS

A huge crowd, a thrilling motor race that culminated in a back-to-front victory, and not one person wearing a mask. And yes, I'm talking about something that happened in 2021, not 1921.

As a country, New Zealand and its leadership have provided an example of calm dignity and let's-get-this-sorted-out proactiveness to the rest of the world in the wake of any recent crises, far at odds with the floundering bumblers hampering the progress of much of the planet. Such methodology also seems to have benefited its motorsport scene, brilliantly illustrated by last weekend's incredibly successful New Zealand Grand Prix opening round of the Toyota Racing Series at Hampton Downs.

Those of you who follow single-seaters will know that, for the past decade, TRS is a super-competitive contest, flooded by talent from around the world keeping themselves sharp during the European winter (Lando Norris and Yuki Tsunoda are among the graduates). Such is its reputation that the 2019 and 2020 champions, Liam Lawson and Felipe Fraga, were both placed on the Red Bull Junior scheme thanks to their successes down under. But with NZ's strict quarantine requirements, it was always going to be tough to attract foreign participation for 2021. So the organisers focused on getting in young local talent plus big-name Kiwis such as Australian Supercars superstars present-and-past Shane van Gisbergen and Greg Murphy, and ex-European single-seater

"The guy's just incredible. He comes with the questions, but he already knows the answers"

hotshot-turned-Asian GT benchmark Chris van der Drift.

Despite a gloomy, rainy morning, the crowd flooded in – as those of us on the wrong side of the world were able to view on the Motorsport.tv stream. You can't fault high-volume TRS TV commentator Jonathan Green for enthusiasm (his stock reaction to a car merely putting two wheels in the dirt is an ear-splitting "aaaaaaggggghhhhhh"). And let's salute his attempts to pay homage to mid-1970s cheesy-pop chart-toppers Paper Lace (as Billy Frazer made a mistake, Green responded: "'Billy, don't be a hero' went the song, but Billy almost went from hero to zero"). Less enjoyable was the local director's habit of following that scourge of modern-day broadcasting: cutting away from a dead-cert overtaking manoeuvre to people in the pits, who are trying to watch the move on their monitors but are only seeing themselves.

Still, it was a great event, and van Gisbergen delighted the crowd by putting in an exhibition of brilliance and winning all three races, including the historic NZGP itself, in which he drove from a pitlane start to victory. He was one of eight drivers run by the Belgo-Kiwi M2 Competition (former TRS home to champions Fraga, Lawson, Robert Shwartzman, Norris, Lance Stroll and Nick Cassidy), which had to readapt its horizons in the wake of the COVID protocols.

"It's a different approach," says Jonathan 'Flex' Moury, the Belgian co-chief of the squad alongside local Mark Pilcher. "Originally we were allowed to go to New Zealand with a limited amount of people from Europe, with the priority being given to the drivers. There was a list of pre-selected people for a visa, and this is when TRS announced that internationals were allowed. After that the government said the quarantine facilities were all fully booked, because you have to remember the America's Cup is on as well.

"The staff we used this weekend was bigger because of all the guest drivers. We could find a lot of guys who had worked with us before, and they were all New Zealanders. I did all the set-up and pressures, preparation and onboards remotely and sent it over, and was in touch all the time to send directions. And I was talking quite a lot to Chris and Shane, because they hadn't driven the car before."

Van Gisbergen and van der Drift were the quickest two drivers over the weekend, and Moury, whose 'summer' job with BMW's DTM effort meant he engineered Robert Kubica last season, was massively impressed with the triple victor, who'd not raced a single-seater since 2007. "The guy is just incredible," he enthused. "He reminded me of Robert to an extent. He comes with the questions, but he already knows the answers and just needs confirmation."

M2 isn't just about the 'old guys' though. Matthew Payne, straight out of karting, was hot on his debut, and had Lawson coaching him. He's got his eyes on a touring car/GT career. Kaleb Ngatoa, the surprise NZGP polesitter, and Frazer both have European aspirations. Ideally, Moury would have combined them with the usual internationals, and he says there was interest in TRS despite the COVID obstacles and slimmed-down, North Island-only three-event schedule: "There was a fair bit, but we were very cautious and didn't want to promise anything. Still, two or three insisted they'd be there, but now they're doing Asian F3 instead."

Hopefully, the established TRS nirvana can return in 2022, but why not repeat last weekend's experiment? How amazing would it be to have, say, Cassidy – or Scott Dixon, Brendon Hartley, Mitch Evans or Earl Bamber – take on Kiwi youngsters plus international Ferrari, Red Bull and Renault juniors? I reckon most single-seater fans would emit an ear-splitting "aaaaaaggggghhhhhh".

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PUTTING THE WILL BACK INTO WILL

It's gone from powerhouse to its current position holding F1's wooden spoon. But, as the Williams family departed last year, the team was already showing that it's on the right track for recovery

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

Formula 1 fans will be very familiar with Williams's plight. Once the championship's powerhouse squad, it faded from the front a few years into the new millennium, its early turbo-hybrid-era revival stalled, and then it crashed to the ignominy of the back of the pack.

The tale of the descent rings loudly to F1 observers because it has only just finished. In 2020, the team repeated its last-place finish in the constructors' championship of 2019. And for the first time in the squad's history running its own cars (from 1978, a year after its first F1 outings with a March chassis), it scored no points – down from the one it had picked up, by luck, at the 2019 German Grand Prix.

We've been here before with Williams. The team has been targeting a recovery ever since it went into constructors' championship freefall, and has remained eager to create memories more akin to those it managed in the 1990s, the decade when it won more teams' titles than any other squad. But however bad the stats look from 2020, it was something of a Williams resurgence.



Robert Kubica lucked into a point at 2019 German GP

For starters, there were George Russell's nine Q2 appearances. His first, at the Styrian Grand Prix, was the first time a Williams had progressed from Q1 since the 2018 Brazilian GP. There was Russell's loss of two likely points finishes at the Tuscan and Emilia Romagna GPs, a poor third start and *that* safety car crash respectively to blame, plus Nicholas Latifi's three 11th-place results (and one for Russell). But it was the FW43's pace that really demonstrated the first shoots of recovery. Autosport's supertimes calculations (see page 24) show that Williams closed the gap to the front last year, going from 104.301% of the ultimate pace in 2019 to 102.831%, and finishing ahead of Haas in the 2020 team averages.

So, Williams finally seems to be on the up, but the second big difference in its quest to get back towards the front of the grid comes from the top of the team itself. For the first time in 44 seasons, the squad heads into a new F1 campaign without the Williams family in charge. Dorilton Capital took ownership late last August, with Frank and Claire Williams exiting their roles as team principal and deputy at last year's Italian GP, where they received an emotional, heartfelt farewell.

In the five months since it took over ownership, Dorilton has been understanding what it bought, and establishing where it plans to take it and how to get there. But it has all been done quietly, without the fanfare of bold declarations designed to grab media attention. An internal review has been completed, with the team then trying to get short-term plans in place for work to be completed before the new »



SUTTON

F1 budget-cap rules came in on 1 January. Just before Christmas, its new senior management structure was announced, with former McLaren operations boss Simon Roberts, installed as acting team principal since Monza last September, getting the job on a permanent basis and reporting to team CEO Jost Capito – the former VW motorsport chief and briefly team CEO at McLaren. Capito in turn reports to Dorilton – and now Williams – chairman Matthew Savage. Williams has also hired 2009 world champion Jenson Button as a special advisor to the team where he made his F1 debut in 2000.

"We've kind of taken it one step at a time," says Roberts, speaking to Autosport just before the end of the 2020 season, of the transition period that followed Dorilton's initial takeover. "We put together an investment plan with them, right from the very start. And that was focused at 'what do we need to do, what can we do and what should we do to add performance to the team?'. It's 100% focused on adding performance. But that does include making sure it's a great place to work."

One of Williams's famous attributes throughout its F1 history was its family set-up, a 'garagista', old-school squad that morphed into one of the championship's superteams, and also active in wider motorsport. It clung fiercely to its 'privateer' status, eager to remain 'independent' in the strictest senses of producing grand prix machinery, even as the F1 world around it changed.



MAUGER

Alfa may get Ferrari engine fillip, while Williams boosts collaboration with Mercedes



Claire Williams has departed, but team's close, family ethos is still key to its identity

COATES

Dorilton, Roberts insists, does not want to lose the historic spirit and heritage that Williams can proudly boast. But the new owner is making changes. Some are small – factory upgrades and improvements squeaked in, sensibly and legally, before the cost-cap rules came into effect. And some are large, including the big news that, as of 2022, Williams will move to "expanded its technical collaboration", according to a team statement, with engine supplier Mercedes. This includes "the supply of certain transferable components", and Williams will run the same gearboxes and necessary hydraulic parts as the works squad.

"Dorilton don't want to shift that lovely feel that exists within Williams, that kind of family spirit and friendliness," says Roberts. "We are investing. We'll be investing in some of the facilities in the factory. Just simple stuff, but stuff that makes it better for people to work there. And with investment behind us, luckily, we're in a position to be able to do that. I don't want to go into the specifics, but it's just all the right things you'd expect an F1 team to be doing."

The move to use Mercedes gearboxes in particular is a major change in the team's technical process, as it had always been determined to build its own. While it will continue to design and build the rest of its cars in-house, Williams is making a bid to improve efficiency in its design and production process. In turn, it hopes to redistribute resources to try to boost performance levels elsewhere.

But this development is really significant because it binds the team closer to one of F1's 'Class A' squads, more along the lines of what Haas has done with Ferrari since entering the championship



"THE INVESTMENT PLAN DOES INCLUDE MAKING SURE IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO WORK"



Patrick Head and Frank Williams imbued team with a fiercely independent spirit

SUTTON

in 2016, and the relationship Aston Martin has long had with Mercedes. To be clear, what Williams has decided to do for the start of next season does not go to the same extent as Haas's use of Ferrari's listed parts, and neither does it mean it will be running a 'white Mercedes' come 2022 — *a la* the pink version of Aston's previous guise. But the success these squads have had with the current trend of binding close to a works operation has clearly paid off. As Racing Point last year, Aston had the third fastest car over the course of the season, and the team won a race for the first time since the 2003 Brazilian GP as Jordan (although of course it was largely reaping the rewards of its choice to base its 2020 car's aerodynamics on the previous season's Mercedes).

The expanded technical arrangement between Williams and Mercedes is simply the start of the new way of working for one of F1's most storied squads. "Aspirationally, this is a five-to-10-year plan with Dorilton," says Roberts. "And that really helps us when we're making these investments. We're not in that horrible position where we're trying to make investments that pay back in one, two or three years. Obviously, we want to do that. But they're happy for us to invest in things that will make a difference over the five-to-10-year period.

"So that's quite refreshing. It gives us real strength and depth in the stuff we're putting in place. So, because of that, you can't just invent all that in three months [after Dorilton took over Williams up to the end of 2020]. But that's part of what we're doing now. We'll start putting the plans for investment in place and over the next four years under the cost cap."

F1's new financial rules are intended to help level the playing field. This has been boosted somewhat by the decision to push the championship's rules reset back a year to lessen the economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because, while spending was unrestricted in 2020, the teams did take a financial hit across the year as the pandemic bit, and now have to complete the designs of their 2022 challengers within the $145million cost cap for the current year. An additional change to F1's rules from the start of this year means that windtunnel testing has a handicap system across the grid, which means the more successful teams are permitted less time using this tool.

Roberts suspects Dorilton "would've probably not invested had that [the cost cap, agreed last May] not been in place, because otherwise you're asking people to sign a blank cheque. So at least they have certainty under the regulations that there is a finite limit on what they could be asked to support. Obviously, we're also looking to do more with sponsorship and other ways of bringing value into the team. All doors are open. But yes, [the cost cap is] important. »

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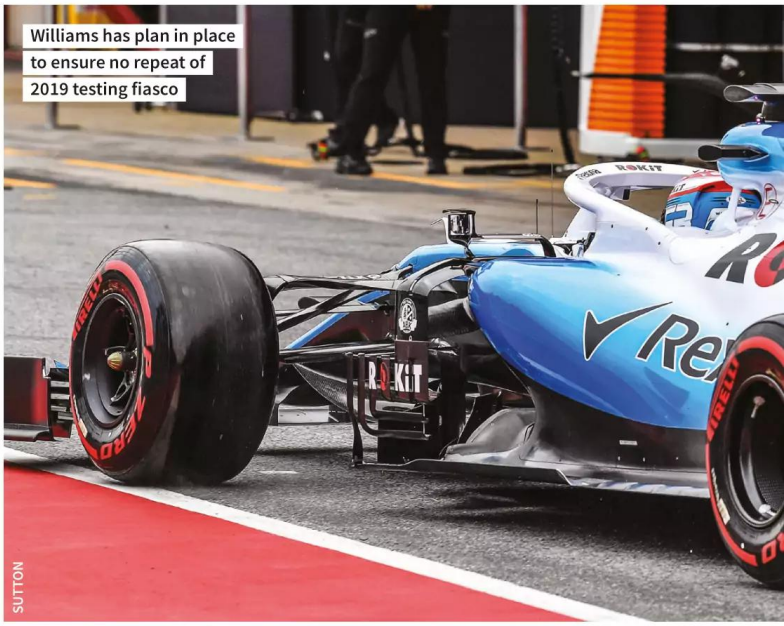


Ex-McLaren man Roberts has cemented role as team principal

"Our view is that we're not rushing to smack our heads into the cost cap, that new ceiling. We're under it [already, in 2020], we're happy where we are. And we're looking to invest and strengthen the team where it really makes a difference. I think what will happen over time, our anticipation is obviously the cost cap is going to continue to fall over the next few years [it will already reduce to $140m in 2022 and $135m in 2023]. And we will slowly creep up towards it and hopefully meet in a happy place, where we've added real performance and real value, and other teams have been pulled down to where we are.

"The great news there is we're not expecting any stress or aggravation of having to reduce costs to achieve the cost cap. And I don't wish that on anybody. I've been in big teams; I've been in companies where I've had to make people redundant – it's super-horrible. I don't envy the rich teams that are going to have to do that, because it's people and their livelihoods. And I don't take that for granted. But it's part of the changing sport."

F1 is going to change substantially in 2022, as the new cars finally hit the track. But first it must get through another season that looks set to be heavily impacted by the pandemic. Completing the 23-race calendar is far from certain given the fluidity of the coronavirus surges around the world. Although new F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali said last week that the championship has adopted a "flexible approach" to the coming campaign, which could yet be shorter and even more condensed then currently planned, it's not hard to imagine the season being similar to 2020. A reduced calendar would impact the finances of all stakeholders once again. But the year's sporting action will really be a continuation of the campaign just gone, with the 2020 cars in essence carried over to save



Williams has plan in place to ensure no repeat of 2019 testing fiasco

SUTTON



costs. The mandated changes to floor design will cut downforce levels by 10%, and only certain parts of the cars can be developed under a new token system.

For Williams, this is both positive and negative. It can continue with the base design FW43 that took it back towards F1's midfield, and so close to the points last year, while it also misses a chance to make further gains with a whole new car. Plus, 2020 'Class C' rivals Alfa Romeo and Haas stand to get the same benefit from Ferrari's new engine, should it prove to be successful.

"WE'RE NOT RUSHING TO SMACK OUR HEADS INTO THE COST CAP, THAT NEW CEILING"

Williams plans to continue to develop the FW43 at the start of 2021, in line with the token restrictions, and there are still plenty of aerodynamic parts that can be freely updated (the chassis and suspension members are included in the token system). There are also new tyre compounds to understand for 2021 – always crucial to F1 car performance, especially in the Pirelli era – and making sure the floor changes are navigated in a way that adheres to the rules while clawing back some downforce. "It's just ratcheting things up slowly," says Williams head of vehicle performance Dave Robson. "Evolving everything that we can – 'a bit here and a bit there'. I don't think there are any silver bullets, unfortunately."

But the team is at least starting with the knowledge that it can make a difference to its place in the performance stakes, building on the "big step" Roberts highlights in Williams's competitiveness from 2019 to 2020. The challenge now is to continue that improvement within the restrictions of 2021's stopgap season, while building towards the reset now back on the horizon.

Before the end of 2020, Williams was yet to finalise its dual car development programme, but it is expected by now to have its initial 2022 designs in its windtunnel. In a year's time, Williams does not want a repeat of its 2019 testing fiasco, where it missed the first two days of the opening test after the FW42 build schedule fell behind. It therefore intends to work back from the expected first race and test dates in 2022 and find the crossover sweet spot to ensure it will not miss out on critical tests at the start of the new era, while also completing maximum development work under the 2021 cost cap.

"It's a great opportunity for all the teams, it's a great risk as well," says »



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Felipe Massa and Valtteri Bottas locked out the front row for Williams at 2014 Austrian GP



"I BELIEVE AS A RACE TEAM, WE'RE OPERATING UP THERE WITH THE LIKES OF McLAREN AND RENAULT"

Roberts. "But the thing we're focused on is, there's zero carryover from 2021 to 2022. You can't be late with anything. So we're being more cautious than normal with our programme. Basically, we're figuring out how much space and capacity we have across the whole organisation. We've taken a really balanced, holistic view across the whole company. And the team have done a great job with that – I'm really pleased and proud of them. And then that will basically carve out for us how much time and effort we have, in total, to develop the 2021 car [alongside the all-new design]."

Williams is, of course, far from alone in hoping the 2022 rule changes dramatically alter F1's competitive order. But the team itself believes that if it can make a significant step up the grid, then the experience of recovering from its previous woes – it suddenly plunged after finishing third in the constructors' championship in 2014 and 2015 – will provide benefits that other teams may not have.

As a Mercedes junior, who could well be on his way to the works operation for the start of the 2022 season, Russell has done his F1 learning in the spotlight, even if it's been a dimmed one at the back of the pack. But from what he has seen in the past two years, he is

WHEN WILLIAMS LAST FOUGHT FOR A TITLE

As Jost Capito gets his feet under the table, new Williams owner Dorilton Capital will hope that 2021 marks the end of the team's spell in the doldrums. Yet there is still some way to go before Williams is capable of challenging for titles for the first time since 2003.

That season was one of the most open in years, with eight different winners from five different teams, and Williams took the 2003 constructors' title race down to the wire with Ferrari. Yet it failed to capitalise when Michael Schumacher lost his front wing against Takuma Sato's BAR at Suzuka, as hydraulic failure ruled out race leader Juan Pablo Montoya while Ralf Schumacher had a messy race to 12th.

Montoya had been eliminated from drivers' championship contention once race prior, having been penalised for a clash with Rubens Barrichello at Indianapolis.

That year's BMW-powered FW25 was a potent force that took Montoya to victory at Monaco and the most dominant win of the year by 65 seconds at Hockenheim, but a combination of mistakes (spins for Montoya in Australia and Canada), ill-fortune and unreliability (another possible Montoya win went begging to an engine failure thanks to a cooling issue in Austria) proved costly.

But it's an off-track controversy that blew up before September's Italian Grand Prix that then-chief operations engineer Sam Michael attributes to its near-miss.

After the preceding Hungarian GP, in which Schumacher was lapped, Montoya was just one point behind the German and Williams led the constructors' fight. But Bridgestone-shod Ferrari protested that, when worn, the tread on Michelin's tyres was wider than the 270mm maximum. So it was decided that they would be measured after the race rather than before. Michelin made changes, and both Williams and McLaren lost crucial momentum adapting.

"We lost that championship predominantly because of the tyre regulation," says Michael. "That had a big impact because of not only the performance changes, it was more around the



Russell qualified ahead of Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel at last year's Portuguese GP

DUNBAR

Rising star Russell reckons poor results have forced Williams to be "mentally stronger"





MAUGER

certain that Williams can secure F1 success if it can nail the rules reset. "There's no doubt the team are mentally stronger," Russell explains. "And I think as an operation, we are improved. When you have a season as we did in 2019, and even [in 2020] to a certain extent, it forces you to go over every single little detail to make sure they're on top of things.

"You know, arguably back in 2014, as a race team, it wasn't anywhere near the standard that the guys are operating at today, purely because the car was so good. You almost become complacent, that 'we must be doing a good job because we're fast'. And equally 2019 and 2020, you feel like 'we must be doing a bad job because we're slow'. It forces us to look at absolutely everything. I really believe as a race team, we're operating up there with the likes of McLaren and Renault, and I think we are a step ahead of some of our nearest competitors."

While the asset that Russell undoubtedly is to Williams may not be around once his three-year deal expires at the end of this season, he would be leaving a team on the up and determined to finally pull itself from its current depths, even if it were to repeat its 2020 results.

Williams is evolving under its new owner and it will inevitably take time to see the full impact of this change. But it is determined not to lose the soul that made it so successful and so special in F1 history, which is what makes its story so captivating in its latest charge. "The team are really up for it," Roberts concludes. "Everyone, despite the fact we're currently 10th in the championship. There's a real fighting spirit here."

P22 WILLIAMS'S PEAKS AND TROUGHS

political disruption that we had and distraction from the normal work."

Michael credits Ferrari's then technical director Ross Brawn as being a "master" of playing strategic games and bears no ill-feeling today.

"They could feel we were strong in the championship, and it distracted us to sort that tyre issue out – that's fair enough," he says. "I don't look back and say, 'That's not how you win a world championship'. You win using all the tools in your toolbox and that's what they did."

JAMES NEWBOLD

Montoya won at Monaco in 2003 in championship challenge that fell short



SCHLEGELMILCH

CHARTING WILLIAMS'S F1 PERFORMANCE HISTORY

The popular British squad has hit the very pinnacle of grand prix racing — and also brought up the rear. Here we show how its pace measures up from 1978-2020

KEVIN TURNER

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

As Williams embarks upon a new era, it's to assess the peaks and troughs of one of motorsport's most successful teams. For this analysis, we have used supertimes, based on the fastest single lap by each car at each race weekend, expressed as a percentage of the fastest lap overall (100.000%) and averaged over a season. We have calculated how far away Williams has been from the fastest team each season or, when the team was quickest, how far ahead it was.

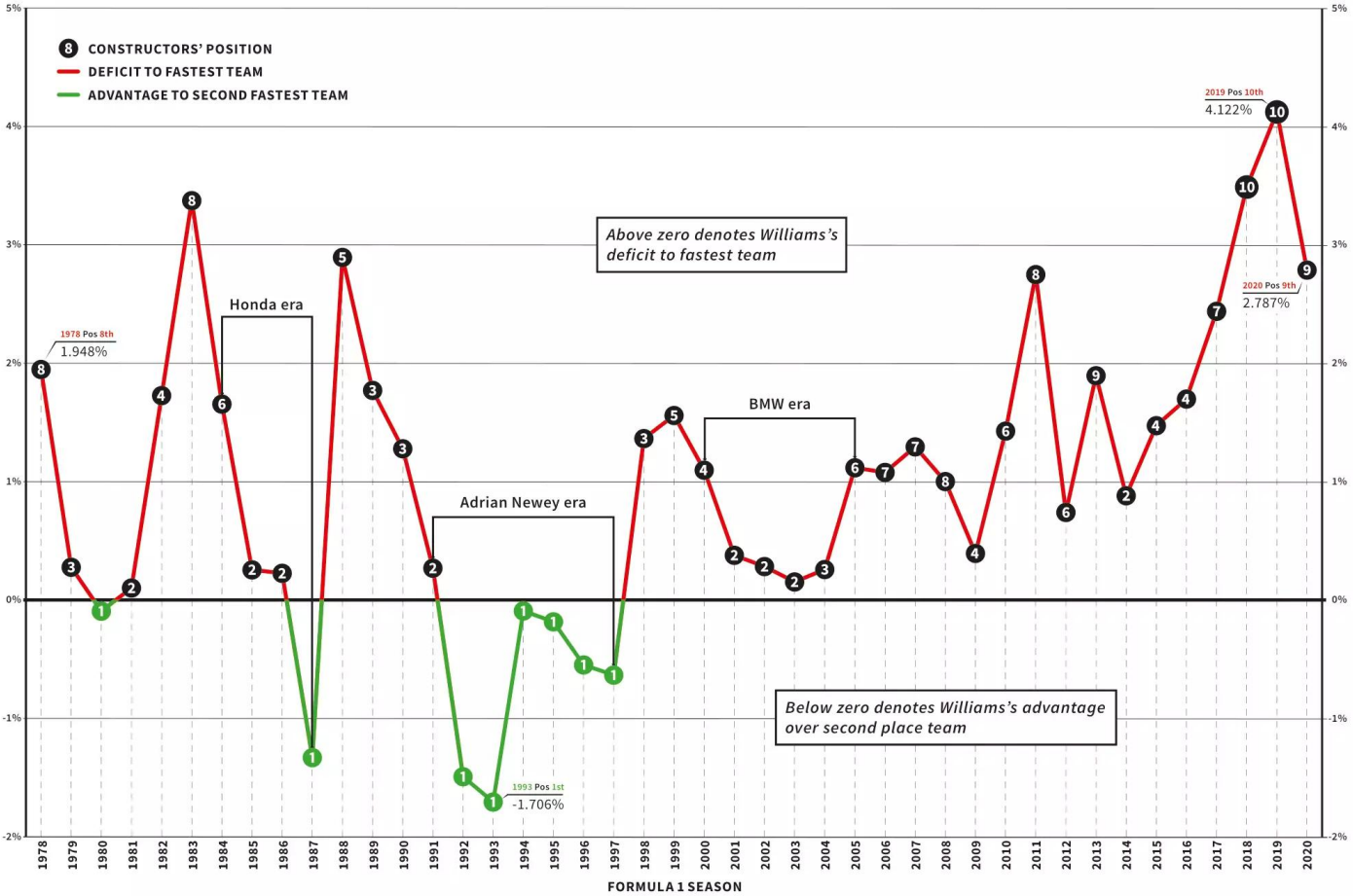
We've started in 1978, when Frank Williams and co-founder Patrick Head produced their first car together. The FW06 was neat and conventional. In the hands of Alan Jones it showed flashes of pace, though on average it was eighth fastest across the season, 1.9% behind ground-effects pioneer Lotus. In 2020 terms that would put it between AlphaTauri and Alfa Romeo, about 0.9% quicker than the FW43 was.

But there was a big step for 1979 with the FW07, essentially a better version of the Lotus 79. It wasn't ready for the start of the campaign and took time to perfect, so Williams missed out on a title and its supertimes position was third, 0.277% down. But that masks the FW07's real performance. With the FW06's races removed, Williams jumps to the top of the chart, 0.538% clear of Ferrari.

The fastest quartet of Williams, Ligier, Renault and Brabham were covered by just 0.271% in 1980, but Williams was the most consistent and took a title double.

Renault was quickest in 1981, but its revolutionary turbocharged machines were still not reliable enough. That left Brabham, just 0.222% behind Williams, as the main challenger. Jones and Carlos Reutemann split the Williams points, while Nelson Piquet was *the* driver at Brabham and took the drivers' crown, although Williams was still comfortably constructors' champion.

The turbo revolution was in full swing by 1982, with Renault, Ferrari and Brabham running competitive cars. They immediately jumped to the top on raw speed, with Williams 1.727% behind. That's further away than AlphaTauri was from Mercedes last year, but Brabham and Renault were still too unreliable, while the terrible crashes for Gilles Villeneuve and Didier Pironi meant Ferrari had no driver to battle for the crown, leaving new Williams recruit Keke Rosberg to become champion.





Rosberg took title despite pace deficit equivalent to AlphaTauri/Mercedes



1997 marked a turning point, with last Newey-influenced Williams

"THE TURBO-HYBRID ERA PROVED A LIFELINE AS WILLIAMS SECURED MERCEDES ENGINES"

It was nevertheless clear that turbocharging was the way to go. Williams, still running the Cosworth DFV, slipped to eighth fastest in 1983, 3.374% away from Ferrari, but Honda power had arrived before the end of the season.

The turbocharged FW09 of 1984 was unwieldy, but it moved Williams closer to the pace, 1.655% behind in sixth. That continued in 1985, the powerful FW10 being second quickest (and ahead of title-winning McLaren).

The qualifying prowess of Ayrton Senna and Lotus-Renault kept Williams in second on the 1986 supertimes, but the Williams-Honda FW11 was the better race car. It won nine of the 16 races and Williams secured the constructors' championship, although the rivalry between Nigel Mansell and Piquet allowed McLaren's Alain Prost to steal the drivers' laurels.

Williams was dominant in 1987, the FW11B's pace advantage being 1.331%, and took both titles.

The loss of Honda engines and switch to normally aspirated Judd V8s was never going to match a McLaren-Honda team with Senna and Prost in 1988, and Williams fell to fifth, 2.894% behind.

The partnership with Renault, which began in 1989, reduced the gap, and Adrian Newey's arrival ahead of 1991 provided another boost. The FW14 was 0.269% behind McLaren on average, but there were races when it was ahead. Williams had also invested in new technologies, most notably active suspension and traction control, and everything came together in 1992. The FW14B obliterated the opposition – its 1.492% advantage remains the sixth biggest in F1 history. The 1993 FW15C was even further ahead – 1.706% – and secured another title double.

The 'gizmos' were banned for 1994. Michael Schumacher and Benetton were more competitive than expected, and Williams lost Senna during the tragic San Marino GP weekend. The team rallied brilliantly and was quickest over the season by a scant 0.092%. Williams retained its constructors' crown, but Schumacher beat Damon Hill to the drivers' title.

The FW17 had a 0.184% advantage in 1995, but that was not enough to make up for the strategic excellence of Benetton and Schumacher's relentlessness. Williams was repeatedly outmanoeuvred in the pits, and errors from Hill and team-mate David Coulthard added to the troubled season.

Schumacher's move to Ferrari and the FW18 restored Williams to the front in 1996. A rejuvenated Hill marched to the crown with eight wins, while rookie team-mate Jacques Villeneuve scored four as Williams largely made the most of its 0.548% advantage.

The following season was a turning point. The 1997 FW19 was the last Williams in which Newey had an influence, then Renault withdrew as a factory engine supplier and new rules arrived in 1998. Ferrari overtook Williams, while McLaren leapfrogged both.

The arrival of BMW power sparked a mini revival in 2000. Williams improved to 1.097% behind in fourth, then second in 2001. It remained in the top three for the next three years, but titles remained elusive, largely due to the strength of Schumacher and Ferrari.

Williams parted company with BMW after 2005, their worst season together – only sixth fastest and 1.117% off the pace. And as F1 costs rose, being an independent proved challenging. Williams switched to Cosworth power for the first year of the 2.4-litre V8 era and then to Toyota. Either way, the team was only seventh quickest.

The F1 field closed up, partly thanks to engine-freeze regulations, in 2008 and Williams got to 1.001% away from Ferrari, but was still only eighth fastest.

The controversial double diffuser – initially used only by Brawn, Toyota and (Toyota-powered) Williams – helped the team rise to fourth, 0.394% off Red Bull, in 2009. This was F1's closest season in terms of raw pace from front to back. Even so, Kazuki Nakajima finished the season point-less, and Nico Rosberg's tally was only sufficient for seventh in the constructors' contest.

Thereafter Williams fell back again, not helped by a lack of engine consistency. Thanks partly to the fragile Pirellis that had teams struggling to make their cars work consistently, the 2012 FW34 was competitive, 0.74% off the pace in sixth. Pastor Maldonado sensationally won the Spanish GP, but the momentum was not maintained, with Williams slipping to ninth (1.895% behind) in 2013.

The turbo-hybrid era proved a lifeline as Williams secured Mercedes engines. The powerplant was so far ahead that Williams vaulted to second in 2014, though still 0.881% behind Mercedes.

As other engine manufacturers got their acts together, Williams dropped back. It did manage to hold on to third in the championship in 2015 but fell to fourth fastest. And the gap to Mercedes almost doubled, averaging 1.473%.

In 2016, Williams was again fourth fastest, but this time that only converted to fifth in the constructors' table, and the fall gathered pace with the more aerodynamically aggressive rules of 2017. Williams had slid to last by the end of 2018. The 2019 FW42 was – hopefully – the nadir for Williams. It was 4.122% off the pace, the 'slowest' a Williams has ever been.

If this makes grim reading for Williams fans, there are reasons to be cheerful. The 2020 FW43 reduced the gap to 2.787%, the team's seventh-best year-on-year improvement. That's even more impressive when you factor in the jump Mercedes made with the W11. Williams also still has the services of George Russell, and there is the extra financial stability provided by the Dorilton Capital buyout.

Taking on giants such as Mercedes is always going to be tough but, if F1 delivers on its promise of a more level playing field with the 2022 regulations, the new Williams era could be one of moving towards the front. That would be good for F1, and a fitting tribute to Frank Williams and his family.

P25 TOP 5 WILLIAMS F1 CARS

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TOP FIVE



WILLIAMS FORMULA 1 CARS

It's a while since Williams produced a great F1 machine, but such was the team's success in the 1980s and 1990s that there were still plenty of candidates for this list. Here are our picks

KEVIN TURNER

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

5 FW11 (1986-87)

The Frank Dernie-designed FW11 won first time out at the 1986 Brazilian GP in the hands of Nelson Piquet, and the fuel-efficient, Honda-powered car won eight of the remaining 15 races. That was enough to take the constructors' crown, but the intra-team battle between Piquet and Nigel Mansell meant McLaren's Alain Prost took the drivers' title. Piquet put that right in 1987, with the FW11B taking nine wins and both titles.



4 FW07 (1979-82)

The FW07 was the first Williams to win a grand prix (at Silverstone in 1979) and the first to secure a championship. Patrick Head applied the lessons of ground-effects introduced by Lotus and built a stiffer, better version of the Lotus 79 that had dominated in 1978. Once sorted, the FW07 was the quickest car of 1979, won both titles the following year as Alan Jones led the team, and took constructors' laurels in 1981.



3 FW18 (1996)

Twelve wins from 16 starts mean Adrian Newey's FW18 has the best strike rate of any Williams F1 design. A rejuvenated Damon Hill scored eight victories and secured the drivers' crown, kept on his toes by rookie team-mate Jacques Villeneuve. Only errors, Hill's Monaco GP engine failure and virtuoso performances from Ferrari's Michael Schumacher prevented a clean sweep, and Williams took another title double.



2 FW15C (1993)

Arguably the most sophisticated F1 car of all time, the FW15C was the culmination of Williams's commitment to long-term programmes on several innovations, including active suspension and traction control. Prost and Hill took 10 wins from 16 races, but the tally should have been more – in terms of raw pace, the FW15C is the fourth most dominant car in championship history, as proved by 15 poles.



1 FW14B (1992)

The FW14B is the most iconic Williams and introduced the innovations that put the team clear of the rest. It wasn't *quite* as far ahead in terms of raw speed as its successor, but fewer mistakes and Mansell's affinity with the car meant the drivers' title was wrapped up much earlier than it would be in 1993. Thanks to wider rear tyres and, we think, a better livery, the FW14B pips the FW15C to the title of greatest Williams.



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POUHON SILVER 3
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The stands around Pouhon are real fan favourites. Silver 3 is bang in the middle of turns 10 and 11 at Pouhon. The cars approach Pouhon at 290km/h, before sweeping around this long left-hander and approaching the final sector of the lap. Antonio Giovinazzi is a driver who has been caught out here: he's crashed out at turn 11 in the previous two races.

Atmosphere at this section of the circuit is electric, not least because Max Verstappen's party-loving Orange Army often congregate around this section of the track. A big TV screen opposite the grandstand also keeps you across all the racing action.



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LA SOURCE GOLD 7
From £470pp

Starts at Spa-Francorchamps are always lively. The short burst down to turn 1 quickly bunches up into this tight hairpin. In recent years, Fernando Alonso was sent over the top of Charles Leclerc in 2018. And who could forget the dramatic pile-up at the start of the 1998 race.

The Gold 7 grandstand is head-on with this heavy braking zone, and you will see the cars push towards Eau Rouge and Raidillon, and will see them reach the top of the hill in the distance.

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THE ’VETTE VET IS DEMOBBED

Oliver Gavin has stepped down from the full-time Corvette Racing line-up after a stellar career with the team spanning nearly 20 years. He looks back on a stint that encompassed, among other successes, five Le Mans 24 Hours victories

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES



LEVITT



Inset: Lime Rock 2016.
Main: final outing,
at Sebring last year

A GAMBLE TO GET GOING

HOMESTEAD 2001

The Oliver Gavin Corvette Racing story started with a gamble. A 10-grand gamble. In April 2000, the Brit cleared his building society account of his and wife Helen's savings, strapped the money to his belly and boarded a plane bound for Miami.

The money paid for his first race at the wheel of a sportscar at the Homestead Grand-Am event. It was a way of getting his foot in the door of a new discipline at a time when his career in Europe was faltering. It ended up paying off handsomely when Gavin landed a factory Chevrolet contract little more than a year and a half later on the back of his early efforts on the other side of the Pond.

"It was seat-of-the-pants stuff; golly was it a gamble," recalls Gavin. "My wife, Helen, was carrying our daughter Lily at the time and she was saying only the other day that she couldn't have been thinking straight because of her condition to allow me to take that money."

The deal to drive a Lola-Ford B2K/10 run by expat Brit Phil Creighton's team alongside car owner Scott Schubot had been forged by Keith Wiggins, for whose Pacific Formula 1 squad Gavin had nominally been test driver. He was now heading up Lola's American operation and looking to show off the company's latest prototype design. Gavin took fourth together with Schubot on the Homestead 'roval' and, just as importantly, Wiggins sold one of the new Lolas to Jon Field. His Intersport team would field Gavin in a further six races in North America that season.

It was during another appearance with Intersport the following year at Watkins Glen that Corvette driver Ron Fellows handed a piece of paper to Gavin, who'd already proved his credentials aboard GTS machinery by beating the Chevys to class victory at the Sebring 12 Hours and pole at the Le Mans 24 Hours, driving a Saleen run by the Konrad team.

The scrap had Corvette Racing programme manager Doug Fehan's name and number written on it. A call was made, a test arranged, and Gavin put his name to Corvette Racing contract for 2002.

"That's probably the best money I've ever spent in my life," he says. "It turned out to be a good investment."

A WINNING START

SEBRING 2002

The initial contract for Gavin at Corvette Racing encompassed the three enduros in the American Le Mans Series, plus Le Mans. He made a flying start with his new employer, winning GTS first time out at Sebring with new team-mates Fellows and Johnny O'Connell aboard a Chevrolet Corvette C5-R.

"It was a bit daunting, because I was definitely the new boy in the team alongside two established drivers," recalls Gavin, who took an eight-lap victory with Fellows and O'Connell over the Konrad Saleen in which he had won the previous year. "Yes, we won our class, but I didn't think of it being easy or hard. I was just looking to do my job, get my head down and see where we ended up. I knew I had to deliver: I could see all the ingredients were there in terms of the car and the team, so it was up to me to do my bit. But to make a winning start to my Corvette career was brilliant."

THREE IN A ROW AT THE BIG ONE

LE MANS 24 HOURS 2006

A hat-trick of victories was completed by Gavin and team-mates Olivier Beretta and Jan Magnussen in 2006. They'd triumphed in GTS with the C5-R in 2004, again in 2005 with the new C6.R in a class renamed GT1, and then made it three in a row in 2006.

"I took immense satisfaction out of that win," says Gavin, who claimed his best overall finish at Le Mans with fourth position that year. "The hat-trick was important, but what made it so special was that we did it with the same group of guys – the same drivers and the same car crew."

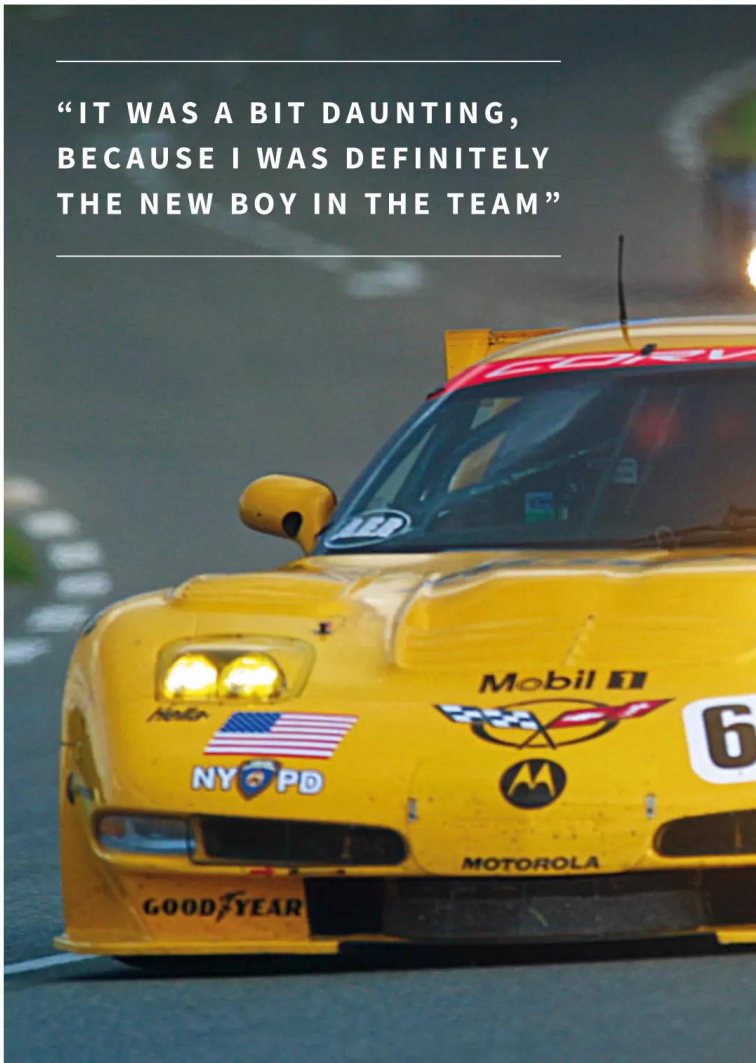
Also important was the intensity of the fight with the Aston Martin Racing squad. The DBR9 had the edge on speed, while the C6.R was able to go longer on the fuel, and the battle was only resolved in the closing hours when the best of the British cars shared by Stephane Sarrazin, Pedro Lamy and Stephane Ortelli ran into clutch problems.

"It was an intense battle and there was some fantastic racing along »



Mid-Ohio is Gavin's favourite win of four on way to 2012 crown

"IT WAS A BIT DAUNTING, BECAUSE I WAS DEFINITELY THE NEW BOY IN THE TEAM"







Victory at Le Mans bagged in first year with Corvette Racing

HIGHLIGHTS AND LOW POINTS



Favourite Corvette of the five generations he drove

"I probably have fondest memories of the C6.R GT1 car that arrived in 2005. The cars at that time had big power and torque, a lot of downforce, and the Michelin tyres were phenomenal and really suited the car. The thing was a monster – all the GT1 cars at that time were – and I loved driving it (below). It was just so much fun."

Most important relationship at Corvette Racing

"It has to be Gary Pratt, because he was like a second father to me. So many times in the early years, he'd put his arm around my shoulder, have a little world and give the guidance and direction I needed. He has always been a calming influence within the team. He's one to stand back and watch, but he's also a doer. If something needed fixing, it wasn't uncommon to see him down on the floor with the welding gear."

Fiercest rivalry out on track

"The one that set the bar for me was the rivalry with Prodrive, first with the Ferrari [550 Maranello GTS], and then a line of Aston Martins, that began in the mid-2000s. There were some amazing battles at many different kinds of circuits, from the Houston city track to Mid-Ohio to Le Mans. It was a special period, but what made it extra-special was the respect between the teams. It was back then that we started the tradition of the two teams coming together to shake hands just before the race at Le Mans."

Worst moment

"I crashed two race weekends in a row in 2008. I went off at Road America chasing Jan [Magnussen] for the win, and the next time out I put it in the tyres in practice down the hill into Turn 2 at Mosport. At Road America, I went off at the Kink and knocked myself about pretty badly. I don't really know what happened at Mosport: my mind must have been some place else because I somehow decided that I could take Turn 2 with a tiny lift when it was really a dab on the brakes. It was a pretty big accident and touch and go whether the team was going to allow me to race. That dented my confidence for a while. "

The biggest regret

"There aren't too many regrets, though one small disappointment is that I didn't get the chance to race the new C8.R at Le Mans. That car will be great there. When Ben Johnson, the team manager, called me to say that we wouldn't be doing the 24 Hours last year, it did cross my mind that my chance to drive it there might be gone, even though we hadn't started talking about 2021 at that stage. Just one little regret in nearly 20 years with the team isn't bad."





PHILLIPS

Huge personal gamble in 2001 to race Lola-Ford paid off handsomely



CORVETTE

Winning start to Corvette career at Sebring in 2002



Road to glory at Le Mans in 2015 was "massive rollercoaster"

BLOXHAM

GAVIN'S CORVETTE CAREER BY NUMBERS

Seasons	19
Races	202
Wins	51
Le Mans starts	18
Le Mans class wins	5
North American sportscar titles	5
Sebring wins	5
Petit Le Mans wins	5
Pole positions	25



Great satisfaction clocking up 100th win for Corvette Racing

DOLE



Swansong season last year tinged with disappointment over team's Le Mans absence

the way," explains Gavin. "They were in their second year with that car and were really strong. It was one of the hottest Le Mans I've done, and in the end the heat played into our hands. We won it on reliability."

THE SWEETEST TITLE

AMERICAN LE MANS SERIES GT CROWN 2012

Gavin rates his 2012 GT ALMS crown in his first season paired with Tommy Milner, who'd joined the squad the previous season, as the best of the five titles he won with the General Motors marque. He places it above a hat-trick of GT1 crowns in the series racked up with Beretta in 2005-07 and another, again with Milner, in the IMSA SportsCar Championship in 2016.

"There have been years, like 2016, when we were a bit up-and-down, but I'd say 2012 was a stronger year in terms of my performances and my consistency," says Gavin of a season in which he and Milner won four races in the GT2-spec C6.R 'Vette. "I felt I really got to grips with the car and understood what was needed from the Michelin tyre at all the tracks. That chassis really seemed to click with me and my style. I felt very comfortable with the car, the tyre and my position in the team. It was perhaps the sweet spot in my Corvette career."

He reckons the Mid-Ohio race is probably the favourite of his four victories that year against opposition from Ferrari, Porsche, BMW and Chrysler's SRT brand, as well as Lotus.

"I was really in the zone that day," recalls Gavin, who ended up crossing the line just a couple of tenths up on the Flying Lizard Porsche shared by Jorg Bergmeister and Patrick Long. "Mid-Ohio is a place where you've got to hit every mark; any tiny little mistake and you are punished."

SOLO CAR SOAKS UP THE PRESSURE

LE MANS 24 HOURS 2015

"A massive rollercoaster." That's how Gavin describes Corvette Racing's Le Mans campaign in 2015. The Pratt & Miller-run team was reduced to one entry when Jan Magnussen crashed heavily in the sister car during qualifying on Thursday evening, but the team rallied, and Gavin, Milner and Jordan Taylor came through to claim the GTE Pro class win.

"Jan's accident really shook the team – it rocked us back on our heels," says Gavin. "But the team pulled together and everyone put their shoulder to the wheel to give our car the best possible chance of victory."

The #64 Chevy C7.R battled with the factory AF Corse Ferrari of Gianmaria Bruni, Giancarlo Fisichella and Toni Vilander for the better part of 10 hours. A gearbox problem for the Italian car in the penultimate hour left the way clear for Corvette Racing to take an emotional victory.

"I remember being 17 seconds behind some time in the last couple of hours and getting the instructions to push hard," recalls Gavin. "We were making small gains and it was going to be nip-and-tuck. I passed the Ferrari out of Mulsanne Corner when it started having its problem. You'd prefer to make a pass fair and square, but making sure your car hangs together is all part of endurance racing.

"Tommy and Jordan rose to the challenge, Jordan in particular because in previous years he hadn't been so confident with the car and the track. I was in the car at the end so did the burnout across the line."

IN-HOUSE BATTLE TO THE LINE

DAYTONA 24 HOURS 2016

Chevrolet, or rather GM, set up one of the most amazing finishes in the history of the Daytona 24 Hours in 2016. The message from the very top of the company was that its two C7.Rs, with Gavin and Antonio Garcia at the wheel, could race to the line for GT Le Mans honours. The only instruction was not to take each other out.

The Brit, who was teamed with Milner and Marcel Fassler, hit the front shortly after taking over the car for the final time, but the Corvette that Garcia shared with Jan Magnussen and Mike Rockenfeller was looming ever closer in his mirrors courtesy of a string of fastest laps as the clock ticked down.

"I knew Antonio was coming and boy, he was fast in that car: he could find time from God knows where," recalls Gavin. "I was told over the radio that we could race. That was the instruction from on high: Mark Reuss, president of GM, was there in the pitbox. But they said that if there was any contact they'd have to call it and one of us would be unhappy.

"I thought he'd got me just before the end. He'd towed up around me on the banking through Turn 1, but left his braking just a little bit too late to try to finish off the pass. He ran wide ever so slightly and I managed to get inside him. If the race had gone one more lap I think he would have got me because he was so close across the line. The margin was just 0.034s at the chequered flag."

TON UP FOR CORVETTE RACING

LIME ROCK 2016

It was fitting that Corvette's longest-serving driver should be at the wheel when the team notched up its 100th victory, at Lime Rock in 2016. Gavin came out on top in a late-race battle with Giancarlo Fisichella in the Risi Competizione Ferrari to secure a win for the #4 Chevy C7.R.

"I'd won nearly half of those races with the team, so it was very satisfying to bring the car home," recalls Gavin, who ended up winning by just under a second from Garcia in the second Chevy. "I think I drove well that day and managed the resources of the car.

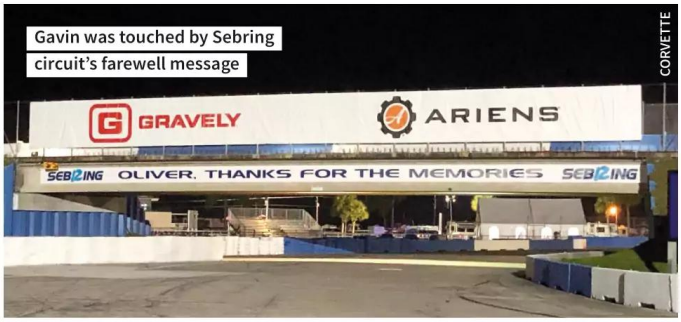
"Tommy and I shared out the honours evenly in terms of having a big influence on the result of the races we won in 2016 on the way to the championship. I got the headlines at Daytona, and Tommy really earned the victory at Sebring, then I got the win at Lime Rock, and then he somehow got the car over the line first at Road America when he was fifth at the final restart with three laps to go. That was quite an extraordinary race in an extraordinary season."

A FOND FAREWELL

SEBRING 12 HOURS 2020

When Gavin drove into the Sebring International Raceway on the morning of his last appearance as a full-timer at Corvette Racing aboard the new mid-engined C8.R that came on stream in 2020, he spotted a banner on the bridge over the Florida track's daunting Turn 17. It read, 'Oliver, thanks for the memories'. His words to wife Helen sitting alongside him were, 'Do you think that's for me?'. Good friend Garcia, sitting in the back, was quick with his response.

"He was laughing and said, 'Of course it's for you! Who else is it going to be for?'" recalls Gavin. "I was touched by what the track had done, but that weekend was real lump-in-the-throat time for me. I battled through a lot of stuff emotionally as I came to terms with the fact that it was going to be my last race as a full-timer. There were so many memories rushing around my head."



Gavin was touched by Sebring circuit's farewell message



All smiles at his last race for Haas – the Dane has no regrets about leaving F1 behind

HONE

DAYTONA PREVIEW

FAREWELL TO LIFE AT THE BACK

Kevin Magnussen's move from F1 tail-ender to IMSA gives him the chance for success in great races on superb tracks. That's why he's excited to get going at Daytona

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

As Kevin Magnussen strode through the paddock of the Yas Marina Circuit in December, likely for the final time as an active Formula 1 driver, he felt no great sadness. Sure, he would miss his Haas team crew, with whom he had enjoyed many ups and downs over the previous four years, as well as the friends he had made in the paddock. And he would miss driving some of the fastest cars in the world every other weekend.

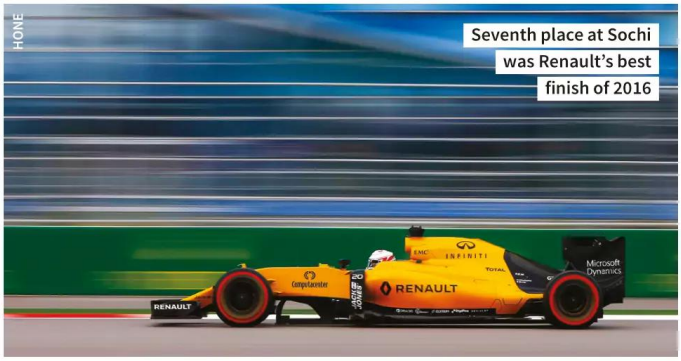
But as his F1 chapter closed, Magnussen was already looking ahead to what was coming next: a move into sportscar racing, which has just begun with qualifying for the Daytona 24 Hours, with Chip Ganassi Racing's revived IMSA SportsCar Championship team. "I don't feel sad," he asserts. "I can't help just feeling excited, looking forward to what's next for me, rather than feel sad about not being in F1."

Magnussen had been hoping to remain in F1 for 2021. But as Haas looked for both change and cash by ushering in an all-new line-up of Mick Schumacher and Nikita Mazepin, the 28-year-old Dane was left looking elsewhere. He set his sights Stateside, initially hoping to land an IndyCar drive. But with the majority of the grid sewn up, and the remaining teams seeking big sponsorship deals, Magnussen pondered other options. Once Ganassi announced in November that it would be returning to IMSA after a one-year break, moving into the DPi category with the Cadillac DPi-V.R, talks quickly progressed and led to a deal.

Unlike many of his peers who tend to take an F1-or-nothing approach, Magnussen had far broader vision. To him, racing has always been about a variety of disciplines. "A lot of people see Formula 1 as the only form of motorsport," he says. "It certainly is the biggest in terms of the attention and the money that's involved. It is the top of motorsport in many ways, no doubt. But it's not the only form.



Second place on F1 debut led to belief that he might get to fight for the title



Seventh place at Sochi was Renault's best finish of 2016

"I DON'T FEEL SAD ABOUT NOT BEING IN F1. I'M JUST EXCITED"

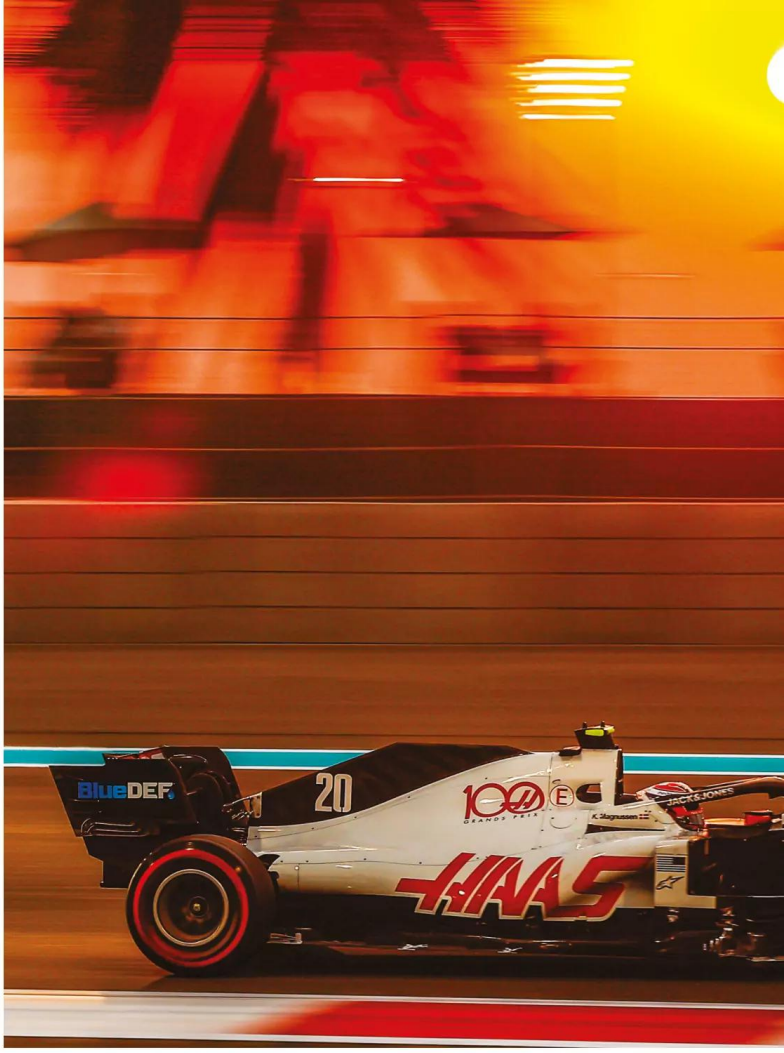
"I've always been super-passionate about all sorts of motorsport, not only Formula 1. My biggest hero, apart from my own father [fellow F1-and-IMSA racer Jan], is Stirling Moss, who is certainly someone that was successful in many things, not just Formula 1. There's so much history that's kind of maybe forgotten. Of course Le Mans isn't forgotten, but there's so many races that have a lot of history outside of Formula 1. I feel really fortunate to be able to go and do some of these races."

Magnussen showed a similar interest in projects outside of F1 when his grand prix career first stalled at the end of 2014. Despite finishing second on his debut, a result that left Magnussen believing he "was going to be fighting for the championship in my first year", his tricky rookie season with McLaren led to him being dropped into a reserve role for 2015. An initial bid for an Andretti Autosport IndyCar seat was derailed after he deputised for the injured Fernando Alonso at the 2015 Australian Grand Prix. And, prior to his late return with Renault in 2016 that revived his F1 career, he had tested Porsche's 919 Hybrid LMP1 car.

But sportscars have always been in Magnussen's orbit, in no small part thanks to his father, who was a Corvette factory driver for 16 years. Magnussen Sr won his class at Le Mans on four occasions, once at the Daytona 24 Hours, and took the IMSA GTLM title with Corvette in 2017 and 2018. A long-held dream for both Magnussens has been to »


DOLE

Kevin is following in dad Jan's footsteps, but they're unlikely to race together



"I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING BACK IN A WINNING SITUATION"

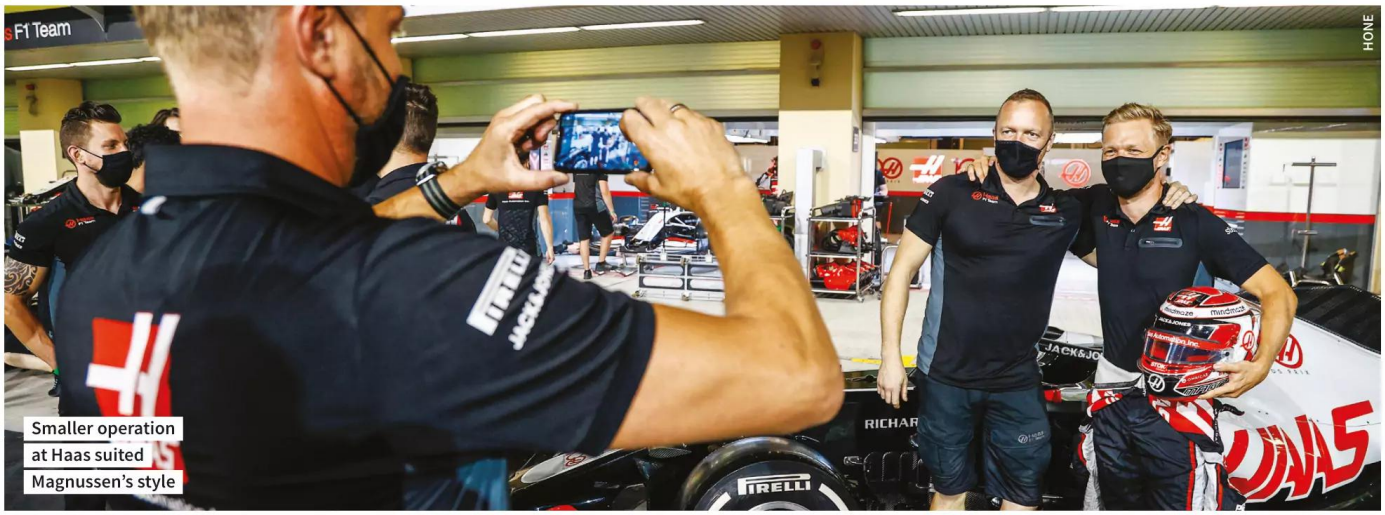
combine for a father-son effort at Le Mans, and was something pursued even amid Kevin's F1 career, only for it to be blocked. "When he was a Corvette driver, there was some opportunities to do it, because Corvette could place me in the car for Le Mans," explains Kevin. "It became impossible with just logistics and time, because you need to prepare. It was difficult for Corvette to put one driver in the car for Le Mans, and not the same driver for the other big races that year."

Now that Jan has left Corvette to become the pro in pro-am line-ups, Magnussen acknowledges that the chances of racing with his dad are slim. "We'd likely have to do it in LMP2 or GTE-Am, which is difficult because we're both platinum drivers," he says. "I'm going to be racing and trying to get good deals for myself, and hopefully in factory teams in the future. But we'll always keep an eye open for it."

The move into sportscars gives Magnussen two things he has largely missed in F1. Firstly, it will offer a return to his roots, banishing many of the airs and graces and media attention he'll have been occasionally irritated by in the past seven years. He'll have a much smaller team to work with – something he revelled in even at Haas compared to McLaren and Renault – and fewer outside distractions. It'll be purer racing, something that fits him perfectly. And it also offers a chance to not just be competitive, but to win races once again. As impressive as Magnussen was on occasion during his time with Haas, his best finish for the team was fifth. In the past two years, he hasn't finished any race higher than sixth, and scored just a single point in his final season with the team as it languished in the third tier of the grid.

"After a while, if you can't win races, even scoring points isn't so exciting," sighs Magnussen. "Even getting into the top 10 becomes old. That's not a true target, if you're a real winner. That is not going to satisfy you. In Formula 1, you need to have a great car to be able to win races. One out of a thousand times it can happen, someone can win who isn't in the best car, but that's more down to luck, and you need some pretty extreme circumstances for that to happen. You can't go out and do it yourself, and make that difference. It's truly impossible.

"I'm really looking forward to getting back in a winning situation again, where I can wake up in the morning and think about how much I'm looking forward to going for the win at Daytona or Sebring or



HONE

Smaller operation at Haas suited Magnussen's style



Magnussen did shine on occasion at Haas. Results were hard to come by, though

Laguna Seca, etc. There's some pretty awesome race tracks and races that I'm going to be able to look forward to."

A smile breaks across Magnussen's face as he considers the prospect of winning races again. It's something he's not done since his final Formula Renault 3.5 start in October 2013, but is going to be a real prospect with Ganassi. The American squad's IMSA programme was only announced in November, and the car build was competed just in time for an initial shakedown at Sebring earlier this month to give Magnussen his first taste of DPi machinery. But he can rely on some vastly experienced drivers to aid his assimilation to the discipline. Magnussen will be sharing the #01 Cadillac with two-time Daytona 24 Hours winner Renger van der Zande for the full season, with Ganassi's six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon joining them for the endurance events. Former F1 driver and current IndyCar racer Marcus Ericsson has joined the trio for Daytona.

Van der Zande has won the last two editions of Daytona in the Cadillac of Wayne Taylor Racing, and has regularly been one of the top operators in sportscar racing. Although the Dutchman feels Ganassi faces a "steep learning curve" with the new programme, he is already pleased to be working alongside Magnussen. "It feels very natural to talk with him," says van der Zande. "Danish people and Dutch people are kind of alike, so it's like a natural fit. I'm looking forward to working with him and building the trust you need to win races together. He is a guy who understands that. His dad has been in endurance racing for 25 years, so he knows what it takes to succeed in this discipline of motorsport."

Magnussen is also excited by the opportunities being a sportscar driver can offer him elsewhere. He is keeping an eye on movements with the Hypercar platform as more manufacturers join the fray, and isn't ruling out a shot in IndyCar some day. "It's one of the perks of being a sportscar driver: you are able to do more things," he says. "There will be more time and better opportunities to try other things."

Magnussen's grand prix career may not have panned out as most would have thought when he stood on the Melbourne podium in 2014, but he has no regrets. With that chapter closed, he is now ready for the start of a second career of sorts that could take him across an array of categories, cars and championships. And it may well lead to the kind of success that was simply never attainable in F1.

CHIPPING AWAY TO A PROTOTYPE RETURN

Chip Ganassi Racing describes its absence from the sportscar ranks in 2020 as a sabbatical. That's because it was always the intention for a team that has six victories in the Daytona 24 Hours to its name to return after the end of the Ford GT programme in 2019.

Ganassi managing director Mike Hull admits that the team never stopped working on a return after it realised that the Ford deal that encompassed full IMSA SportsCar Championship campaigns and Le Mans 24 Hours assaults in 2016-19 was coming to an end. The deal with Cadillac to run a single DPi-V.R Daytona Prototype international (below in the series is the culmination of those efforts.

"CGR relishes being able to have different programmes running at the same time and what it does for our team and brand," says Hull of an organisation that also runs cars in IndyCar, the NASCAR Cup and, from this year, Extreme E. "We worked very hard in our sabbatical to be able to do that, while reallocating the majority of our staff elsewhere within our organisation. The relationship with General Motors [Cadillac's parent company] is a culmination of those efforts."

Asked if the priority was a manufacturer deal or a return to the top flight of North American sportscar racing after spending 12 seasons in the Daytona Prototype category in 2004-15, Hull replies: "Both – I think you can check both those boxes. The important thing in sportscar racing is to have factory alignment. That creates the legs you need to go forward. I think it's fair to say we have factory support."

Hull makes no secret that of the team's aspirations to carry that support forward into a new era of sportscar racing from 2023, when LMDh takes over as IMSA's top class, and offers North American teams the chance to race at the Le Mans 24 Hours. He admits, however, that it's still early days, not least because GM has yet to commit to developing an LMDh contender.

"We consider Le Mans to be one of the biggest motorsport events in the world and we would love to be back there at some point with LMDh," says Hull of a team that took a GTE Pro class victory with Ford in 2016. "Right now we are at the very bottom rung of being able to do that, but we want to be in a position to be able to do it when the times come to be counted. We'd love to go to Le Mans with the chance to be able to win overall, but in the meantime we are going to work really hard to do our best in the IMSA series."

GARY WATKINS



DAYTONA PREVIEW

THE BIG CHANGES FOR THE DAYTONA 24 HOURS

There's plenty to watch out for in this weekend's running of the twice-round-the-clock American classic. Here are the main picks

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES



Mazda is down to one, but Tincknell and co have a strong chance

MAZDA READY TO WIN

Mazda notched up its biggest sportscar victory since its 1991 Le Mans triumph at the rescheduled Sebring 12 Hours last November. Harry Tincknell, who shared that win with Jonathan Bomarito and Ryan Hunter-Reay, reckons the RT24-P is now ready to go one better than its second place at Daytona last year.

"This programme remains on an upwards trajectory: each year we're getting better and better," says Tincknell, who shares the solo Mazda Motorsports entry with fellow Brit Oliver Jarvis and Bomarito.

Tincknell isn't taking the reliability of the RT24-P for granted, even though many reckon 12 hours around the bumps of the Sebring International Raceway are at least as hard as 24 at Daytona. He knows that the small-capacity AER turbo in the back of the RT24-P has never proved as reliable as Cadillac's 6.2-litre normally aspirated V8.

"The car was strong at Sebring, but there's a lot less flat-out running there than at Daytona – you barely get into sixth gear down the back straight," he says. "But we did finish second at Daytona last year, and AER has been making continual improvements with the engine and the processes."

Tincknell concedes that Mazda's downscaled single-car attack with the Multimatic team for 2021 is a double-edged sword. "It means that all our eggs are in one basket," he says, "but on the other hand focusing on one car has its benefits."



Konica Minolta colours are on an Acura rather than a thundering Caddy this season

NO CADILLAC FOR WAYNE TAYLOR

Cut Wayne Taylor in half and he's probably got 'General Motors' written large right through him. The long-time entrant and former driver has links with the marque stretching back 30 years to a programme with a Chevrolet-powered Intrepid GTP car. He's won the Daytona 24 Hours four times with Cadillac and once with Pontiac, and an operation he put together masterminded Caddy's Northstar LMP programme at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2001 and 2002. Yet now he's on the grid with an Acura. So what's going on?

The 64-year-old makes no secret of why Wayne Taylor Racing has switched camps for this season to field an Acura ARX-05 in the IMSA SportsCar Championship after winning the 24 Hours in three of the four seasons of the Daytona Prototype international era so far. His reasons were all about the green and folding stuff.

"I made a statement after winning Daytona last year that I needed to be factory backed or at least semi-factory," he explains. "I told GM that I needed a little bit more money, that I shouldn't be sponsoring the brand."

Acura and its Honda Performance Development motorsport organisation came knocking on WTR's door over the course of 2020. "When I was being courted by Acura, I said, 'But you've got Penske [which ran the ARX-05s in 2018-20]'," explains Taylor. "They told me the contract was expiring and they wanted to regroup and that I'd won all the big races, something they'd never managed."

There's a supplementary reason for Taylor's decision to leave the GM family. Acura has made a tacit commitment to continue in the top class of US sportscar racing when the new LMDh category comes on stream in 2023. GM has yet to reveal its hand on that front. "I've said all along that I want to do LMDh and I want to take one of those cars to Le Mans," says Taylor, who has revealed that he has a three-year contract with Acura that will take his team into the new era. "It's the one big race I haven't won. I want to be there in LMDh."

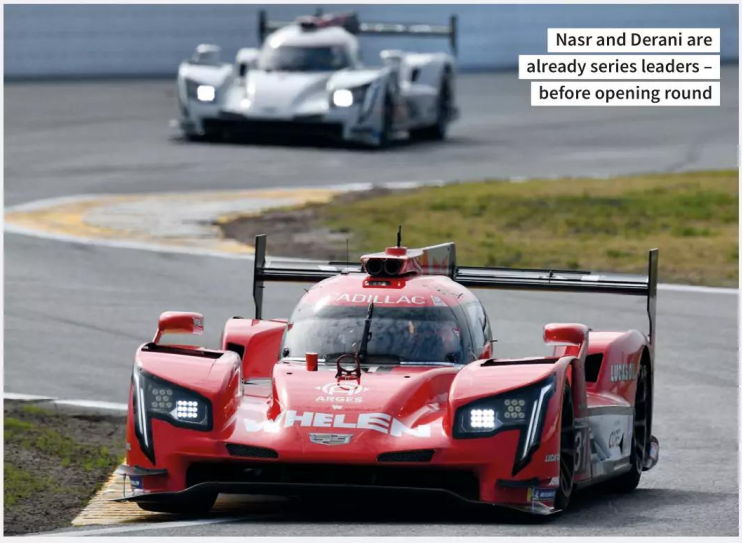
For the moment, though, the focus is on delivering a first win for the ARX-05 in one of IMSA's blue-riband races this weekend. That's FEE with his full-season drivers – son Ricky and Filipe Albuquerque – plus Helio Castroneves and Alexander Rossi. "We've stepped things up: we have more people," he says. "We're not going out there to just drive around because it's our first race with a new car. We're going out there to win."

NO QUALIFYING THIS WEEK

Conventional qualifying has been banished for Daytona this year. The grid is now set by a 100-minute qualifying race, known as the Motul Pole Award 100, that's already taken place. Action Express Racing Cadillac drivers Felipe Nasr and Pipo Derani triumphed in last Sunday's event to claim pole position for the big race (see p5).

They also gathered 35 points in the team's bid to win the championship for the first time since Nasr and Eric Curran brought home the end-of-season trophy in 2018. That's another new development for 2021.

The same points awarded for last weekend's race will be dished out for regular qualifying over the remainder of the IMSA season. As part of the new system, the number of points for each of the races has been increased tenfold, so that means 350 for a win, while 35 are on offer for pole, 32 for second on the grid, and so on.



Nasr and Derani are already series leaders – before opening round



Tandy (right) gets to know size of Jordan Taylor's hand

NEW HOMES FOR TANDY AND GAVIN

Nick Tandy has left the employ of Porsche after eight seasons, for seven of which he was a regular in GT Le Mans. The lure of continuing in the class brought him to Corvette Racing in 2021 after Porsche announced it would be exiting the class at the end of last season.

"I loved my family at CORE Autosport [which ran the factory 911 RSRs] and Porsche, but at the end of the day there was no option to go racing in GTLM and IMSA, which has been my favourite race series and my favourite racing across the globe over the past 15 years," he says. "GTLM and GTE is super-competitive; the cars are great, it's factory against factory and its great competition."

Tandy has taken Oliver Gavin's seat in the #4 Chevrolet Corvette C8.R alongside Tommy Milner. The veteran could yet be seen in a Corvette again, just not as a full-timer, so he's most definitely not hanging up his helmet. That explains why he's racing for the Vasser Sullivan team at the wheel of a Lexus RC F GT3 this weekend.

A REDUCED FIELD IN GT LE MANS

Porsche's withdrawal from GTLM, announced last summer, was a bodyblow for a category that had already lost Ford at the end of 2019. BMW, meanwhile, is only doing the four rounds that make up the Michelin-sponsored Endurance Cup, and the Risi Competizione Ferrari squad has yet to make its post-Daytona plans clear.

But the Corvettes will definitely have opposition over the full season from a customer Porsche 911 RSR fielded under the WeatherTech Racing banner by the German Proton Competition squad, better known for its exploits as Dempsey-Proton in the World Endurance Championship. Regular driver Cooper MacNeil is joined at Daytona by a trio of factory drivers in Kevin Estre, Gianmaria Bruni and Richard Lietz.

Estre, who is racing at Daytona for the first time since 2017, reckons that the presence of a silver-rated driver in the line-up doesn't necessarily scrub out the chances of Porsche winning the class for the first time since 2014.

"We're not the favourites on paper, but the package is good enough to have a strong result and with a little bit of luck maybe win it," he says. "There are more cars and we have LMP3 this year, so I could imagine that there'll be more yellows than in the past two or three years. It isn't going to be about fighting for the last tenth in traffic in hour two. More important will be to have a clean race and stay out of trouble, and then see where we are in the last couple of hours."



Proton is running WeatherTech Porsche with strong line-up



LEVITT

LMP3 cars, including this CORE Autosport Ligier, have broken into 24 Hours pitlane

A NEW CLASS – LMP3

LMP3 has slowly spread around the world since its launch in Europe back in 2015. The first rung on the Automobile Club de l'Ouest's prototype ladder was brought into the IMSA arena in the Prototype Challenge support series in 2017, and has now been given a home in the main WeatherTech-sponsored championship. There are seven cars on the entry for this weekend and possibly more to come when the full series kicks off at Sebring in March. P3 runners, like those in P2, only score points towards the Michelin-sponsored Endurance Challenge this weekend.

Bill Riley, whose team has won Daytona outright on two occasions, is running a pair of Ligier-Nissan JSP320s, and reckons P3 is a good fit for the main IMSA series. "A lot of drivers have the goal of doing Daytona and Sebring," he says. "P3 is the easiest, most affordable route to get there. It's a lot cheaper than GTD by a solid $750,000."



PR1/Mathiasen ORECA took 24H quali race honours with Mikkel Jensen and Ben Keating aboard

LEVITT

LMP2: EXTRA QUANTITY AND QUALITY

The LMP2 field has doubled in size over the past year for the 2021 opener, and the level has shot up too. DragonSpeed is fielding a pair of ORECA-Gibson 07s in its bid for a hat-trick of class wins at Daytona, while World Endurance Championship teams Racing Team Nederland and High Class Racing are making one-offs in the IMSA opener. They have joined entries from PR1/Mathiasen and Starworks Motorsport, both IMSA regulars.

DragonSpeed boss Elton Julian, who has Ben Hanley and Christopher Mies on his driver roster, reckons his success over the past two years has persuaded the European teams against which it has raced in both the WEC and the European Le Mans Series to join the party. "They've seen what we have done and are thinking, 'We'd like to have some of that'," says the ex-Formula 3000 driver.

The other factors for the entry upturn, Julian reckons, include the switch to a pro-am format last year: a bronze driver is now mandatory in each crew. "It's given P2 more legs over here," he says.

Then there's the arrival of the P2-based LMDh class in IMSA in 2023, and with it the return of Porsche and Audi to the top flight of sportscar racing, and almost certainly more manufacturers. "There are drivers on the grid in P2 this year because they know what's around the corner," he suggests. "They want to get their foot in the door."

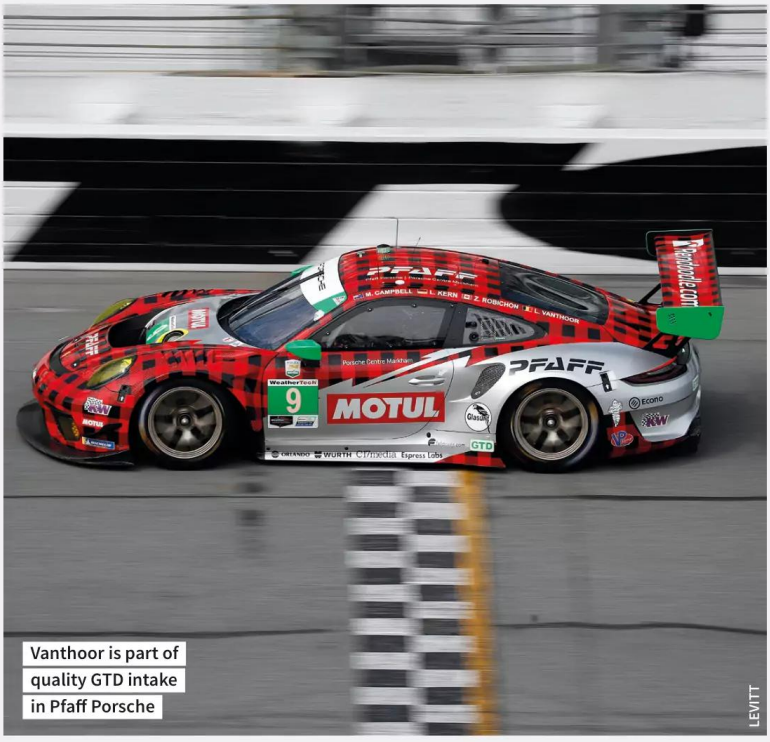
That probably explains why a certain Robert Kubica is turning out with High Class this weekend.

BIG NAMES IN GTD

The GT Daytona class for GT3 machinery looks stronger than ever, not so much in numbers but the quality of drivers on the grid. The grid is up one on last year, but scroll down the entry list and you'll find the likes of Laurens Vanthoor, Earl Bamber, Ryan Briscoe and JR Hildebrand.

Vanthoor, a regular in IMSA since joining Porsche for 2017, has found a new home in GTD with the Pfaff Motorsport team, sharing a 911 GT3-R in the full season with Zach Robichon. He concedes that it's a step down, but he insists that the competition will be no less intense. "In GTLM the level was super-high, but there weren't many cars," he says. "In GTD there are a lot more. It's not easy to compare; it's just different."

Vanthoor reckons this year's GTD grid is among the strongest ever, and he believes that with Robichon he's among the favourites. That's why he was happy to remain at Porsche in a less high-profile category while he waits for its LMDh project to come on stream. "My dream is to try to win Daytona and Le Mans overall with Porsche," he says. "It was a clear choice on my part, but I know I'm going to be racing on some great circuits and in a competitive championship this year."



Vanthoor is part of quality GTD intake in Pfaff Porsche

LEVITT

RACE CENTRE

MONTE CARLO RALLY

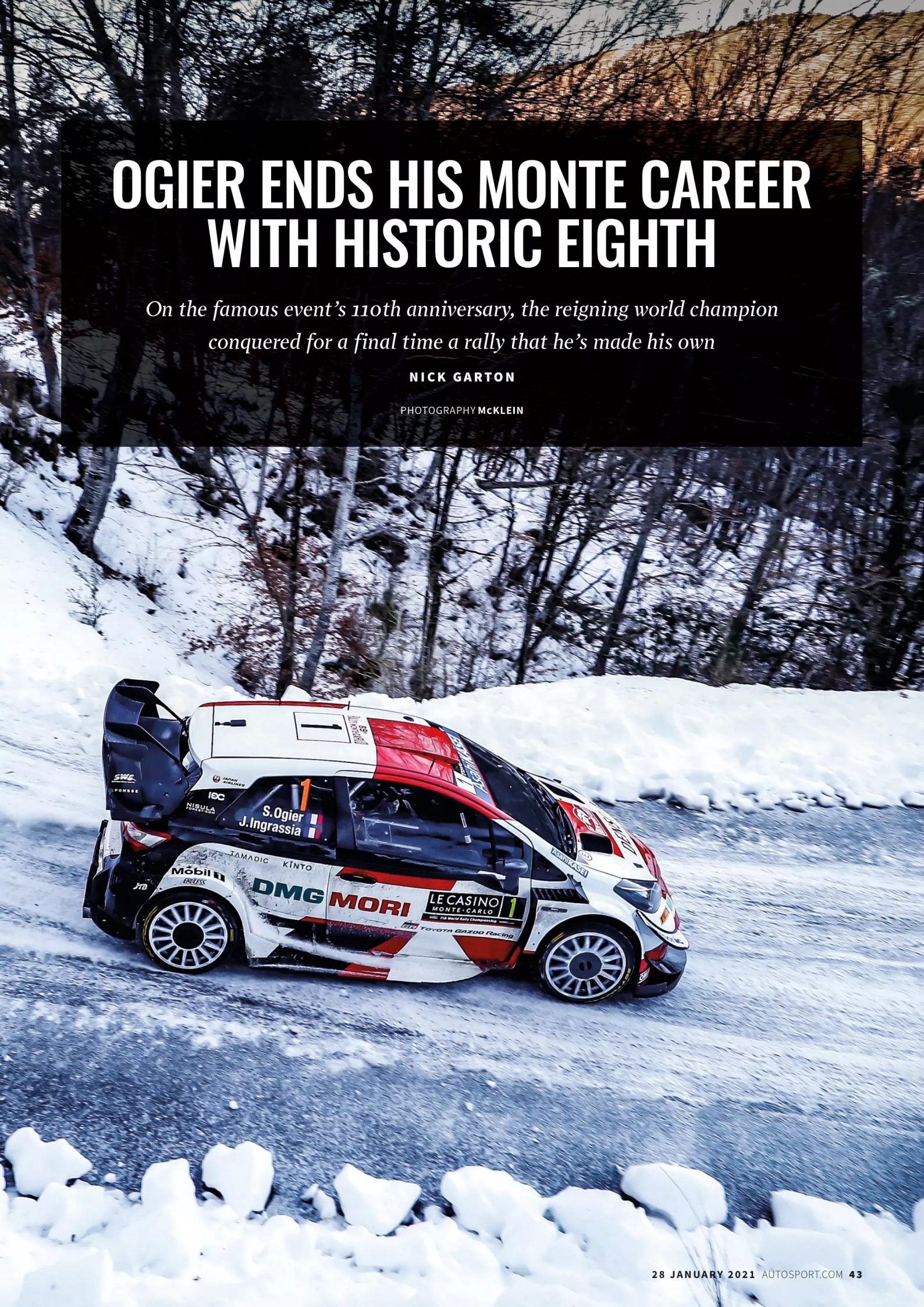


OGIER ENDS HIS MONTE CAREER WITH HISTORIC EIGHTH

On the famous event's 110th anniversary, the reigning world champion conquered for a final time a rally that he's made his own

NICK GARTON

PHOTOGRAPHY **McKLEIN**





Neuville started the season with a *very* new co-driver

The 2021 World Rally Championship is under way, and the Monte Carlo Rally celebrated its 110th-anniversary year despite the ever-present threat of COVID-19. In the end, it proved to be a historic four days in the Alpes Maritimes, crowned by a record-breaking eighth victory for Sebastien Ogier.

Back in 1911, the founding fathers of the event saw an opportunity to use the glamour of motorsport to bring well-heeled visitors to the principality and its casino, which PG Wodehouse had declared was solely designed to bring young men to ruin. The rally remains imbued with all the style of the Riviera; an event on which James Bond creator Ian Fleming was once a co-driver, and that features stages on which the Mini Cooper, Porsche 911 and Lancia Stratos are among the many to have burnished their legend.

There was considerably less pizzazz this year thanks to a devastating combination of coronavirus and road damage in the wake of Storm Alex. There were no fans, no Col de Turini, no ceremonial start and no photo opportunities at the casino. Only 15 stages were scheduled within the draconian curfews in place through the Haute Alpes prefecture, giving a total competitive distance of just 280km (around 170 miles), of which only 14 stages were run. Nevertheless those 110 glorious years were celebrated, for which we must all be profoundly grateful in a winter of continued discontent for almost every major sporting event.

NEW AND OLD FACES

The WRC teams arrived in much the same order as they had left Monza barely six weeks earlier at the close of the 2020 season. Neither the cars nor the crews had changed drastically over the winter, save for an absence of the debonair Nicolas Gilsoul from his traditional position alongside Thierry Neuville. When you do the same thing year in and year out, it's often hard to notice the passing of time, but the appearance of Martijn Wydaeghe in the passenger seat of Neuville's Hyundai brought it home with a resounding thump.

So fresh-faced is he that you could be forgiven for assuming that Neuville's recruitment process involved standing in the middle of a Belgian scout hut and shouting, 'Can anyone here read a map?'. In fact, Wydaeghe is an accomplished 28-year-old veteran of Belgian and European competition, and his composure in stepping into the role with just a few days' notice and no practice was admirable.

The other new boy in the top class was a much more familiar face to WRC regulars, this being 18-time rally winner Jari-Matti Latvala. The much-loved Finn overtook M-Sport's Richard Millener as the youngest team principal in the series by just over a year when he agreed to hang up his helmet and take over from Tommi Makinen as Toyota's head man. Except, of course, Latvala hasn't hung up his helmet at all – he made sure that he would still be allowed to campaign his beloved historic cars in Finland on off weekends before signing on the dotted line.

One move that Latvala has instigated is bringing another old boy from the Yaris WRC programme, and another of the nicest men in any sport, Juho Hanninen, to mentor Toyota's young Japanese protege Takamoto Katsuta.

"I never thought that this kind of job I could be in at the age of 35," Latvala said before the start. "It was something maybe beyond my rally career time, when I'm 45 to 50, something like this. So this was a huge surprise."

The biggest change of all in the service park was not a surprise, this being the return of Pirelli, replacing Michelin as sole supplier of WRC tyres. Last year's runner-up Elfyn Evans had suggested that the new rubber on offer for the Monte (supersoft, snow and studded varieties) lacked traction on snow and ice compared to the Michelins, but gave a much bigger increase in grip on dry asphalt.



Evans held a brief lead, but finished more than 30s behind Ogier


RYBAK

"OGIER HAD THE COUNTENANCE OF A LION WHO'S HEARD THE DINNER GONG"

OGIER'S UNFORTUNATE START

Testing had been severely limited for all teams by measures to contain the ongoing pandemic, but reigning champion Ogier's seat time was cut further when he managed to invert his Toyota and uproot a tree, as a result of which his co-driver, Julien Ingrassia, needed a hospital check-up.

Despite this setback to the pair's pre-event preparations, Ogier approached the rally with the countenance of a lion who has heard the dinner gong. He is a native son of the rally's host town, Gap, and this year will be his last as a full-time driver, all of which bestowed an additional sense of purpose upon a man who had won the event seven times previously.

Rather than engage with the usual pre-start flimflammery about this being a long rally with changeable conditions, he permitted himself to simply declare: "I'm here to win this rally, so I'm going to win it!"

Proceedings got under way with two stages on Thursday afternoon, both of »

M-SPORT SUFFERS ON THE MONTE

A notable absentee from the main story of the rally on these pages is M-Sport, which endured possibly the worst event in its illustrious World Rally Championship history.

In the weeks leading up to the rally, the team had to hurdle innumerable obstacles, including the burden of red tape imposed by Brexit, ever-steepening lockdown measures being taken in the UK, and the question of whether French COVID policy might entirely preclude the team's attendance. Nevertheless, Richard Millener and his team arrived in Gap with WRC Fords for Teemu Suninen and Gus Greensmith, plus the WRC2 entry of Adrien Fourmaux.

Suninen was flying on the opening split times of the first stage but then lost traction on a right-hander, being sent into an earth bank and exiting the stage upside-down, smashing his Ford Fiesta's rollcage (below).

'Anger' falls short of describing Millener's reaction by a mile. "It's great to set that kind of time, but the intention was to get two cars to the finish and we've not even managed that on one stage," he said. "So after everything we've done to get here, it's a pretty big kick in the teeth."

A shame-faced Suninen suggested that his presence on next month's Arctic Rally was no longer a certainty, and Millener did not deny the claims. "We have to go back and take a bit of a restock and think things through," he grimaced. "Malcolm [Wilson, M-Sport founder] wants a bit of extra time as well, and I don't think there's any harm in taking some time and not rushing things."

The only M-Sport driver confirmed for all rounds is Greensmith. The Englishman had a nightmare Monte, unable to break into the top 10 overall on six stages. "I'd say it's been the worst performance of my career so far," he summarised.



Fortunately, the performance of Fourmaux galvanised M-Sport as he took a strong second place in WRC2 behind Andreas Mikkelsen's flying Skoda Fabia. The young Frenchman beat his vastly experienced Norwegian rival on six stages, restoring no little honour to the Cumbrian squad.

Mikkelsen (above) could still chalk up 'mission: accomplished' in Monte, though, as he seeks to dominate WRC2 as leverage to earn a works drive with Toyota or Hyundai in 2022. Even after easing up on the final day, his margin of victory was almost two minutes.

Pierre-Louis Loubet made his Monte debut in Hyundai's second-string WRC car, which was rebuilt after sliding head-on into a rock face on Saturday. He finished 16th.

In WRC3, the Citroen C3s of Yohan Rossel, Yoann Bonato and Nicolas Ciamin finished 1-2-3 in a quiet weekend for the junior category, some way off the pace of WRC2.

Considerable damage was wrought in the service park on Friday night when a freak localised gale struck in Gap. Millener was able to see the lighter side of the drama: "There's some old fashioned al fresco rallying this morning!"



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HYUNDAI/ BAUDIN

Sordo contributed to Hyundai boss Adamo's downbeat assessment

which were won by the Hyundai of 2019 drivers' champion Ott Tanak. The Estonian had been in bullish form throughout the build-up, and it was noticeable in Hyundai's preview material that, while team-mates Neuville and Dani Sordo declared the manufacturers' championship to be their primary goal, Tanak simply said: "The drivers' championship."

At the first overnight halt, Tanak led the rally from the Toyotas of Kalle Rovanpera and Evans, with Neuville in fourth. Ogier was close behind him in fifth, but had not enjoyed the opening stages as his brake pedal repeatedly went to the floor. "It was pretty scary moment, luckily uphill, and I could pump enough and stop the car before the corner but, of course, after that my confidence went completely down and I was pumping all the time," he said. "It happened a couple of times during the stage so the rest of the loop was freaky!"

HYUNDAI HITS TROUBLE

Friday began in the small hours for gravel crews and mechanics as they prepared for an 0610 start time to comply with local curfews. This meant running the first two stages in the dark and, predictably, it was Ogier who shone brightest. Ogier and Rovanpera topped both stages, while Evans survived a half-spin to stay with them overall. It was all going beautifully for Toyota, but at Hyundai the rally was unravelling quickly.

Tanak had elected to take the same mix of tyres as the Toyotas for the morning loop, four supersofts and two studded, but both Neuville and Sordo went with three of each type, obliging them to make crabwise progress at a pace considerably off that of their rivals.

Although he was on the money with his tyre choice, Tanak's engine suffered a recurrence of the stalling in low-speed corners that had plagued him and Neuville through 2020. Soon he too began to fall away from the lead battle.

Matters improved marginally as the day wore on, with Sordo only 1.3 seconds off Ogier's winning time on the final stage, but Tanak was slowed by a misty windscreen and Neuville's day was no better. "We didn't do the best tyre choice," said Neuville ruefully. "Also in stage four my gravel crew wasn't able to go through the stage because they had an incident on the road section, so I had no corrections in the pacenotes and we lost a lot of time... and we made a spin towards the end."

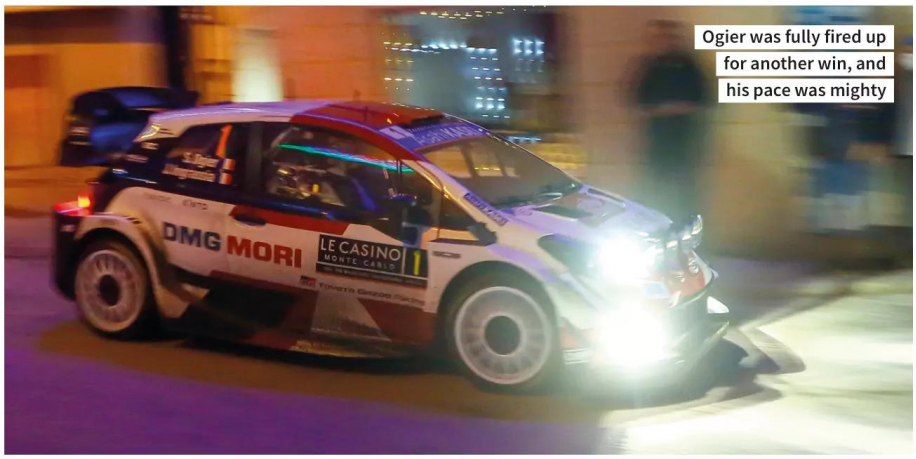
Hyundai principal Andrea Adamo was an unusually low-key presence where the media were concerned, presumably to save his voice for any hairdrier treatment that might be meted out to his team. "We have seen Dani... this morning lost in the middle of nowhere, in the first time of going. The other [Hyundais] going up and down," he said, with the look of one who had drunk the cup of life and found a dead beetle at the bottom.

"Surely so far it has not been the rally for which we were targeting and not the rally that Hyundai should do... So it's not good. So we have not to find excuses."

Toyota's dominance of the day was not without its own share of misadventure, however. Rovanpera incurred a 10s penalty for late check-in after a warning light needed investigation by the roadside, while Ogier lost the overnight lead to Evans after losing 30s to a puncture on the penultimate stage of the day.

In the heat of the moment, Ogier gave Pirelli both barrels. "I mean, we knew this tyre was very weak for punctures and unfortunately it happened already," he thundered, taking some of the lustre from Pirelli's return.

With one stage left in the day, Ogier harnessed his ire and utterly demolished the field, winning back 16s from Evans in one fell swoop. It was a magisterial performance.



Ogier was fully fired up for another win, and his pace was mighty

OGIER STAMPS HIS AUTHORITY

Another pre-dawn start beckoned on Saturday, and with it came an abundance of snow and ice. This eased Hyundai's tyre-choice issues as everyone went off with studded rubber, although based on Ogier's assessment it seemed brave indeed for some runners to take only one spare.

Once again, Ogier delivered the rallying equivalent of an Ayrton Senna pole lap: absolute conviction resulted in a time 18.7s faster than Evans, and 20s faster than anyone else in the field. It was to prove the decisive moment in the rally.

Despite the pre-dawn chill, Ogier's forehead was lavishly bedewed with »



Ogier didn't hold back in his criticism of new tyre supplier Pirelli

the perspiration of endeavour, and he was wide-eyed as he attempted to describe what had just occurred: "It was very difficult conditions. There was ice obviously, but it didn't feel like we had studs, it was just sliding away. It was tricky!"

Toyota now held the top three positions, and Hyundai's erstwhile leader Tanak was falling even further behind, having picked up a puncture early on in the morning's first stage. "I immediately had a spin and next corner there was a loose stone inside," he said, with all the jauntiness of a wet cat. "It's a beautiful morning!"

Tanak's misery reached Tolstoy-esque proportions on the very next stage, however, when another puncture put him out of the rally completely, having already used his single spare. Adding insult to injury, Tanak subsequently received a suspended one-rally ban for attempting to drive back to service in a car that was not roadworthy.

It was a busy event for the stewards, who also had to haul Ogier, Wydaeghe and Sordo's co-driver Carlos del Barrio over the coals for failing to fasten their helmets properly on the stages, serving €400 fines upon them all.

Up at the front, Ogier began to pull away from his pursuing team-mates, while Rovanpera started to slip back, giving Neuville an unexpected sniff at the podium. He girded his loins and put in a superlative performance to win the day's penultimate stage by 12s from the second-string Hyundai of Pierre-Louis Loubet as the Toyotas struggled, Rovanpera 24s in arrears, Ogier 42s and Evans 46s.

Normal service was resumed on the day's final test, with Evans heading a Toyota 1-2-3, which kept him in the hunt against Ogier and bought Rovanpera a little time in his battle with Neuville. The Welshman was mightily relieved: "I needed that. It's been a bit of a frustrating day, just not been on the money... we'll keep the pressure on!"

Sunday brought a later start and the sort of crystalline skies and snow-lined Alpine roads that define the Monte Carlo Rally. Ogier just held off Neuville by 0.7s to win the first stage of the day, while a puncture cost Rovanpera almost a minute, effectively surrendering third place overall to the Hyundai.

On the penultimate stage, Ogier beat Neuville and a more sprightly Sordo. As usual, the rally then ended with a powerstage, which, for the first time in WRC history, not only brought bonus points for the drivers' championship but also for the manufacturers' tally. It was a Toyota whitewash. Ogier rounded off a perfect closing chapter to his Monte Carlo story to claim the fastest time and five extra points, ahead of Rovanpera and Evans.

With this win, the 50th of his career in the top flight, the seven-time WRC



Ogier and Ingrassia celebrate with new team boss Latvala

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"IT'S BEEN SUCH A PLEASURE SO I THINK I ALMOST HAVE TEARS IN MY EYES NOW"

champion not only equalled Walter Rohrl's 37-year-old achievement of winning the event with four different manufacturers, but broke the record for most Monte Carlo wins previously held by his old nemesis, Sebastien Loeb.

At the finish line in Entrevaux, it was an understandably emotional winner who took the applause of his team, his rivals and FIA president Jean Todt. "It's not a bad end of the weekend," said Ogier. "The car's been amazing. It's been such a pleasure so I think I almost have tears in my eyes now. I think it was a good decision to do one more year, the team is great, such a huge thanks I want to give to all of you."

It was an entirely fitting coda to the Ogier era in Monte Carlo and, for Toyota, gave the team a firm footing at the start of a season, which may yet see its schedule thrown into further disarray by the blight of coronavirus.

RESULTS ROUND 1/12, MONTE CARLO RALLY, 21-24 JANUARY

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	**Sebastien Ogier** (FRA) **Julien Ingrassia** (FRA)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	2h56m33.7s
2	**Elfyn Evans** (GBR) **Scott Martin** (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	+32.6s
3	**Thierry Neuville** (BEL) **Martijn Wydaeghe** (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+1m13.5s
4	**Kalle Rovanpera** (FIN) **Jonne Halttunen** (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	+2m33.6s
5	**Dani Sordo** (ESP) **Carlos del Barrio** (ESP)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+3m14.2s
6	**Takamoto Katsuta** (JPN) **Daniel Barritt** (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	+7m01.3s
7	**Andreas Mikkelsen** (NOR) **Ola Floene** (NOR)	Toksport WRT / Skoda Fabia Rally2 Evo	+7m23.6s
8	**Gus Greensmith** (GBR) **Elliott Edmondson** (GBR)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Fiesta WRC	+8m21.1s
9	**Adrien Fourmaux** (FRA) **Renaud Jamoul** (BEL)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Fiesta Rally2	+9m15.8s
10	**Eric Camilli** (FRA) **Francois-Xavier Buresi** (FRA)	Sports & You / Citroen C3 Rally2	+10m36.0s
OTHERS			
16	**Pierre-Louis Loubet** (FRA) **Vincent Landais** (FRA)	Hyundai 2C Competition / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+18m16.4s
R	**Ott Tanak** (EST) **Martin Jarveoja** (EST)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	SS11-punct
R	**Teemu Suninen** (FIN) **Mikko Markkula** (FIN)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Fiesta WRC	SS1-accident

STAGE TIMES

STAGE	FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND
SS1 **Saint-Disdier - Corps** (12.79 miles)	Tanak 12m05.7s	Tanak	Rovanpera +3.0s
SS2 **Saint-Maurice - Saint-Bonnet** (12.91 miles)	Tanak 12m11.8s	Tanak	Rovanpera +3.3s
SS3 **Aspremont - La Batie-des-Fonts 1** (12.19 miles)	Ogier 14m00.9s	Rovanpera	Evans +2.2s
SS4 **Chalancon - Gumaine 1** (13.43 miles)	Ogier 13m36.8s	Ogier	Evans +3.3s
SS5 **Montauban-sur-l'Ouveze - Villebois-les-Pins 1** (13.82 miles)	Ogier 13m35.8s	Ogier	Evans +11.3s
SS6 **Aspremont - La Batie-des-Fonts 2** (12.19 miles)	Evans 13m32.5s	Evans	Tanak +20.4s
SS7 **Chalancon - Gumaine 2** (13.43 miles)	Ogier 14m09.8s	Evans	Ogier +7.4s
SS8 **Montauban-sur-l'Ouveze - Villebois-les-Pins 2** (13.82 miles)	Stage cancelled		
SS9 **La Breole - Selonnet 1** (11.38 miles)	Ogier 13m16.2s	Ogier	Evans +10.4s
SS10 **Saint-Clement - Freissinieres** (12.73 miles)	Neuville 16m28.3s	Ogier	Evans +14.3s
SS11 **La Breole - Selonnet 2** (11.38 miles)	Evans 11m59.0s	Ogier	Evans +13.0s
SS12 **Puget-Theniers - La Penne 1** (8.03 miles)	Ogier 8m47.6s	Ogier	Evans +21.0s
SS13 **Brianconnet - Entrevaux 1** (8.89 miles)	Neuville 11m29.6s	Ogier	Evans +19.7s
SS14 **Puget-Theniers - La Penne 2** (8.03 miles)	Ogier 8m42.6s	Ogier	Evans +28.1s
SS15 **Brianconnet - Entrevaux 2** (powerstage) (8.89 miles)	Ogier 10m56.2s	Ogier	Evans +32.6s



HYUNDAI/THUILLIER

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Ogier 30; 2 **Evans** 21; 3 **Neuville** (left) 17; 4 **Rovanpera** 16; 5 **Sordo** 11; 6 **Katsuta** 8; 7 **Mikkelsen** 6; 8 **Greensmith** 4; 9 **Fourmaux** 2; 10 **Camilli** 1.

MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1 Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT 52; 2 **Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT** 30; 3 **M-Sport Ford WRT** 10; 4 **Hyundai 2C Competition** 8.

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ARCTIC RALLY
4 MARCH ISSUE

The crews will be donning their thermals for the first of two visits to Finland, this round offering the prospect of -30C temperatures…

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Bevan Imps (inset and above) were hugely successful, winning three British Saloon Car crowns

BEVAN IMP RESTORED BY GRANDSON READY TO GO

HISTORICS

The grandson of master Hillman/Sunbeam Imp preparer George Bevan has restored the last Group 2 Imp, and the car is set to return to the track this year.

With Irishman Bill McGovern driving the very special 1000cc creations, Bevan Imps won successive British Saloon Car Championships in 1970, 1971 and 1972.

Half a century later, Jonathan Bevan is close to fulfilling his ambition of bringing the last Group 2 car back on track to honour his grandfather's memory. "George is a bit of an unsung hero – I didn't want his achievements to be forgotten," he said.



A flash of familiar blue in the background of a photo on social media enabled Bevan Jr to track the car down in Germany. "It was sitting above a taxi!" he said. "I'd spent 25 years looking for it and found two Imps, the other a Team Hartwell car which a friend has bought."

Hans Sauer was George Bevan's agent in Europe and bought it, before it was subsequently raced by Wolfgang Reich. "I couldn't believe that the books and charts documenting its races, plus the German Wagenpass [log book] and many original spares were with it," added Bevan.

Apart from featuring on Chrysler's London Motor Show stand in 1972, the car won the 1000cc class in the Tourist Trophy race at Silverstone. Driving solo, McGovern finished 14th overall, covering 124 laps, eight clear of two Minis. Jochen Mass/Dieter Glemser won in a Ford Cologne Capri.

"Bill was a professional," said Bevan. "He didn't just dominate his BSCC class [outpointing Chevrolet Camaros and Ford Mustangs, Capris and Escorts in the larger-capacity divisions], he spent much of his time racing against 1300cc BMC Cooper Ss. Bevan Imps were giantkillers."

Bevan rebuilt the Imp during the first COVID-19 lockdown last year, but has not had an opportunity to drive it. "It's on the button, but I don't want to race it," he said. "It's beautiful and if it was damaged, its history would be lost. Much of it is irreplaceable."

MARCUS PYE

New tie-up for Equipe 50s and FISCAR for 2021

HISTORICS

The Equipe 50s and Fifties Sports Car Racing grids are set to be combined at two double-header events this year ahead of a possible more extensive partnership next season.

Equipe Classic Racing introduced its new 50s grid for 2020 to expand its portfolio to include older cars than those featured in its Equipe GTS and Pre-'63 categories. It was due to join forces with FISCAR for MG Live last year, but that meeting was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For 2021, we've got two meetings where we're going to run combined Equipe 50s and FISCAR races, at Silverstone Grand Prix and Snetterton, called Equipe FISCAR," said Equipe Classic Racing partner John Pearson. "The idea is it's a pilot and if it all goes well, then in 2022 we'll combine the two. We feel FISCAR's ethos fits really well with


FISCAR will partner with Equipe at two events
WALKER

Equipe and we are looking forward to working with them to produce some fantastic 1950s racing."

Pearson explained that, if successful, the idea would be to have one larger grid in the future rather than two smaller ones. "With small grids, drivers don't have as much fun," he said. "Larger grids is something that's good for all of us."

FISCAR chairman John Turner added: "We are delighted to take this second chance to join Equipe Classic Racing at two of their meetings and hope that it leads to further opportunities to race with them in the future."

STEPHEN LICKORISH


Leda driver picked up two more F5000 wins at Taupo
FAST COMPANY/RIDDER

Collins extends his winning streak

FORMULA 5000

Michael Collins extended his winning run from November's New Zealand Tasman Cup Revival Series opener at Circuit Chris Amon Manfeild by winning both scratch races as the action moved to Taupo's Bruce McLaren Motorsport Park last weekend.

Christchurch-based Collins, 25, qualified Alistair and Vicky Hey's ex-Graham McRae 1972 Tasman Cup and US L&M title-winning Leda GM1 quickest for the Taupo Historic GP feature, pursued by a strong posse of Lola drivers split by sister Anna in the Heys' Leda LT27.

Closest rival Codie Banks (Lola T332) hit gearbox issues in Saturday's opener, so former NZ Formula Ford champion Kevin Ingram and Brett Willis took up the chase in similar cars. The same trio formed Sunday's podium.

The second race, run as a rolling-start handicap, appropriately rewarded series newcomer Toby Annabell, whose McLaren M10B was one of four marque representatives in the field. Annabell beat Tony Galbraith (T332) by barely half a second, with Michael Collins third.

Shortened to four events this season, the F5000 Tasman Cup Revival contest moves to the Mike Pero Motorsport Park (Ruapuna) on 5-7 February and concludes at Hampton Downs.

MARCUS PYE

IN THE HEADLINES

ROBERT BRIDGER

The recent death of Robert Bridger has dealt a third blow to the Thundersaloon fraternity, following the loss of Pete Stevens last April and Ricky Parker-Morris earlier this month. A Lydden specialist who had enjoyed previous success in Ford Escort and Toyota Starlet Hot Rods, Bridger had battled Parkinson's disease in later life.

CADWELL CARS STOLEN

Police are appealing for information after a medical car and safety car, worth over £100,000 combined, were stolen from Cadwell Park earlier this week. The BMW X5 medical car and M240i safety car were stolen at 0015 on Tuesday morning from the Lincolnshire circuit. If anyone has seen the cars, which carried MotorSport Vision stickers, they are urged to contact police on 101. More details can be found on Lincolnshire Police's website.

McCRACKEN'S MINI STEP-UP

Scottish Citroen C1 Cup runner-up James McCracken plans to step up to the Mini Cooper Cup this season. McCracken, who finished sixth in the C1 Cup standings in the inaugural season in 2019, scored one victory in the shortened 2020 campaign. "The plan was always two years in the C1 to cut my teeth in motorsport," said McCracken. "I want a new challenge and something a bit faster."

MORE MINI BIRTHDAY RACES

The 60th anniversary of the Cooper version of the Mini is due to be marked by two Mini-only races at this year's Silverstone Classic. In a rerun of the fiercely competitive races at the 2019 event (below), which celebrated the 60th anniversary of the launch of the Mini, this year's event will honour 60 years since John Cooper developed a sporting version of the Mini with more power, better brakes and improved handling. A capacity grid of 60 cars will compete on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit.


JEP



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Double R to sit out British F3 for 2021

BRDC BRITISH F3

Leading BRDC British Formula 3 Championship team Double R Racing will not be on the series' grid this season for the first time in its history, but is eyeing a return in the future.

Double R has been ever-present in British F3 — under the series' old pre-2015 philosophy and in the current MotorSport Vision-run era that began in 2016 — since its formation for the 2005 season and has won titles with Mike Conway (2006), Matheus Leist (2016) and Linus Lundqvist (2018).

The move also means that, for the first time in the team's history, Double R will not be represented this year in any national UK single-seater championship.

Team boss Anthony 'Boyo' Hieatt explained that the decision has been taken because of a new motorsport venture that will occupy many of the team's resources, but which has yet to be announced.

"Other commitments have taken priority," he said. "It's a shame, because I've loved doing it. Certainly we won't be competing in British F3 in 2021, but we hope to come back in the future. We're proud of our record in it."

Hieatt said that his best times in the MSV-run series include "fighting against some really good teams".

"Leist coming back from being way behind and nicking it at the last event was a special moment," added Hieatt. "And so was Lundqvist dominating the whole of the season. Also, working with MSV and Giles Butterfield [the series' manager], because they've been absolutely top-drawer."

Double R will continue in Euroformula Open, the series that runs to the old philosophy of F3.

The plan is to run a minimum of two, or potentially three HWA-powered Dallaras. The team's British F3 ace Louis Foster, who took a race win at Spa on a cameo EFO outing in late 2020, is understood to be one driver in contention for a seat. Another is Foster's fellow British F3 race winner Kiern Jewiss, who claimed the British F4 crown with Double R in 2018.

MARCUS SIMMONS

Pearson's cancer diagnosis halts racing plans



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

BRITISH F4

Ginetta Junior racer Joel Pearson has been forced to delay a planned graduation to British Formula 4 for this year after being recently diagnosed with bone cancer.

The 16-year-old finished eighth in his second full season in the Ginetta category last year, taking two podiums with the R Racing squad. He had been due to drive for Argenti Motorsport in F4 in 2021 but this has now been put on hold.

Pearson wishes to raise awareness of the work the Teenage Cancer Trust charity does and a fundraising page has been set up.

A statement issued on behalf of the Pearson family read: "For 2021, Joel Pearson had signed a deal to move into the F4 British Championship with Argenti Motorsport, however the news means Pearson's racing plans will have to be put on hold for now. True to character, the Yorkshire-based racer still plans to return to the cockpit and continue his rise through the ranks.

"Pearson is going to be using his home sim, keeping fit and healthy with help from his trainer and management team, while Michael Meadows at Argenti Motorsport has already opened the channels to get Joel back testing as soon as he gets signed off fit.

"Joel wishes to take the opportunity at this time to raise awareness and donations for Teenage Cancer Trust, who are the only UK charity dedicated to providing the specialised nursing care and support needed for young people fighting cancer."


National FF1600 was already scheduled to race at Oulton Park

WALKER

British GT support slot for National FF1600 at Oulton

BRSCC

National Formula Ford 1600 will appear at a British GT event this year, following the recent spate of calendar changes.

The traditional Easter weekend Oulton Park GT season opener has been pushed back amid continuing concerns over the coronavirus pandemic. The Cheshire round is now set to take place on 11-12 September, when the British Racing and Sports Car Club's National FF1600 category was already due to be racing at Oulton as part of a Scottish Motor Racing Club meeting.

"That [securing the support slot] was through working with MSVR, we were able to call upon them to help," explained BRSCC chairman Peter Daly. "It's exactly the same venue – we couldn't move the date because it would affect the whole of the calendar."

FF1600 team boss Andy Brickles – whose B-M Racing squad powered Rory Smith to victory in last year's Festival – believes it is a good opportunity for the series, which had previously explored the possibility of racing at British GT events.

"It's good news being on that package and it's really the route these young drivers should be looking at," he said. "Formula 1 is not a realistic option, so the next realistic, professional option for these guys is as GT drivers and being on this GT package allows drivers to network with teams."

STEPHEN LICKORISH & STEFAN MACKLEY

SMRC delays start to the season

SMRC

The Scottish Motor Racing Club has become the latest organiser to delay the start of its season, postponing its opening two rounds amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A week after the British Racing and Sports Car Club cancelled its opening two March events, the SMRC season – originally scheduled to begin on the first weekend in April – will now start at Knockhill on 6 June at the earliest. The planned season opener has been pushed back to the end of October and has switched to the reverse configuration of the Fife circuit.

The second round at Cadwell Park has also been rescheduled and will now take place on the weekend of 12 September, the date originally planned for the second away meeting at Oulton Park. With Oulton dropping off the calendar, as the date has been taken by British GT, the SMRC season is set to feature six events, instead of the planned seven.

A club statement said: "In light of the continued uncertainty around the coronavirus pandemic and resulting government restrictions, we have made a joint decision with Knockhill to postpone the first round of the season.

"Whilst it is possible that our Cadwell Park event could have taken place in May, with the increased travel and accommodation logistics associated with an away round, we did not feel it would be responsible to start the season there."

STEPHEN BRUNSDON

IN THE HEADLINES

ELITE'S GINETTA CONTENDERS

Leading Ginetta squad Elite Motorsport has announced its four-strong line-up for the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this season. Ginetta Junior graduate Will Aspin and GT5 podium finisher John Bennett will spearhead Elite's assault. They will again be joined by Karim Sekkat, while 2019 Ginetta Racing Drivers Club competitor Harry Mangion will step up. Also on the GT5 Challenge grid, driving for Race Car Consultants, will be former British Formula 4 racer Nat Hodgkiss and Magnus Kriklywi.

ASSETTO EXPANDS ROSTER

Assetto Motorsport will expand its involvement in Ginetta Junior this year, running three cars. The squad fielded a single entry for Joe Wheeler in 2020, but this season he will be joined by scholarship finalists Maxwell Dodds and Harri Reynolds. Team manager, 2000 Renault UK Clio Cup champion Jim Edwards Jr, said: "The whole team at Assetto Motorsport are delighted to be expanding our presence in the Ginetta Juniors this year."

WINFIELD EYES TCT MOVE

Civic Cup champion Bruce Winfield plans to graduate to the Touring Car Trophy this year. Area Motorsport – which ran Winfield to his Civic title – has acquired a 2020 DSG-spec Cupra TCR, with Winfield set for a full campaign once a budget is in place. He said: "It's obviously faster and got a lot more grip [than the Honda Civic] but it's still a front-wheel-drive car so the driving principle's the same."

APPEAL WIN FOR FOSTER

Louis Foster (below) has successfully won his appeal in the UK National Court and been reinstated into third place in the final BRDC British F3 Championship standings. The Double R driver's one-minute time penalty for a collision at the final round of the season at Silverstone was overturned, meaning he acquired enough points to beat Ulysse De Pauw to third in the standings.



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Ex-F3 racer Wood makes move to F2 after 37 years

HISTORIC FORMULA 2



Wood will race a Ralt-BDG RT1 in Historic F2

Martin Wood, who raced in the classic Ayrton Senna/Martin Brundle 1983 British Formula 3 season, is returning to full-time racing after a 37-year layoff to compete in the Historic Sports Car Club's Historic F2 Championship.

Wood, who was British Automobile Racing Club Oceanair Clubmans champion in his first year of circuit racing, made the leap into F3 at the end of 1982 with the ex-Enrique Benamo Ralt-Toyota RT3/81. Sevenths at Donington Park and Snetterton were his best results.

Promotasport National banger racing points champion in the 1970s, Wood did not compete for a decade before he cleaned-up in the FF1600-engined Clubmans class, scoring eight wins in the unique ex-Richard Mallock U2 Mk22.

The unrelated Clive Wood, whose Pine City Racing team assisted Martin in Clubmans and F3 almost 40 years ago, will again be in the fold, the multiple Clubmans champion competing against him this time.

"I'm competitive but have always enjoyed racing's social side, too," said Martin. "When I discovered Historic F2 at Brands Hatch last year I was blown away. I had to give it another go before I was 70!"

Both Martin's Ralt-BDG RT1 – chassis 120, built for 1600cc FAtlantic but last raced successfully in F2 spec by Nick Fleming in 2013 – and the Chevron Clive will race are being rebuilt by Dan and Glenn Eagling's Lifetime Racing in Norfolk.

"After some tests and the HSCC finals meeting at Silverstone in Clive's [Classic FF2000] Van Diemen RF82 last October, it's going to take time to be competitive, but I'm really excited about driving the Ralt," said Martin. "I'm working on my upper body strength in the gym. I'll need that and bravery in the fast corners."

MARCUS PYE

Cadwell Park double-header circuit rally planned

RALLYING

Two rounds of the *Motorsport News* Circuit Rally Championship are set to be held on consecutive days at Cadwell Park in April, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cirrus Research Stages – postponed from its original 21 November 2020 date – and the Alan Healy Memorial Stages (postponed from 31 January) will now take place over the Easter weekend on 3-4 April.

"I am delighted to confirm that MNCRC, Cadwell Park and MSV have reached an agreement in principle to host two rounds of the MNCRC," said championship coordinator Darren Spann.

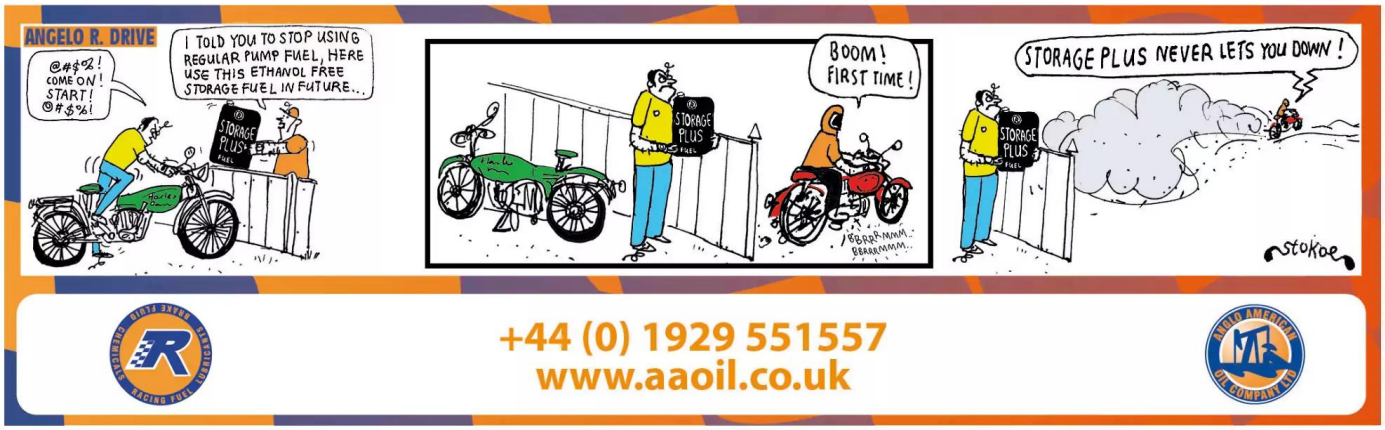
"However, these rounds will be subject to Motorsport UK approval, as our priority is the safety of all involved and strict compliance with COVID-19 regulations.

"I would like to thank all our sponsors, competitors and fans who have been so supportive throughout this and to assure them we are determined to do all we can to get the MNCRC to an eight-round championship this season."

Only one round of the championship has been held so far, the season-opening Dukeries Rally at Donington Park on 6 December.

The next scheduled round, the Snetterton Stages, is still due to go ahead at present on 20 February.

PETER SCHERER



Should online scrutineering be permanently adopted?

After a year in which COVID-19 led to self-declaration and random spot-checks being introduced, our writers debate whether this is the right long-term approach



YES
STEPHEN LICKORISH

Change is sometimes feared. Old habits are sometimes hard to break. And yet change can often be a good thing. Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic forced club racing to operate in a very different way. Adopting online signing-on ahead of a race weekend went down a treat, and arguably should have been introduced years ago, while removing the traditional pre-event scrutineering on the morning of a meeting also proved popular.

As many have argued, the process of traipsing over to the scrutineering bay and queueing up very early in the morning is possibly not needed anymore. Admittedly, the usual, more rigorous scrutineering is still warranted for top-level national championships that form stepping stones for aspiring career drivers or carry significant prize pots. But it's less crucial for the average club series – is it really necessary for the driver often battling for 29th place in a 40-car Toyota MR2 field to head to scrutineering before every event? Perhaps, for many championships run under the lowest Interclub permit, it's not.

"Any change that makes club racing more enjoyable has to be welcomed"

An important point is that, once the COVID-19 outbreak has passed and social distancing restrictions are relaxed, spot-checks could increase. Organisers could coordinate these to ensure that every full-season entrant's car is thoroughly examined at least once a season. The process of checking the top three finishers after a race or perhaps the top three in the standings before the event starts could be formalised. Last year, different organisers put in place various scrutineering procedures, but a prescriptive minimum standard could be set out to give competitors peace of mind.

As well as eligibility, the other key aspect of scrutineering is safety, and this could be a concern when adopting the online approach. Again, increased spot-checks should help with this, but maybe harsher penalties could be applied for those with incorrect, incomplete or faulty safety equipment to act as a deterrent.

When there are so many competing demands on people's time, any change that helps to make going club racing more enjoyable has to be welcomed. And permanently removing those queues outside the scrutineering bay and reducing the burden on scrutineers themselves could be a good place to start.



NO
STEFAN MACKLEY

While there's no doubt that procedures needed to be changed in the wake of COVID-19 in order for UK motorsport to return, and return as safely as possible, long-term online scrutineering could well be a slippery slope.

Sure, it saves time and no doubt all competitors will be glad there's not quite the early start like before but, as with anything – even club motorsport – competitors will always look for the 'unfair advantage'. It won't be the majority of them, but those intent on winning at almost all costs, and who have the budgets to match, will take advantage wherever possible. This is still racing at the end of the day, whether it's a small club meeting or Formula 1.

While some will look to gain a competitive advantage, it's from a safety standpoint where on-the-day scrutineering is perhaps most vital. Motorsport is expensive and wherever money can be saved – or corners cut – someone will look to do it, whether by not having a rollcage correctly fitted into the car or self-declaring that their helmet or race suit is of a certain FIA homologation.

"Those intent on winning at almost all costs will take advantage"

Having taken part in one event last year and done self-scrutineering, it really is down to the honesty of the competitor to make sure that what they are saying about both vehicle and driver equipment is correct. And while the vast majority will do that, there's always the few who let the side down.

Taking my cynical hat off for a moment, cutting safety corners may not even be a deliberate act, but more a case of a competitor finding themselves a little out of their depth when building their own machine.

Increasing the number of spot-checks and coming down harder on those who deliberately flaunt the regulations are certainly ways of combatting rulebreakers but, without each car being scrutinised every weekend, there will always be one or two that get through the cracks.

What would the consequences be to UK motorsport should a competitor whose machine wasn't up to the task be involved in an incident that leaves drivers, marshals or even spectators with serious injuries or worse? People may not like the early starts, but it's a small price to pay for knowing their pride and joy is of the highest standard, both from a competitive and safety point of view.



HOW CLUB RACING FARED DURING 2020

It was a season like no other but, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were some positives last year in terms of entry numbers

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Amid all the doom and gloom in the world in the past year, positivity has been in short supply. But let's have an upbeat statistic in relation to the 2020 club racing season. Of the 108 English series with comparable data, 55 featured average entries that were either the same or higher than during the 'normality' of 2019.

Yes, there are plenty of caveats to that. The shortened nature of the season because of the coronavirus pandemic meant one bumper grid could skew the averages a little. And the delayed start to the campaign led to an unprecedented clamour to get on track. But, putting all of those considerations to one side, it was still a significant achievement given the economic and health challenges faced during a tough 2020.

"It was a terrible season on the whole and really difficult, but it could've been a lot worse," says British Automobile Racing Club group CEO Ben Taylor. "There's always silver linings to be found and we can take those learnings into 2021."

One of those silver linings was the stunning entries among some series. Twelve categories managed average grid sizes of 35 or above — a brilliant figure in any year, let alone one with so many obstacles. Leading the way was the British Racing & Sports Car Club's ever-popular MX-5 Championship for Mk1 models on 51 entries, just ahead of MotorSport Vision Racing's 7 Race Series on 50, which really flourished last year after achieving championship status. Other notable performers were the 750 Motor Club's Roadsports and Club Enduro categories, and the Classic Sports Car Club's Swinging Sixties division.

Back in November 2019, Autosport calculated the average grid size for each of the major organising clubs. And, although we have done that again for the season just gone, given all the caveats of it being such an unusual year, it is important not to overanalyse the figures, and we are therefore not exploring them in as much detail this time around. Nevertheless, the fact that six of the eight main English clubs enjoyed increases in their average overall grid sizes is another positive sign.

When racing finally got under way in July, three and a half months later than planned, nobody could be quite sure what the appetite from competitors would be. The Castle Combe Racing Club was one of three clubs to hold events on the first weekend after governing body Motorsport UK lifted its permit suspension,



The CSCC once again attracted some massive grids during 2020

JONES

"IT WAS A TERRIBLE SEASON ON THE WHOLE AND REALLY DIFFICULT, BUT IT COULD'VE BEEN A LOT WORSE"

and among its entries on that July day was a 28-car Hot Hatch grid. "When we started racing, we were very heartened by the numbers," recalls CCRC chairman Ken Davies. "Everybody has been affected by this pandemic to a greater or lesser degree, so it exceeded our expectations. People were enthusiastic and ready to race and that was great."

That enthusiasm to get back on track was seen near enough across the board, and clubs did what they could to encourage as many drivers as possible to emerge from the long winter hibernation. "Every championship bent over backwards to try and accommodate the wishes of people who wanted to go racing," says Taylor. "I think we all got a bit less picky about what we did and where we did it — and I think that's a good thing. There's always a danger that people, over time, decide they only want to race at this circuit or that circuit, with this person or that person. It got mixed up a bit last year and people enjoyed a bit of variety."

Autosport has long argued that there were too many club racing events spreading entries too thinly, but the pandemic meant this was no longer a problem. While COVID-19 undoubtedly accelerated that too far, the fewer events did mean each individual one was >>

NATIONAL RACING ENTRIES

750 MOTOR CLUB

CATEGORY	AVERAGE 2020	AVERAGE 2019	2019 TO 2020 CHANGE
Roadsports	43	36	+19%
Club Enduro	41	41	0%
Toyota MR2	38	34	+12%
MX-5 Cup	36	28	+29%
BMW Car Club Racing	29	32	-9%
Hot Hatch*	29	30	-3%
Locost	29	34	-15%
116 Trophy	27	N/A	N/A
Formula Vee	26	29	-10%
Bikesports*	22	22	0%
Sport Specials*	22	N/A	N/A
F1000	21	18	+17%
Historic 750 Formula	20	20	0%
Alfa Romeo	19	16	+19%
Classic Stock Hatch	19	23	-17%
Clio 182	19	21	-10%
Ma7da*	16	N/A	N/A
750 Formula	14	17	-18%
Sports 1000*	13	16	-19%
Type R Trophy*	9	8	+13%
CLUB AVERAGE	24	26	-8%

BRITISH AUTOMOBILE RACING CLUB

Caterham Graduates**	36	43	-16%
CNC Heads Sports/Saloons	31	32	-3%
Ginetta G40 Cup & Ginetta Racing Drivers Club	28	34	-18%
Classic Touring Cars: BOSS & Classic Thunder*	27	17	+59%
Mini Challenge JCW	27	27	0%
British Touring Car Championship	26	30	-13%
Junior Saloon Cars	23	20	+15%
Legends	23	22	+5%
Britcar Trophy*	22	N/A	N/A
MG Owners' Club*	22	20	+10%
Hyundai Coupe Cup*	21	20	+5%
Ginetta Junior	20	23	-13%
Super & Mighty Minis	20	17	+18%
Britcar Endurance*	19	22	-14%
Classic Touring Cars: Pre-'93 & Pre-'03*	19	14	+36%
Porsche Carrera Cup GB	19	18	+6%
British Truck Racing	18	21	-14%
Ginetta GT5 Challenge	18	29	-38%
Classic Touring Cars: Pre-'66*	16	16	0%
Ginetta GT4 Supercup	16	18	-11%
Classic Touring Cars: Pre-'83*	15	19	-21%
Kumho BMW*	15	16	-6%
Porsche Sprint Challenge GB	14	N/A	N/A
MaX5*	11	9	+22%
Open Sports & Saloons*	9	N/A	N/A
CLUB AVERAGE	21	19	+11%

NOTE All figures only include series that had at least three race events. * shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually. ** split over two or more different grids

Longstone CLASSIC TYRES

Michelin Competition Tyre Sizes	ETRTO Tyre sizes	CompetitionRim Sizes in Inches
16/53-13 TB15	175/60 R 13	5.0"-7.0"
16/53-13 TB5 F	175/60 R 13	5.0"-7.0"
20/53-13 TB15	225/45 R 13	7.0" - 9.5"
20/53-13 TB5 F	225/45 R 13	7.0" - 9.5"
18/60-15 TB15	215/55 R 15	6.0 "- 8.0"
18/60-15 TB5 F	215/55 R 15	6.0 "- 8.0"
18/60-15 TB5 R	215/55 R 15	6.0 "- 8.0"
23/59-15 TB5 R	265/40 R 15	8.5"-11.0"
23/62-15 TB15	270/45 R 15	8.5" - 10.5"
23/62-15 TB5 F	270/45 R 15	8.5" - 10.5"
23/62-15 TB5 R	270/45 R 15	8.5" - 10.5"
26/61-15 TB15	295/40 R 15	10.0"-12.0"
26/61-15 TB5 F	295/40 R 15	10.0"-12.0"
26/61-15 TB5 R	295/40 R 15	10.0"-12.0"
29/61-15 TB5 R	335/35 R 15	11.0"- 14.0"

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better supported. And best supported of all the clubs was once again the CSCC. Its September Donington Park meeting attracted almost 500 entries, an incredible figure that the club itself does not expect to be matched this year.

"I can't see grids like that ever happening again – the support was astonishing!" says club director David Smitheram. "I think our policy of doing refunds gave members confidence, and that helped. For now, I think the way Hugo [Holder, fellow director]

"IT WAS EASY FOR DRIVERS TO THINK, 'WE'LL ABANDON DOING THE FULL YEAR AND WE'LL DIP IN AND OUT'"



Fiesta Junior featured largest increase in average entries

JONES

and I and the committee are doing things, particularly for the members, works – if a decision has to be made, we think, 'What's right for our members and volunteers?' and not, 'What's right for the bank balance?'"

There were plenty of other success stories. MSV's Supercup went from strength to strength in its second year, while the BRSCC launched its new CityCar Cup category for race-modified versions of the Citroen C1, Peugeot 107 and Toyota Aygo. Around a dozen were on track last year, but at least 47 are estimated to be in build or ready for 2021, proving its popularity. The merger of the BRSCC's Mk3 MX-5 Supercup and Super Series also worked perfectly, creating a bumper grid once again. But the largest individual increase went to the club's Fiesta Junior championship. Just four cars took part in the 2019 finale, but that peaked at 15 last year, meaning the average rose by 160% to 13. Not bad for a series that had been written off as having no future.

"That was very pleasing," says BRSCC chairman Peter Daly. "It had fallen by the wayside and hadn't been managed well for a period of time, and that had gradually led to a decline and loss of identity and direction. We put a lot into marketing and put some taster days in place. With the teams on board, we managed to get it back up. It was because of the investment in time and the focus on what we want to be and who we want to be. We also have some new cars in build [for this year] and, on top of that, we've got 14/15 registrations already."

While Fiesta Junior was a success, albeit from a very low base, many organisers agonised over whether to run their series at all or not award championship points. Three of the MG Car Club categories – MG Trophy, Metro Cup and Midget & Sprite Challenge – opted against crowning a champion last year, and the club's competitions secretary Mark Baulch believes that was the right approach to take. "It was a difficult decision – we have to do what's best for our competitors," he says. "There was some discussion over reigning champions. The reigning MG Trophy champion, for example, was a guy from Scotland and, for most of last year, you couldn't come out of Scotland and, as he couldn't defend his title, would it be fair to run a championship?"

That was one problem the CSCC did not have to contend with as it does not run any championships. Given the disrupted nature of last season – not least with the risk of having to self-isolate at any time – it was perhaps another factor that worked in the club's favour. "I think last year, because there were so many affected championships, it made it easy for drivers to think, 'We will abandon doing the full year and »

BRITISH RACING & SPORTS CAR CLUB

CATEGORY	AVERAGE 2020	AVERAGE 2019	2019 TO 2020 CHANGE
MX-5 Championship**	51	57	-11%
Caterham 270R & Roadsport	35	63	-44%
Compact Cup	35	40	-13%
MX-5 Supercup	33	15	+120%
Clubsport Trophy*	31	N/A	N/A
Caterham Seven UK & 310R	30	56	-46%
National & Northern Formula Ford 1600	29	35	-17%
Caterham Academy White	26	21	+24%
British GT	25	38	-34%
Fun Cup	23	24	-4%
ST-XR Challenge*	22	18	+22%
Caterham Academy Green	20	22	-9%
Civic Cup	16	23	-30%
Touring Car Trophy & TCR UK & VW Cup	16	24	-33%
Fiesta*	15	15	0%
British Formula 4	13	13	0%
Fiesta Junior	13	5	+160%
CityCar Cup*	12	N/A	N/A
CLUB AVERAGE	25	22	+14%

CASTLE COMBE RACING CLUB

CATEGORY	AVERAGE 2020	AVERAGE 2019	2019 TO 2020 CHANGE
Combe Hot Hatch	33	25	+32%
Combe Formula Ford 1600	22	18	+22%
Combe GT	18	16	+13%
Combe Saloons	17	30	-43%
CLUB AVERAGE	23	22	+5%

CLASSIC SPORTS CAR CLUB

Swinging Sixties**	47	53	-11%
Open Series & Jaguar Saloon & GT	40	49	-18%
Tin Tops*	39	37	+5%
Classic K	33	25	+32%
Magnificent Sevens	33	37	-11%
Future Classics*	30	29	+3%
Modern Classics*	23	19	+21%
Special Saloons & Modsports*	20	N/A	N/A
Turbo Tin Tops*	20	20	0%
CLUB AVERAGE	32	31	+3%

NOTE All figures only include series that had at least three race events. * shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually. ** split over two or more different grids

HISTORIC SPORTS CAR CLUB			
CATEGORY	AVERAGE 2020	AVERAGE 2019	2019 TO 2020 CHANGE
Historic Formula Ford 2000**	34	26	+31%
Historic Road Sports	30	24	+25%
70s Road Sports	28	23	+22%
Formula Junior	27	30	-10%
Historic Touring Cars	24	19	+26%
Guards Trophy	25	23	+9%
Historic Formula Ford 1600	23	25	-8%
Classic Formula Ford 1600*	21	20	+5%
Historic Formula 3*	12	16	-25%
CLUB AVERAGE	25	21	+19%

MG CAR CLUB			
BCV8	25	25	0%
Cockshoot Cup*	19	19	0%
Midget & Sprite Challenge*	17	22	-23%
MG Cup*	15	23	-35%
Metro Cup*	14	14	0%
MG Trophy	14	21	-33%
CLUB AVERAGE	17	20	-15%

MOTORSPORT VISION RACING			
7 Race Series	50	N/A	N/A
EnduroKa	37	27	+37%
Racing Saloons & Z Cars & Production BMW	33	46	-28%
Trackday Championship	33	30	+10%
MSV Supercup	31	17	+82%
Trackday Trophy	29	31	-6%
Mini Challenge Trophy*	28	20	+40%
GT Cup	23	20	+15%
Sports 2000	23	26	-12%
Champion of Brands Formula Ford 1600	21	19	+11%
Clubmans Sports Prototype	21	18	+17%
BRDC British F3	18	16	+13%
Elise Trophy	18	14	+29%
Focus Cup	15	12	+25%
Heritage Formula Ford 1600*	15	17	-12%
Radical SR1 Cup	15	16	-6%
Radical Challenge	14	21	-33%
F3 Cup	9	10	-10%
Ferrari Challenge UK	9	19	-53%
CLUB AVERAGE	23	20	+15%


MG Trophy was among the series not to run as a championship

STYLES



CCRC was encouraged by Hot Hatch grid size at first meeting after racing began

"WE'RE TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE'S HEALTH, LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS AND THOSE MUST COME FIRST"

we will just dip in and out," reckons Smitheram.

While there were plenty of success stories last year, it's important to recognise what a struggle it was for many series. Stricter restrictions in Scotland reduced the Scottish Motor Racing Club to just three half-day events, while only one, tiny trial meeting was held in Wales all year. Four English categories had average grids in single figures, and the one that featured the largest decline was the Ferrari Challenge UK (down 53% to an average of nine cars). And that's perhaps no surprise given that it's a one-make championship for one of the most expensive machines in club motorsport. Some of the BRSCC's manufacturer-backed Caterham championships also found it tough. Academy numbers were up, but figures were down for the other divisions.

"The Caterhams have, in a way, been a victim of their own success," says Daly. "They've introduced 50 new drivers a year into the motorsport arena and then in four years' time there will be 200 new drivers in motorsport all having a Caterham and they've got to race somewhere. COVID was one problem and the second problem was the marketplace being diluted slightly. We weren't the prime choice for racing your Caterham, and some of that came down to people wanting to race at other venues or wanting to race abroad.

"This year we've been working hard on the regulations, like the change in tyre specification for the National Caterham UK championship, putting slick tyres in now, which makes them a couple of seconds a lap quicker. Subscriptions are higher and Caterham are continuing to sell brand-new 420Rs."

The BRSCC is taking a similar approach with other categories, taking stock of the situation and looking at ways to improve. For example, its main Fiesta senior series had another season where grids averaged 15 cars – a far cry from its glory years. But the introduction of a new Mk7 ST turbo machine for this year is set to provide a boost. "A lot of work has gone into that, making sure we've got the right specification of car, making sure the tyres are the right specification," adds Daly, who is expecting entries to rise.

Another example of this modification of regulations can be found



with the CCRC. While its Hot Hatch Challenge flourished – again, possibly because it's not a championship – and Formula Ford and GT entries were up, its Saloons series suffered one of the largest decreases (43%). For this year, the post-2000 age limit on cars has been scrapped, opening the category up to a wider pool of competitors.

"We're hoping that will make a difference," says Davies, who believes the Saloons series was hardest hit by restrictions on spectators and entertaining sponsors at meetings. "People have got cars hanging around that possibly wouldn't have previously been allowed, and there were no particular objections from existing competitors. We would like to go back to those days of 42 starters and a couple of reserves."

The COVID-19 situation meant there were no shortage of challenges faced by the clubs and competitors, both practical and financial. They had to get used to new administrative processes and operate with the lingering threat of events being cancelled at a moment's notice. "As a driver, there were a lot of challenges because you had to register all your safety equipment online, and remember to do that and sign on and download the instructions online," says Daly. "That was alien to a lot of drivers, especially if they were part of a team [that would normally deal with the administration side]. As a club, there was also the challenge of balancing the books. We'd got 12 months of overheads but only four months of racing, rather than 12 months of overheads and six or seven months of racing."

Overcoming those challenges certainly wasn't easy, but there were some positives, such as the pre-event signing-on and scrutineering, and removal of reams of paperwork as processes moved online. "Competitors weren't expected to push their car at seven o'clock on a cold winter Saturday morning across to the scrutineering bay – that was a huge sigh of relief!" adds Daly.

Ultimately, the entire club racing community pulled together and came up with innovative solutions that enabled at least part of a season to take place. "Everybody is taking a very responsible and realistic view of the crisis," believes Davies. "As passionate as we are about motor racing, we're talking about people's health, people's lives and people's livelihoods and those must come first."

As we all face fresh uncertainty in the build-up to the 2021 season over the coming months, that message will be important once again. Last year proved what was possible under the most challenging of circumstances, and gives at least some cause for optimism for what lies ahead.



While Caterham Academy numbers were up, other classes struggled

OTHERS

CATEGORY	AVERAGE 2020	AVERAGE 2019	2019 TO 2020 CHANGE
Monoposto**	37	45	-18%
Super Saloons & Tin Tops & Intermarque*	31	N/A	N/A
Monoposto Tiedeman Trophy	29	N/A	N/A
Track Attack	27	26	+4%
Morgan Challenge	26	24	+8%
Northern Saloons & Sports Cars	25	33	-24%
Mini Se7en*	22	26	-15%
Porsche Club	20	23	-13%
Mini Miglia*	19	21	-10%
Pirelli Ferrari Formula Classic	18	19	-5%
Modified Fords*	17	N/A	N/A

NOTE All figures only include series that had at least three race events. * shared a grid with another series at one or more rounds, but figures are based on each series individually. ** split over two or more different grids

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IF WE COULD GO BACK TO ANY POINT IN TIME...



Here's another fix of fantasy fun from members of the Autosport editorial team. To amend the words of Cher's hit record, if we could turn back time, if we could find a way, these are the motorsport events our writers wish they could have witnessed in person.

The reports from past issues of this magazine and grainy video footage might very well whet the appetite, but nothing comes close to attending (or, in one case, reattending) live sporting events first-hand.

From epic wet-weather endurance drives and record-setting road races to the arrival of grand prix stars, here's what would be on our bucket list should we ever stumble across Dr Emmett Brown and his DeLorean.



1996 MONTEREY GRAND PRIX

The year is 1996, and it's a hot, dry day in Monterey, California. The intensity of a down-to-the-wire CART title fight between Jimmy Vasser and Michael Andretti is raging at Laguna Seca – but the race victory battle between Alex Zanardi and Bryan Herta makes for an even more tantalising prospect. I wish I'd been watching at the Corkscrew on the final lap for *that* pass...

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



1988 ITALIAN GRAND PRIX

Plonk someone who hates football in a packed stadium and they'll soon come to their senses. Atmosphere is everything. So, what must it have been like among fans at the first Italian GP held after the death of Enzo Ferrari, as the team scored a 1-2 to call time on McLaren's imperious winning streak? Hairs on end. Oh, and for good measure, the lesser-spotted Alfa Romeo 164 ProCar ran two demo laps.

MATT KEW



1995 RAC RALLY (RALLY GB)

Who could resist the World Rally Championship at one of its peaks? With Colin McRae locked in a titanic battle against Subaru team-mate Carlos Sainz Sr, the Lanark lad's exploits captivated the public like never before. Oh, to be nestled in the Chester Racecourse for McRae's title celebrations led by his donuts and the bagpiper.

HAYDN COBB



1979 FRENCH GRAND PRIX

Forget *Thunderbirds* or *Thomas the Tank Engine*, one of my most-watched VHS tapes when I was growing up was Murray Walker's *Formula 1 Celebration*. My favourite moment was Gilles Villeneuve and Rene Arnoux's breathtaking battle at Dijon in the 1979 French GP. Watching it on video was good. But to have seen those two pushing beyond the boundaries in their scrap for second place in person would've been something else.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



AN1IMAGES/NEANDER

1997 BATHURST 1000

This was touring car heaven. The best Super Touring drivers and teams from Britain against Australia's elite at Mount Panorama. Held at the height of a tin-top war between Super Touring and the local V8 formula, the factory BMW 320i of Geoff and David Brabham saw off the European challenge. The victory was declared after on-the-road winners Paul Morris/Craig Baird were disqualified for exceeding driving time in this controversial epic.

TOM HOWARD



1957 GERMAN GRAND PRIX

Lewis Hamilton referred to him as the 'Godfather of Formula 1', but was Juan Manuel Fangio the greatest driver of all time? Going back to the 1957 German GP and El Maestro's greatest moment – chasing down a 48-second gap to the Ferraris of Peter Collins and Mike Hawthorn around the Nordschleife – would probably help sway the debate.

STEFAN MACKLEY



Fans celebrate Gerhard Berger and Michele Alboreto's 1-2 for Ferrari in 1988 Italian GP



1999 SNETTERTON BTCC NIGHT RACE

There's nothing like night racing to get the blood pumping. But it's one thing in a 24-hour race at Le Mans, Spa or Daytona when there's knowledge of how long is left, and quite another in a 20-minute sprint with some of the best tin-top drivers in the world banging against each other. I don't imagine many will choose Snetterton but, as a place in time, the British Touring Car night races in 1999 and 2000 with the Super Tourers would take some beating.

JAMES NEWBOLD



1977 BRITISH GRAND PRIX

I was there anyway with my dad, but I was only 10 – to travel back with the knowledge of today would be to appreciate it even more. Silverstone was a laid-back place, grass banks everywhere. Pre-qualifying gave us a new sensation named Gilles Villeneuve; qualifying the Renault turbo; there were two Formula 3 heats and a final. And the sun drenched us.

MARCUS SIMMONS



1970 BRANDS HATCH 1000KM

The Silver Arrows at Donington Park in 1937, the 1969 Italian GP slipstreamer and the dramatic 1986 Australian GP title-decider were strong candidates, but it has to be the 1970 Brands Hatch 1000Km. Was Pedro Rodriguez's victory in the Gulf-liveried Porsche 917K the greatest wet-weather drive in history? I'd like the chance to find out.

KEVIN TURNER

YouTube youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Lola is a byword for success, having assembled a string of single-seater and sportscar winners. But its lacklustre Formula 1 efforts buck the trend. Perhaps a return to the grand prix fold for the 2010 season could have helped amend the record in time. But, in this episode of the *Lost F1 Teams* series, Autosport explains why the bid failed to come together. **Go to bit.ly/LolaGP**

AUTOSPORT PLUS bit.ly/ToyotaAS

The ground-up refresh behind Toyota's new Le Mans challenger

Toyota's new GR010 contender for the WEC has little in common with its LMP1 TS050 predecessor. But within the confines of the scaled-back Hypercar rules, the latest challenger will be no less formidable

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

24 Hours of Daytona
IMSA SportsCar
Round 1/12
Daytona, Florida, USA
30-31 January

Michelin Pilot Challenge
Round 1/10
Daytona, Florida, USA
29 January

F3 Asian Championship
Round 1/4
Dubai Autodrome, UAE
29-30 January



Toyota Racing Series
Round 2/3
Hampton Downs, New Zealand
30 January


SAMSON
GOODYEAR



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Awaiting practice for the 1979 United States Grand Prix West at Long Beach, Jan Lammers sits in the cockpit of his Shadow-Ford DN9, resplendent in the fiery feline livery inspired by sponsor Samson, the Dutch rolling-tobacco company. Lammers qualified in 14th place, while team-mate (and fellow F1 rookie) Elio de Angelis was back in 22nd, his car sporting a rather less flamboyant plain blue colour scheme. At the start Lammers's car was struck from behind by Patrick Tambay's McLaren-Ford M28 and he had to pit for a new rear wing; he retired later in the race with broken suspension. De Angelis was seventh of nine classified finishers, two laps down.

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IN DEFENCE OF...

‘FERNANDO IS FASTER THAN YOU’

Delivered in his broad Tees Valley accent, Rob Smedley’s message to Felipe Massa in the 2010 German Grand Prix would come to be a defining point in recent Formula 1 history. When Smedley informed Massa that “Fernando is faster than you”, prompting the Brazilian to slow and allow his team-mate into the lead, it led to outrage throughout the paddock.

Red Bull team boss Christian Horner called it “the clearest team order I’ve ever seen” and said it was “wrong for the sport”. BBC pundit Eddie Jordan went as far as saying Ferrari “should be ashamed” for breaking the rules against team orders, which would ultimately be removed following the incident.

But as controversial as it may have been, it was the right thing to do. The on-track scenario had prompted Ferrari to act, as it feared third-placed Sebastian Vettel would catch both Massa and Alonso, and Alonso had already called it “ridiculous” that he could not get ahead. He was clearly quicker; the fashion in which he pulled away from Massa after the switch proved as much.

But more important was the wider championship picture. Alonso was always the Ferrari driver who stood the better chance of winning the title. He had arrived at Hockenheim 47 points back from leader Lewis Hamilton, making it vital for him to claw back points given the three-team, five-driver title fight that was unfolding.

While it was harsh on Massa and ignited fury from Ferrari’s rivals, the move was justified by the form that followed. Alonso would go on to record three wins and three further podiums in the final eight races, ultimately falling four points short of the title. The win at Hockenheim was the turning point in his title challenge.

Team orders may have been outlawed, but they still existed to put the squad’s result first. Massa had been denied victory at Interlagos in 2007 in order to help Kimi Raikkonen’s title bid. Yes, that was the title decider, but he was realistically out of the points race in 2010, making it similar.

It was cruel, just a year after Massa’s horrible crash in Hungary, but Ferrari had to act in its best interests and help the driver who could become world champion — not the one who, as well as he may have driven that day, could not.

LUKE SMITH



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Track Day - Brands Hatch	March 4th
Silverstone National	March 20th
Brands Hatch Indy	April 24-25th
Oulton Park International	May 22nd
Silverstone GP Circuit	June 12-13th
Castle Combe	July 3-4th
Donington	July 17-18th
Snetterton	September 4-5th
Silverstone National	October 2nd
Estoril Classic - Portugal	October 10th



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