

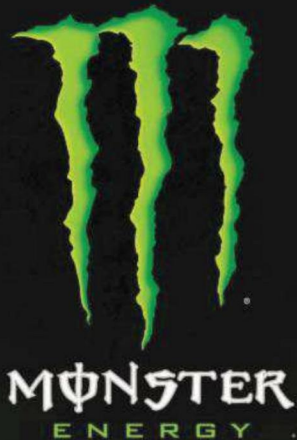
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“I’m more of a fan of having the rally on Friday/Saturday, the party on Saturday then go home Sunday”

EIGHT-TIME WORLD RALLY CHAMPION SEBASTIEN LOEB ISN'T KEEN ON WRC EVENTS BEING ANY LONGER

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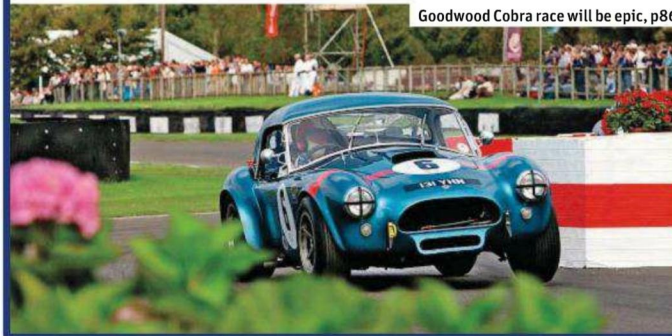
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Aussie thriller points to a classic season ahead



WHAT A START! F1 2012 LIVED UP TO pre-season expectations with an Australian Grand Prix that more than hinted at the prospect of a classic season to come.

Jenson Button laid down a marker with a faultless drive to victory, one that certainly popped Lewis Hamilton's bubble.

But Sebastian Vettel's charge to second place shows that the double champ is in no rush to hand over his crown. That move on Nico Rosberg once again demonstrated what a great racer he is, and when Red Bull gets on top of its new-car issues we can look forward to some thrilling battles with the McLaren drivers.

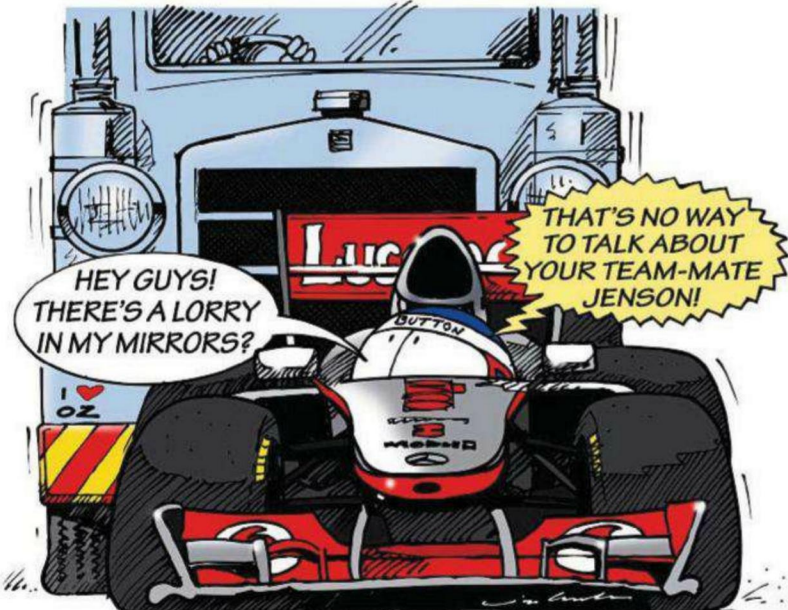
Fernando Alonso did an amazing job to be best of the rest in a Ferrari that's clearly struggling, while both Mercedes and Lotus have a lot more pace than they were able to show in the race.

Add into that mix a resurgent Williams, a couple of cracking rookies at Toro Rosso and a Sauber that's as easy on its tyres as ever and we have all the ingredients for another cracking race in Malaysia this weekend.

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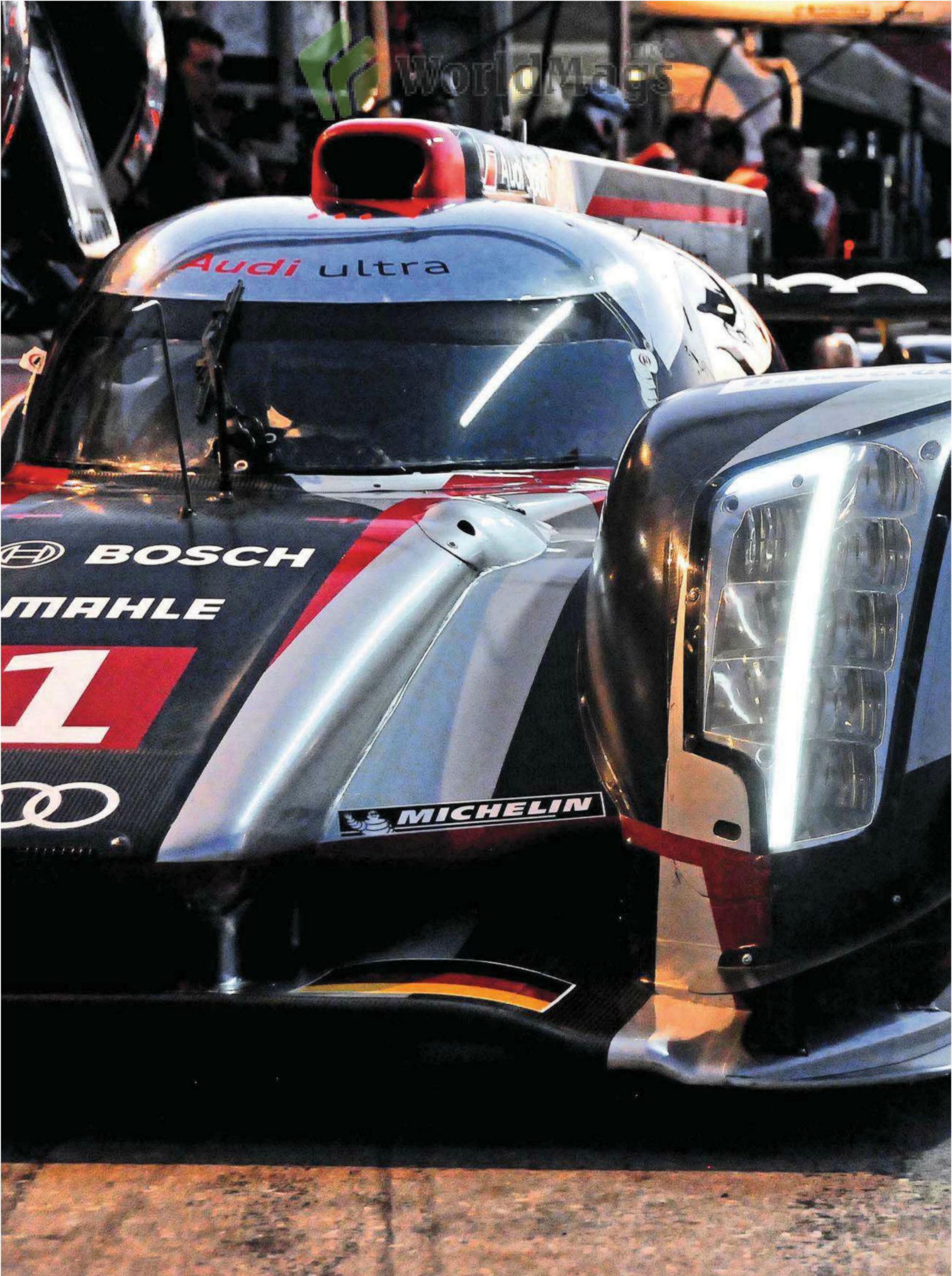
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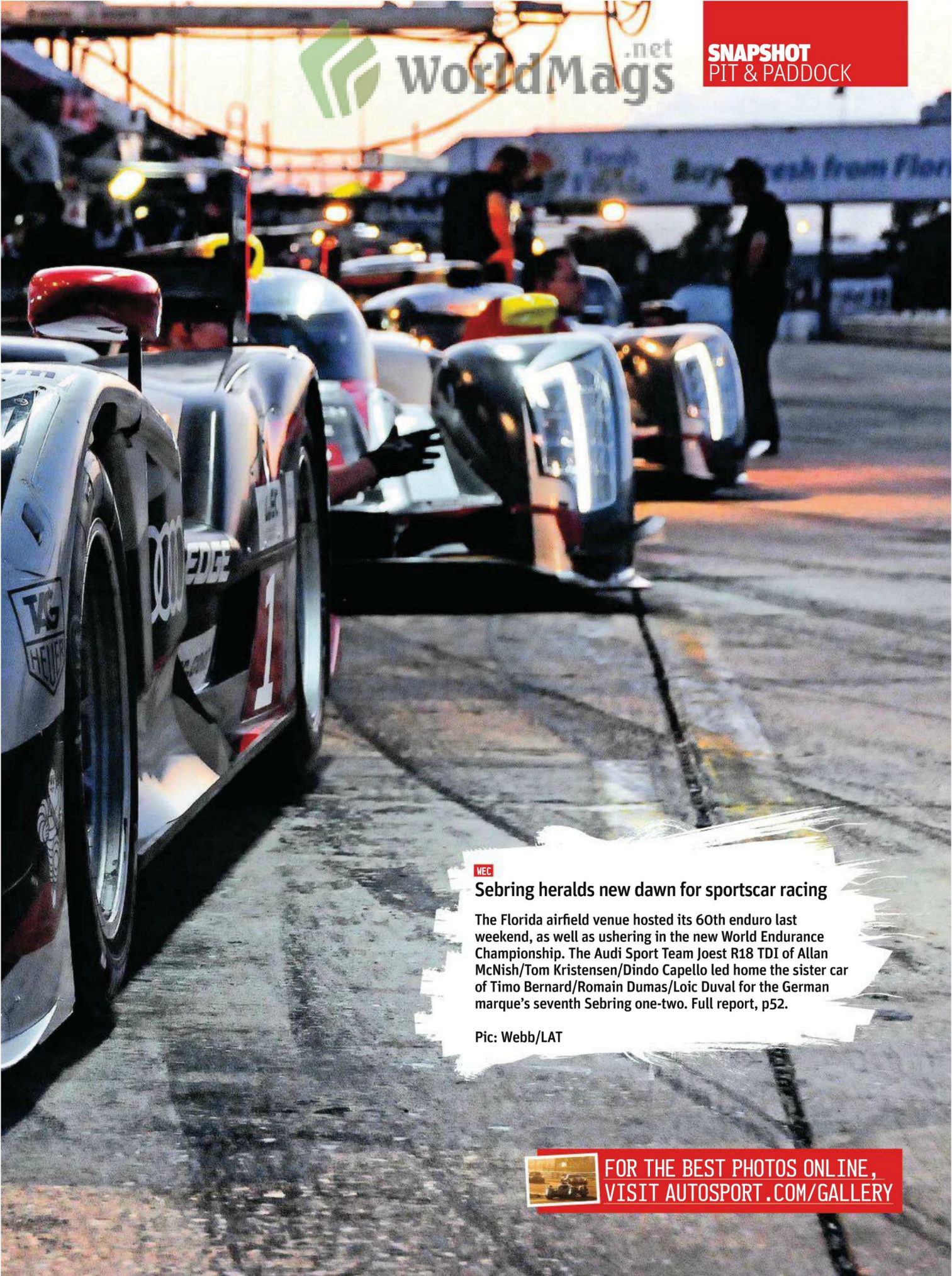
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Sebring heralds new dawn for sportscar racing

The Florida airfield venue hosted its 60th enduro last weekend, as well as ushering in the new World Endurance Championship. The Audi Sport Team Joest R18 TDI of Allan McNish/Tom Kristensen/Dindo Capello led home the sister car of Timo Bernard/Romain Dumas/Loic Duval for the German marque's seventh Sebring one-two. Full report, p52.

Pic: Webb/LAT



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Front-row lockout preceded great race

More to come from McLaren

It was a comfortable win in Melbourne – and Button didn't even have to push the limits. By EDD STRAW

Is wheel of fortune in Button's favour?



McLaren's new MP4-27 could have even more pace than it showed in last weekend's Australian Grand Prix, as Jenson Button got his season off to a perfect start with a dominant win.

Both Button and team-mate Lewis Hamilton, who finished third, were forced to take it easy in the race because of a fuel miscalculation. Hamilton was unable to overtake the Red Bull of reigning world champion Sebastian Vettel for second in the closing stages, but even so it appears that McLaren has the edge over Red Bull on race pace.

The McLaren's strength over the Red Bull during pre-season testing appeared to be in high-speed corners, so to dominate

at a relatively slow circuit such as Albert Park was viewed as a very positive sign by the team.

McLaren team principal Martin Whitmarsh told AUTOSPORT: "I thought we would be competitive but I don't think anyone knew."

"We're in for a massively competitive season, and if we don't continue to improve our car at a good rate we will get overhauled. But we have made a reasonable start and we would like to keep the pressure on and do the job in Malaysia [scene of this weekend's second round]."

McLaren has an aggressive series of upgrades planned for the coming months, which team insiders are confident will enable it to keep pace with work from Red Bull, Mercedes and Lotus. The aerodynamic package McLaren introduced halfway through the final Barcelona test delivered the expected improvement and indicates that the team is on the right path.

RED BULL STRUGGLES

McLaren fears that the Red Bull RB8 is also yet to show its true pace.

The upgrade package that the

Milton Keynes team ran in the second half of the Barcelona test appears to have created some balance problems. While Vettel and team-mate Mark Webber struggled with understeer and all-round grip in Melbourne, the package is reckoned to provide an overall increase of downforce. A series of tweaks is expected at the coming races to extract that performance.

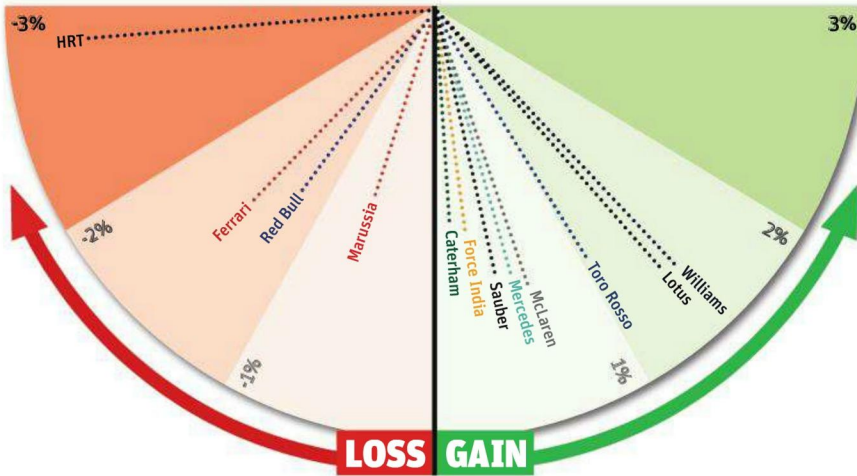
Even so, it appears that McLaren is at least on a par with Red Bull.

Last year the team struggled for single-lap pace in qualifying, and this often allowed Vettel to control the race. But in Melbourne, Button and Hamilton gave McLaren its first front-row lockout since the European Grand Prix of August 2009.

While Red Bull showed improved pace relative to McLaren in the race, Vettel did not have the straight-line speed to attack Button in the closing stages, during which the Briton was conserving fuel.

If McLaren can repeat its qualifying performance at Sepang this weekend, it will again be difficult for the Red Bulls to get

SWINGOMETER: 2012 v 2011



BASELINE: ABSOLUTE PACE

An analysis of car performance based upon each team's fastest lap time over the Australian Grand Prix weekend relative to last year's 19-race average shows that Red Bull lost almost as much ground as Ferrari.

For this calculation, McLaren is taken as the reference because it had the fastest car, so its performance is rated at 100 per cent. As McLaren's average last year was 100.577 per cent, we use the 0.577 per cent figure

as an offset to get a score for the other teams as their outright performance deficit last year was relative to Red Bull, not McLaren.

This prevents the figures becoming distorted, yet still gives an accurate indication of how each team's form has swung relative to the outright pace.

This shows that Red Bull has lost 1.399 per cent relative to last year, second only to Ferrari among the serious teams. At the other end of the spectrum, Lotus

and Williams have made big improvements relative to their average pace last year.

As Red Bull set the standard with exhaust-blown diffusers, you might expect it to be hit hardest by the rule changes. But according to AUTOSPORT technical correspondent Gary Anderson: "Ferrari reckoned they would benefit greatly from this rule change. If that's the case then they have really messed up with this year's car."

"My decision will be based on more than just the car. It's the whole package"
Lewis Hamilton on his McLaren future

ahead, given their deficit on straight-line speed. A second consecutive victory for the Mercedes-powered team would suggest that it has lived up to its promise to produce a car capable of fighting for the title.

HAMILTON'S FUTURE

McLaren's strong start to the 2012 campaign appears to boost the chances of Hamilton signing a contract to remain at the Woking team beyond this season.

But his sound beating at the hands of Button left the 2008 world champion downbeat after the race.

He described his performance as "a pretty poor standard compared to some others" and vowed to refocus on this weekend's Malaysian GP. In the build-up to the Melbourne race weekend he confirmed that the team's early-season performance would play a role in whether he would sign a new contract, but that there were other factors.

"My decision will be based on more than just the car," Hamilton said. "When you make a decision on your future it's the whole package. It's something that has to be thought about at the right time."

Hamilton stressed the need for consistency after last year's wild ups and downs, but it seems that re-establishing himself as the team's lead driver could also figure in his decision-making process.

Whitmarsh added: "Lewis clearly won't like to have been beaten by Jenson or Sebastian. But if he ever gets used to being beaten, he won't be the Lewis we all love and admire."

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

EDD STRAW
F1 EDITOR

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Few doubt that on a single, balls-out lap, Lewis Hamilton has an edge on Jenson Button. But as we saw on Sunday, that's no longer enough. The ban on refuelling and the arrival of less-durable Pirelli rubber has widened the skill set needed of a grand prix driver. Hamilton has been found wanting relative to his exceptional team-mate.

Some characterise the Hamilton way of doing things – drive fast, go all out to win – as the 'right' way. There's almost an anti-intellectual stigma to what Button does, combining his prodigious turn of speed with a bigger-picture view that allows his ego to take being beaten in qualifying.

Those who see it that way are wrong. Grand prix racing has always been about the thinking driver and the current rules package has moved the sport away from being a glorified sprint race.

We can conclude that McLaren has provided a car that can fight for the title. The question is, which driver?

Based on the evidence of Melbourne, and of last season, maybe it's Button who will lead the line. It's not that Hamilton's performance in Australia was poor, far from it. But the race has proved once again that he must master the cerebral side of F1. If he harness that to his searing speed, he could be unstoppable.

At the moment, Button looks to be the man to lead the line at McLaren. How Hamilton reacts could prove career-defining.



Button v Hamilton will be fascinating



Last weekend's Australian Grand Prix was only the fourth time McLaren has locked out the front row for a season opener. The last time was in 2000, with Mika Hakkinen leading David Coulthard away from the start for the third year in succession.



Vettel gives vain chase to Button

Race begins to copy Mercedes

Efforts from rival teams to get latest aero trick banned look set to fail. Now they need to make their own



Other teams have queried Merc wing

Mercedes' rivals face a battle to clone the DRS-activated f-duct device the team used at last weekend's Australian Grand Prix.

FIA technical delegate Charlie Whiting has confirmed that he regards it as legal, although some claim that it contravenes article 3.15 of the technical regulations, which states that 'drivers are no longer allowed to do things to alter the aerodynamics using the car's body parts'.

The design stalls the front wing when the DRS is deployed by exposing a hole in the rear-wing endplate that is connected by ducting to the front wing (see below). While this is activated by the driver, the DRS is exempt from article 3.15.

But some rival teams have asked Whiting to issue a technical directive to the effect that this is not legal.

They argue that the terms of the DRS exemption refers to parts "necessary" for its deployment, and that the hole in the endplate, which is close to the rear-wing actuator, is not necessary for the DRS.

But teams are prepared for the possibility that they will have to incorporate the system into their cars. While of negligible benefit in the race, save for in the DRS zones, it is of significant advantage in qualifying – AUTOSPORT technical correspondent Gary Anderson estimates that the Mercedes design could easily be worth 0.2 seconds per lap on an average circuit.

MERCEDES DRS/F-DUCT SYSTEM

➔ The Mercedes F1 W03's rear wing features a mechanism that is believed to divert air from the rear wing to the front when the DRS flap is used. This has the effect of partly stalling the front wing for further straight-line speed.

When the DRS flap activates, it exposes a hole in the inner endplate that is routed through hollows in the car. Given that driver-activated aerodynamic stalling devices are not permitted, some rivals argue this is illegal. Mercedes counters, saying the ducting system is only triggered by the driver activating the DRS wing, and not by the driver directly.

AUTOSPORT TECHNICAL CORRESPONDENT GARY ANDERSON:

"The holes in the endplates are closed when the DRS is closed [inset, right]. When the DRS opens it sucks air through that hole and down to the front wing,

reducing its performance. This does three things:

- 1) It balances the car a little better, meaning DRS could be used through corners that were marginal before;
- 2) There will be a small reduction in the front wing's drag;
- 3) Most importantly, it will reduce the rake of the car in a straight line. Activating the DRS wing takes between 150-200kg of load off the rear wing, increasing the car's rake, which creates a lot more drag. So by reducing the front wing's performance, you won't get that big increase in rake and that will allow more air beneath the car and reduce the drag. I would expect them to be getting an extra 4-6km/h from the reduction in rake.

The system will need to be sealed at the nose end. You may need a restrictor, varying the effect from track to track. You don't want to lose as much at some tracks as others."

"I would be expecting them to be getting an extra 4-6km/h from the reduction in rake"

Gary Anderson

Wing gives Merc huge DRS boost



The ease of incorporating the system depends on the layout of cars. Firstly, teams would have to modify their DRS systems to have an actuator placed next to the endplate, rather than in the centre of the wing, which has become the trend.

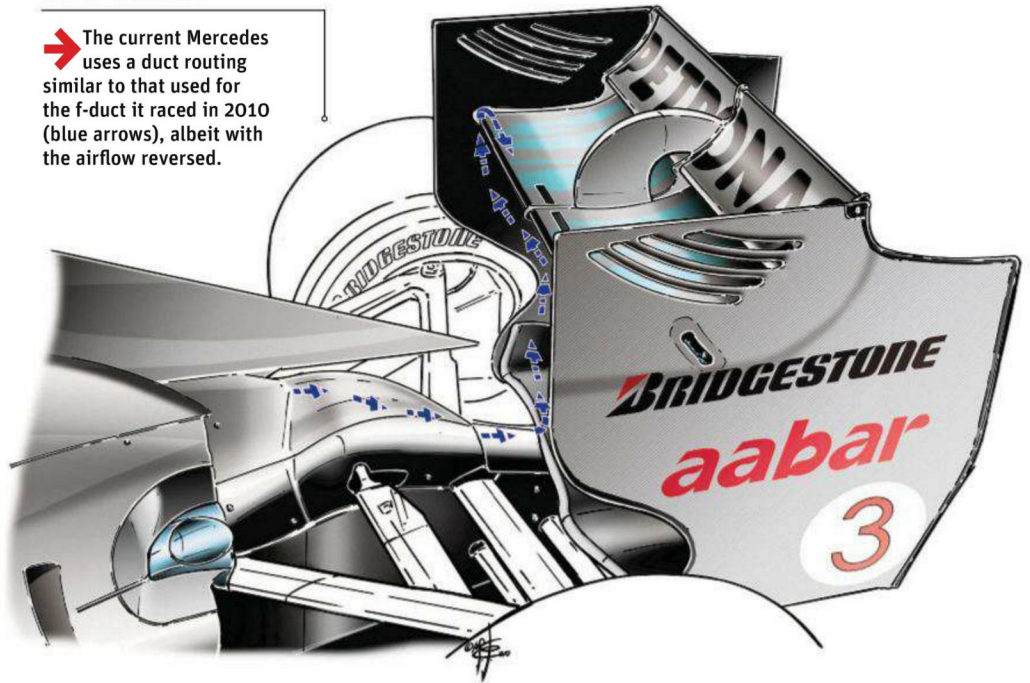
Secondly, teams would have to find a way to run ducting to the front wing, which in some cases may require a new chassis to be built. This could also lead to additional crash tests being undertaken. Aside from those potential pitfalls, the system should be relatively straightforward to make work.

If the FIA does choose to take any action, the potential cost of incorporating such a design could prove to be a compelling argument. But, under the current wording of the regulations, it appears that there is a strong case that it is legal.

A wing design tried by Mercedes at the last Barcelona test is, however, likely to be deemed illegal (see bottom right).

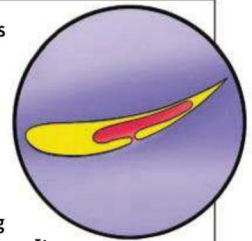
2010 CONCEPT

→ The current Mercedes uses a duct routing similar to that used for the f-duct it raced in 2010 (blue arrows), albeit with the airflow reversed.



DUCTED REAR-WING PROFILE

→ This was run by Mercedes during the Barcelona test, but is widely regarded as contravening the regulations. It was not run in Melbourne.

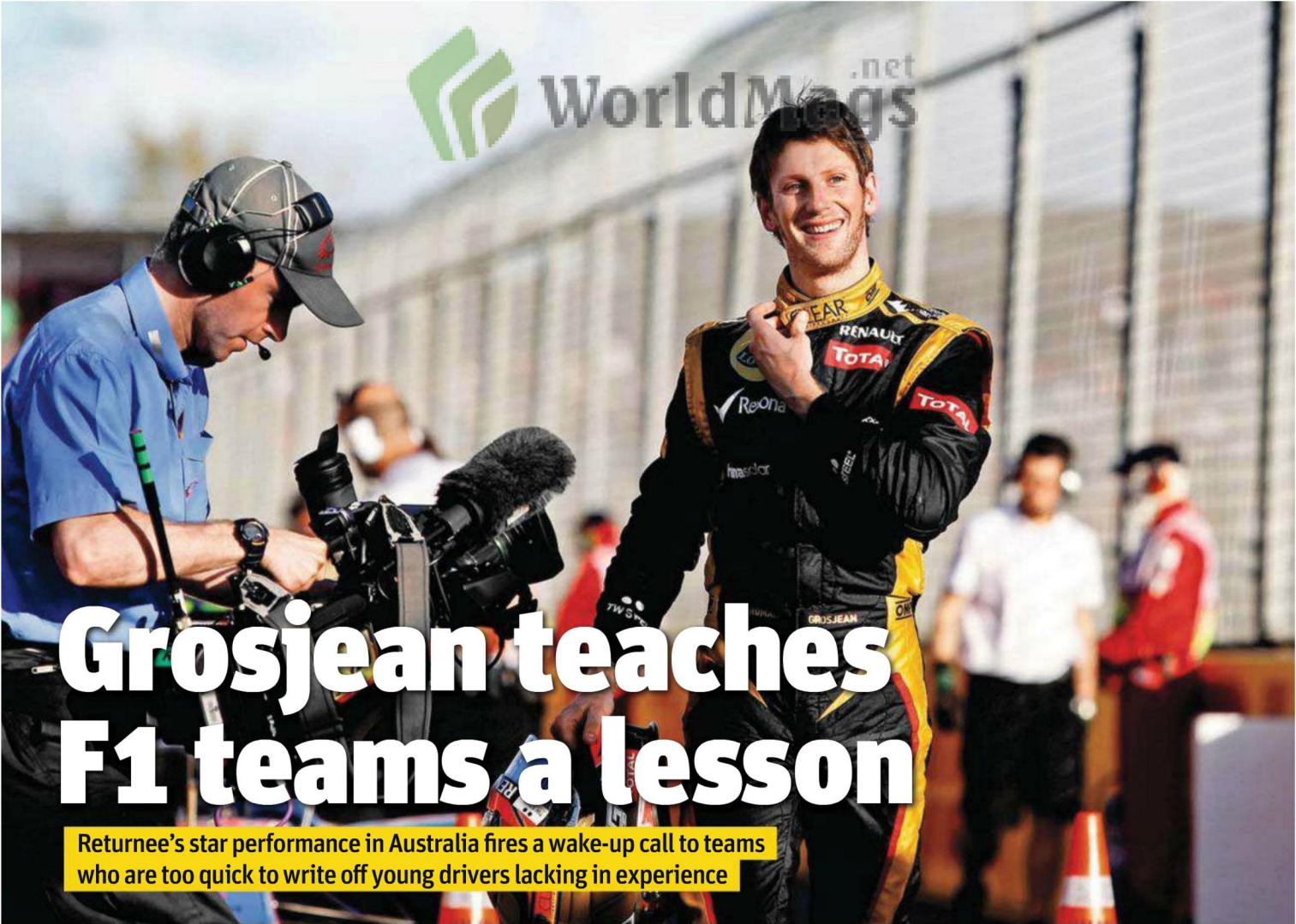


GARY ANDERSON: "You'd love to put a three-element rear wing on the car, but the regulations limit you to two. If you look at the side profile of the rear wing, with an additional slot it can be made a more extreme shape on the underside, giving you more downforce before it detaches. You make that underside work harder. This gets you that advantage with what is still ostensibly a two-element wing."

It also has to be a closed section – and that's why I don't believe this is legal. To ban the use of f-duct-style rear wings and the mechanisms that allowed what was effectively a three-piece wing to be made out of a two-piece, the FIA introduced the 100-degree concave radius rule, applying to the curvature of any surface exposed to the external air stream. Using an internal part of the wing exposed by a slot to create what is effectively a third element of the rear wing would clearly violate this rule.

→ P42 GP DRAWING BOARD





Grosjean teaches F1 teams a lesson

Returnee's star performance in Australia fires a wake-up call to teams who are too quick to write off young drivers lacking in experience

Formula 1 teams can learn a valuable lesson from Romain Grosjean's second coming as a grand prix driver, according to Lotus team principal Eric Boullier. Grosjean was discarded after his seven starts without a point alongside Fernando Alonso at Renault in 2009. But the 25-year-old proved his ability with third on the grid in Melbourne. He was unable to capitalise on it, his race ending after contact with Pastor Maldonado on lap two.

Boullier, who was key to

Grosjean's return to F1 via the World GT Championship, Auto GP and GP2, warned that the sport needs to be wary of throwing drivers in at the deep end without adequate preparation.

"F1 is very exclusive and very competitive and it's difficult for a young driver to come in straight from GP2 and perform straight away with no testing," Boullier told AUTOSPORT. "Romain is the perfect example as he was thrown into F1 in the middle of 2009. It's a very good lesson for F1 to learn. You

need to find a way to give rookie drivers more experience before F1."

The breakout success of Lewis Hamilton in 2007, when he won four races and came within a point of winning the title, transformed

the expectations of rookies.

However, this was before the ban on in-season testing was introduced in 2009. While Hamilton had more than 7000 miles under his belt in an F1 car prior to his debut, drivers coming into the sport after the draconian testing restrictions came in have been heavily handicapped. By way of comparison, Vitaly Petrov, who is now in his third season, has only 3617 miles of testing to date spread over three winters, having come into F1 in 2010. As Boullier points out, it's



Grosjean's race lasted only two laps

SINK OR SWIM

The differing fortunes of recent newcomers to the Formula 1 grid

Three who shone...

KAMUI KOBAYASHI

Debut: Brazil 2009
Age on debut: 23
Pre-debut days of F1 testing: 23 (incl one GP Friday)

Faltering single-seater career revived by two star drives for Toyota at the end of 2009. The Japanese racer has since established himself at Sauber, where he is now in his third season as a full-time driver.



NICO HULKENBERG

Debut: Bahrain 2010
Age on debut: 22
Pre-debut days of F1 testing: 27

Made a shaky start with Williams but came on strong as rookie year progressed. Season culminated with stunning pole position for Brazilian GP, and only financial demands forced him to spend a year on the sidelines in 2011.



PAUL DI RESTA

Debut: Australia 2011
Age on debut: 24
Pre-debut days of F1 testing: 17 (incl eight GP Fridays)

Handled the switch from DTM to F1 well, emerging as the standout rookie of 2011 having been patiently groomed by Force India. Now, alongside Hulkenberg, he forms one of the most exciting driver line-ups on the grid.





“What happened in 2009 was a challenge and it was great experience. I wasn’t ready. Now, I am”

Romain Grosjean

Grosjean: all smiles after qualifying P3



Grosjean says he is ready for F1 this time round

was the wrong time for me. I was not ready for it. Now, I am.”

While Grosjean had little F1 running in the two years after his first foray with Renault, the experience he picked up in categories like GP2 has stood him in good stead. With so little testing, the trend must now increasingly go towards drivers spending more time in GP2 so that they are ready for F1.

Ex-Scuderia Toro Rosso driver Jaime Alguersuari, who turns 22 tomorrow (Friday) is the most extreme example of a driver damaged by being thrown in at the deep end. He made his debut with no F1 testing at all in 2009 and believes that he was still improving after that tough start last year before being dropped by Red Bull.

“I was thrown into F1 with no testing and I had to learn there,” Alguersuari told AUTOSPORT. “This is not a common thing or the best thing for drivers. I came out of F1 at my best time physically, mentally and technically. I did learn and grow up in F1 and if I had stayed, it would have been better.”

Alguersuari is now chasing a return to F1 and has taken up a commentary job with BBC Radio 5 Live. But thanks to his premature promotion, he now faces the possibility of his grand prix career being over at just 21.

Pastor Maldonado, who acquitted himself well in a trying first F1

season with Williams last year reckons that his long GP2 career, which stretched from 2007-2010 and culminated in his winning the title, meant that he was ready to graduate.

“It meant that I was ready last year even though I didn’t run a lot in winter testing,” said Maldonado. “I did something like 1000km, which is nothing. After three races where I didn’t finish because of car issues, when we got to Europe I was there [on the pace].”

“It was important for me to have more experience in GP2. Hamilton nearly won the world championship in his first year, but he had so much running before the season. He was not a real rookie.”

Force India driver Paul di Resta also benefitted from coming into F1 when he was a little older. The Scot was last year’s standout rookie after spending four years racing in the DTM, a series in which he learned to work with a major manufacturer and develop machinery in a way that drivers can’t in GP2.

“Everyone is slightly different in how they mature,” said di Resta. “I can only speak for myself and when I came into F1 I was a bit more mature. Doing four years in DTM certainly wasn’t a negative for me.”



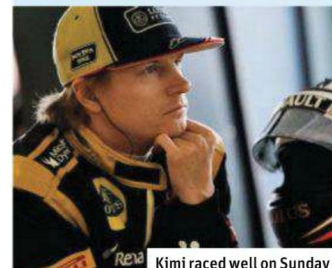
Raikkonen back on the money

Kimi Raikkonen proved that he is already capable of fighting for podium finishes on his Formula 1 comeback after a fighting drive in the Australian Grand Prix.

The 2007 world champion came home seventh, having started 17th after a communication problem in qualifying led to him aborting a lap that could have been good enough to make Q2. He scrapped that effort because he believed he had time for one more attempt. Despite spending much of the race mired in the battle for minor points placings, he showed flashes of the pace needed to get into the mix for the podium.

Lotus technical director James Allison believes that the speed of both Raikkonen and teammate Romain Grosjean has shown that the E20’s testing pace was representative, although the team felt that circumstances prevented a better result in Melbourne.

“I’m pleased for Kimi taking some points after a difficult qualifying,” Allison told AUTOSPORT. “Our performance has shown that the podium is certainly in the upper reaches of what this car can do.”



Kimi raced well on Sunday

experience, not merely age, that decides if a driver is ready. World champion Sebastian Vettel achieved his success after making his debut at 19 – but only after plenty of testing (2332 miles).

While Grosjean’s performance level in 2009 was better than most recognised, he made himself unpopular in the team with his approach. He is in no doubt that he was not mature enough.

“What happened in 2009 was a challenge and it was great experience,” said Grosjean. “But it

Three who didn’t...

ROMAIN GROSJEAN

Debut:	Europe 2009
Age on debut:	23
Pre-debut days of F1 testing:	3

Seven starts at the end of 2009 nearly ruined his career, forcing him to drop back down the ladder to rebuild his reputation. After two years away, he starred in qualifying for his return last weekend in Australia.



JAIME ALGUERSUARI

Debut:	Hungary 2009
Age on debut:	19
Pre-debut days of F1 testing:	0

Did well not to humiliate himself in his early races considering he’d never driven a Formula 1 car round a corner before his mid-season debut. Made progress at Toro Rosso in 2010/11, but was dropped last winter at the age of 21.



BRUNO SENNA

Debut:	Bahrain 2010
Age on debut:	26
Pre-debut days of F1 testing:	2

Struggled in a dire car in his rookie campaign, and had to go back to square one for 2011 by taking a reserve-driver role with Renault. Looked more impressive in eight starts last year, and now trying to establish himself at Williams.





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THIS WEEK IN F1



Last Argentinian GP, at Buenos Aires in 1998

ARGENTINA HOPEFUL OF 2013 RACE

Argentinian president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner revealed last week that her government is planning to bring Formula 1 back to the country. She hopes to secure a three-year deal to revive the Argentinian Grand Prix, which ran as part of the world championship 20 times between 1953 and '98. The mooted race would be held at the Mar del Plata seaside resort, 250 miles south-east of Buenos Aires, on a street track along the seafront. The plan is to run the race in November as part of a double-header with the Brazilian Grand Prix.

CONCORDE DEALS TO GIVE TEAMS SWEETENERS

Discussions over the 2013 Concorde Agreement have moved on in recent weeks, with Bernie Ecclestone believed to have made offers to six teams including Red Bull and Ferrari, who would benefit from preferential deals. This is part of a deal that could lead to CVC Capital Partners floating F1.

READ DIETER RENCKEN ON
AUTOSPORT.COM PLUS

Paffett takes Force India role

McLaren reserve and DTM star Gary Paffett acted as Force India's understudy for last weekend's Australian Grand Prix. Designated third driver Jules Bianchi was absent testing ahead of his Formula Renault 3.5 campaign.



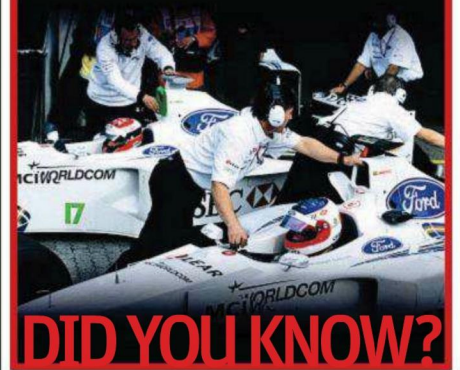
KOVALAINEN DOCKED FIVE PLACES ON GRID

Caterham's Heikki Kovalainen goes into this weekend's Malaysian Grand Prix weekend with a five-place grid penalty. The Finn was hit with the punishment for passing two cars before the safety-car line at a restart during last Sunday's Australian Grand Prix.



From Snetterton to Melbourne...

Toro Rosso new boys Daniel Ricciardo and Jean-Eric Vergne became the first ex-British Formula 3 champions to start a grand prix as team-mates since 1999, when Stewart fielded Johnny Herbert and Rubens Barrichello (below).



FIA PLANS NOSEJOB

The FIA's F1 Technical Working Group will discuss possible rules to eliminate the unsightly stepped noses that the majority of this year's cars feature. They could be removed if the regulations governing chassis height are modified. FIA technical delegate Charlie Whiting said: "I will raise the question with the TWG when we next meet. Everybody would like to see something nicer."

HRT faces battle just to make Malaysia field

HRT has a mountain to climb to make the grid for this Sunday's Malaysian Grand Prix after missing the cut in Australia last weekend by a second and a quarter. Driver Narain Karthikeyan said: "It's going to be damned hard in Malaysia. It's going to be lot hotter and we have cooling problems already. We don't want to bullshit ourselves... it's going to be very difficult."

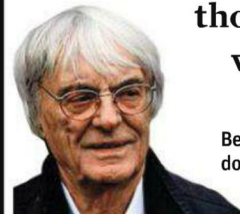


Castrol GRAND PRIX EDGE PREDICTOR

EiwoGP topped the opening round of the Castrol EDGE Grand Prix Predictor, landing a massive points haul by correctly predicting the podium trio, pole position, fastest lap and the driver who gained the most positions. His prizes include a certificate signed by three-time grand prix winner Johnny Herbert. To play the game, visit predictor.autosport.com



That's a danger. Nothing you can do about that. It could happen anytime, anywhere. There are always people threatening. I don't believe the [organisers] would take a risk if they thought there was a risk.



Bernie Ecclestone plays down safety fears over next month's Bahrain Grand Prix.



MALAYSIAN GP PREVIEW

FACTS, STATS, TRACK GUIDE, TV LISTINGS AND MORE



Sepang offers a whole new challenge for F1

Now the fight for glory really heats up

F1 heads from the stop-start Melbourne streets to the sweltering sweepers of Sepang, so drivers will need to keep cool

While Melbourne and Sepang are in similar corners of the world, albeit separated by 4000-odd miles, their layouts represent vastly different challenges. Albert Park is a temporary track with short, sharp corners and short straights, while Sepang is what you might call a 'proper' racing circuit. Its long straights, sweeping corners and big braking zones make it a far stiffer test of machinery as well.

But what strikes you more than anything is the heat and humidity, which makes the Malaysian GP so stern a test of cars, drivers and team personnel. While the 2012 crop of

machinery appears to be pretty reliable, any cooling weaknesses will be ruthlessly exposed at Sepang.

It's difficult for the drivers in the cockpit too, and it's tough for those in the pitlane as well. Despite attempts to ventilate the garages, temperatures can be sweltering for the mechanics and engineers. The pitstops will be a real test of their fitness.

And while Melbourne was a relatively straightforward race in terms of tyres, Malaysia could bring three-stop strategies into play, another curveball that should make for an even more dramatic race.

 **P20**

TRACK GUIDE AND GARY ANDERSON'S AUTOSPORT SUPERGRID

Sepang is established on the F1 calendar



Humidity can take its toll





Teams with most wins

Ferrari 5



Renault 2



McLaren 2



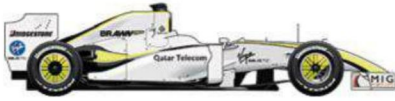
Red Bull 2



Williams 1



Brawn 1



Winning drivers



3

Michael Schumacher



2

Fernando Alonso



2

Kimi Raikkonen

Sebastian Vettel 2, Eddie Irvine 1, Ralf Schumacher 1, Giancarlo Fisichella 1, Jenson Button 1

Races at Sepang: 13



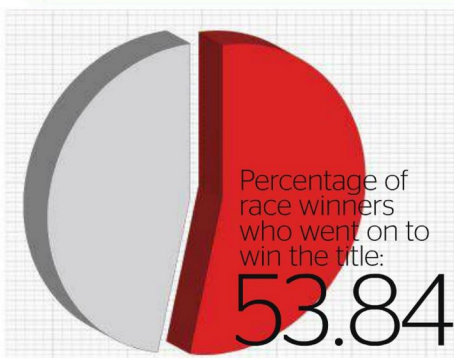
AVERAGE NUMBER OF FINISHERS

14.923



Average winning margin: 15.870s

Biggest: 39.699s (2002); smallest: 0.732s (2000)



SAFETY CARS 2



MALAYSIAN GP TV AND RADIO LISTINGS

FRIDAY MARCH 23

0145-0350 Free practice 1
LIVE (Sky Sports F1)
0155-0330 Free practice 1
LIVE (BBC Radio 5 Live SX)

0555-0730 Free practice 2
LIVE (BBC Radio 5 Live SX)
0600-0750 Free practice 2
LIVE (Sky Sports F1)

SATURDAY MARCH 24

0345-0610 Free practice 3
LIVE (Sky Sports F1)
0455-0600 Free practice 3
LIVE (BBC Radio 5 Live SX)

0700-0945 Qualifying LIVE
(Sky Sports F1)
0755-0930 Qualifying LIVE
(BBC Radio 5 Live SX)

1300-1415 Qualifying
replay (BBC1)

0730-1200 Grand Prix LIVE
(Sky Sports F1)
0830-1045 Grand Prix LIVE
(BBC Radio 5 Live)
1445-1640 Grand Prix
replay (BBC1)

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GARY ANDERSON'S SUPERGRID

AUTOSPORT technical correspondent Gary Anderson is compiling an index, created by taking each driver's percentage deficit to the outright pace over the season, using their best lap from each grand prix weekend. This is how they stand after the Australian Grand Prix. The theoretical absolute pace is expressed as 100 per cent.



Senna 101.966



Raikkonen 102.053



Hamilton 100.000



Maldonado 101.078



Button 100.096



Kobayashi 101.400



Di Resta 102.464

100%



Grosjean 100.365



Hulkenberg 101.555



Schumacher 100.405



Ricciardo 101.561



Massa 102.947

Caterham claimed it was happy to be getting closer to the midfield (again), but it still has a long way to go to catch midfield proper-upper Massa...



Rosberg 100.561



Vergne 101.691

While this paints a worrying picture for Ferrari fans, it is exaggerated by the fact that Fernando Alonso ended qualifying in the gravel in Australia.



Kovalainen 103.909

The index largely reflects the grid in Australia, but Nico Rosberg's Q2 lap ensures both Mercedes are ahead of the Red Bulls, despite him qualifying behind them.



Webber 100.775



Alonso 101.767



Petrov 104.365



Vettel 100.795



Perez 101.887

FLASHBACK

2011: TWO FROM TWO FOR VETTEL

Sebastian Vettel maintained his 100 per cent record with another controlling performance in the Malaysian Grand Prix to add to his win in the Australian season opener. Jenson Button starred to take best of the rest, while Nick Heidfeld overcame a struggling Lewis Hamilton for third in the closing stages before holding Mark Webber off to the flag.

PODIUM FINISHERS

POS	DRIVER
1	Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2	Jenson Button (McLaren)
3	Nick Heidfeld (Renault)

TYRE ALLOCATION

TYRES USED THIS WEEKEND

SUPER SOFT



SOFT



MEDIUM



HARD





...and it's only because of Marussia's and HRT's lack of pace stretching our scale that Caterham appears to be getting in among the midfield!



Glock 106.749



Pic 107.334



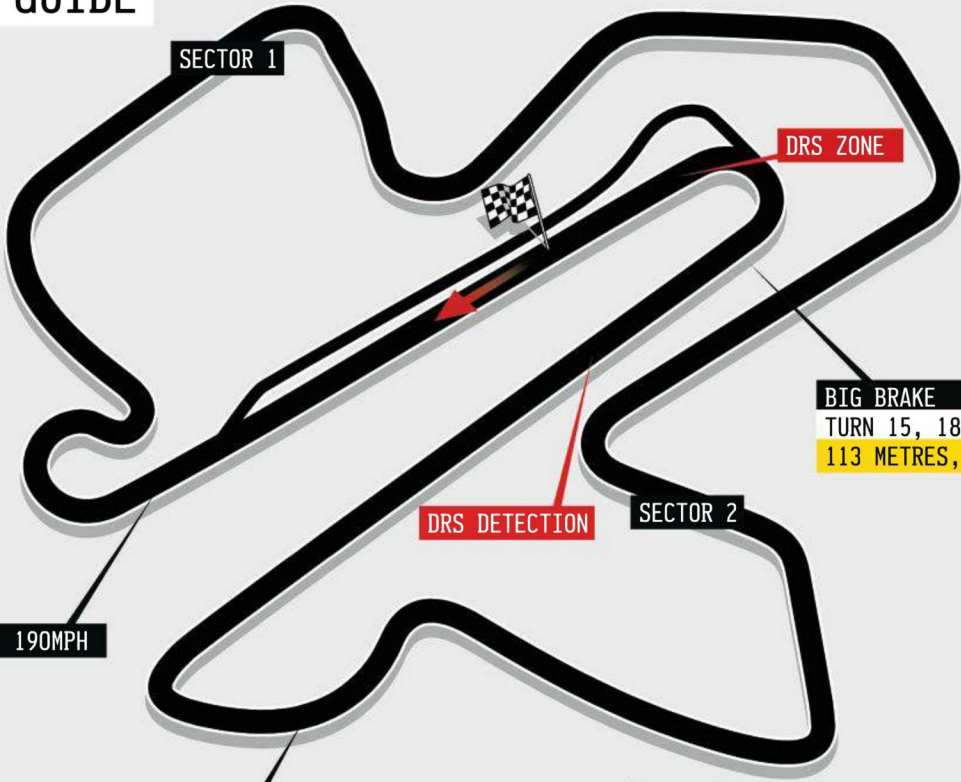
De la Rosa 109.556



Karthikeyan 109.676

110%

TRACK GUIDE



TOP SPEED - 190MPH

FASTEST CORNER
TURN 13 165MPH
6TH GEAR 3.4G

BIG BRAKE
TURN 15, 189MPH-56MPH
113 METRES, 2.3S 5.4G

SEPANG	NUMBER OF LAPS 56
CIRCUIT LENGTH	3.44 MILES
LAP RECORD	1:34.223 - JP MONTOYA (2004)
UK START TIME	9AM

FIA HISTORIC FORMULA ONE



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STRAIGHT TALK DAVID COULTHARD

13-time GP winner and 2001 world title runner-up

The fickle nature of the Melbourne semi-street circuit means we don't know exactly who's got the upper hand after the first GP – in fact it may be a few races before we really know

Melbourne didn't answer many of our pre-season questions, but what it did give us was the kind of trailer that makes you want to run down to the cinema to see the latest Hollywood blockbuster, because it draws you in but doesn't reveal whodunnit.

I don't really think we'll see the full picture until we've had three or four races. Melbourne, after all, is a very particular circuit. It's semi-permanent, takes a lot of rubbering-in over the weekend and is a track that needs to be driven 'on the front end'. The higher

we might then begin to see the pecking order.

GAME ON AT McLAREN

Jenson Button's emergence into McLaren's team leader during the second half of 2011 created a fascinating set of circumstances between him and Lewis Hamilton. And just when it looked like Lewis had stolen an early upper hand, Jenson goes and does that in the race...

All of Jenson's pre-race chat was just about having a go, and didn't he? The way he just controlled that race from start to finish was so impressive. And he didn't let Lewis have a look in, just soundly beating his team-mate. Of course, we only know what McLaren tells us. There might be another story going on within the team that we don't know about that explains the pace gap between the two. Look at Lewis' face on the podium and in interviews; he wasn't happy to finish third, but was that because he lost second in the stops, or because Jenson beat him? We just don't know.

AND MR VETTEL?

They say the great drivers can pull out results from nowhere, and on the face of it, having qualified sixth, finishing second looks like a great result for Sebastian Vettel. What nobody asked after qualifying is whether he – like Mark Webber – was minus KERS, which is a penalty of 0.3s per lap around Melbourne. Certainly his race performance would be conducive with having working KERS as he was able to move forwards.

I think we can say that McLaren does have an advantage on outright pace, so beating one was a brilliant achievement, but even more impressive was Seb's aggressive pass on Nico Rosberg, showing what a brilliant racer he is. Those who questioned his ability to overtake and go wheel-to-wheel had better get back into their corners after that – and Monza last year, of course.

The truth is, unless you're within one of the teams, you don't know exactly what's happening. For all we know Red Bull could have set the whole weekend up to maximise the use of DRS in race conditions, with McLaren optimising it in qualifying to guarantee a front-row lock-out from which it could control the race. If that's what happened, it would have worked had it not been for the safety car. I've got my doubts as both teams will surely be thinking about the championship, and therefore the big picture, but you never know.

FERRARI: NOT WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED...

I haven't a clue what to make of Ferrari. From the tests at Barcelona the car seemed to have good single-lap speed, but a narrow performance window and terrible issues keeping the rear tyres in good shape. And yet in Australia Fernando Alonso was more than a second away in qualifying trim, and far closer on race pace. The lack of quick corners in Melbourne means any aero deficiency shows up less, but Sepang is far more punishing, in terms of aero and higher temperatures, and that will have an effect on the tyre-wear rates too. ☼



Ferrari was all over the place down under

temperatures in Malaysia, as well as the faster corners at Sepang, will call for better cooling and probably some different rear bodywork to aid that, plus it will put more demand on front and rear axles. So add that into the pot and then Shanghai – a much more conventional circuit in terms of modern grand prix racing – and

PIC: GILHAM/GETTY

“Melbourne drew you in but it didn't reveal whodunnit...”



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MARK HUGHES

GRAND PRIX EDITOR

McLaren has turned the tables on Red Bull, on the drawing board and on the track, although this could just present an opportunity for Sebastian Vettel to reinforce his stature

OK, so it was still McLaren versus Red Bull as we finally headed into the new season, but there was a distinct juxtaposition in the dynamics of that fight.

Last year one team might have been a little irritated that its rival had copied its exhaust layout on the eve of the season, but it remained on top regardless. It had a faster car in qualifying even if in the race that margin would be significantly

repeated almost to perfection – except it was McLaren setting the agenda, Red Bull doing the chasing, in both exhaust layout and on track.

“They were faster than us at the beginning of the stints,” says Sebastian Vettel, “but we seemed to be a bit quicker at the end of them.” Lewis Hamilton said pretty much the same words at Albert Park last year after chasing home Vettel’s victorious Red Bull. It was a pattern that was repeated for most of last season’s races.

Of course it’s early days, but it seems as if Red Bull has yet to optimise its car around the McLaren-like ‘blown diffuser’ introduced right at the end of testing. Both Vettel and Mark Webber could be seen working away at the wheel in a very un-Red Bull-like way, especially in qualifying, and it does seem that on new tyres over one lap it needs to be man-handled in its current form. “It’s just about finding a set-up in which the front and the rear work together rather than fighting each other,” said an apparently calm Vettel after qualifying only sixth.

The car has been like this only since the revised exhaust layout was fitted. Gary Anderson watched both in Barcelona action and says: “The original one looked very much like we’ve come to expect of a Red Bull – very high entry speed, no drama, great balance. Ever since that update went on it the drivers have looked a lot busier – a lot more fighting on the steering wheel.”

Vettel nonetheless insists the team was right to bring the newer-spec car to the opening races. “That’s the approach that has always worked for us and maybe we’ve been

lucky in the past that things have worked well straight away, whereas this time we were struggling a bit to get enough track time in testing. Then we come here, practice gets rained out and it’s hurting us a bit. But I don’t believe we have a global problem with the car or that there is anything wrong with its philosophy.”

However, it seems inescapable that the restrictions on exhaust blowing do seem to have impacted upon Red Bull’s competitiveness, even if it turns out not to be permanent and even though the RB8 was very competitive in the race, increasingly so the longer into a stint it went. The McLaren concept seems to have clawed more of what was lost to those regulations than anyone else, even if it is still generating only a fraction of the downforce of the full-fat exhaust-blown diffusers. The very different driving characteristics of that generation of cars is something Mark Webber says he never got used to. “The blown diffuser cars were an extreme bit of kit,” he says. “They were very, very different on the way into a corner, very sensitive to rpm and that changed the balance quite a lot and I never really got my teeth into them. These are much more like traditional racing cars.”

It looks as if Vettel will be facing more competition from his team-mate this year than last as well as from the other teams – and while he may be less dominant as a result, we are also surely going to get confirmation of his stature. His charging drive to second on Sunday, splitting the McLarens and putting a stunningly committed pass on Nico Rosberg’s Mercedes along the way, suggests Seb is going to give us some of the season’s highlights. ❄



Jenson and Lewis try to see what else Red Bull has cribbed

reduced. It seemed as if the extra performance was taking more out of the Pirellis, applying a sort of self-leveling effect on the two cars. It was all about using the track position advantage of pole and measuring the performance out very carefully.

This year that pattern was

PIC: TEE/LAT

“Last year’s pattern is repeated, but now Red Bull is chasing”

FORMULA RENAULT 3.5

TEAMS TEST NEW MACHINE

Formula Renault 3.5 teams got their first taste of the championship's new-for-2012 car at Paul Ricard last week. Fortec's Robin Frijns (pictured) topped the times on both days as the new car lapped more than four seconds quicker than its predecessor.



INDYCAR

Dallara shuns engine builders

Italian constructor to develop 2013 IndyCar bodykit for non-racing organisations. By MARK GLENDENNING

Dallara will build an IndyCar bodykit under contract to an outside party for the 2013 season and has ruled out having any kind of involvement with any of the championship's

engine manufacturers.

All teams are using standard Dallara aero kits for road courses and ovals this season as part of the overall DW12 package, but the series is opening up the regulations to

allow other companies to create, use and sell their own designs next year.

Dallara has already confirmed that it won't build an alternative bodykit under its own name next year, but Andrea Toso, who heads R&D for the Italian constructor's IndyCar project, told AUTOSPORT that it is likely to pair up with an organisation that sees the new rules as a chance to enhance its brand identity by having a completely different-looking car, as opposed to just a livery.

"The engine manufacturers are already working on their own kits, because if the car wins with the Honda kit, it's Honda winning, not Dallara," Toso said. "IndyCar is looking at us to attract companies that are not engine manufacturers; say Coca-Cola or Boeing; someone from the food industry or the telecommunications industry or the defence industry, that are looking to showcase themselves. [But] we would only do one. We cannot please two lords. You have to be fair."

Toso also confirmed that development of the 2012-spec bodywork has now ended, although Dallara will continue to support the

current aero kits next year so as to not disadvantage smaller teams that cannot afford the additional cost of replacing their aero parts and spares inventory after just one season.

"We have to support the 2012 car and guarantee that the teams that continue with the 2012 aero – the small teams – can get spares," he added. "But the development of these parts has been stopped. There is no further work being done on these parts. Period."

"If it turns out that it is difficult to improve the Dallara package, then the small teams might not want to buy the kits from the other manufacturers because these would immediately make their stock of spare parts obsolete. It's not only the cost of buying the new kit, it's also the cost of restocking your entire [spares] inventory. If you are a small team, what do you do? This is a form of insurance for the smaller teams in IndyCar."

Viso's car could be a Citgo-Chevrolet in 2013



P62
INDYCAR
PREVIEW

GP2

Filippi announces GP2 'retirement'

GP2'S MOST EXPERIENCED RACER, Luca Filippi, has vowed never to return to the Formula 1-feeder category after revealing that he had offers from several teams over the winter.

Filippi, who started 107 races in the main series since 2006, finished as runner-up in the championship last year to Romain Grosjean and set his sights on landing an IndyCar drive for this year. However, he has revealed that before his deal with Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing – which was confirmed earlier this month – he was contacted by GP2 teams.

"I have to say, I got a couple of calls [about GP2 drives]," Filippi told AUTOSPORT. "They were talking about 'testing first and then we'll see'. Maybe before 2011 I never had as good a season as I wanted, so I always had something to show. But now I am happy with my GP2 record [including five wins], and I'm so glad to look back on GP2 as a great memory. I just want to freeze it and keep it forever. I found



Filippi's final GP2 win came at Monza last year

a new me last season, and this is how I want to leave it."

The 26-year-old Italian said that he never entered into any talks with teams about even testing a GP2 car.

"I never went into any details," he said. "I never really wanted to go forward with a [GP2] deal because it was not my goal. It's nice for me to end it like this."

Filippi added that he could be

tempted to reverse his decision if he was offered a drive at Monaco, but he hopes to be making his IndyCar debut in the Indianapolis 500 that weekend.

"It would be tough to refuse a Monaco call," he said. "But I hope I'll be busy because that means I will have qualified for Indy."

[P60 GP2 PREVIEW](#)

BRITISH F3

Ford champ holds out for F3 as drivers join field

BRITISH FORMULA FORD champion Scott Malvern could be among a raft of late recruits to join the British Formula 3 International Series for the opening round at Oulton Park on April 7.

Malvern, 23, has been linked to a drive with Hywel Lloyd's CF Racing team, which is

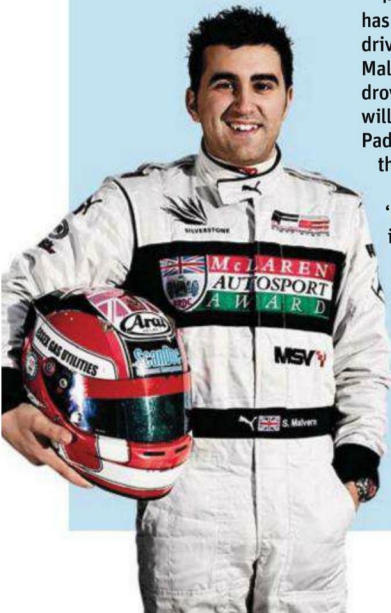
weighing up whether or not to run a new Dallara F312.

"At the moment we're just talking about the first race, and about a budget I haven't got," said Malvern, a two-time McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award finalist. "But I'm desperate to jump into anything at the moment."

Meanwhile, Double R Racing has secured its first A-class driver for 2012 in the form of Malaysian Fahmi Ilyas, who drove for Fortec last season. He will join Australian Duvashen Padayachee, who will race for the team in the National Class.

Double R boss Anthony 'Boyo' Hieatt said: "The aim is to get Fahmi in the top six in qualifying and progress from there."

Formula Renault UK driver Dan Cammish is set to join the National Class field with T-Sport, and was due to test this week at Silverstone. "We'll see what happens, but it looks like it's going to be OK," he said.



Nissan made McBride quick on straights

BRITISH F3

Nissan engine shocks at test

NISSAN'S FORMULA 3 ENGINE CAUSED a sensation on its maiden British series test at Rockingham last week.

Category newcomer Nick McBride used the ThreeBond-financed, Tomei-tuned powerplant to go seventh fastest in his T-Sport Dallara and topped all three speed traps on the second afternoon of the two-day test.

The performance prompted rival team Fortec's chief engineer Mick Kouroso to say: "We've seen in Japan that the engine is very fast on long straights. It may struggle with torque on some of the UK circuits, but at Monza, Silverstone and Spa it could beat us all."

T-Sport boss Russell Eacott was more cautious. "We're happy, but we'll see what happens at Silverstone [at the next test]. It was Nick's first proper dry days in an F3 car, and he's still got a lot to learn to compete with the second- and third-year kiddies."

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

MARK GLENDENNING
US EDITOR

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It's strange to think that Dallara could end up fighting against itself in next year's IndyCar Series. The engine manufacturers are already working on their own bodywork for 2013, putting them in the weird position of working on an improvement to something that (assuming you're reading this before the weekend), they haven't actually tried in combat yet.

But what if Dallara has got it right first time? The areas that are open to modification are the sidepods, the endplates, and a few other bits and pieces. And while the final parameters in which 2013 aero-kit designers will have to work are still being signed off, it appears that there will be enough scope to make a difference, however small.

So if Dallara has chanced upon a pretty good solution first time out with this year's base aero kit for the DW12, then in 12 months' time the small teams will be in the happy position of having to choose between

keeping what they've got or switching to a potentially inferior package that they can't really afford from somebody else, while Dallara, now working under contract for someone like the National Guard, has to figure out a way to outsmart itself. As Dallara's Andrea Toso told AUTOSPORT this week: "We are in a delicate situation."

And for those of us on the outside, an intriguing one.

Dallara could work with National Guard



BIG NUMBER

129

The record number of GP2 starts Luca Filippi made across the main and Asia Series from 2006-2011



Marino Franchitti in DeltaWing at Sebring

LE MANS

DeltaWing passed tough Nissan exams

New car had to meet strict performance targets to gain support of Japanese manufacturer. By GARY WATKINS

The Project 56 squad behind the radical DeltaWing Le Mans 24 Hours contender was given a series of strict performance targets to meet before Nissan gave the green light to its involvement in the programme.

The Japanese manufacturer was announced as the DeltaWing's primary sponsor and as its engine supplier earlier this month. The go-ahead for the deal was given by Nissan executives just days after the final targets were met during the maiden test of the DeltaWing at Buttonwillow Raceway in California.

Nissan Europe brand strategy boss Darren Cox said: "We believed in the project, but we needed to make sure. We laid down what they

needed to achieve in the windtunnel and on the racetrack.

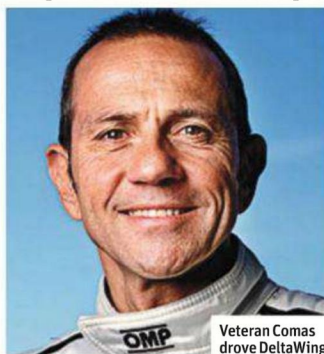
"We had to do our due diligence, if you like. If our criteria hadn't been met, that would have been it as far as we were concerned, but the car exceeded every target we set."

These targets included running the first car at different angles of attack in the full-size Windshear windtunnel in the US to make sure it was stable. It also had to achieve certain *g*-levels under cornering and acceleration, as well as hitting a target lap time at Buttonwillow.

Nissan also embedded its own representatives within the DeltaWing project. These included stalwart sportscar engineer Ricardo Divila and ex-Formula 1 driver and

long-time Nissan factory GT racer Erik Comas, who drove the car during its first test at Buttonwillow.

Cox said: "We wanted an independent view from the cockpit."



Veteran Comas drove DeltaWing

None of our Super GT drivers were available, but Erik fitted the bill. He's part of the Nissan family and has a lot of experience of driving in sportscars."

The engine, which is built around a block from the Nissan Juke, has been developed by RML, which ran the manufacturer's British Touring Car Championship campaigns from 1997-99, and won the '99 drivers' and manufacturers' titles. RML will provide a base for the DeltaWing once it leaves the US following two weeks of testing at Sebring this month. It is expected to run at the Spanish Aragon circuit in late April.

World GT1 champion Michael Krumm and Scot Marino Franchitti drove the car at Sebring this week.

A total of 64 cars started at Sebring



WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

Audi expects Sebring to stay in WEC

AUDI IS CONFIDENT THAT THE FIA World Endurance Championship will once again kick off with the Sebring 12 Hours next season.

Head of Audi Sport Wolfgang Ullrich expressed his belief that the WEC field would join the American Le Mans Series grid at Sebring in March 2013 in the face

of rumours that the WEC will look elsewhere for its US event next year.

The problem hinges on accommodating two grids that are likely to grow for 2013. The WEC and ALMS fields combined last weekend to create a 64-car entry, the maximum the pits at the Florida airfield circuit can hold.

Ullrich said: "Scott Atherton [ALMS boss] has given me a clear message that he will find a solution. The signs are that there could be a way to put the race on."

ALMS and WEC officials said last weekend that the future of Sebring as a joint fixture would not be discussed until after this year's event.



What an Aston DP could look like

AUTOSPORT
IMAGE

GRAND-AM

Aston Martin eyes Daytona Prototype future

AN EXPANSION BY ASTON MARTIN

Racing into Grand-Am in the US could encompass the series' Daytona Prototype category in the future.

AMR is already testing the waters in Grand-Am this season with two Vantage GT4s in the Sportscar Challenge feeder series. AMR managing director John Gaw said that Aston could follow Ferrari and Audi into the GT ranks with a version of its new-for-2012 Vantage V12 GT3 and that a DP is a potential next step after that.

"America is a very important market for Aston Martin," said Gaw. "That's why we did the GT4-based car for the Challenge class this year.

"We could transfer what we learnt doing that car and build a Vantage for Grand-Am GT in eight weeks. Then there's Daytona Prototypes. Why wouldn't we look at it? The cars can look like road cars, which is very important to Aston Martin, and our V8 engine would absolutely work in that class."

The DP rules allow manufacturers to

produce their own body kits styled after their road cars. The new Chevrolet Corvette aero package has so far run on Coyote, Riley and Dallara machinery.

Gaw revealed that a Vantage-styled DP is already under consideration.

"It is part of a presentation, which says it is something we are considering," he said. "We have a three-year plan for our new Vantage GTE and after that we are looking for tactical opportunities. One of them would be developing a DP car around our V8."

IN BRIEF

ROLEX Hybrid Audi ran at Sebring



AUDI CONTINUES WEC TESTING

Audi continued development of its definitive 2012 World Endurance Championship cars at Sebring this week following the 12 Hours. Four new R18s ran; two hybrid e-tron quattros, a TDI and an ultra. The ultra was seriously damaged on Monday when Timo Bernhard crashed.

ELMS SET FOR MAJOR CHANGES

The European Le Mans Series is about to undergo a major rejig that could result in major calendar changes and a shortening of the race format. Series boss Patrick Peter has been pushing for the ELMS to join the grid of the European rounds of the FIA WEC at Spa and Silverstone.

FRENCHMEN GET ELMS DRIVES

Peugeot refugees Stephane Sarrazin and Nicolas Minassian have been confirmed for the Sebastien Loeb Racing ORECA-Nissan in this year's ELMS. They will share with fellow Frenchman Nicolas Marroc.

HEYLEN'S SEBRING CONQUEST

Ex-Champ Car racer Jan Heylen was a late substitute for Conquest Racing's LMP2 Morgan at the Sebring 12 Hours after Francesco Dracone fell ill. The Belgian partnered Briton Martin Plowman and David Heinemeier Hansson.

GREEN STAYS WITH MERCEDES

British DTM star Jamie Green will remain with the HWA Mercedes squad for another year in the series. Meanwhile, Audi has taken on Auto GP frontrunner Adrian Tambay after electing to expand its Abt Sportsline squad from three cars to four.

PIQUET WINS IN NASCAR

Nelson Piquet Jr claimed his maiden NASCAR victory at Bristol Motor Speedway last weekend in the K&N East Series. The Brazilian is competing full-time in the Truck Series this year and is also planning some Nationwide outings.



Piquet won at Bristol

BTCC

O'Neill ready to call time on touring car career

BRITISH TOURING CAR RACE WINNER

Paul O'Neill is ready to turn his back on the series after a sponsorship deal fell through.

Two-time race winner O'Neill finished 10th overall last year with the Tech-Speed Chevrolet squad. He had hoped to return with a TOCA turbo-engined version, but was not on last Monday's official entry list.

"A couple of weeks ago we suddenly had a budget shortfall,"



The last we've seen of 'Owy'?

said O'Neill. "Tech-Speed pulled out all the stops, but we couldn't go.

"It's a disaster – I turned down quite a few things and then nothing."

O'Neill, 32, is now looking elsewhere. "The BTCC is a fantastic championship, but it really isn't a career," he added. "It's something I'll always support and watch on TV, but I don't see the point of being in it. Not enough is being done to look after people's careers. I can't get sponsors to commit.

"It's too late for a GT deal. I'm going to try and look at club stuff and earn some money – perhaps be a second driver in sportscars."

Tech-Speed boss Marvin Humphries is still hoping to appear in the BTCC. "We're still committed, but it's very difficult," he said. "I think the cars would be competitive."

NASCAR

Cup teams split over data-release plans

NASCAR SPRINT CUP TEAMS ARE

split over plans by the series to release information from frontrunning cars to the rest of the field in order to help the grid get a handle on fuel injection.

Series director John Darby said last week that plans are afoot to help teams understand the process of mapping the fuel-injection system, but drivers such as Dale Earnhardt Jr have questioned the extent to which data should be shared.

"It's a slippery slope," the Hendrick Motorsports driver told *Scene Daily*. "We should ease into how we use that data, and how NASCAR allows us to use it slowly [so as] not to upset the culture of the sport, or how things have worked in the past."

Darby said the information would not be of use for adjusting the set-ups, adding: "It's about the ability to keep the teams with very few resources competitive with the teams that have got the big resources".

24 HEURES DU MANS 16-17 JUNE 2012



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Concept car broke cover at Geneva Motor Show



LE MANS

Honda NSX set for Le Mans attack

HPD targets Ferrari and Porsche with GTE version of NSX. By GARY WATKINS

Honda is on course to take the NSX brand back to the Le Mans 24 Hours.

The Japanese manufacturer has revealed that the second-generation NSX sports car, unveiled in concept form at the Detroit Auto Show in January, will have a future in international motorsport.

Honda Performance Development is taking charge of producing a racing version of the mid-engined hybrid and aims to take on Ferrari, Porsche, Aston Martin and Chevrolet in LM GTE.

HPD president Erik Berkman said: "The new NSX is being designed and built in America and will be developed into a race car in the US by HPD."

"I think it will be raced in the GTE class, but that is being studied right now. We are looking to see how many variations of the car we can do for various classes."

Berkman said that discussions, which encompassed the likely

inclusion of hybrids in GTE, were already underway with the race-organising Automobile Club de l'Ouest at Le Mans.

The new NSX, shown with a 3.5-litre V6 in Detroit, is due to go on sale in 2014 and Berkman hopes that it will race the following year.

He said that the onus would be on selling cars to customers rather than running an overt works team.

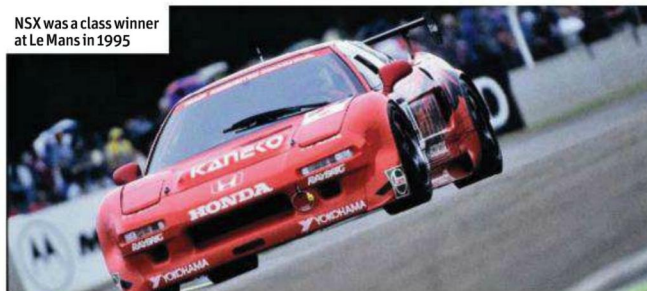
"We are looking to follow the Porsche model of selling cars to customers and then supporting

them," he said. "Maybe there would have to be some kind of factory team to develop the car at the start."

The original NSX raced at Le Mans from 1994-96. Honda developed the car for GT2 in conjunction with TC Prototypes and Kremer Racing for '94.

The factory operation focused on a new GT1 version of the NSX for 1995. A privateer Team Kunimitsu entry won the GT2 class at Le Mans that season.

NSX was a class winner at Le Mans in 1995



IN BRIEF

MG did not run in anger



BTCC MG BREAKS COVER

British Touring Car Championship star Jason Plato's new MG6 got its first public airing at Silverstone's pre-season media day on Monday. The Team ES Vauxhall of Dave Newsham was quickest of those who tested. Elsewhere in the BTCC, one-make veteran Mark Hazell has joined Rob Austin Racing to race an Audi A4.

LIUZZI'S A SUPERSTAR

Formula 1 refugee Vitantonio Liuzzi will race in the Italian-based Superstars tin-top series this year for the Caal Mercedes squad. Fellow ex-F1 men Mika Salo and Christian Fittipaldi will alternate drives in a Swiss Racing Maserati.

DILLMAN HEADS RAPAX LINE-UP

Ex-German Formula 3 champion Tom Dillmann will race for Rapax in GP2 this season alongside Angolan Ricardo Teixeira.

TINCKNELL TOPS TEST

Briton Harry Tincknell topped last week's two-day Rockingham British F3 test. He pipped Carlin Dallara-VW team-mates Jack Harvey and Carlos Sainz Jr.

FERRARI F1 TEST FOR F3 KING

This year's FIA European F3 champion will receive a prize Ferrari F1 test plus two days of running in a Formula 2 car.

McKENZIE MOVES TO F2

Britain's Daniel McKenzie switches to F2 for 2012 after a year in Formula Renault 3.5. German F3 graduate Markus Pommer is also on board for the series.



McKenzie tested F2 car

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Block is excited by GRC competition

WRC

WRC chiefs reveal endurance vision

Series top brass push on with plans to make rallies longer and tougher, despite teams' fears. BY DAVID EVANS

The FIA has laid out its long-term vision for the World Rally Championship – and it flies in the face of what the manufacturers are calling for from the sport's governing body.

FIA president Jean Todt and WRC manager Michele Mouton remain steadfastly committed to making the sport more challenging and proposed regulation changes will necessitate more reliable cars than

ever. The primary argument against longer and more challenging rallies from the teams is the cost involved versus the benefit gained, but Mouton, who won four WRC events for Audi in the early 1980s, says the financial implications could be catered for in the shape of far more stringent service regulations.

LONGER DAYS

Championship organisers are adamant that a greater element of endurance will be brought into the championship. And Mouton believes the concerns of the manufacturers will be addressed.

"If the teams feel the problem is the cost of carrying and changing spare parts, then they should not worry," she said. "The FIA is very concerned about the cost. We don't want to increase the cost, we want to make the sport more exciting.

We have worked on this already for this season: the teams have one engine less for the year and 14 tyres less for every rally. In the future we can save more with less service. The philosophy is to go without service for the day, which will make the rally more challenging."

Mouton added that these changes are likely for 2014, although current WRC technical regulations run until the end of 2015.

One rule that will change this year relates to the length of events. Currently, regulation 13.1.2 states: "The total distance of the special stages shall be between 300 and 500km."

Later this year, rallies will be split into two categories: classic and endurance. Classic rallies will have a total distance between 300 and 400km, while endurance events will be between 400 and 500km.

READY FOR A DUST UP

The next round of the WRC is likely to bring Mouton into further conflict with the teams and drivers, with the Rally of Portugal including potentially dusty night stages. There was outcry in Greece last year when the drivers were confronted by just such a scenario.

Discussing the potential for dust, Mouton said: "The drivers are not used to driving in the dust at night. I understand them and I agree with their position. But what is important is that the rally becomes more challenging. If it is too easy what do you prove? Nothing. The value for the driver will be higher because they will have to use their brain more for something which is more challenging. If I am with Jean [Todt], it is because I saw his vision for the future of the sport and I agree completely with him."



Mouton: sticking to her guns

IRC

Pressure off Mikkelsen's IRC title defence

SKODA WILL LET ANDREAS MIKKELSEN go unchallenged in his Intercontinental Rally Challenge title defence.

Although the Norwegian, who is backed by the car firm's UK importer, missed out on a fourth-straight win in the series when his Fabia S2000 suffered a broken injector connector on the final stage in the Canary

Islands last week, he was able to extend his points advantage to 18 heading to next month's Circuit of Ireland Rally by finishing second to Jan Kopecky's factory Skoda.

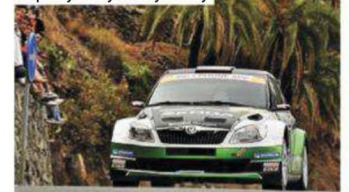
While Mikkelsen is due to contest all 13 IRC rounds this year, Skoda Motorsport is set to enter only one extra Fabia on each event. Kopecky and Juho Hanninen will

share, with Mikkelsen unlikely to face a sustained title challenge from either driver.

"All I know is this weekend I am doing the Czech championship," said Kopecky. "For the IRC it is open because I am here to help Skoda win the [manufacturers'] title."

Skoda will run Hanninen on the Circuit of Ireland from April 6/7.

Kopecky: Lucky Canary victory



➔ P59 IRC REPORT

GLOBAL RALLYCROSS/WRC

Block to focus on Global RallyCross in the face of WRC regulation fears

KEN BLOCK WILL FOCUS HIS

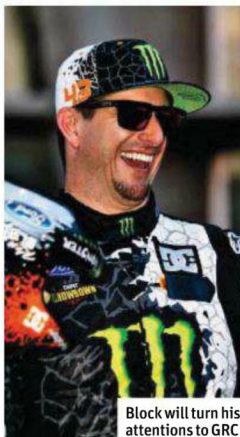
attentions on winning this year's Global RallyCross title – with his participation in the World Rally Championship in doubt following the change of running-order regulations for this season.

Block is contesting the full six-round GRC this year and says he is relishing the close competition.

"It's kind of like Gymkhana on steroids," said Block. "I did X Games last year and that was a lot of fun, but this year we have a serious focus on GRC. There are some great, great drivers in there, with Marcus Gronholm, Travis [Pastrana] and the others. It's going to be a tough one."

Aside from his GRC effort, Block is only scheduled to do two more WRC rounds this year. But the American is not happy about the new qualifying rule that leaves slower drivers with the worst road position for the opening day of rallies.

Block's team manager, Derek Dauncey, said: "Ken's here to learn from competing at the highest level. What does he learn running at the front? Nothing. This is not what we came to WRC for and we would have to look at the commitment to WRC if the rule stays. It seems ridiculous that we take the best drivers in the world and give them an even bigger advantage."



Block will turn his attentions to GRC

AUTOSPORT SAYS...
**DAVID EVANS
RALLIES EDITOR**

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This endurance debate is rumbling along dangerously. Having spoken at length with all involved, it's quite clear... the twain shall remain estranged.

The FIA makes a compelling case for longer and ultimately more rewarding events. But those rewards come in terms of achievement within the sport. The desire is to let the drivers know they've competed on a real rally.

Such sentiment is laudable. Michele Mouton is right: an endurance event offers more fulfilment; lasting 12 rounds with Mike Tyson would have meant much more than if, for the sake of television, it had lasted six.

The problem comes in trying to assess the value of this inner sporting serenity. And that's where the wheels come off. There's simply no commercial scope for sentiment in the modern-day WRC. And not just in monetary terms. Increasingly, there's little appetite for an event that could last a week.

My honest opinion is that we need an element of each. Personally, I think Jean Todt's plan of six endurance and six 'classics' is wrong. A couple of endurance rallies would be brilliant, if one was in Africa and the other started in Harrogate and ended a week later back in the same place.

And the other 10 rallies should be two long days and no more.

The argument for long distance equaling close competition is nonsense. The last time Rally Argentina went over 300 stage miles (in 1996), as it will next month, the podium was split by almost five minutes. Last year's 220-miler? First and third were split by 7s...

1996 Argetina was not a close one


IN BRIEF

Ostberg flew 50 metres


LOIX IN TURBO U-TURN

Hopes of seeing a turbocharged car in this year's IRC series are fading with Freddy Loix unlikely to mount a Fiesta RRC-based title bid this season. He will instead contest the French championship in a Peugeot 207 S2000.

CITROENS HEAD FOR WALES

Eight Citroen DS3 R3s will contest this week's Bulldog International Rally of North Wales, which is a round of the Citroen Racing Trophy.

HUGE ENTRY FOR BULLDOG

This week's Bulldog International Rally, round two of the BRC, has proved as popular as ever with more than 135 cars set to start the event's five separate rallies. The Historic is the most popular with 60 entries. Beyond the international field, there is also a national competition for World Rally Cars and a shorter Challenge rally.

MEEKE PLAYS MENTOR

WRC star Kris Meeke switched to the co-driver's seat last week, when he spent time tutoring 14-year-olds in Junior 1000 crews at Kirkistown race circuit.



Meeke (r) turned teacher



Atko is heading back to the APRC

APRC

Atkinson in Skoda APRC title assault

THIS YEAR'S ASIA-PACIFIC RALLY

Championship entry has been spiced up by the news that Chris Atkinson will contest the complete season in a Skoda Fabia S2000.

Atkinson, who recently returned to the WRC with the Monster WRT, came within an ace of winning the FIA title last year, but lost out to then team-mate Alister McRae. McRae is joined in the British-based Proton team by P-G Andersson this season and the Scottish-Swedish pairing is firmly in the sights of Atkinson, who will drive an MRF-run Skoda.

Atkinson, who drives an ex-Freddy Loix Fabia, said: "P-G's going to be the big competition, but we'll definitely be doing our bit to beat him. It's going to be a good year in the APRC. I've got some good experience of the rallies and the title's what we're after."

The APRC gets under way with the International Rally of Whangarei in New Zealand next week.

OSTBERG JUMPS TO RECORD

Mads Ostberg set a new unofficial world record for jumping on snow on Saturday night. The Norwegian flew his Ford Fiesta RS WRC for 50 metres over a specially built jump.

IMPREZA SERIES IS GO

Four cars will start the all-new Rally Class series for Subaru Impreza WRXs on Rally Portugal. The six-round series offers the winning driver five expenses-paid drives in next year's WRC, while the runner-up gets two 2013 outings.

IRC EVENT SWAP RUMOURED

IRC officials have denied reports that the Targa Florio Rally in Sicily will replace the Mecsek Rallye on the same early June weekend. It is understood the Hungarian event doesn't have enough money to secure its slot on the IRC calendar.

A-STAR FOR BASSO

Giandomenico Basso will return to IRC action on May's Tour de Corse in a Ford Fiesta S2000 prepared by the Italian A-Star team. Italian Basso has won four IRC events, all with Abarth.

BRC PREVIEW

Event	Bulldog Rally
Round	2/6
Based	Welshpool
Date	March 23-24
Mi Leage	97.49
Stages	11
Surface	Gravel
Last year's winner	Elfyn Evans
Championship leader	Mark Donnelly





AUSTRALIAN GP

Melbourne,
March 18

ROUND 1/20

LAPS 58

WINNER

Jenson Button
1h34m09.565s

POLE POSITION

Lewis Hamilton
1m24.922s

FASTEST LAP

Jenson Button
1m29.187s

RACE RATING

★★★★★

OK, Button walked it, but there was tons of action behind him

DRIVERS STANDINGS

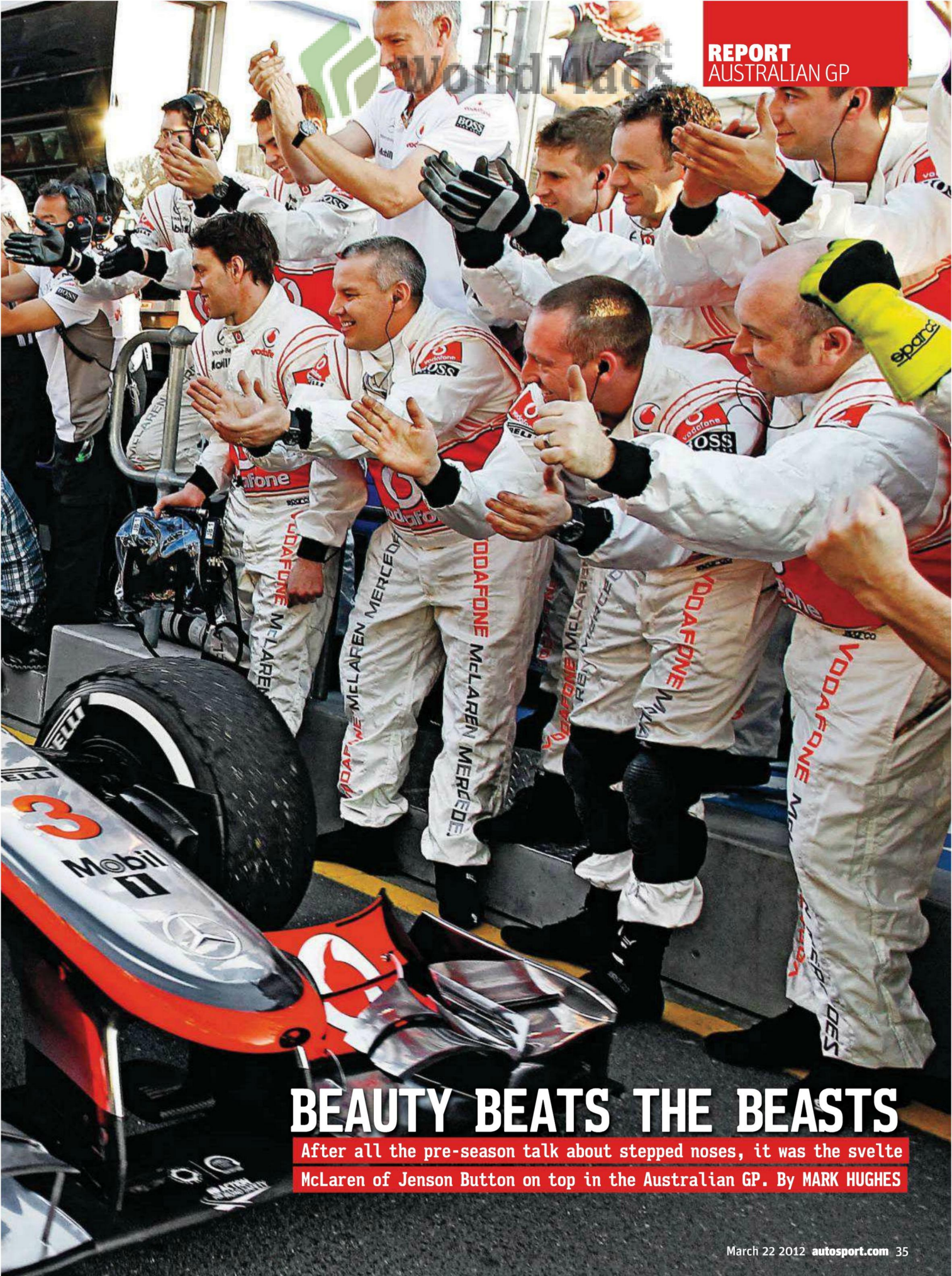
Button	25pts
Vettel	18pts
Hamilton	15pts

MILESTONES

- Raikkonen is first Lotus driver to score points since Johnny Herbert, Belgium '93
- First time two drivers have raced in their home world championship GP



PHOTO: J. L. AT



BEAUTY BEATS THE BEASTS

After all the pre-season talk about stepped noses, it was the svelte McLaren of Jenson Button on top in the Australian GP. By MARK HUGHES

QUALIFYING

McLaren and Mercedes seem to have the edge, but it's Hamilton who delivers

⌚ And so came the time of revelation. The tease of winter testing times was finally forgotten as the real picture played out around a sunny Albert Park on Saturday afternoon – and it was a fascinating one: McLaren and Mercedes very evenly matched; Red Bull struggling by its own phenomenal standards; a Lotus that is genuinely quick – by the team's own estimation around 0.3s off the absolute front; and confirmation that the Ferrari F2012 is currently a very difficult beast.

Within that basic competitive framework, McLaren sewed up the front row – Lewis Hamilton marginally faster than Jenson Button – and Mercedes slightly miskicked at the crucial time, enabling Romain Grosjean's terrific error-free lap to put the Lotus third.

Mercedes' controversial 'f-duct/DRS' was helping it to impressive straight-line speeds – Nico Rosberg was quickest over the finish line at 192.7mph, Sebastian Vettel's Red Bull only 18th at 188.3mph – but they were all but matched by those of the McLarens. Both cars changed direction well and maintained a good balance through long fast turns and sharp, slow ones alike and appeared evenly matched. The only thing seeming to separate them was the quality of the drivers' laps at the crucial time in Q3.

Hamilton was at his acrobatic best on his first run in that final session, impressing even himself. "That lap felt pretty special," he said, "and at the end of it I felt it'd be surprising if anyone could push ahead of that. I tried even harder on my final run, but braked a little too late into the first corner and spoiled the lap. After that, I was just hoping that nobody would go any quicker. I just love qualifying, especially when you get the lap just right; when it all flows, the tyres work and you hit the sweet spot everywhere. It's like heaven."

Button made an error on his first run but put in a great second effort, silky momentum where Hamilton was all breathtaking drama – but the end result was only 0.15s slower.

With neither Mercedes driver accessing the full potential of their cars at the crucial



Hamilton gunned it to dramatic pole

moment, it ensured McLaren its first qualifying one-two since Valencia 2009 – and allowed Grosjean into the mix. Romain was visibly thrilled with the outcome and it confirmed what winter testing had suggested – that the new E20 is the first properly competitive car out of Enstone since the Renault title-winning glory years. That this was Grosjean's first experience of the circuit only added to his achievement. Throughout the weekend he'd had a couple of tenths' edge over Kimi Raikkonen and was more consistent, impressing the hell out of the team. Raikkonen found himself mired in Q1, 18th, after sliding wide on the Turn 12 exit and backing off in the mistaken belief that the lap would not have been good enough to get him through had he stayed on it.

Michael Schumacher was delighted with his new Merc, though had been trailing team-mate Nico Rosberg by a couple of tenths run for run during practice. His final Q3 effort, around 0.4s off pole, gained him fourth, his best

qualifying position in his comeback career. But even he acknowledged that Rosberg could potentially have beaten that had he not locked up badly at Turn 3 on his final run, leaving him in seventh.

The Red Bulls were being drifted and slid in spectacular fashion, their balance not quite what Mark Webber and Vettel have been used to in recent years. "I think we're not getting the best of the new package yet," conceded Vettel of the upgrade to the exhaust/rear end made towards the end of testing, "but I'm not panicking. There is no global problem with the car."

With Vettel making errors on each of his Q3 runs, Webber was marginally the faster of the pair, a good effort given that he was without KERS and the 0.3s benefit it brings. He was forced into making only one Q3 run on account of having to do two in Q2, sorting out the different braking balance that running without KERS requires. It implied that without those problems the RB8 should have been good enough for third but still trailing the McLarens.

Those squeezing into the tail end of Q3 were Pastor Maldonado's Williams, Nico Hulkenberg's Force India and Daniel Ricciardo's Toro Rosso. "That was a great lap by Pastor to get into Q3," said Williams's Mark Gillan, "and it represents where the car is at." The improvement over 2011's car is clearly significant.

The Force Indias seemed to be struggling and Hulkenberg had made significant changes to his set-up coming into qualifying. Ricciardo preferred to save his tyres in Q3 and didn't complete

a lap there. He was pushed hard by team-mate Jean-Eric Vergne, the 0.1s separating them leaving the rookie just failing to graduate to the run-off, in 11th.

Which was one place ahead of Ferrari's Fernando Alonso – who ended his Q2 in the Turn 1 gravel trap after just one run. He had the left-hand wheels on the grass as he approached, Felipe Massa having made a similar error in Friday practice – and it confirmed how difficult the car was.

Had Kamui Kobayashi completed his Q1 lap in Q2 he'd have graduated to the run-off, but on his single run he found this set of soft tyres to be drastically lacking the grip of the previous set, leaving the Sauber 13th. Bruno Senna didn't get a clean Q2 lap in and was a disappointed 14th in the Williams, having been within a couple of tenths of Maldonado up to that time. Force India's Paul di Resta did not get his tyres up to temperature on his Q2 out-lap because of traffic, leaving his flying lap badly compromised. Felipe Massa was all at sea in the wayward Ferrari, still 1s off Alonso even after two runs, and back in 16th. Sergio Perez was unable to complete a Q2 lap as the Sauber broke its gearbox.

GP2 champ Grosjean was sensational third



P40 RESULTS
All those vital stats





Senna's Williams career got off to dramatic start



RACE CONDITIONS

A very pleasant sunny autumn day in Melbourne, with sunshine throughout and track temperature peaking at 29C.

Jenson Button and McLaren delivered on Sunday exactly the sort of performance we came to associate with Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull last year. From winning the start, Button sprinted out of DRS range, marshalled his fuel and tyres, and delivered the devastating laps when it mattered. He never looked like losing, not even when a safety car wiped out a 10-second lead.

It was a tense race for the team. Quite aside from the familiar Albert Park safety car coming at a very awkward time, there was the matter of tyre degradation and fuel consumption. Both were higher than expected, the rubber by a factor of two in the first stint. "We went into the race expecting it to be a comfortable two-stop," said engineering director Paddy Lowe, "but it ended up being quite marginally so."

At this Red Bull may have given

a knowing nod. Last year the team was all too familiar with the need to balance performance with the degradation rates of the Pirellis. It came from having more downforce than the others, from a car that had more of it than the tyres could withstand for competitive stint lengths. Well, around Albert Park last weekend it was the McLaren that was on the cusp of doing that even on the new, less-sensitive 2012 Pirellis.

Red Bull, by contrast, was not in that window. Vettel's second place came from a tenacious performance and a gift from that safety car. His best lap times were close to those of Button's, but Jenson was only rarely accessing the car's full performance.

Everyone is being very careful to point out that we didn't see the best of the RB8 and that Albert Park's demands are not typical of most tracks on the calendar and, while that's true, the MP4-27 did look formidable. It had the raw pace in qualifying to enable the team to adopt the sort of aggressive approach we saw so often from Red Bull last year. McLaren had watched often enough as Seb fuelled light, using that to help him sprint away at the start, knowing he had the performance then to manage the gap



Vettel stuns Rosberg with outside pass

and bring the fuel back on schedule.

On the fuel loads McLaren chose for Australia, neither Button nor Lewis Hamilton could have got to the end of a flat-out race using all the car's performance – and from as early as lap eight both drivers were being asked to conserve. The fuel consumption was higher than anticipated as a grippier track than expected enabled greater speeds.

Through all these complex challenges, Jenson wove a silky

thread so no-one could see the joins. The only thing he didn't do was set pole – but when your team-mate is Hamilton that can happen. Lewis's race went wrong from the moment his clutch grabbed slightly and he was outaccelerated by his team mate, enabling JB to slice down the inside of Turn 1. Hamilton wouldn't see Button again until after the race – he was gone, and Lewis had no answer either in the car or afterwards.

Behind the two McLarens, ▶

◀ Romain Grosjean's Lotus initially got away OK, but as he went for the second/third upchange an electronic glitch cut the power for a second or so, enough to see him swamped, Michael Schumacher's Mercedes on one side, Vettel's Red Bull on the other. Nico Rosberg then slalomed spectacularly through in the other Mercedes, proceeding to take Vettel by surprise and snatching fourth place into the turn.

Just behind the Lotus, Mark Webber – whose clutch also grabbed but who was at least now armed with KERS – was squeezed between Nico Hulkenberg's Force India to his right and Jean-Éric Vergne's Toro Rosso on his left, banging wheels and rubbing bodywork and losing momentum to Pastor Maldonado (Williams) and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), with Fernando getting by the Williams on the next lap.

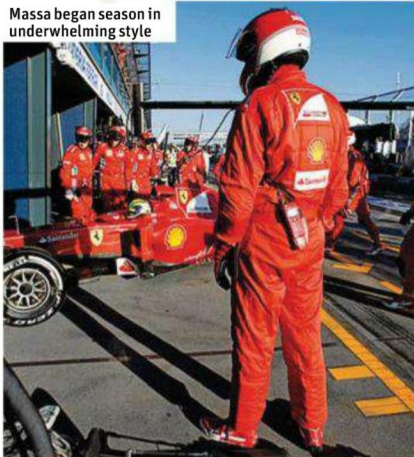
Button was already out of DRS range at the end of the opening lap and proceeded to absolutely nail the car for the following three. By the time DRS was enabled, he was 2.4s clear and still pulling away. It was easy to imagine Hamilton's bewilderment. Should he now try to nurse the tyres, attempt to beat Button by making them last longer? Or would that just leave him yet further behind?

By this time Grosjean was out of the race, victim of a no-compromise Maldonado pass into Turn 13 on the second lap, Williams left-rear breaking Lotus front-right trackrod.

Up into Turn 9 on the same lap Vettel got alongside Rosberg on the outside and simply braved it out, turning in and making the pass. "That was on the edge!" he would smile later. It was a stunning move but it also highlighted that the relative speeds of the Mercedes and Red Bull had swapped since qualifying.

Now Vettel quickly closed down on Schumacher, putting him under

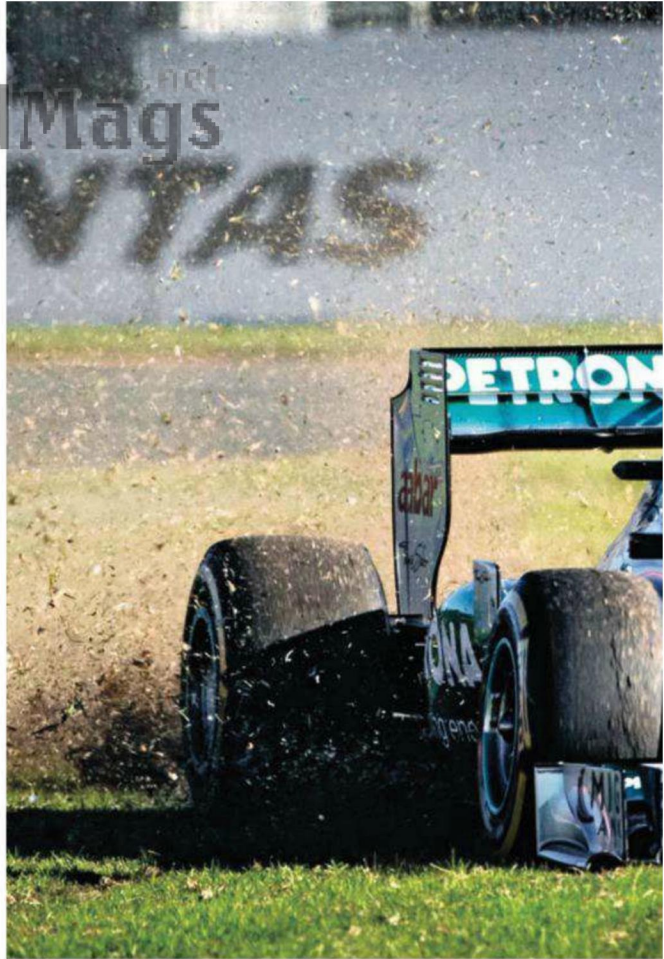
Massa began season in underwhelming style



Toro Rosso new boys both shone...



...although Ricciardo had start-of-race scare



DRIVER BY DRIVER by Edd Straw

1 **8/10**
Event rating

SEBASTIAN VETTEL

Red Bull-Renault RB8
Start: 6th. Finish: 2nd
Qualifying was desperately underwhelming by his standards and he admitted there was more he could get from the car. A brilliant pass on Rosberg on the outside of Turn 9 was a statement of intent and, thanks to a well-timed safety car, he was able to get ahead of Hamilton.

2 **7/10**
Event rating

MARK WEBBER

Red Bull-Renault RB8
Start: 5th. Finish: 4th
Lost KERS during qualifying and reckoned that he squandered a tenth or so himself, but still outqualified Vettel. Another slow start left him down in ninth and facing an uphill struggle, but he mixed it well throughout the race and was rewarded with a solid fourth.

3 **10/10**
Event rating

JENSON BUTTON

McLaren-Mercedes MP4-27-02
Start: 2nd. Finish: 1st
Drove an immaculate race and always looked to have things completely under control from the moment he took the lead at the start. The only mild criticism of his weekend was that he missed out on pole, but his imperious drive on Sunday made up for that.

4 **7/10**
Event rating

LEWIS HAMILTON

McLaren-Mercedes MP4-27-03
Start: 1st. Finish: 3rd
Turned in a stunning qualifying lap to dip under 1m25s and deny Button his first McLaren pole. Lost the lead at the start, and dropped out of touch when his rear tyres went just as Button was pitting. Would have been second but for that ill-timed safety car.

5 **9/10**
Event rating

FERNANDO ALONSO

Ferrari F2012-295
Start: 12th. Finish: 5th
Alonso excelled on race day. Qualifying wasn't quite so good as he spun into the gravel at Turn 1 after kissing the grass under braking, but climbed to sixth early on and stayed there until the first stops. Wrung every iota of potential from the Ferrari for an excellent fifth.

6 **4/10**
Event rating

FELIPE MASSA

Ferrari F2012-293
Start: 16th. DNF
That he failed to outqualify his team-mate, despite Alonso binning it, suggests Massa's pre-season optimism was not well-placed and the unwieldy F2012 has made life doubly hard. Made a good start, but soon faded from the points and retired after hitting Senna.



On-form Schumacher came to sorry end



Alonso hauled Ferrari to fifth

“The Merc struggled with a transmission problem, and it gave Schumacher a big moment”

all sorts of pressure, but it was the reigning champion who went straight on at Turn 1 on the sixth lap after he arrived there at DRS-enhanced speed and the rear simply refused to stick, forcing him to open out the steering to avoid a spin.

Keeping his foot hard down was enough to keep Rosberg from taking advantage – in fact Nico had to get his elbows out to keep Alonso from passing him, this getting Vettel off the hook. Soon enough he was right back on Schumacher’s tail.

The Merc began to struggle with a transmission problem, and going into Turn 1 on the 11th lap it gave Schumacher a big moment – and he took to the run-off grass to avoid spinning, just as Vettel had done there earlier. Michael trailed slowly back to the pits to retire, with Vettel now up to third but about 10s adrift of Hamilton, who in turn was over 3s behind Button.

Both McLarens were already into economy mode and Vettel quickly began closing the gap, Red Bull having not been so aggressive with light-fuelling and its car not being so hard on the rubber.

That the tyres were losing performance faster than anticipated was confirmed by Massa making his first stop at the end of lap 11, with Rosberg following him in one later. Perhaps surprisingly, they were each fitted with another set of option soft tyres. Pitting this early suggested they were destined for three-stop races – a strategy that you’d only go for if forced to, for it’s slower than two-stopping around here. “The

teams were coming in earlier than we’d expected,” confirmed Pirelli’s Paul Hembery, “but it wasn’t because of wear, just degradation.” With a track temperature around 8-deg higher than during Saturday, the tyres were getting a harder time than forecast and losing their performance more quickly.

This was very much on McLaren’s mind as Vettel continued to catch up, and both drivers were saying the rears were causing them concern. If they pitted too soon they could consign themselves to a three-stop which, if Vettel could remain on a two, would have been disastrous for them. It was essential they stay out as long as possible, to minimise the lengths of the remaining two stints.

Button came in on the 16th lap and Red Bull responded by bringing Vettel in from around 11s behind. Button was fitted with prime tyres, Vettel with options. As the leader, Button got first call over Hamilton on the timing of the stops, and this was particularly bad news for Lewis for his rears really were finished now – to the extent that he lost a full 2s on his in-lap. This snowballed when it brought him out behind Sergio Perez, doing a remarkable job one-stopping the Sauber just as he did here last year. For three laps Hamilton was stuck at the Sauber’s pace while Button extended his lead by around 1.5s per lap. Those combined delays for the prime-tired Lewis also brought Vettel – with his faster tyres – onto his tail.

With hindsight, McLaren would have done better bringing Hamilton in before Button. His tyres were in a worse state and it would not have affected Button’s position, but would have saved Hamilton from the accumulated delays that allowed Vettel to close.

Perez had started plum last with a gearbox-change penalty, was up to 12th on the first lap, helped by the ▶

7  **8/10**
Event rating

MICHAEL SCHUMACHER
Mercedes F1 W03-05
Start: 4th. DNF
Admitted Rosberg probably had the single-lap pace to do better than him in qualifying. Made a good start to take third, but gearbox problems soon set in and forced him out after 10 laps. Hard to see that he would have held onto a podium slot given the car’s tyre-degradation problems.

8  **5/10**
Event rating

NICO ROSBERG
Mercedes F1 W03-03
Start: 7th. Finish: 12th
Costly lock-up in Q3 left him down grid, but spectacular start put him fourth. Tyre degradation proved his and Merc’s Achilles’ Heel and forced an early stop. From there it was a downward spiral and he was eighth when contact with Perez on final lap damaged steering.

9  **7/10**
Event rating

KIMI RAJKONEN
Lotus-Renault E20-03
Start: 17th. Finish: 7th
After running wide at the exit of Turn 12, Raikkonen thought he had time to back off and try again and blamed the team for not telling him he had enough time for the planned final lap. Showed a great turn of speed in the race, fought hard and was rewarded with seventh.

10  **7/10**
Event rating

ROMAIN GROSGJEAN
Lotus-Renault E20-01
Start: 3rd. DNF
Was the star of qualifying on his return, getting the most out of the Lotus to put it third on the grid. Dropped to sixth after a slow getaway and retired on second lap with front-left suspension damage after contact with Maldonado. Disappointed, but had made his point.

11  **6/10**
Event rating

PAUL DI RESTA
Force India-Merc VJM05-02
Start: 15th. Finish: 10th
Blamed traffic on his out-lap for losing tyre temperature and therefore having to start his qualifying lap with rubber that wasn’t switched on. Stuck to his task in the race and leaped from 13th to 10th on the final lap, a result which perhaps slightly flattered the Force India.

12  **7/10**
Event rating

NICO HULKENBERG
Force India-Merc VJM05-03
Start: 9th. DNF
Pulled a great lap out of the bag in Q2 to make the top 10 shootout in a car that didn’t look destined for such a lofty position in practice. Left-rear suspension damage after a rub with Webber in the first corner meant that his race was over within seconds of it beginning.

◀ midfield carnage, and then just kept going, keeping his primes in great shape, rising up the order as everyone stopped ahead of him. He was demoted from his temporary second place as Hamilton and Vettel got on with their contest and by Alonso, Rosberg and Webber soon after. He stayed out until lap 25, then set about making his fresh options last for the remaining 33 laps.

Red Bull had split its tyre strategy, putting Webber onto the primes a couple of laps before Vettel had stopped for his options. But he was still trapped behind Rosberg, whose Mercedes continued to quickly degrade its tyres. Nico was trying desperately to get back on schedule for a two-stop, allowing Alonso to gradually pull away from them.

Alonso's was an amazing drive in a Ferrari that by rights should have been way further back, but it too was hard on its rear tyres and the team already believed it would have to stop him three times, just as it would Massa further back.

Hamilton's delays around the first stops had allowed Button's lead to balloon to over 10s, giving Jenson the luxury of getting those fuel and tyre numbers properly under control. He was nursing that lead when McLaren called both of them in for their second stops after 35 laps, the gap between them allowing the team to perform a 'double-shuffle' as they fitted two sets of options in quick succession. "That was a bit demanding for the pit crew," said Lowe, "especially as there are quite a few new members there this year, but they did brilliantly."

Red Bull chose not to bring Vettel in at this point, reckoning his tyres were still OK and hoping that by doing a shorter final stint his newer tyres would allow him the pace to pass Hamilton on track.

But it didn't work out that way. Instead, Vitaly Petrov parked his

Caterham by the pit wall after suffering power-steering failure out of the final corner – and that triggered the safety car. With the McLarens held back to safety-car speeds and Vettel only delayed for part of the lap, he was able to pit for his fresh primes and get out in between Button and Hamilton. It had gained Vettel around 10 seconds. Ironically, had McLaren not done the 'double-shuffle' and brought Hamilton in one lap later again, the 10 seconds he would have gained would have brought him out near-level with Button, possibly even ahead!

As it was, the safety car was still not great news for Jenson. "With a 10-second lead you've pretty much

"The safety car was still not great news for Jenson. 'With a 10-second lead you've got control, and that gets wiped out'"

got control of the race," he said, "and of course that gets wiped out. But not only that, with the sun going down and the slow pace you struggle to keep heat in the tyres, so you're potentially vulnerable at the restart." But he mastered the whole procedure perfectly, sprinting away from Vettel as racing got underway again at the end of the 41st lap. On that lap he was a full 1.9s faster and it was clear the McLaren switched on the prime tyres more quickly than the Red Bull. Hamilton was now all over Vettel and looking for a way by, albeit in vain.

The safety car had been very good news for Webber, wiping out what had been a 16s deficit to Vettel, racked up while he'd been stuck behind Alonso and Rosberg. The



Delight: Ricciardo scored his first points



DRIVER BY DRIVER by Edd Straw

14 **7/10**
Event rating

KAMUI KOBAYASHI

Sauber-Ferrari C31-01
Start: 13th. Finish: 6th
Kobayashi's spectacular style was reasonably effective and, had he duplicated his Q1 time in the second segment of qualifying, he'd have made the top 10. Drove a typical race and was on course for 10th. Then some great opportunism allowed him to leap to sixth.

15 **7/10**
Event rating

SERGIO PEREZ

Sauber-Ferrari C31-03
Start: 22nd. Finish: 8th
Qualifying was ruined by a gearbox problem, which led to a five-place grid penalty. A great stint on mediums got him into the mix and he started the last lap seventh. Backed off when Maldonado crashed, then clashed with Rosberg, costing him ground in the final mile of the race.

16 **8/10**
Event rating

DANIEL RICCIARDO

Toro Rosso-Ferrari STR7-01
Start: 10th. Finish: 9th
Was pulled from pillar to post at his home grand prix, but delivered a great lap in qualifying to sneak into Q3 ahead of his team-mate. Survived a battering at the first corner but dropped to the back. Jumped from 12th to ninth on an opportunist last lap.

17 **8/10**
Event rating

JEAN-ERIC VERGNE

Toro Rosso-Ferrari STR7-03
Start: 11th. Finish: 11th
Just missed out on Q3 on his debut after failing to improve significantly on his Q2 time. Forced off the track after a flying start, he took a bit of the gravel later on while trying to pass di Resta. Came close to nabbing a point in the last-lap madness in his first F1 race.

18 **7/10**
Event rating

PASTOR MALDONADO

Williams-Renault FW34-02
Start: 8th. Finish: 13th
If ever there was an example of a weekend of brilliance being undone in one lapse, it was Maldonado in Australia. Had done the hard work, survived a clash with Grosjean on lap two and had sixth in the bag when he lost the rear on the final lap and speared into the wall.

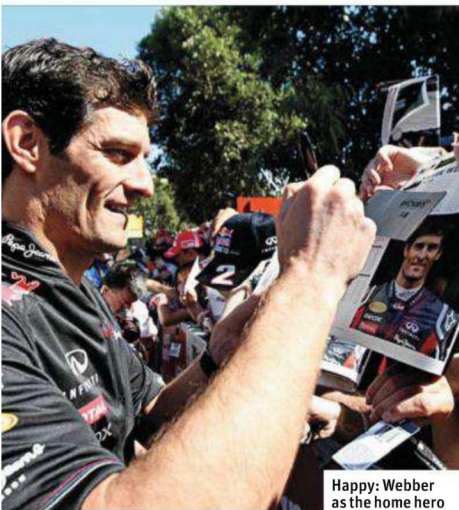
19 **4/10**
Event rating

BRUNO SENNA

Williams-Renault FW34-03
Start: 14th. Finish: 16th
One of those weekends. Couldn't get it together on the soft tyres, which left him down the grid. Punted into a spin at the first corner, he spent the race edging his way up the order before being barged out by Massa while attempting a bold move on the outside of Turn 4.



Joy: Button began his season in top form



Happy: Webber as the home hero

Gloom: Hamilton was flat beaten



Merc and Ferrari had each already made their second stops when the safety car was deployed and were then slowed in the queue as Webber followed Vettel in for his final stop and leapfrogged past them, now on fresh primes. He was then part of a three-way DRS-zone fight for the rest of the race: Vettel/Hamilton/Webber as one for lap after lap. Although the safety car had cost Alonso and Rosberg places to Webber, it had also allowed them not to make third stops, as had originally looked inevitable.

Rosberg's early second stop had dropped him places to Maldonado and Perez, who were now right with fifth-placed Alonso, and the remainder of the race was something of a series of brawls between cars brought together by the safety car.

Alonso withstood immense pressure in sixth from the visibly faster Williams until Maldonado, on the very last lap, got his worn left-rear onto the exit kerb of Turn 6 and tank-slapped hard into the wall. But the final-lap action was only just beginning: Rosberg tried to pass Perez, made contact and punctured — no points for Mercedes. Perez's momentum was checked, allowing team-mate Kamui Kobayashi and Kimi Raikkonen's Lotus through for sixth and seventh. There was a similarly desperate skirmish for ninth down to 11th, with Toro Rosso's Daniel Ricciardo pipping the Force India of Paul di Resta and the other Toro Rosso of Vergne.

Button was immune from all this, out front and pulling away. He even let rip with the race's fastest lap three from the end, giving his team palpitations — just like Vettel used to do with Red Bull last year. As he pulled into parc ferme and his wheels rolled to a stop, so Jenson's tyres could be seen to be in great shape. This is what complete mastery looks like. 🏆

20  **6/10**
Event rating

HEIKKI KOVALAINEN
Caterham-Renault CT01-01
Start: 18th. DNF
Reckoned he lost as much as seven tenths thanks to encountering de la Rosa's slow HRT on his best qualifying lap. That still wouldn't have put him into the midfield pack. DRS didn't work, then he lost KERS and retired with a suspension problem. Tough start.

21  **5/10**
Event rating

VITALY PETROV
Caterham-Renault CT01-02
Start: 19th. DNF
Hard to be too critical of the Russian on his first weekend as a Caterham driver. Went into qualifying undercooked thanks to hydraulics problems in FP3. Jumped the ailing Kovalainen after his first stop and did a solid job before retiring with a steering problem.

22  **6/10**
Event rating

PEDRO DE LA ROSA
HRT-Cosworth F112-02
DNQ
Went into Saturday with one installation lap under his belt in F112 and was always fighting a losing battle. Like his team-mate, struggled with the awful HRT steering system that made the car almost impossible to drive and did a decent job to get within 1.4s of qualifying.

23  **6/10**
Event rating

NARAIN KARTHIKEYAN
HRT-Cosworth F112-01
DNQ
Managed 19 laps on Friday, but despite completing more running than his team-mate never had a chance of hauling the car onto the grid. Cooling and hydraulic problems, plus terrible steering, meant he was a mobile chicane in qualifying and did well to extract the pace he did.

24  **7/10**
Event rating

TIMO GLOCK
Marussia-Cosworth MR-01
Start: 20th. Finish: 14th
The German declared it felt "great to have fun driving an F1 car again" after qualifying, although was only three tenths closer to pole than last year. Car didn't miss a beat in the race despite braking problems, and Glock even ran ahead of the Caterhams early on.

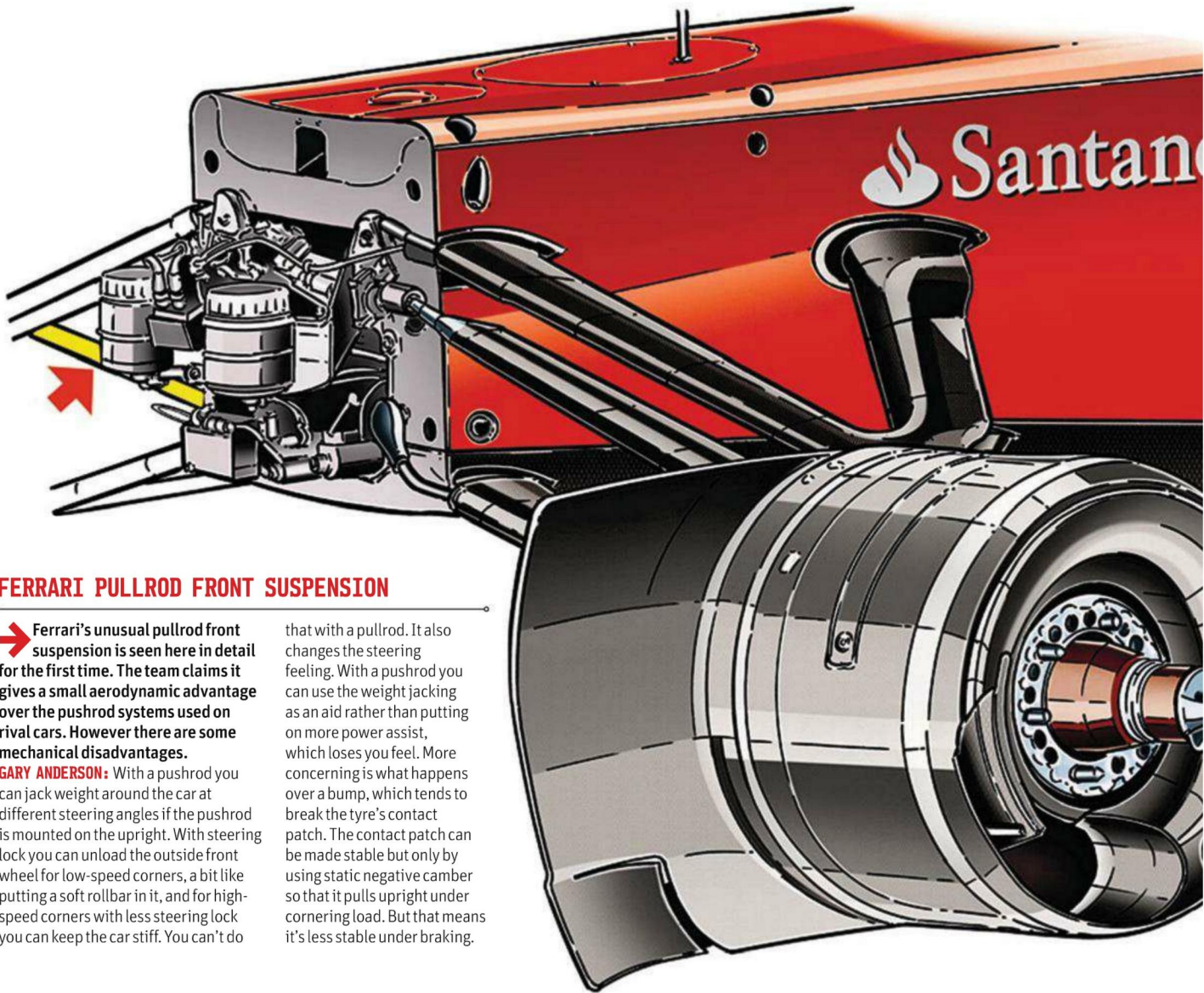
25  **7/10**
Event rating

CHARLES PIC
Marussia-Cosworth MR-01
Start: 21st. Finish: 15th
With no meaningful running in the MR-01, the rookie was in at the deep end. Qualified comfortably, kept out of trouble and impressed with his pace relative to Glock on high fuel. Stopped once he had completed enough laps to be classified because of dropping fuel pressure.

Drawing board



Gary Anderson, Mark Hughes and Giorgio Piola explain some of the technical innovations from Melbourne, featuring Ferrari, Mercedes, Red Bull and Sauber



FERRARI PULLROD FRONT SUSPENSION

➔ Ferrari's unusual pullrod front suspension is seen here in detail for the first time. The team claims it gives a small aerodynamic advantage over the pushrod systems used on rival cars. However there are some mechanical disadvantages.

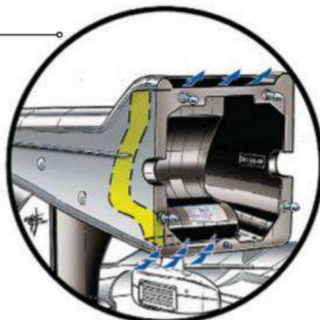
GARY ANDERSON: With a pushrod you can jack weight around the car at different steering angles if the pushrod is mounted on the upright. With steering lock you can unload the outside front wheel for low-speed corners, a bit like putting a soft rollbar in it, and for high-speed corners with less steering lock you can keep the car stiff. You can't do

that with a pullrod. It also changes the steering feeling. With a pushrod you can use the weight jacking as an aid rather than putting on more power assist, which loses you feel. More concerning is what happens over a bump, which tends to break the tyre's contact patch. The contact patch can be made stable but only by using static negative camber so that it pulls upright under cornering load. But that means it's less stable under braking.

SAUBER NOSE HOLE

➔ Sauber ducts air from beneath the nose through a channel that emerges on the upper surface.

GARY ANDERSON: You're trying to make the airflow as tidy as possible beneath the nose and this takes it up, keeping it better attached to the underside surface.

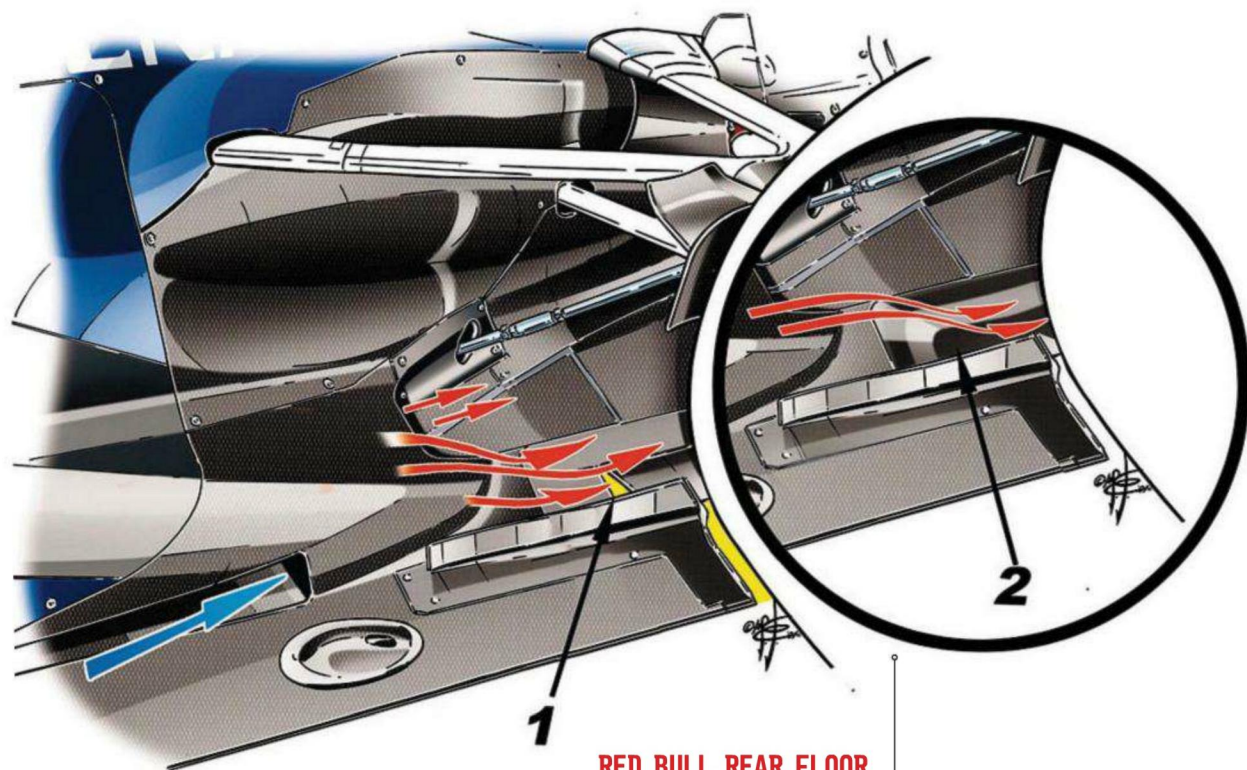


MERCEDES REAR END

➔ This car is like a maze with its internal channels serving different purposes.

GARY ANDERSON: It's difficult to get the flow to stay attached on the inner edge of the Coke bottle profile, especially on the inside of the car through a fast corner because as the car yaws the angle of attack increases and the airflow sometimes cannot sustain it. Getting it to stay attached so you can have a more aggressive Coke bottle is what the exhaust flow coming down the sides like this is trying to do.

At the base of the engine cover is a cooling exit.



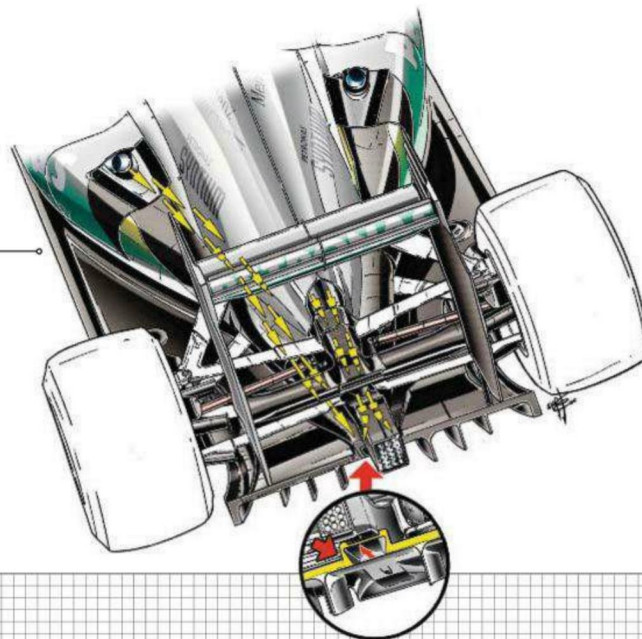
RED BULL REAR FLOOR

➔ For Melbourne Red Bull made further modifications to the new rear bodywork package introduced with the new exhaust layout during the final winter test. The previous hole (1) in the floor was gone and a lateral fence (2) added to the lower edges.

GARY ANDERSON: The fences are trying to create what the exhaust did last year

by getting a vortex in the air down by the rear tyre, preventing it going under the diffuser. Get the vortex set up correctly and it whistles down the inside of the wheel and acts like a skirt around the diffuser. The previous hole, which took airflow from the bottom of the sidepods and routed it to the diffuser, would have negated the effect of those fences.

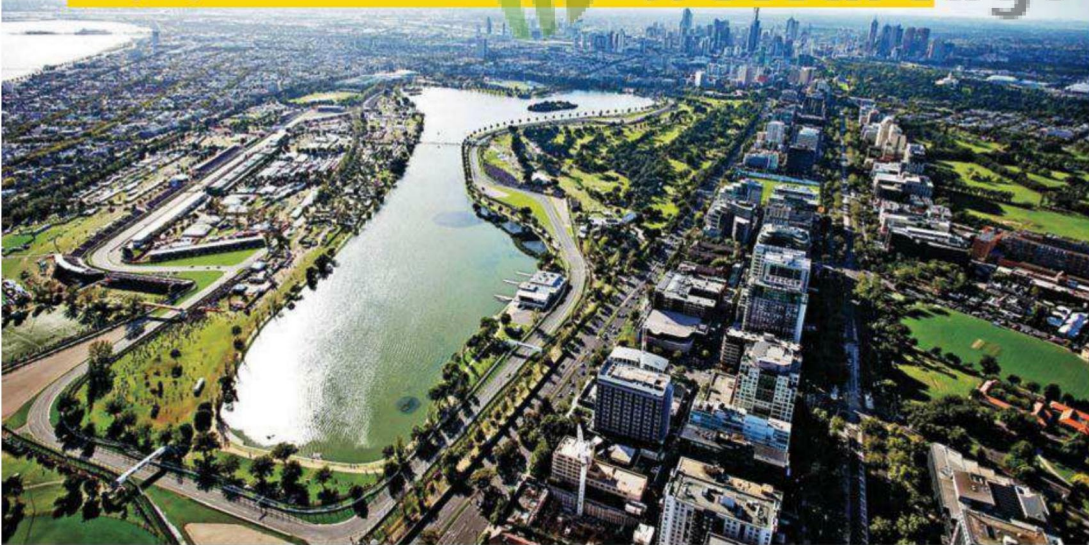
This is near the area of the diffuser that's very prone to stall, very near the ground. The most important thing is when the air comes back up off the ground it re-attaches – and this will help it do that. That's a big benefit on initial braking because if it doesn't re-attach quickly enough there's a lot of momentum to it and it makes the car really nervous. If you can get it to re-attach like a light switch it improves the braking stability.





AUSTRALIAN GP RESULTS

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ags



PRACTICE 1: Friday

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	BUTTON	1m27.560s
2	HAMILTON	1m27.805s
3	SCHUMACHER	1m28.235s
4	ALONSO	1m28.360s
5	WEBBER	1m28.467s
6	ROSBERG	1m28.683s
7	RICCIARDO	1m28.908s
8	MALDONADO	1m29.415s
9	RAIKKONEN	1m29.565s
10	KOBAYASHI	1m29.722s
11	VETTEL	1m29.790s
12	HULKENBERG	1m29.865s
13	DI RESTA	1m29.881s
14	SENNA	1m29.953s
15	PEREZ	1m30.124s
16	GROSJEAN	1m30.515s
17	KOVALAINEN	1m30.586s
18	MASSA	1m30.743s
19	VERGNE	1m31.178s
20	PETROV	1m31.983s
21	GLOCK	1m34.730s
22	PIC	1m40.256s
23	KARTHIKEYAN	no time
24	DE LA ROSA	no time

Weather: wet and drying

PRACTICE 2: Friday

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	SCHUMACHER	1m29.183s
2	HULKENBERG	1m29.292s
3	PEREZ	1m30.199s
4	ALONSO	1m30.341s
5	KOBAYASHI	1m30.709s
6	DI RESTA	1m31.466s
7	MASSA	1m31.505s
8	KOVALAINEN	1m31.932s
9	ROSBERG	1m32.184s
10	VETTEL	1m32.194s
11	WEBBER	1m32.296s
12	GLOCK	1m32.632s
13	PETROV	1m32.767s
14	GROSJEAN	1m32.822s
15	BUTTON	1m33.039s
16	HAMILTON	1m33.252s
17	MALDONADO	1m34.108s
18	RAIKKONEN	1m34.275s
19	SENNA	1m34.312s
20	VERGNE	1m34.485s
21	RICCIARDO	1m34.604s
22	PIC	1m34.770s
23	KARTHIKEYAN	1m42.627s
24	DE LA ROSA	no time

Weather: wet and drying

PRACTICE 3: Saturday

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	HAMILTON	1m25.681s
2	GROSJEAN	1m25.758s
3	WEBBER	1m25.900s
4	BUTTON	1m25.906s
5	ROSBERG	1m25.929s
6	SCHUMACHER	1m26.078s
7	VETTEL	1m26.211s
8	MALDONADO	1m26.470s
9	PEREZ	1m26.632s
10	RICCIARDO	1m26.723s
11	VERGNE	1m26.733s
12	RAIKKONEN	1m26.737s
13	KOBAYASHI	1m26.755s
14	HULKENBERG	1m27.029s
15	SENNA	1m27.199s
16	ALONSO	1m27.323s
17	DI RESTA	1m27.428s
18	MASSA	1m28.023s
19	KOVALAINEN	1m28.341s
20	PETROV	1m28.702s
21	GLOCK	1m30.728s
22	PIC	1m31.225s
23	DE LA ROSA	1m33.114s
24	KARTHIKEYAN	1m33.261s

Weather: dry



QUALIFYING TIMES

POS	DRIVER	QUALIFYING 1	QUALIFYING 2	QUALIFYING 3
1	HAMILTON	1m26.800s (9)	1m25.626s (3)	1m24.922s
2	BUTTON	1m26.832s (11)	1m25.663s (4)	1m25.074s
3	GROSJEAN	1m26.498s (3)	1m25.845s (5)	1m25.302s
4	SCHUMACHER	1m26.586s (4)	1m25.571s (2)	1m25.336s
5	WEBBER	1m27.117s (14)	1m26.297s (7)	1m25.651s
6	VETTEL	1m26.773s (8)	1m25.982s (6)	1m25.668s
7	ROSBERG	1m26.763s (7)	1m25.469s (1)	1m25.686s
8	MALDONADO	1m26.803s (10)	1m26.206s (10)	1m25.908s
9	HULKENBERG	1m27.464s (15)	1m26.314s (8)	1m26.451s
10	RICCIARDO	1m27.024s (13)	1m26.319s (9)	no time
11	VERGNE	1m26.493s (2)	1m26.429s	-
12	ALONSO	1m26.688s (6)	1m26.494s	-
13	KOBAYASHI	1m26.182s (1)	1m26.590s	-
14	SENNA	1m27.004s (12)	1m26.663s	-
15	DI RESTA	1m27.469s (16)	1m27.086s	-
16	MASSA	1m27.633s (17)	1m27.497s	-
17	PEREZ	1m26.596s (5)	no time	-
18	RAIKKONEN	1m27.758s	-	-
19	KOVALAINEN	1m28.679s	-	-
20	PETROV	1m29.018s	-	-
21	GLOCK	1m30.923s	-	-
22	PIC	1m31.670s	-	-
23	DE LA ROSA	1m33.495s	-	-
24	KARTHIKEYAN	1m33.643s	-	-

Weather: dry

QUALIFYING STATISTICS

	HEAD TO HEAD
VETTEL	0 1 WEBBER
BUTTON	0 1 HAMILTON
ALONSO	1 0 MASSA
SCHUMACHER	1 0 ROSBERG
RAIKKONEN	0 1 GROSJEAN
DI RESTA	0 1 HULKENBERG
KOBAYASHI	1 0 PEREZ
RICCIARDO	1 0 VERGNE
MALDONADO	1 0 SENNA
KOVALAINEN	1 0 PETROV
DE LA ROSA	1 0 KARTHIKEYAN
GLOCK	1 0 PIC



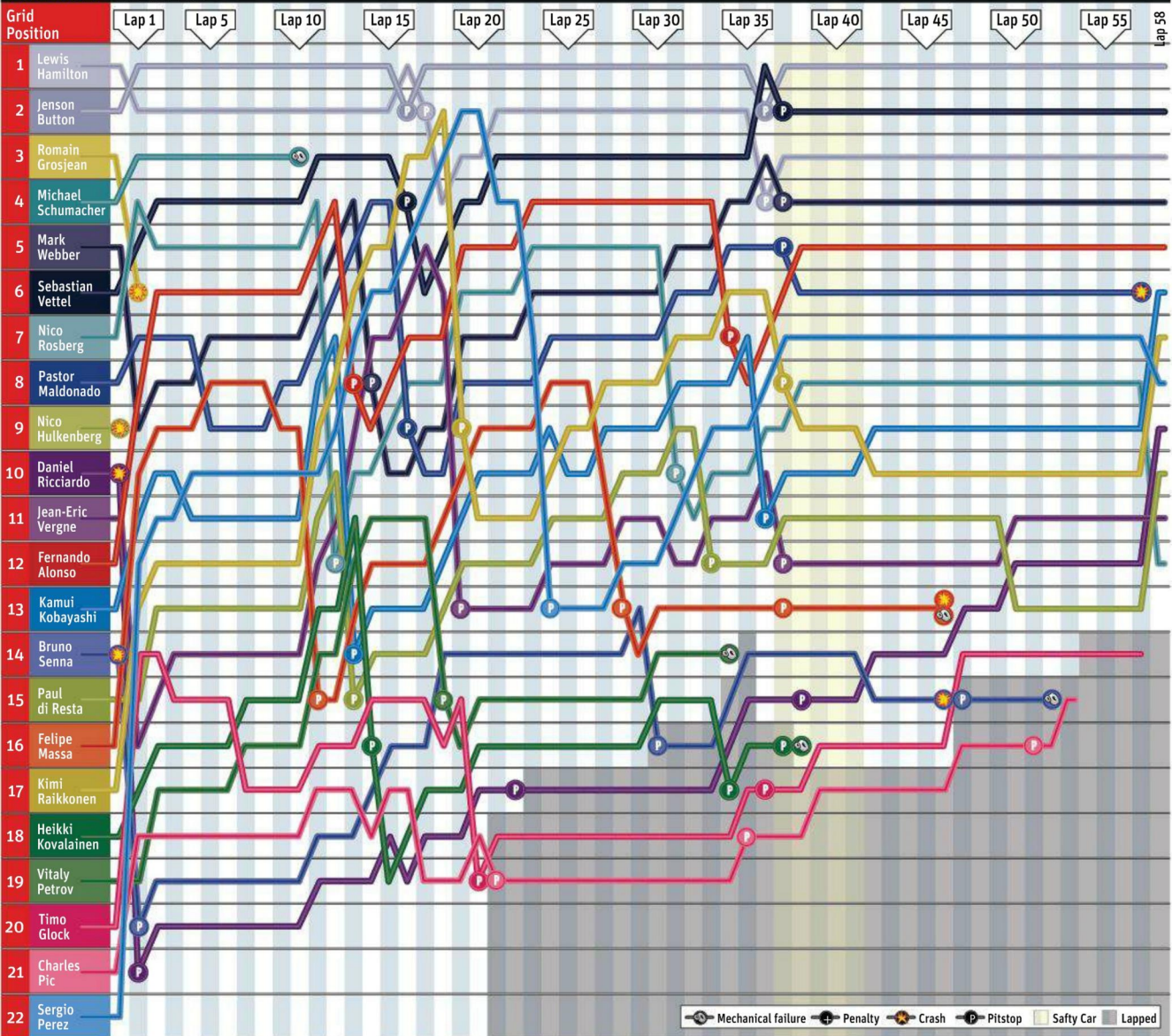
THE GRID

	1 HAMILTON McLAREN 1m24.922s Soft		2 BUTTON McLAREN 1m25.074s Soft
	3 GROSJEAN LOTUS 1m25.302s Soft		4 SCHUMACHER MERCEDES 1m25.336s Soft
	5 WEBBER RED BULL 1m25.651s Soft		6 VETTEL RED BULL 1m25.668s Soft
	7 ROSBERG MERCEDES 1m25.685s Soft		8 MALDONADO WILLIAMS 1m25.908s Soft
	9 HULKENBERG FORCE INDIA 1m26.451s Soft		10 RICCIARDO TORO ROSSO no time Soft
	11 VERGNE TORO ROSSO 1m26.429s Medium		12 ALONSO FERRARI 1m26.494s Soft
	13 KOBAYASHI SAUBER 1m26.590s Soft		14 SENNA WILLIAMS 1m26.663s Soft
	15 DI RESTA FORCE INDIA 1m27.086s Soft		16 MASSA FERRARI 1m27.497s Soft
	17 RAIKKONEN LOTUS 1m27.758s Soft		18 KOVALAINEN CATERHAM 1m28.679s Soft
	19 PETROV CATERHAM 1m29.018s Medium		20 GLOCK MARRUSSIA 1m30.923s Soft
	21 PIC MARRUSSIA 1m31.670s Soft		22 PEREZ SAUBER no time* Medium
	DNQ DE LA ROSA HRT 1m33.495s**		DNQ KARTHIKEYAN HRT 1m33.643s**

*Gearbox-change penalty. **Outside 107 per cent rule

AUSTRALIAN GP THE FINAL WORDS

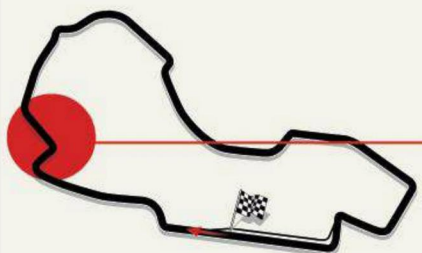
THE RACE: LAP BY LAP



TRACKSIDE VIEW



MARK HUGHES
GRAND PRIX EDITOR















All to do in a manic 60 minutes on Saturday morning. New cars, Friday practices rained out, blue sky now peppered only lightly in wisps of pure white, autumn breeze stirring up the surface of the lake, the sound of Melbourne traffic going about its business nearby. Meanwhile there are tyre comparisons to be made, limits to be explored, track rubbering-in and altered handling balances to be felt. The howl of insanely high-revving V8s rising and falling, echoing off the trees soon drowns out anything in Albert Park that is not F1. Jenson Button's scything through the super-fast chicane of 11-12 but is so silky the car seems barely even to notice the extremes being asked of it, its body language poised. By contrast, Nico Rosberg's Mercedes is spectacular, on full attack – even with tyres not yet fully up to

temperature – and man-handled into compliance. But this Merc changes direction like none before it, Nico looking so reminiscent of his dad as the silver arrow is aggressively pointed into the first part of the sequence. Romain Grosjean's confidence is breathtaking, clearly very much at ease in a Lotus that's malleable, encouraging him to take yet more liberties with his entry speed, its smooth absorption of the bumps on the exit of 12 letting him know there is no nastiness to its character. With the pace of the session building, Lewis Hamilton is beginning to deliberately over-step even the McLaren's heady limits, fourth gear oversteer mid-way through the left of 11 lining him up better for the right of 12. The connection between this and the outside world just over the fences has never seemed so tenuous.

“Button's so silky the car seems barely to notice the extremes being asked of it, its body language poised”

THE WORD ON THE CIRCUIT



6-7 APRIL OULTON PARK 	14-15 APRIL MONZA 	11-13 MAY PAU 	9-10 JUNE ROCKINGHAM 	23-24 JUNE BRANDS HATCH 	29 JUNE -1 JULY PAUL RICARD 	26-28 JULY SPA 	4-5 AUGUST SNETTERTON 	8-9 SEPTEMBER SILVERSTONE 	29-30 SEPTEMBER DONINGTON 
									

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2011 GT3 Champions

2012 Calendar

7-9 April
OULTON PARK

17-19 May
NURBURGRING

9-10 June
ROCKINGHAM

23-24 June
BRANDS HATCH

4-5 August
SNETTERTON

8-9 September
SILVERSTONE

29-30 September
DONINGTON PARK

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GRAND PRIX DIGEST

The weekend in a nutshell - plus moments you might have missed...

THURSDAY

1133 Fernando Alonso won't rule out Ferrari making a bid for the title despite its pre-season troubles: "We want to be world champions, that's the ultimate target."

1310 Ross Brawn declares it "optimistic" for Mercedes to expect to take its first victory this year since returning to F1 in 2010.

1353 @HeikkiKovalainen Here's a pic of my new "Angry Birds" themed crash helmet!



1507 Mark Webber delivers his verdict on the look of the stepped-nose 2012 challengers: "They look ugly, for sure," he says. "It's an ugly regulation."

1523 Marussia's French rookie Charles Pic defies Formula 1 convention by declaring "the Nurburgring and Barcelona" as his favourite circuits.

1540 Preliminary scrutineering is completed, with the FIA decreeing all 23 cars presented to be in conformity.



1630 HRT given permission to put Pedro de la Rosa's car (left) through scrutineering late because of last-minute rush to build it.

1815 FIA technical delegate Charlie Whiting reveals that moves are afoot to prevent the ugly stepped noses in 2013.

1830 @therealdcf1 (David Coulthard): Been at the track and learned absolutely nothing more than we knew already, it will be Saturday morning FP3 before we get down to business

2030 AUTOSPORT story reveals that the FIA currently considers the Mercedes 'f-duct' rear wing to be legal.

FRIDAY

1129 Pedro de la Rosa's HRT finally passes scrutineering.

1230 Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne becomes the first driver to hit the track in an official Formula 1 session in 2012 at the start of a wet Free Practice 1.

1300 Narain Karthikeyan is the first to suffer car problems as his HRT grinds to a halt (left) with a loss of fuel pressure exiting Turn 12.



1317 Sergio Perez becomes the first driver of the season to bolt on slicks in the first free-practice session.

1345 Felipe Massa spins into the gravel at Turn 9 after dropping a wheel on to the grass under braking for the right-hander.

1356 @rubarrichello (Rubens Barrichello): It feels kind of strange to watch the cars going around #MelbournePark from a distance

1706 Williams driver Pastor Maldonado is hit with the first speeding fine of 2012: €400 for breaking the 60km/h pitlane limit.

1717 Mark Webber goes off under braking for Turn 1, wedging an armful of grass in his Red Bull's splitter (right).



1730 Sauber's Kamui Kobayashi survives a lurid spin at the exit of the final corner at the end of the second free-practice session.

0026 @kamui_kobayashi Finally start from tomorrow. yosssssssssssssss!!!! Let's going to sleep!

SATURDAY

1415 Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne picks up the first punishment of his F1 career. He is fined €400 for breaking the pitlane speed limit in FP3 by 1.2km/h.

1445 World champion Sebastian Vettel spins into the gravel at Turn 6 after touching the grass. His FP3 is over.

1454 The other German world champ, Michael Schumacher, spins into the gravel at Turn 9 (right) ending his session too.



1650 Martin Whitmarsh confirms he has no problems with the legality of the Mercedes. "I support Charlie [Whiting] and Mercedes," he says.

1720 Kimi Raikkonen falls in Q1 on his F1 comeback. He blames "a mistake" and "a communication issue" for mis-timing the end of the session by at least 5s.

1732 Fernando Alonso drops a wheel on to the grass on the approach to Turn 1 and spins into the gravel in Q2. He stomps away from his Ferrari and will start 12th.

1736 @InsideFerrari on Alonso: "He had managed to keep the engine on, waiting for the marshals who did nothing."

1952 Narain Karthikeyan is reprimanded for hindering Alonso in Q1. Five minutes later, HRT team-mate Pedro de la Rosa gets a similar punishment. Stewards then decide not to waive the 107 per cent rule, ending the Spanish team's weekend.

2039 Sauber confirms that Sergio Perez must have a change of gearbox, which failed in Q2, and earns a five-place grid penalty. He will start 22nd and last.

2124 AUTOSPORT reveals that Lotus has asked for talks with the FIA and Mercedes over the legality of the DRS-activated f-duct.

SUNDAY

1345 Toro Rosso refugee Jaime Alguersuari (right) spotted having lunch with Pirelli's Paul Hembery... who needs a test driver.



1610 AUTOSPORT reports that Ross Brawn is hopeful no-one will protest against Mercedes. "It is not really the way to resolve these issues," he says.

1703 Nico Hulkenberg becomes the first driver to retire from a grand prix in 2012 with suspension damage after contact with Mark Webber at the first corner.

1720 @NickHeidfeld: First time I manage to watch #F1 this weekend. Cars look generally pretty unstable I have to say

1745 Kimi Raikkonen asks: "Why do I get all the time blue flags?" The reply: "Blue flags are for the cars behind Kimi. They are not for you."

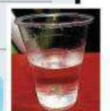
1752 @PaulHembery: of top runners the greater degradation is from front 2 cars. Obviously they have pace to compensate and are push push

1804 Caterham's Heikki Kovalainen hit with a five-place grid penalty for the Malaysian Grand Prix for overtaking two cars before the safety car line.

1923 Romain Grosjean tells AUTOSPORT that Pastor Maldonado was at fault for their lap-two clash. "He just arrived too quick and couldn't turn his car."

2015 Maldonado disagrees, and tells us his move "was a clean one".

2020 @alo_oficial (Alonso): Mmm,what a race! We know there is a lot of work ahead, but today I see the glass half full. :))!



SEBRING

USA

March 15-17

World Endurance Championship
Round 1 of 8



AT A GLANCE

- Winner Allan McNish/Tom Kristensen/Rinaldo Capello
- Pole Andre Lotterer
- Fastest lap Lotterer



Lotterer celebrates pole with Treluyer (l) and Fassler (r)

Audi old guard's anniversary waltz

The German marque's veteran crew of McNish, Kristensen and Capello showed its younger team-mates the way home in the 60th running of the Florida classic



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IT WAS ONLY FITTING THAT the Audi old guard of Allan McNish, Tom Kristensen and Rinaldo Capello should win the 60th anniversary Sebring 12 Hours. The trio have written their names large in the history of the oldest US sportscar endurance and underlined their past achievements with an emphatic victory in a milestone event that marked the start of the FIA World Endurance Championship.

McNish, Kristensen and Capello led most of the way on Saturday and looked to have a clear edge over their team-mates in the other two Joest-run Audi R18 TDIs over the race distance. The #2 R18 led all but 66 of the 325 laps around the Sebring International Raceway that made up this year's race, but more significantly it appeared to be permanently in control of what was always going to

be an internecine Audi battle in the absence of any manufacturer opposition.

It was a fitting riposte for those who have argued that there is a changing of the guard underway within the Audi Sport squad. Their performance in the face of opposition from younger team-mates drew a line under their disappointing 2011 season and suggested that McNish and Kristensen are hungry to add the words

'world' and 'champion' to their already bulging sportscar CVs. The Scot is the only one of the trio confirmed for the full WEC right now, but Kristensen staked a claim for a seat alongside his long-time team-mate.

"It was a fantastic victory for Tom, Dindo and me after a tough season last year," said McNish. "To start off the new world championship with a victory is superb."

McNish took the lead from Marcel Fassler into Turn 17 at the end of the opening lap before ducking into the pits during the first safety-car period. The winning trio were pitted in the middle of the three Audis and were keen to get out of sequence to avoid the pitlane melee.

The tactic also gave the car the advantage out on the track. When Kristensen took over at the end of the

RACE RATING

★★★★☆

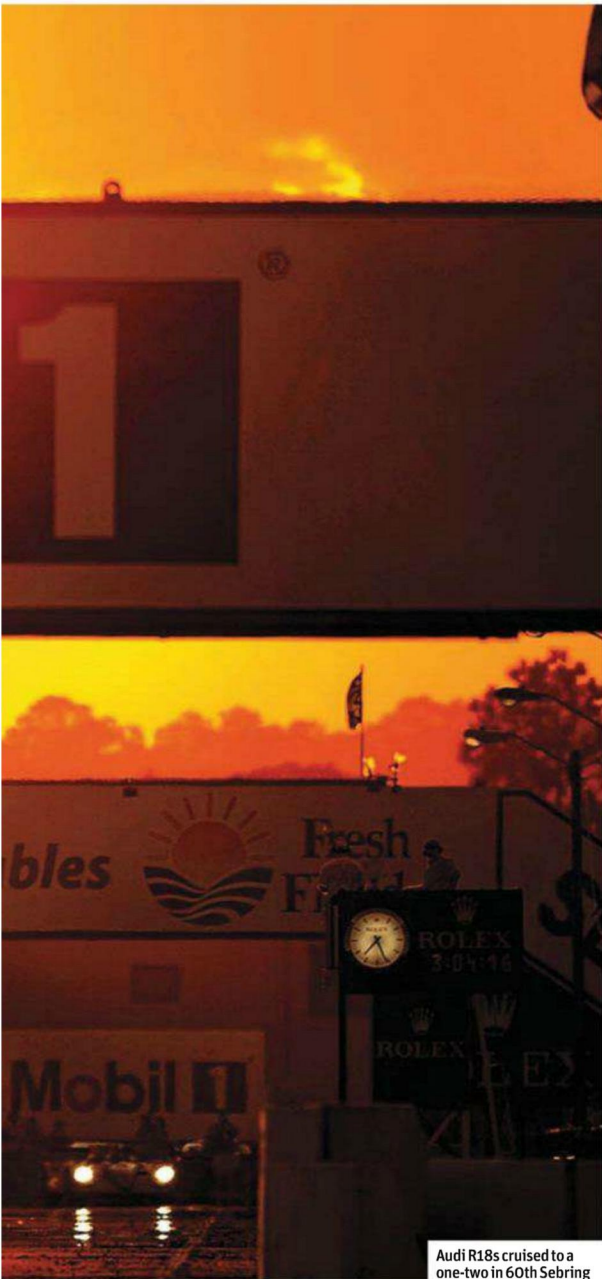
Remained close until the penultimate hour, but the winners always had the edge

“Initially I thought I’d equalled Tom’s record of five Sebring victories. Then I remembered he was my team-mate”

Rinaldo Capello was a little confused, but is still second in the all-time list of Sebring 12 Hours winners

REPORT SEBRING 12 HOURS

GARY WATKINS
reports



Audi R18s cruised to a one-two in 60th Sebring

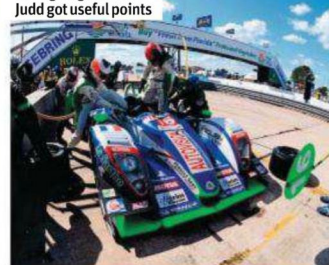
Heartache befell the Muscle Milk HPD



British JRM HPD hit suspension woes



The ageing Pescarolo-Judd got useful points



second hour, he came out ahead of the other two Audis, which were both due pitstops. The Dane pulled away from Andre Lotterer, who had qualified the #1 car on pole, and was nearly a minute ahead after his team-mates had refuelled.

That advantage was wiped out by a subsequent pitstop, but it set the tone for the race. Kristensen had the edge on Benoit Treluyer in the #1 after the safety car and then pulled away from Romain Dumas in the #3 car after the next yellow-flag period.

The Lotterer/Treluyer/Fassler Audi lost a lap early in the fourth hour when gear selection problems struck. The initial problem was resolved in the pits by hitting the electronic reset button, but when the problem returned in hour six, the car was taken back

to the paddock for repairs.

The problem was eventually traced to the electric motor that drives the gearchange mechanism in the gearbox, but the 17 laps lost left the car down in 16th position.

It remained close between the two undelayed Audis until the penultimate hour, though the 11 safety-car periods that interrupted this race played their part.

Kristensen, back in the #2 car for the second time, was able to pull away from Bernhard with ease, though the German was struggling with a handling issue.

“There was a kick-back through the steering, something we saw at Petit Le Mans last year,” explained Ralf Juttner, “so we told him to take it easy.” Kristensen was already a lap up when Bernhard was involved in a collision with

a GTC-class Porsche in the final hour. The subsequent repairs resulted in the car finishing what was an unrepresentative four laps down at the finish.

McNish had no doubt that he and his team-mates deserved the victory.

“Generally we had the pace to pull away, and that’s what we did,” he said. “We did a good job in setting the car up for the race. It was the best R18 I’ve ever had in race trim; it worked well from the beginning of the race to the end.”

It was difficult not to agree with McNish’s conclusions, though Bernhard begged to differ. “I think in pure performance we were a little bit better,” he said, “but it didn’t work out for us today.”

The 60th anniversary event was like a Sebring



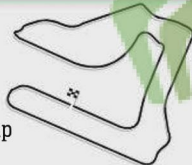
Pole Audi (#1) led away, but winning R18 (2) was soon past

SEBRING

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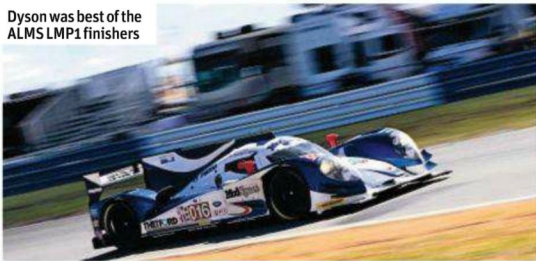
LMP2 AT A GLANCE

- Winner **Stephane Sarrazin/
Ryan Dalziel/Enzo Potolicchio**
- Pole **Olivier Pla**
- Fastest lap **Pla**



Sarrazin, Potolicchio and Dalziel took LMP2 victory

Dyson was best of the ALMS LMP1 finishers



Core ORECA (L) won LMPC, despite this disagreement

of old, in the days when Audi turned up to the American Le Mans Series opener in the knowledge that victory was its to lose but always allowed its drivers to make a race of it. As far as the battle for victory went it didn't seem like the start of the brave new world of the WEC, and for that we have Peugeot to thank.

Look beyond the battle right at the sharp end, and it looked very much like a new championship with an exciting future. The strong field of privateer LMP1 prototypes and LMP2 machinery distinguished

this race from so many Sebring of the noughties.

That said, the chase of the Audis was led most of the way by a competitor from the ALMS entry that made up over half the field in this year's 12 Hours. The Muscle Milk/Pickett Racing Honda Performance Development ARX-03a became established in third after problems for the #1 Audi and even gained back one of its two lost laps late in the race, only to fall at the final hurdle.

The refuelling valve failed at what should have been the car's final pitstop. Such had been the rush to get its

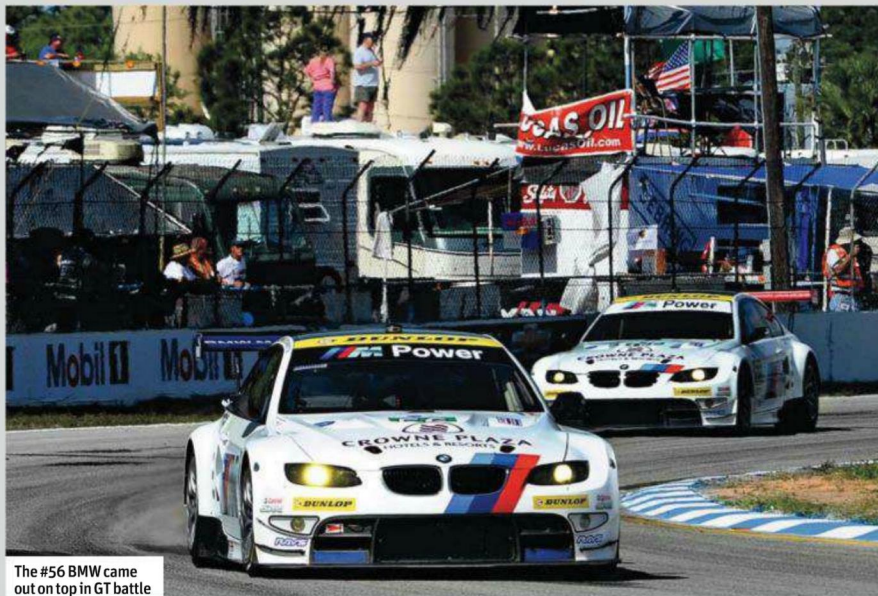
fleet of P1 and P2 cars finished on time for Sebring that there was a shortage of spares, and that included the all-important valve.

The team attempted a Heath Robinson repair with an older valve, but a fuel leak resulted in a heartbreaking retirement within sight of the flag.

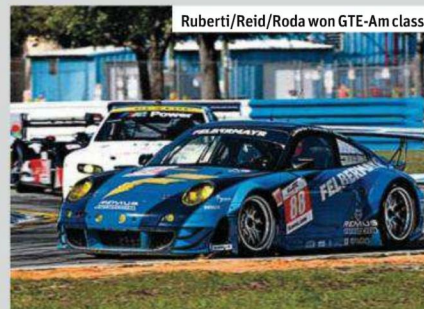
"The car ran perfectly for so long and we weren't far off the pace of the Audis," said Klaus Graf, who shared the car with Lucas Luhr and Simon Pagenaud. "We came so close to finishing second overall that we feel empty."

The Muscle Milk HPD had briefly fallen behind

BMW edges GT-class rivals for second Sebring success



The #56 BMW came out on top in GT battle



Ruberti/Reid/Roda won GTE-Am class

Nobody could have expected the battle for honours in the combined WEC GTE Pro and ALMS GT class to have been much closer, especially Joey Hand who sealed the victory for the Rahal BMW team with a superlative drive on used tyres over his final stint. He started the last lap erroneously believing he was in second place and ended up off the track after becoming embroiled in a battle with the sister car to the AF Corse Ferrari that he was really battling with.

Gianmaria Bruni, whose car had been delayed by two alternator failures early in the race, charged past Hand's BMW at Turn 16 on the penultimate lap, but the DTM-bound American came back at the Ferrari believing it was the sister car, being driven by Olivier Beretta. He made it past into Turn 1 of

the last lap, before a return move by Bruni ended up with Hand off the track at Turn 3.

The BMW, which was shared by Dirk Muller and sportscar newcomer Jonathan Summerton, would have lost the lead had not Beretta also gone off as he avoided another car that spun to try to avoid the melee. In fact, the Monegasque came out worse, meaning he and co-drivers Andrea Bertolini and Marco Cioci ended up third behind the best of the Chevrolet Corvette C6.Rs driven by Jan Magnussen, Antonio Garcia and Jordan Taylor.

Hand was not best pleased with the antics of the Ferrari driver, whom he was convinced was in fact Beretta immediately after the race.

"He had no chance of making that move," he said. "But I was expecting it from him."

The race officials had realised what had really gone on and Bruni was fined \$15,000 for his antics. Beretta should, by rights, have been ahead of the BMW at this stage. He'd lost out to Hand after the final round of stops, but on new tyres he came back at the BMW and with 13 minutes to go attempted a pass at the hairpin, only to get it all wrong and lock up and lose five seconds in the process.

The combined GT pack provided the best action of the race. The two Rahal BMWs, the pair of Pratt & Miller-run factory Corvettes, the Beretta AF Ferrari and the Felbermayr-Proton Porsche of Marc Lieb/Richard Lietz/Patrick Pilet were all still in contention as the race drew to its conclusion. The factory Aston Martin Vantage of Darren Turner/Adrian Fernandez/Stefan Mucke was also in the mix until it lost a wheel in the eighth hour.

The outcome of the race might have been different had the fastest of the two Ferraris in the race not hit problems early on.

Toni Vilander led the early laps in the car he shared with Bruni and Giancarlo Fisichella before the first of the two alternator failures struck. Luxury Racing's GTE Pro entry driven by former Ferrari factory driver Jaime Melo, Frederic Makowiecki and Jean-Karl Vernay was right in the mix until Melo went off on someone else's oil and sustained irrevocable rear-end damage.

LMP2 RACE RATING

★★★★☆

Another amazing battle that provided drama all the way

“Last year I was third and I was not happy. This time I’m third and I can’t believe it”

Stephane Sarrazin casts his mind back to missing out on an overall win with Peugeot in 2011

REPORT
SEBRING 12 HOURS

JRM-Racing’s identical example in the ninth hour. It was a remarkable performance by the British team, which completed the build of the car in the paddock and only ran for the first time right at the end of the two days of official testing at the start of Sebring week.

The car driven by David Brabham, Peter Dumbreck and Karun Chandhok didn’t have the ultimate pace of the Muscle Milk car, but the drivers picked up speed as they came to grips with their new mount during the race, while the team belied its lack of endurance-racing experience and used the yellows to get ahead of Muscle Milk. It was back behind Graf and co but still in with a shout of third when the right-rear suspension collapsed with the loss of 15 laps.

“We shouldn’t grumble because we only came here to gain experience,” said team manager Nigel Stepney, “but we showed we could compete today.”

The problems for JRM and Muscle Milk meant Strakka Racing was the top HPD in LMP1. It had what team owner Nick Leventis described as a “messy race”, interrupted by four stop-go penalties for pitlane speeding on the way to 10th place overall.

Rebellion Racing failed to get either of its Toyota-engined Lola coupes to the finish cleanly, though the best of its two cars driven by Neel Jani, Nicolas Prost and Nick Heidfeld ran ahead of Muscle Milk early on.

It was still in contention for best petrol car when a pitlane fire lost it a couple of laps in the ninth hour. The car was running fifth in the penultimate hour when an electronic glitch stranded the car on the back straight.

Jani got the car into a safe place on the starter motor at which point it was recovered to the paddock where the team effected the repairs that got it to the finish in 32nd position.

The good news for Rebellion was the pace of its

Lolas in last year’s configuration. That bodes well for the rest of the season, when its cars will run the latest aero package from Lola.

Pescarolo Team ended up best of the rest in third position in P1, though behind the top three in LMP2, on what should be the last appearance for its ageing Judd V10-engined 01 chassis. The French team was never aiming for anything other than a clean run to get as many points as possible and drivers Emmanuel Collard, Jean-Christophe Boullion and Julien Jousse stayed true to that plan.

Pescarolo should have its new car in time for Spa in May when the WEC should burst into life. The French team won’t be alone in new machinery a race debut. Audi will have both its 2012 challengers present and will hopefully get the opposition that was so missing at Sebring in the form of the Toyota’s all-new TSO30 HYBRID. ❖

LMP2: Starworks pips Level 5 rival



Starworks HPD prevailed in epic LMP2 scrap with Level 5

The LMP2 division boiled down into a straight fight between two American teams running HPD ARX-03bs, one entered in the ALMS, the other in the WEC. The Starworks Motorsports version shared by Stephane Sarrazin, Ryan Dalziel and Enzo Potolicchio eventually prevailed over Level 5 Motorsports drivers Joao Barbosa, Christophe Bouchut and Scott Tucker.

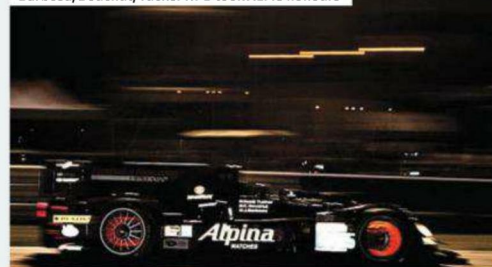
Sarrazin and Barbosa swapped positions multiple times over the final two hours in a frantic battle between two identical cars. They were locked together before the final round of stops, Sarrazin glued to Barbosa’s gearbox for the best part of 20 laps before finally making it past with an audacious move around the outside of Turn 17.

Once past, Sarrazin drove away from his rival, who began to struggle on the soft-compound Dunlop tyres.

OAK Racing’s Morgan-Judd was consistently the fastest car in the race, at least during the heat of the day, and Olivier Pla looked a safe bet to claim the victory after taking over from gentleman driver Jacques Nicolet for the run to the flag. The Frenchman hustled the Morgan towards the HPD dogfight ahead of him, but couldn’t get on level terms as the car lost its edge as the temperatures fell.

P2 was not without controversy at Sebring. The Morgan and the HPD, heavily re-worked versions of their predecessors, had a clear advantage over their rivals in what is meant to be a non-development formula. The best of the rest was the AF Corse/Pecom ORECA-Nissan O3, which finished two laps down on the Starworks entry.

Barbosa/Bouchut/Tucker HPD took ALMS honours



Lotterer took pole and fastest lap but was unlucky



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NASCAR SPRINT CUP BRISTOL (USA), MARCH 18, RD 4/36

Keselowski wins after avoiding spin



Keselowski (2) beats Kenseth at final restart

PENSKER'S BRAD KESELOWSKI narrowly avoided an early scare, and then held off Matt Kenseth late on to take his first NASCAR Sprint Cup victory of the year on the half-mile oval at Bristol.

Keselowski's early-race evasion tactics meant his Dodge survived contact with Kasey Kahne's spinning Hendrick Chevrolet on lap 23 with no more than a few bent panels, Kahne having been initially involved in a collision with Regan Smith's Furniture Row Chevy.

He then hauled himself into contention for the lead and hit the front before the halfway point. The defining pass for the lead came with a little over a quarter of the race to go, when Keselowski ran side by side with Kenseth's Roush Fenway Ford before eventually pulling ahead of the 2003

series champion and heading off to his fifth Cup victory. He was helped by a late-race caution that allowed both to easily make the chequered flag without a late fuel stop.

"Matt raced hard and so did I," said Keselowski, who climbed from 21st to 13th in the championship order. "We rubbed a little, but that's good racing. This is one of the best races I've ever been in."

Behind the pair, Michael Waltrip Racing had its best Cup showing to date, the team's Toyotas of Martin Truex Jr, Clint Bowyer and Brian Vickers rounding out the top five. All three were in victory contention all day. Truex and Vickers – making his first Cup appearance of the year – stayed out at the final caution to take third and

fifth spots and sandwich Bowyer, who recovered after his late pit stop.

Jeff Burton was the best-placed of the Richard Childress Racing Chevy drivers in sixth, ahead of Earnhardt Ganassi pair Jamie McMurray and Juan Pablo Montoya, enjoying their best race of the year. Five-time champion Jimmie Johnson was ninth in his Hendrick Chevy, while the Childress machine of Paul Menard rounded out the top 10.

Kyle Busch, a five-time winner in the Cup at Bristol, sustained considerable damage in Kahne's early accident, as did Carl Edwards and Marcos Ambrose. Jeff Gordon had a strong run ended after contact with Hendrick team-mate Dale Earnhardt Jr cut his

left-rear tyre and caused him to spin into the wall.
● Dylan Jacobs

RESULTS

1 Brad Keselowski (Dodge Charger), 500 laps in 2h51m52s; 2 Matt Kenseth (Ford Fusion), +0.714s; 3 Martin Truex Jr (Toyota Camry); 4 Clint Bowyer (Toyota); 5

Brian Vickers (Toyota); 6 Jeff Burton (Chevrolet Impala); 7 Jamie McMurray (Chevy); 8 Juan Pablo Montoya (Chevy); 9 Jimmie Johnson (Chevy); 10 Paul Menard (Chevy). **Points** 1 Greg Biffle, 157; 2 Kevin Harvick, 148; 3 Kenseth, 145; 4 Truex, 139; 5 Denny Hamlin, 137; 6 Dale Earnhardt Jr, 137; 7 Tony Stewart, 130; 8 Bowyer, 126; 9 Joey Logano, 126; 10 Menard, 123.

NO WINS IN 2011, AND NOW TWO IN THREE WEEKS FOR SADLER
Elliott Sadler increased his NASCAR Nationwide Series points lead with his second win of the year at Bristol. The Chevy driver (#2, below) elected not to pit late for fuel and beat Kasey Kahne and Brad Keselowski to the flag.



CURRENT STANDINGS

- 1 **Sebastian Vettel** ◇ 30,920
- 2 **Mark Webber** ◇ 21,563
- 3 **Jenson Button** ◇ 20,433
- 4 **Lewis Hamilton** ◇ 19,715
- 5 **Fernando Alonso** ◇ 18,425

Ranking the world's best drivers

WHAT HAPPENED THIS WEEK

Brad Keselowski jumps one spot to an all-time high of 22nd in the Rankings after his second-straight Bristol Cup win. Matt Kenseth, a close second, rises two spots to his own best of 12th, in the process demoting Kyle Busch (13) and Jimmie Johnson (14).

To see the full list, visit castrolriverrankings.com

- Winners **Kopecky/Dressler**
- Group N **Consani/Klinger**
- 2WD **Vinyes/Mercader**
- Most stage wins **Kopecky**



Epic finish as Kopecky denies Mikkelsen victory by tight margin



IRC RALLY ISLAS CANARIAS (E), MARCH 16-17, RD 2/13

Kopecky on top as Mikkelsen loses out

WITH THREE STAGES TO GO, Jan Kopecky vowed not to let victory in Gran Canaria slip away for a second time in three years. While it didn't, the reality on the Spanish island was that the Czech was outclassed by Andreas Mikkelsen.

The 2011 IRC champion, in a semi-works Skoda UK Fabia, albeit in full factory trim, had led virtually the whole rally until that point, and the Norwegian only slipped behind Kopecky's works car on Friday's final test in order to secure an advantageous road position on day two.

While Kopecky won more stages, Mikkelsen was either ahead or just behind in his pursuit of a first asphalt win.

Kopecky, making his first IRC appearance of 2012, began the final loop of three runs trailing Mikkelsen by 4.4 seconds, but closed to within 3.6s with one to go.

In normal circumstances,

Kopecky's deficit would have been too great to overcome, but the Norwegian was in trouble.

Just over a mile from the end of the penultimate test, Mikkelsen experienced a slight power loss, caused by a broken injector connector. Unable to fashion sufficient repairs prior to the final stage, Mikkelsen was starved of vital grunt through the closing run to the extent that he was more than 17s down on Kopecky at the halfway point.

"There was nothing we could do," said Mikkelsen, "we were actually just hoping we could get through the stage."

Mikkelsen did reach the finish line but it had taken him 31.9s more than Kopecky to do so, which gave Kopecky victory by 28.3s. But the celebrations were slightly muted. "I wanted to beat him in a fight,"

Kopecky won through some stunning scenery



the winner said.

Event promoter Luis Monzon, a double Canarias winner, finished third on his first time in an S2000 car (a Peugeot) since 2008. Skoda-mounted Volkswagen junior driver Sepp Wiegand did his hopes of a long-term future with the German make a power of good by finishing fourth, while rival Hermann

Gassner Jr crashed on the first stage of Saturday's running.

Britain's Harry Hunt was in the top 10 in his two-wheel-drive Citroen DS3 until a broken fuel pump forced him out en route to the finish. Andorran Joan Vinyes went on to win the class in his Suzuki.

● Graham Lister

RESULTS

- 1 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dressler (Skoda Fabia S2000)**, 2h21m46.5s; 2 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Floene (Skoda) +28.3s; 3 Luis Monzon/Jose Deniz (Peugeot 207 S2000); 4 Sepp Wiegand/Timo Gottschalk (Skoda); 5 Jonathan Perez/Enrique Velasco (Peugeot); 6 Joan Vinyes/Jordi Mercader (Suzuki Swift S1600).
Points 1 Mikkelsen 43; 2 Kopecky 25; 3 Wiegand 24; 4 Juho Hanninen 18; 5 Bryan Bouffier, 15; 6 Monzon 15.

V8 SUPERCARS MELBOURNE (AUS), MARCH 16-18, NON-CHAMPIONSHIP

Winterbottom gets the cash as the rest crash

A CASH-STREWN MARK

Winterbottom emerged from four crash-strewn V8 Supercar races at Melbourne.

'Frosty' continued Ford Performance Racing's strong start to 2012 by staying out of trouble and winning three times while the rest piled

into, over and on top of each other, leading to long safety-car periods and high rates of attrition in two of the races.

While the concrete-lined streets prompted many drivers to do untold damage to their cars, Winterbottom left the track £67,000 better

off for keeping things clean.

"I'm disappointed not to make a clean sweep," he said after taking fifth in the 'final'. "But we'll take the win. The best thing was my soft-tyre pace."

Stone Brothers Ford driver Shane van Gisbergen won the final race to take second overall, ahead of Holden Racing Team's Garth Tander.

Tander's team-mate James Courtney copped a 50s time penalty for triggering one of the pile-ups, while Jamie Whincup had a weekend to forget, the Triple 8 Holden driver 19th overall after a series of mishaps. Of the crashers, Taz Douglas suffered the worst, the rookie literally climbing down from his Holden after it ended up on top of the

machinery of Russell Ingall and Alexandre Premat.

● Phil Branagan

RESULTS

- Race 1 1 Mark Winterbottom (Ford Falcon FG)**, 11 laps in 28m23.649s; 2 Jamie Whincup (Holden Commodore VE II), +0.500s; 3 Shane van Gisbergen (Ford); 4 Will Davison (Ford); 5 David Reynolds (Ford); 6 Craig Lowndes (Holden). **Race 2 1 Winterbottom**, 12 laps in 24m34.779s; 2 van Gisbergen, +0.591s; 3 Davison; 4 Garth Tander (Holden); 5 Whincup; 6 Lee Holdsworth (Ford). **Race 3 1 Winterbottom**, 7 laps in 42m52.464s; 2 Tander, +3.326s; 3 Davison; 4 van Gisbergen; 5 Fabian Coulthard (Holden); 6 Holdsworth. **Race 4 1 van Gisbergen**, 15 laps in 30m36.806s; 2 Tander, +2.639s; 3 Coulthard; 4 Davison; 5 Winterbottom; 6 Reynolds.

IN BRIEF



Baird (ahead) did the treble

CARRERA CUP AUSTRALIA

Series veteran Craig Baird won all three Australian Grand Prix support races at Melbourne from fellow Kiwi Jonny Reid and pre-weekend points leader Alex Davison. Heinz-Harald Frentzen picked up a pair of fourth places on his first Porsche outing.

US F2000

Matthew Brabham and Spencer Pigot each took a win and a third at Sebring, with the Australian taking an early points lead at the track where grandad Jack clinched the 1959 world title. Romain Lagudi was second in each race.



Winterbottom leads the pack

PICS: ABBOTT/LAT, LAT SOUTH



GP2: STILL THE FAST TRACK TO F1?

Formula Renault 3.5 is giving it a real run for its money as the main F1 feeder series. But does that mean GP2 has gone stale? No, says *GLENN FREEMAN*

There's no arguing that 2011 was a fine year for the GP2 Series. The depth of quality on the grid was the best it had been for years, there were numerous drivers with close links to Formula 1 teams, while the combination of a new car and F1-style Pirelli tyres added plenty of spice to the racing.

But these things are cyclical. The 2011 GP2 field was a high watermark that had been years in the making – even champion Romain Grosjean had first graduated to the category back in '08.

Of the top 10 in the standings from last year, only three drivers remain, and those moving on have taken drives in Formula 1, IndyCar and the DTM.

Oh, and there's the small matter of Jules Bianchi and Sam Bird hot-footing it over to a resurgent Formula Renault 3.5 as that series prepares to introduce its new car – complete with its own version of the F1-style Drag Reduction System rear wing.

Even so, claims that the Renault-backed series has overtaken GP2 at the top of the junior single-seater pyramid are a bit of an exaggeration. Comparisons of the two grids suggest that the gap has closed between the two, and the consensus among teams and drivers on both sides is that they are pretty much equal. The most notable observation is that if the top halves of the two grids could be combined in one series it would make for an incredible season!

Money has unquestionably played its part in the movements of young F1 hopefuls, and also accounted for the departure of former F3000 title-winning squad Super Nova over the winter. GP2's quest to be as close to F1 is an admirable one, but that, of course, comes with ever-increasing costs. Talk of budgets creeping towards €2 million for last year didn't seem like much of a concern with such a strong line-up, but the tightening of financial belts all over the world led to an admission from

series organisers towards the end of last year that they would look into cost-saving measures. Given the expansion of the calendar to include flyaway races in Malaysia, Bahrain and Singapore, a decrease in budgets is unlikely and the more-realistic outcome should be a stabilising of costs. But even that can



New boys went GP2 in Abu Dhabi last November

PIC: KALISZ, FERRARO, STALEY/GP2, GIBSON/GP3

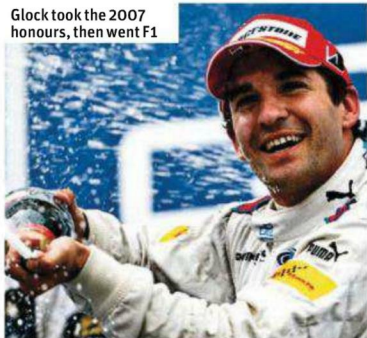
GP2 2012 CALENDAR

March 24-25	Sepang, Malaysia
April 21-22	Sakhir, Bahrain
April 27-28	Sakhir, Bahrain
May 12-13	Barcelona, Spain
May 26-27	Monte Carlo, Monaco
June 23-24	Valencia, Spain
July 7-8	Silverstone, GB
July 21-22	Hockenheim, Germany
July 28-29	Hungaroring, Hungary
September 1-2	Spa, Belgium
September 8-9	Monza, Italy
September 22-23	Marina Bay, Singapore

LAST FIVE CHAMPIONS

2011	Romain Grosjean (DAMS)
2010	Pastor Maldonado (Rapax)
2009	Nico Hulkenberg (ART)
2008	Giorgio Pantano (Racing Engineering)
2007	Timo Glock (iSport)

Glock took the 2007 honours, then went F1



WHERE TO WATCH GP2 ON TV

Sky Sports will cover every GP2 session this year on its F1 channel. That's right – all the races, plus qualifying and free practice from every weekend

DRIVERS TO WATCH

GIEDO VAN DER GARDE

Caterham

He's the top finisher from 2011 to stay on, so has to be the favourite. But his hopes will depend on Caterham getting over last year's late-season slump.



FABIO LEIMER

Racing Engineering

Moved to Rapax just as Italian squad lost its 2010 title-winning form. He's gelled well with Racing Engineering, and needs to make up for a stuttering '11.



ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ

Lotus GP

He might have finished 13th in the standings last year, but the Sauber protege was top rookie in a tough field so should be able to kick on for his second season.



JAMES CALADO

Lotus GP

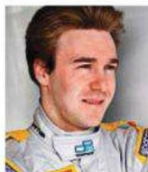
The Briton already has a GP2 win under his belt thanks to the end-of-season non-championship race in Abu Dhabi in November. He should be even stronger now.



DAVIDE VALSECCHI

DAMS

The Italian is hugely experienced at this level, having first raced in FR3.5 in 2006. He's inherited the championship-winning car, and looked good in testing.



FELIPE NASR

DAMS

Another exciting rookie, although the noises coming out of the team in testing suggest he didn't quite hit the ground running straight out of the box.



“As long as we're careful to adapt our product to exactly what the market needs, then it looks quite promising”

GP2 Series boss Bruno Michel

be viewed as progress, and series boss Bruno Michel is satisfied with the work his team has put in over the winter.

“I'm not worried about GP2 suffering from other series,” says Michel. “It is important to keep ourselves in line with what Formula 1 is doing, and I think we are achieving that. As long as we are careful to adapt our product to exactly what the market wants, which is what

we are doing at the moment, then it looks quite promising.”

The keeping-up-with-F1 changes for this year include the introduction of two tyre compounds on race weekends, with teams getting one set of the softer ‘option’ rubber to go with three sets of the prime compound. That should mix up race strategies, although the teams expect to get on top of the curveball as the year goes on, much as they did with the high-wear Pirellis introduced for last year. The F1 points system has also been adopted for the feature race, but the same cannot be said for DRS, which was considered for 2011 but ignored because it would not be as efficient on

spec single-seater wings.

On the driver line-up front, there's a chance for some of those marginalised last year to kick on, while the less-experienced field should give more opportunities for rookies such as GP3 runner-up James Calado and British F3 champion Felipe Nasr to add a fresh spark into the action.

Michel recently told AUTOSPORT that the organisers were “a little worried” about the fate of GP2 before the turn of the year. But with the grid filling up and pre-season testing out of the way, everyone involved can get back to focusing on the racing, which should be as exciting as ever. ☘

RUBENS: INTO THE GREAT WIDE OPEN

What can the Formula 1 veteran expect as he moves across to compete in the full-throttle world of IndyCar?

MARK GLENDENNING asks some stars who know



It's a new discipline for Barrichello

Race paddocks are never united about anything. Even within the hospitable surroundings of IndyCar, it doesn't take too much digging to find schisms. But on this everyone seems to be in agreement: Rubens Barrichello's arrival into the series is a 'Good Thing'.

Even Barrichello is excited, which seems at odds with how fiercely he was fighting to stay on for a 20th season in Formula 1, driving a Williams that likely wouldn't have been capable of delivering his 12th win. Or maybe even his 69th podium. On 2011 form, it may not even have done much to reinforce his tally of 658 points. To some, even an uncompetitive F1 car seems better than no F1 car.

The 39-year-old Brazilian is not the first veteran to have had the decision about his future made for him, but you have to admire the way he responded. Information processed, disappointment compartmentalised and then... time to answer that voicemail from Tony Kanaan.

A couple of months later, after all the tests, debate over whether he'd race on ovals, and whether there was a budget,

Barrichello's IndyCar debut is just a few days away. What can he really achieve?

Going quicker than Kanaan in his frat brother's own KV Racing car during testing proves that the fundamental speed is not an issue, at least on road courses. You can't fault his timing either; arriving into the series just as everyone switches to a completely new technical package after years of honing the same piece of kit. A guy who has spent two decades developing F1 cars will not be daunted by the prospect of taming the Dallara DW12.

Alex Zanardi switched from Formula 1 to CART/Champ Car twice, and believes that the less-judgemental ambience of North America will allow Barrichello to play himself in at his own pace.

"Rubens has always been a very good driver, and nothing has changed," says Zanardi. "For him, it will be a new start. All the expectations from outside observers are not going to be, like, 'OK, this is Rubens Barrichello coming from Formula 1 — he's going to win his first race.' Everybody will expect that he is going to need time to adapt, and that will help him to deliver what he is capable of. "I wouldn't be surprised if before the

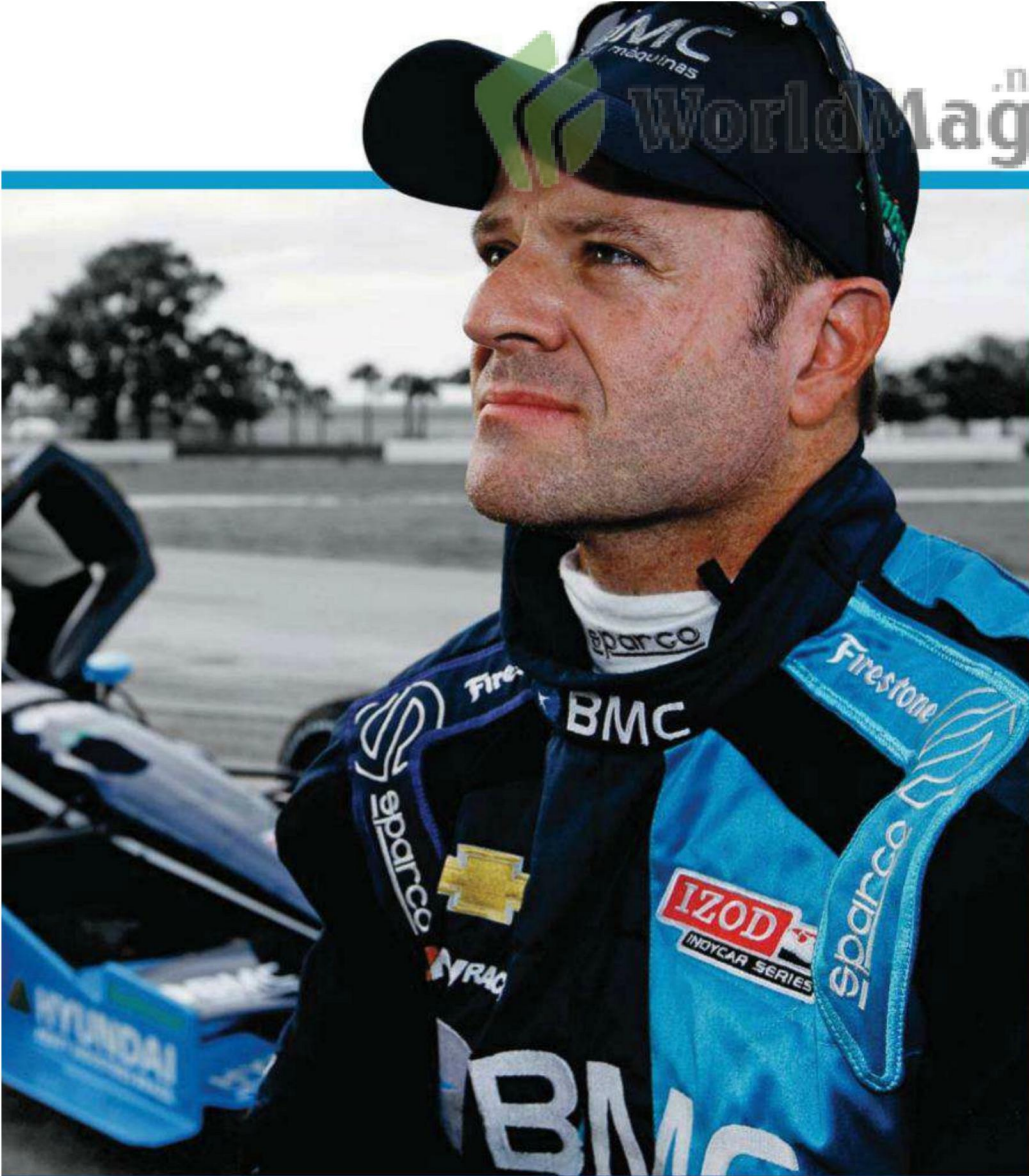
end of the season, Rubens will be fast enough to win races."

After the bright glare of the F1 paddock, the more-relaxed environs of the IndyCar community should also play to Barrichello's inherent sociability. Three-time grand prix winner Johnny Herbert did not spend a long time in IndyCar circles, but he saw enough to believe that Barrichello will be a good fit.

"There's a nicer atmosphere in IndyCar," says Herbert. "Everyone is more together; there is a more communal spirit. Certainly the crossover

Getting to grips with new Dallara DW12





THE BARRICHELLO OF GP2 MOVES TOO



Sato will be Filippi's team-mate

As well as starting more GP2 races than anyone else in history, Luca Filippi has had his sights set on IndyCar for quite some time. But his deal to race for Rahal Letterman Lanigan this year came together for him too late to make the early races.

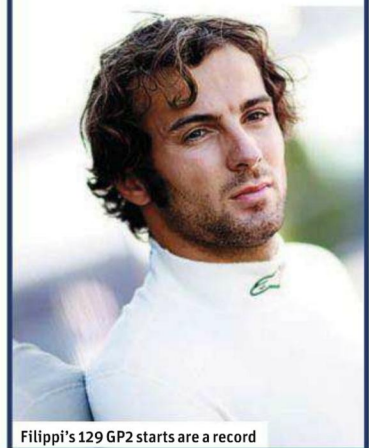
Instead, the Italian will have to make his US racing bow at the Indianapolis 500, and that's only if he manages to qualify for what would be his first oval race. It's a tough ask, but it's not taking the gloss off his mood heading into the new season.

"It's quite a strange feeling," he says. "I'm happy, because IndyCar was my target, and now I have a contract. But it's tough because I have to follow the first races just watching. I'll be happy when I sit in the car."

Filippi is likely to get one road-course test and an oval outing at Texas Motor Speedway before heading to Indy for rookie orientation. But he sees the benefit in heading to the Brickyard this year, despite the odds being stacked against him.

"Ideally as a European racer you want to start on the street and road courses," he says. "But I want to have a long career here, and if I wait until next year to experience Indy maybe that will be a problem in signing an important deal for the future."

Glen Freeman



Filippi's 129 GP2 starts are a record

from F1 to IndyCar is much easier than going the other way."

Nobody has ever questioned Barrichello's technical sensitivity and quality of feedback. But there's an elephant in the room, and it's shaped like an oval. Rubens has said that he'll be leaning heavily on Kanaan for advice as he prepares for his first speedway races at Indianapolis and Texas Motor Speedway, but Zanardi's concern is not about how Barrichello will adapt to the technical requirements of oval racing, but rather how he will deal with its intangibles.

"I think it was easier [to adapt to ovals] when the car was more difficult to drive," says Zanardi. "When I first drove on a superspeedway, you had to tune your car aerodynamically in order to generate maximum speed down the straight, but still be able to go around the corner fast enough. It was very difficult to set the car up. Last year, they reached the point where they would run the car three inches off the ground at the front in order to create drag. The car was bolted to the ground."

"From the drivers' point of view, you drive around flat-out and you say, 'Is that what it's all about? Anybody can do

that.' And that's when you are vulnerable, because you lose the sense of how fast you're going. If you don't have that experience, that's where something can happen. I think this is being changed, but still it's difficult for somebody who does not have oval experience to predict what somebody else is doing, and to understand what is going to happen in the race."

"In the race, there are things that will happen that you cannot practise. Nobody can tell you. Somebody will warn Rubens, but no warning can prepare you for what is really going to happen. So this is going to be difficult for him."

For now then, the great unknown remains. But at least Barrichello can look to history for comfort. Nigel Mansell arrived in CART during the 'ovals-are-hard era', and won the 1993 title in his first season. Of his five wins that year, four came on ovals.

So to return to the original question: what can Barrichello achieve this year? The answer is that, for all his experience, not even he knows yet. And that's why the coming months promise to be so enthralling. ▶



DRIVERS TO WATCH

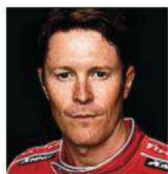


DARIO FRANCHITTI

It's stating the obvious, but four titles in five years is not a record that screams 'fluke'. The Scot has few weaknesses, and the Ganassi/Honda package looks competitive in testing, so he's a guaranteed contender.

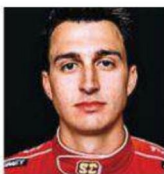


Ganassi set-up is always strong



SCOTT DIXON

The Kiwi endured an extraordinary run of bad luck in 2011, but remains fast, quick and reliable. It's difficult not to imagine him being one of the pacesetters yet again in his Ganassi/Honda machine.



GRAHAM RAHAL

Has been around so long that it's hard to believe he's still only 23, and the progress made last year with Ganassi's satellite team suggests there's still potential waiting to be tapped. Good platform for 2012.



WILL POWER

Penske-run Power's star has been in the ascent for a couple of seasons, and now we know he can get the job done on ovals after his win last year in Texas. Stung to lose title narrowly to Franchitti, so motivation is strong.



JAMES HINCHCLIFFE

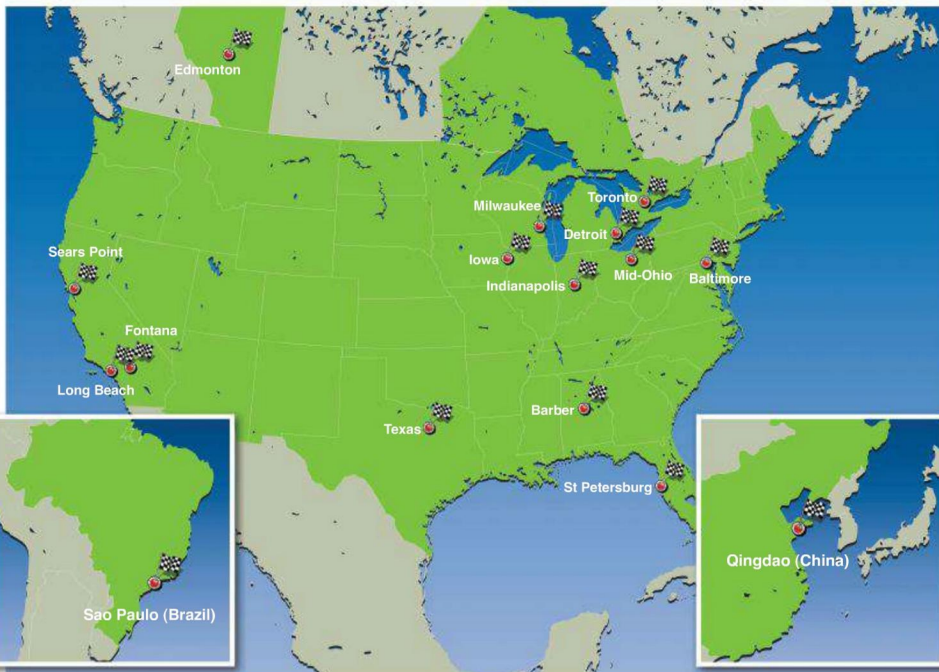
Taking the Andretti seat previously occupied by Danica Patrick and then earmarked for Dan Wheldon means 2011 rookie of the year will be in the spotlight, but behind the made-for-TV persona is a quick, intelligent driver.



Power is champing at bit to reverse '11 loss



Dixon is shooting for a third IndyCar crown



INDYCAR 2012 CALENDAR

March 25	St Petersburg [S]
April 1	Barber Motorsports Park [R]
April 15	Long Beach [S]
April 29	Sao Paulo (Brazil) [S]
May 27	Indianapolis [O]
June 3	Detroit [S]
June 9	Texas Motor Speedway [O]
June 16	Milwaukee [O]
June 23	Iowa Speedway [O]
July 8	Toronto (Canada) [S]
July 22	Edmonton (Canada) [S]
August 5	Mid-Ohio [R]
August 19	Qingdao (China) [S]
August 26	Sears Point [R]
September 2	Baltimore [S]
September 15	California Speedway [O]

[S] street course [R] road course [O] oval

WHAT'S NEW

It would be quicker to list what isn't. The 2012 IndyCar season will feature a new car in the distinctive form of the Dallara DW12, two new engine suppliers in Chevrolet and Lotus to join Honda, a new rulebook and a new group of faces in race control. On the grid, significant arrivals include Rubens Barrichello and a full-season Sebastien Bourdais plus three full-time teams – Ed Carpenter Racing, Bryan Herta Autosport (aka Team Barracuda) and Dragon Racing. On the calendar front, Motegi in Japan has been replaced by a new street race in Qingdao, China, while Detroit and Fontana both return after sabbaticals.



Chevrolet back on the scene

LAST FIVE CHAMPIONS

2011	Dario Franchitti Chip Ganassi Racing
2010	Dario Franchitti Chip Ganassi Racing
2009	Dario Franchitti Chip Ganassi Racing
2008	Scott Dixon Chip Ganassi Racing
2007	Dario Franchitti Andretti Green Racing

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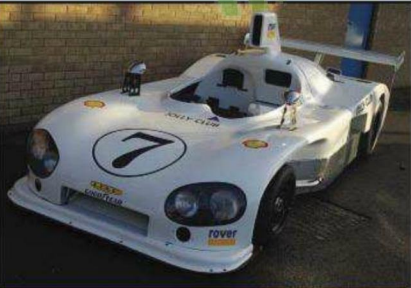


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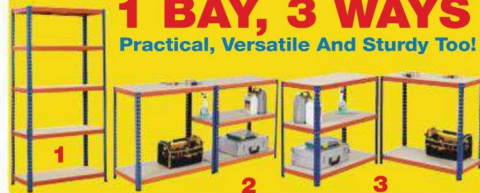
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Caterham F1 Team	Head of CFD	22 March 2012
Formula Two	Systems Engineer - Full Time	22 March 2012
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Lotus F1 Team	Procurement Co-ordinator	22 March 2012

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Only six drivers registered for Renault UK in 2012



Formula Renault UK canned

Leading single-seater series suspended until 2013 because of poor entry

» THE 2012 FORMULA RENAULT UK Championship has been cancelled due to low entries.

Controlling bodies Renault UK and Renault Sport Technologies decided to cancel this year's championship after just six drivers signed up to compete.

They released a joint statement on Monday saying the category would be suspended for 2012, with "all efforts diverted towards returning it to full health in 2013".

Renault UK managing director Thierry Sybord said: "This is the most sensible decision for all concerned. Initially, there is a feeling of shock that this prestigious series will not take place this year but, upon reflection, trying to run Formula Renault UK in its current state is unacceptable for the drivers, teams, sponsors, suppliers and spectators."

The decision means Formula Renault UK, which was due to kick off at Brands

Hatch on March 31/April 1, will be absent from the British motorsport calendar after a 23-year stretch running from its inaugural season in 1989.

Lisa Crampton of series promoter SRO said she hoped the move would act as a wake-up call for motorsport.

"We have done absolutely everything in our capability to try and increase that grid," said Crampton. "No one wants a championship with only six cars, but we were stuck with what we had.

"It's disappointing to have to do this, but I'm hoping the positive to come out of it is that the whole of motorsport has a rethink about what's going on.

"This might be a tipping point - if something with Formula Renault's history, with touring cars on live TV, is not able to get drivers then what's next?"

"I don't think I'm alone in saying that junior single-seaters is on shaky ground at the moment."

Renault and SRO hope the six drivers already registered for 2012, including reigning InterSteps champion Jake Dennis, former Ginetta Junior and Formula Ford race winner Josh Hill, and Formula Renault BARC runner-up Josh Webster, will instead compete in the FR North European Cup.

Fortec Motorsports boss Richard Dutton, whose squad was set to run four of the six registered cars, said he was disappointed the decision had come so close to the start of the season.

"They've known about the situation for a long time, so it's very poor to come up with this [decision] so late," he said.

"We're all prepared for the championship, the drivers have spent their money and tested over the winter, so it's a bit late now to say there's no championship. I just feel for the drivers and their sponsors who have put so much effort in."

The move leaves a space vacant on the BTCC-supporting TOCA package. TOCA boss Alan Gow said he would look to fill it with guest races at some tracks and drop the slot entirely from tight-curfew venues such as Oulton Park.

"We endorse and accept the decision," said Gow, who is prepared to welcome FR UK back in 2013. "It's the right thing to do, given they only had six cars - Renault wants to protect its series.

"Renault are the longest-supporting race partner [of TOCA] and a momentary glitch isn't a reason to part company."

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

BEN ANDERSON
NATIONAL EDITOR

ben.anderson@haymarket.com



ATECH REID GP TEAM BOSS

Anthony Reid said Formula Renault UK couldn't run with six cars on the grid and it turns out he was right. This year, for the first time since it began in 1989, there will be no Formula Renault UK Championship.

The decision to cancel will come as a bitter blow to the six drivers already signed up, but nobody - least of all Renault - wanted to see races run on live TV with so few cars.

The writing's been on the wall for a while now, with grids falling every year since the old Tatuus chassis was replaced in 2010 (a year before promoter SRO came on board). While it's not merely the new, more expensive car that's to blame for FR UK's plight, it certainly hasn't helped during a time of worsening austerity.

Most monied drivers have gone to the Eurocup, with its 40-car grid and £500,000 World Series scholarship for the winner. Those without big budgets have set their sights a little lower, on things like Formula Renault BARC, InterSteps and Formula Ford.

FR UK is stranded in the middle - too expensive for most budget-conscious drivers, but lacking the range of grand prix circuits and prizes on offer on the continent.

Fortec boss Richard Dutton is right to question the timing of the decision (less than two weeks before the start of the season), but how many times do we see categories soldier on regardless when grids are poor? A bit of short-term pain for long-term gain may be just what Formula Renault needs.

Extra contact details

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Hill is one of those looking for a new place to race



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Renault Clio Cup

Rally ace Gould to make race debut in Clio

Former British Rally Championship frontrunner to make circuit racing switch with Stancombe squad



Gould will swap the stage for the track

FORMER BRITISH RALLY Championship frontrunner Adam Gould will switch to circuit racing this season in the Renault Clio Cup.

Gould, 24, will race with the Stancombe Vehicle Engineering squad that ran Paul Rivett to his third Clio Cup crown last season.

Gould finished sixth in the BRC last season, after abandoning his

campaign midway through the year due to running out of sponsorship. He hopes to use Clios as a springboard into the British Touring Car Championship.

Gould said: "I've always been interested in touring cars. I went to a couple of races last year, and the marketability and popularity makes a lot more sense to a sponsor.

"Clios is a fantastic category and

the live TV is the main appeal. To get that for any motorsport is quite rare, but for something like Clios it makes it great value. The BTCC is now my main aim over the next couple of seasons and Clios is probably the best feeder series for touring cars."

Gould hopes Stancombe's title-winning pedigree, and Rivett's presence as a driver coach, will help ease his transition from

rallying to circuit racing.

"If you're going to pick a team, go for the championship-winning team from last year," added Gould. "It will be the first time I've gone circuit racing and I need help to make the transition as easy as possible.

"I'm not expecting anything for the first part of the season, but it doesn't intimidate me. I've been driving competitively for a long time."

Ginetta Junior

BTCC test for Ginetta champs

GINETTA HAS ADDED A BRITISH Touring Car test to its prizes for 2012.

Last year's Ginetta GT Supercup champion Adam Morgan won a part-funded drive in the BTCC for this season. The award was changed this year to prize money and career assistance for Ginetta's various champions, but now the sportscar firm has added the BTCC tests.

The winner and runner-up in the BTCC-supporting Ginetta Junior Championship and the Ginetta Junior Ireland champion will win tests in one of Speedworks Motorsport's NGTC Toyota Avensis BTCC racers.

Ginetta championship coordinator



Ginetta Junior aces of 2012 will get BTCC test

Max Gregory said: "This is a great opportunity for our junior drivers in both the UK and Irish championships.

"Aspirations of young drivers are changing, and it's clear that the majority of these drivers are stepping away from the stereotype of F1 dreams and looking more towards a career in touring cars or GT racing.

"We think that to have this opportunity at such a young age will be inspirational for our junior drivers."

British GT

Scott/Dhillon defect to Vittoria

BRITISH GT PAIRING AARON

Scott and John Dhillon will switch from MTECH to Scuderia Vittoria for this year's championship.

The duo raced an old Ferrari 430 in the series last season with MTECH, and had been set to remain with the squad as they step up to a 458 for 2012 (see AUTOSPORT, February 9).

They will now race an upgraded version of the Vittoria car that carried Charles Bateman and Michael Lyons to third in British GT last year.

Scott cited a "change of circumstances" with his co-driver as the reason for the switch.

"SV have won in British GT and I've known Piers [Masarati, team boss]

a long time," said Scott.

"I'm looking forward to it. I'm really pleased to be in a 458 and SV know the car pretty well."

Masarati added: "They're a nice pairing for us. Aaron's a good little pedaller and John's come on a lot under him."

Scott (left) and Dhillon have moved teams



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British GT

Mazda launches British GT attack for 2012 in revised GT4 category

MAZDA WILL CONTEST THE

British GT Championship this season with its MX5 GT.

The Mazda UK project, developed and run by Jota Sport, competed in Britcar last season.

The 310bhp, 1000kg car will race against Lotus and Ginetta machinery in the GT4 category.

Drivers have not yet been confirmed, but AUTOSPORT understands that the team's Britcar regulars Mark Ticehurst

Mazda MX5 GT was developed in Britcar



and Owen Mildenhall are possibles.

Mazda UK managing director Jeremy Thomson said: 'We are looking forward to taking on the supercar brands this year and winning.'

"Last season was a valuable development year when we established the strengths of the car and then developed the power and handling to best exploit those strengths."

"We are excited and optimistic about our first year in British GT and fully expect the MX5 to upset a few established marques."

● The KTM X-Bow, which took the 2011 GT4 title in the hands of Marcus Clutton and Peter Belshaw, can no longer compete in the class. Championship manager Benjamin Franassovici said: "Supersport cars have been removed from the GT4 regulations, which means the X-Bow is no longer eligible for GT4."

MARCUS PYE

HUMBLE PYE

The voice of club motor racing

Formula Renault has 'outraced market'



The axing of Formula Renault UK has sent shockwaves through the sport, but what else could its promoters have done faced with a parlous level of support for the last single-seater class on the high-profile British Touring Car Championship bill? It had long been too expensive to contest and, in a financially

strained world, introducing the latest generation of chassis in 2010 was the nail that sealed its coffin.

Formule Renault's ancestry can be traced back to the 1300cc R8 Gordini-motivated Formule France in 1968, and while its roots in the United Kingdom were not sown until '89, its contribution to a TOCA package on which Ford and Vauxhall also had monoposto classes has been significant. The Regie always outshone its rivals, supporting its series with lavish hospitality, lucrative rewards and 'leg-up' drives for champions. But times have changed.

Compromised initially by wet-sumped 1700cc street-car engines - which blew with monotonous regularity with the (modest by today's standards) cornering forces generated by slick-tyres and tubeframe chassis - and obstinate road gearboxes, FR evolved thrice internationally. The last two generations of FR 2.0 have centred on high-tech composite

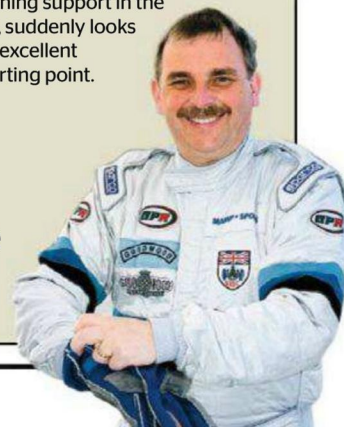
monocoque cars (by Tatuus of Italy, against French patriotic instincts, then back home to Barazi-Epsilon of Le Mans), but they have come at a price. Ever costlier, and requiring big professional logistics to operate, the cars have outraced the market in a bid to remain relevant to modern racing's confused matrix.

Just as the announcement that the long-established 2500cc Formula 1 would be superseded by 1500cc regulations from 1991 brought howls of discontent in the late '50s, the 1600cc turbocharged four-cylinder F1 coming for 2014 must be part of a bigger picture.

From '61 to '63, there was just 1100cc Formula Junior (essentially the F2 and F3 of its day) beneath F1. Now we have GP2 (four-litre V8, 610bhp), FR 3.5 (3.4-litre V8, 530bhp), F2 (1.8-litre four-cylinder turbo, 420-500bhp) and others.

All bar F2 come at stratospheric cost, but with F1's changes there is a major opportunity to realign junior and intermediate classes to provide a proper feeder ladder. Perhaps that is what Ford has tried to espouse with the new EcoBoost rules - which cannot be cheaper than underfilled Duratec and Zetec predecessors - but motorcycle-engined F1000, gaining support in the US, suddenly looks an excellent starting point.

“With F1's changes there is a real opportunity to realign junior classes to provide a proper feeder ladder”



Ginetta GT Supercup

Abbott to Century for Ginetta return

FORMER BRITISH GT4 RUNNER-UP Hunter Abbott will contest this season's Ginetta GT Supercup with leading team Century Motorsport.

Abbott, who won a race in the inaugural season of the G50 Cup in 2008, will form part of Century's three-car G55 attack alongside Fergus Walkinshaw and Josh Wakefield.

Abbott, 31, said: "I'm excited to be back again after a couple of years away from the wheel, and to join one of the most successful teams in the paddock is the icing on the cake."

Team boss Nathan Freke believes Abbott can help his squad retain the teams' title and take the

Abbott infamously destroyed G50 in 2008



drivers' crown in 2012.

"To have someone of Hunter's calibre in the team this year is great," said Freke. "We worked hard to make this deal happen and I'm pleased it's come off. He has a wealth of experience with Ginettas and big GT cars and I'm confident he will be a title contender."

MSA/MIA

New scheme to help young talent

THE MOTOR SPORTS ASSOCIATION and the Motorsport Industry Association will take a selected group of up-and-coming drivers and engineers on a special tour during this year's National Motorsport Week to help raise awareness of the UK's leading position in motorsport.

The MSA and MIA launched their new 'Racing Ahead' scheme at Goodwood last week.

The MSA will pick six leading young drivers, and the MIA six top young engineers, for special trips during the week of June 30 to July 8.

The tour will include visits to leading Formula 1 and World Rally facilities, the Goodwood Festival of Speed and the British Grand Prix.

MIA CEO Chris Aylett said: "The UK motorsport industry is booming during otherwise uncertain times. The winners will join the Racing Ahead scheme and thus gain a head start in their careers."

MSA chief executive Colin Hilton added: "The MSA is committed to investing in future champions because it is fundamental to our objective to lead and develop the sport at both international and grassroots levels."

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IN BRIEF



Chevy returns in 2012

THE UNRELATED PIERS AND RON

Johnson will return to British GT this season in an upgraded version of the Speedworks Chevrolet Corvette Z06R GT3 they raced last season. Former BTCC runner-up Anthony Reid and youngster Jordan Witt will race Chevron's new GT3-spec car in the invitation class.

GT DRIVER WILL GOFF WILL STEP UP

to the Porsche Carrera Cup in 2012 with his family-based team. He will run in the Pro-Am2 class. Also joining that class is Australian Tania Mann, who will drive for Sibsport Performance.

KARTER NIKHIL CHOPRA WILL

graduate to the VW Racing Cup this year. The 16-year-old will drive a Prestige Performance/Tony Gilham Golf R32.

MOTORSPORT BROADCASTER BEN

Constanduros will drive a Ginetta G40 rub by GT squad Scuderia Vittoria in this season's GT5 Challenge.

EXPERIENCED TIN-TOP RACER

Freddy Nordstrom will contest the Euro Racecar NASCAR Touring Series this season. He will drive with Team Orhes.

EX-GINETTA JUNIOR RACER JOE

Shaw was killed in a train accident earlier this month. A Facebook tribute page has been set up for Shaw, who was 19.

BRDC MEMBER RICHARD PIPER HAS

landed an F3 entry in May's Monaco GP Historique with the ex-Brian Henton/Rupert Keegan March 743. The car is owned by Simon Hadfield, who worked for him at Sark Cars in the mid-1970s.

WILL NUTHALL, 23, WHO IMPRESSED

in Alta and Cooper-Bristol F2 cars of the 1950s last season, made his Historic FF1600 debut at Donington Park last Saturday. The Jamun T2 driver charged from 10th to fourth place.

JULIAN MAJZUB'S 1958 SADLER MK3

sports-racer made its bow at last week's Goodwood media day. The Blockley Tyres boss plans to race it in the Sussex Trophy race at September's Revival Meeting.



Sadler will race at Goodwood



Historic F1 will return to Silverstone for the GP

Historic F1

Historic F1 to support Brit GP

Series for classic Formula 1 cars to be part of Silverstone event this summer

HISTORIC FORMULA 1 WILL support the British Grand Prix this year for the first time in over a decade.

The field will be made up of four classes, with cars built between 1966 and '85 eligible.

Historic Formula 1 last supported the British Grand Prix in 2001, when it held an invitation race in its previous Thoroughbred Grand Prix guise and 37 cars turned out.

Historic Formula 1 chairman Dan Collins predicts a strong entry. "There don't seem to be as many people out

and about at the moment with the economy, but I'd be surprised if we didn't get in the mid-thirties," he said.

Historic F1 has also supported contemporary grands prix at Barcelona, the Hungaroring and Sakhir recently and will visit seven circuits this year, including Spa and Imola.

Collins hopes that grids will return to their normal size in 2012. "Our average for years has been around 18," he said. "It dropped a bit last year, but if you look across all series around Europe that wasn't uncommon.

"I hope that our minimum this year will be 15 cars and the biggest one at Silverstone will be well over 35."

Historic F1 received an invitation to compete at Silverstone, having maintained contact with organisers of contemporary grands prix.

"Silverstone don't have much say about what races are going to be there," he said. "That's all out of their hands once they've released the circuit to the organisers, but we have had a dialogue for a number of years and we were delighted to be invited this year."

Goodwood

Vettel to make Goodwood bow at Festival

REIGNING DOUBLE FORMULA 1 world champion Sebastian Vettel will make his Goodwood Festival of Speed debut this year.

The 24-year-old German will attend the event on June 29-July 1 with his Red Bull Racing team as



Vettel will head to Goodwood

part of the Goodwood Festival's 'Young Guns - Born To Win' theme.

The 20th edition of the Festival of Speed will celebrate a host of motorsport talent, including Bernd

Rosemeyer, Stirling Moss, Mike Hawthorn, Emerson Fittipaldi, Lewis Hamilton, Colin McRae and Valentino Rossi.

There will also be showcases of the cultural differences between iconic US and European sports-racers of 1972, the Group C era from '82, and more than 50 Lotus racing cars.

After a successful trial of half-price tickets for young people last year, the age band has been widened to 13-21 (from 18) for 2012.

Masters

Oulton Allcomers single-seater race lost

MASTERS HISTORIC RACING DID not run its planned Formula Libre-style event at Oulton Park last weekend due to a lack of competitor interest.

The organisation originally added the race to its season opener alongside its established GT, sportscar and touring car series (see AUTOSPORT, February 2).

Single-seaters below F1 were eligible, but a lack of entries resulted in Masters

cancelling the 20-minute event before Saturday's meeting.

Masters event manager Rachel Bailey said: "We were disappointed not to get the interest we had hoped for with the single-seater Allcomers race, and took the difficult decision to cancel the race before the event."

Masters has not confirmed whether it plans to try the initiative again in future.



Sportscars were not joined by single-seaters



Dodd (leading) fought Hodges in sports racer split

Fleming's little Elan beat the Guards Trophy grunTERS



HSCC DONINGTON PARK, MARCH 17-18

Fleming slays V8s with Elan

NICK FLEMING'S decision to concentrate on the SPT team's second 26R-spec Lotus Elan rather than its Chevron B8 was vindicated by a magnificent Guards Trophy GT victory, highlight of a thrilling HSCC season opener at Donington Park.

The Scot teetered inside Mike Whitaker's TVR Griffith and Leo Voyazides's AC Cobra into the first corner and clung tenaciously to the slenderest of advantages as the trio tore through constant traffic in the 35-car field.

Whitaker jumped Voyazides for second after they pitted together, but the Greek moved back ahead before he plunged through the McLeans turn sign into the gravel pit, having been too busy to pump fried brakes.

Whitaker thus finished as runner-up. "I've never spent so much time sideways in fourth," he said, "but for Nick to win with 1600cc against 4.7 litres I've got to hand

it to him – he drove brilliantly." The fact that Sean Walker (Elan) was a distant third amplified Fleming's achievement.

James Dodd (Ginetta G16) was boxed behind lapped American Mike Malone's Elva Mk7S at Coppice three laps from home, but held his nerve to win the separate Guards Sports Racing event under huge pressure from Steve Hodges (Chevron B8). Hodges, who avoided Mark Colman's pirouetting B8 at the drizzle-moistened Old Hairpin on lap one, played catch-up thereafter. A hot Philip Nelson (in his B8 for the first time since 2008) deserved third.

David Methley was "lucky" to start the rear-engined Formula Junior race after a valve-spring cap broke in his engine during practice. Fortunately, Simon Diffey lent a spare and 'Curly' scythed from 24th and last on the grid to victory in his Brabham BT6, looking considerably better than when Bob Birrell vacated it

at Goodwood last year.

Methley's phenomenal progress was set to net third before Michael Hibberd (Lotus 27) launched leader Sam Wilson (Cooper T59) at the chicane. Hibberd continued but, with steering awry, was powerless to prevent Methley and the overjoyed Pete Morton (Lightning Envoyette) passing him.

The front-engined bout had been equally intense until Stuart Roach (Alexis Mk2) gave shadow Jack

Woodhouse (Elva) the slip by squeezing past some lapped cars before a yellow flag. Simon Goodliff (Lola) started tardily but wriggled back to third.

With top qualifier Jeremy Smith's six-wheeled March non-starting with diff issues, and Greg Thornton's F5000 Surtees's engine dying, Jamie Brashaw pulled off an unexpected Derek Bell Trophy/Classic F3 win. The CF3 champ never let up in his March

793, but David Shaw closed to within 2.6 seconds on a sensational debut in his ex-Nelson Piquet Ralt RT1.

Although Mark Jones and Roger Godfrey were well clear in the first HRSR Touring Car race, the fight for third between Neil Brown and Tim Davies (Lotus Cortinas), Steve Platts and David Heale ('Imps') and Tim Harber's Cooper S was enthralling. Brown prevailed after Davies – whose FF2000 engines he built in the

Hibberd launched Wilson out of Formula Junior lead



“For Nick to win with 1600cc against 4.7 litres I’ve got to hand it to him”

Guards runner-up Whitaker was full of praise for Fleming



Jones annexed 500cc F3



High entries meant a split grid for tourers

HISTORIC FORMULA FORD DONINGTON PARK, MARCH 17-18

Cheshire cat gets the cream in Formula Ford

DRIVING HIS EIGHTH race out of karts, 16-year-old Cheshire lad Callum Grant scored a resounding maiden car victory in Historic Formula Ford after a scintillating struggle with the vastly experienced David Wild.

The third-generation competitor [grandfather raced Austin-Healeys; dad Nigel does Historic FF2000] took pole, with Portugal’s Diogo Ferrao and Derek Rodgers making it a Merlyn 1-2-3 – a fitting tribute to designer Selwyn Hayward, who died a fortnight previously.

As Wild’s Lola rocketed away from row two, Grant clung to the inside line for Redgate and miraculously avoided trouble as Rogers changed tack, collecting Ferrao. “I heard the bang and saw a wheel flying,” said Grant.

If Callum expected an

easy ride thereafter, he soon had a rethink, for Rob Wainwright (Elden) shot ahead until he pitted, whereupon Wild – still chasing his first win – turned the screw.

“Oil was coming out of Rob’s car and he kindly let us through, but then David came past and I had to fight even harder,” said Grant. Having run abreast at Hollywood, Grant made his move on the penultimate lap and held on to the chequer.

“That was the race of my life,” he beamed, clutching the trophy.

RESULTS – HISTORIC FF1600

(16 LAPS) 1 Callum Grant (Merlyn Mk20A); 2 David Wild (Lola T200) +0.560s; 3 Simon Toyne (Lola T200); 4 William Nuthall (Jamun T2); 5 Harvey Sykes (Merlyn Mk17); 6 Andrew Mansell (Merlyn Mk11A). **Fastest lap** Robert Wainwright (Elden Mk8) 1m18.338s (90.94mph).



Merlyn man Grant pipped Wild to win

1980s – retired.

Seasoned Ford Falconer Leo Voyazides outgunned Dan Cox’s spectacular Cortina among the big fry. New Zealander Warren Briggs – who last raced at Donington 17 years ago – bounced back from a gilhooley at Coppice for third in his Mustang.

A surprised Richard Dutton qualified the ex-Jim Prentice Mustang second in the rain, but muffed the dry start, then spun. The Fortec Motorsports boss blasted back to fifth momentarily, before thundering into the Coppice gravel trap.

Despite the misfire that blighted his Reynard in wet qualifying returning, reigning champion Russell Love won in Historic FF2000. Andy Huxtable (Lola) nosed ahead briefly, but ran out of fuel on the last lap, which promoted David Wild to a close second. Andrew Park survived a hairy ‘360’ out of the Old Hairpin but

charged back to third.

Paul Conway rumbled his Morgan +8 past ex-70s Road Sports champion Julian Barter’s TVR 3000M mid-way through Saturday’s ‘mini-enduro’ to win the first race of the HSCC season. “I think he got fed up with seeing the Morgan in his mirrors,” grinned Conway. “Chasing Paul was certainly more enjoyable than leading,” countered Barter, whose diff was found to be seized after the presentation. Father Charles grabbed bronze in his brakeless Datsun 240Z.

Defending Historic Road Sports champion Paul Tooms, in one of three Witchampton Garage Elans, opened his 2012 account as he finished ’11, showing Peter Shaw (now Elan-mounted) the way home. Australian Justin Murphy started stone last but howled his open Ginetta G4 to third.

Having weathered a determined challenge from

Antony Ross’s sister Lotus 59/69 at the first corner, Ian Jones streaked to Classic Racing Cars victory. Ross spun, which let Mike Freeman close in with his pretty Brabham BT14. Sam Mitchell, 16, dominated the FF1600 class despite a quick spin when it rained.

Heading into Saturday’s setting sun, Spitfire pilot Steve Jones’s steady hands won his second 500cc F3 race. The poleman balanced a fraction of his 27-litre Rolls-Royce Merlin V12 engine’s torque under a double rainbow, his Cooper-Norton cutting through the wash as rivals slithered and spun.

After a heroic battle with Richard Bishop-Miller’s Revis, JB Jones was ecstatic with a best-ever second in the bizarre French Cousy, after RB-M gyrated Reg Bicknell’s full-bodied brainchild at Redgate. Race debutant Mark Riley excelled for fifth in his Creamer Special.

● Marcus Pyle

GUARDS TROPHY GT (28 LAPS)

1 Nick Fleming (Lotus Elan 26R). 2 Mike Whitaker (TVR Griffith) +16.151s; 3 Sean Walker (Lotus Elan 26R); 4 Ian Cox (Marcos-Volvo 1800GT); 5 Jamie Boot (Jaguar E-type); 6 Will & Steve Hodges (Jaguar E-type). **Class winners** Whitaker; Boot; Tom Smith (MGB); Peter Aylett/Steven Farrall (Tunex Diva); Karl Wetherell/Andy Somerville (Triumph TR4). **Fastest lap** Whitaker 1m21.370s (87.55mph).

GUARDS TROPHY SPORTS RACING CARS (30 LAPS)

1 James Dodd (Ginetta-BMW G16); 2 Steve Hodges (Chevron-BMW B8) +0.369s; 3 Philip Nelson (Chevron-BMW B8); 4 Mark & Hugh Colman (Chevron-BMW B8); 5 Ted & Mark Williams (Chevron-BMW B8); 6 Mike Malone (Elva-BMW Mk75). **CW Malone**, Andrew Garside (Lotus t/c 23B); Brian Casey (Lenham-Lotus t/c P69). **FL Hodges** 1m15.949s (93.80mph).

HISTORIC FORMULA JUNIOR REAR-ENGINE (15 LAPS)

1 David Methley (Brabham BT6). 2 Pete Morton (Lightning Envoyette) +23.262s; 3 Michael Hibberd (Lotus 27); 4 Andrew Hibberd (Lotus 22); 5 Mark Woodhouse (Lotus 20/22); 6 Richard Smeeton (Lotus 22). **CW** Crispian Besley (Cooper T56); Lance Whitehead (Lotus 22). **FL** Methley 1m18.157s (91.15mph).

HISTORIC FORMULA JUNIOR FRONT-ENGINE (15 LAPS)

1 Stuart Roach (Alexis Mk2); 2 Jack Woodhouse (Elva 100) +2.313s; 3 Simon Goodliff (Lola Mk2); 4 John Chisholm (Gemini Mk2); 5 Derek Walker (Terror Mk4); 6 Crispian Besley (Elva 100). **CW** Richard Utley (Caravelle Mk1), Jan Biekens (Stanguellini).

FL Woodhouse 1m23.120s (85.71mph).

CLASSIC F3/DEREK BELL TROPHY (17 LAPS)

1 Jamie Brashaw (March-Toyota 793); 2 David Shaw (Ralt-Toyota RT1) +2.575s; 3 David Clark (Argo-Toyota JM6);

4 Michael Hibberd (Brabham-BDG BT38); 5 Ian Gray (Brabham-BDA BT30); 6 Keith Norris (Chevron-BDA B49). **CW** Hibberd; Norris; Andy Jones (Brabham-Lotus t/c BT38C). **FL** Greg Thornton (Surtees-Chevrolet TS11) 1m11.963s (99.00mph).

HISTORIC TOURING CARS UP TO 1600cc (14 LAPS)

1 Mark Jones (Ford Lotus Cortina); 2 Roger Godfrey (Austin Cooper S) +12.384s; 3 Neil Brown (Ford Lotus Cortina); 4 Steve Platts (Singer Chamots); 5 David Heale (Hillman Imp); 6 Steve Read (Ford Anglia 105E). **CW** Godfrey; Brown; Platts; Marc Earnshaw (Austin Cooper S). **FL** Jones 1m26.148s (82.70mph).

HISTORIC TOURING CARS OVER 1600cc (15 LAPS)

1 Leo Voyazides (Ford Falcon Sprint); 2 Dan Cox (Ford Lotus Cortina) +19.761s; 3 Warren Briggs (Ford Mustang); 4 Jonathan Gomm (BMW 1800T); 5 Chris Clarkson (Ford Falcon Sprint); 6 Louis Bracey (Ford Mustang).

CW Cox, FL Voyazides 1m24.043s (84.77mph).

HISTORIC FF2000 (16 LAPS)

1 Russell Love (Reynard SF79). 2 David Wild (Reynard SF79) +4.878s; 3 Andrew Park (Reynard SF81); 4 Simon Toyne (Reynard SF79); 5 Andrew Storer (Royale RP27); 6 David Clark (Dulon MP21). **CW** Clark; Jon Randall (Lola-VW T324). **FL** Andy Huxtable (Lola T580) 1m50.49s (94.93mph).

70s ROAD SPORTS (22 LAPS)

1 Paul Conway (Morgan +8); 2 Julian Barter (TVR 3000M) +0.404s; 3 Charles Barter (Datsun 240Z); 4 Alan Harper (Lotus Elan S4); 5 Iain Daniels (TVR Tuscan); 6 Ross Braithwaite (Lotus Europa). **CW** J Barter; Harper; Bob Trotter (Alfa Romeo 2000GTV). **FL** Conway 1m22.638s (86.21mph).

HISTORIC ROAD SPORTS (15 LAPS)

1 Paul Tooms (Lotus Elan S1); 2 Peter Shaw (Lotus Elan S1) +14.793s; 3 Justin Murphy

(Ginetta G4); 4 Jim Gathercole (Lotus Elan +2); 5 Roddie Fielden (Morgan +8); 6 Patrick Ward-Booth (Ginetta G4). **CW** Fielden; Paul Lattimer (MGB); John Shaw (Porsche 911). **FL** Tooms 1m23.117s (85.71mph).

CLASSIC RACING CARS (16 LAPS)

1 Ian Jones (Lotus-t/c 59); 2 Antony Ross (Cousy-Triumph No2) +26.227s; 3 Mike Freeman (Brabham-t/c BT14); 4 Stuart Tizzard (Chevron-MAE B15C); 5 Steve Seaman (Brabham-MAE BT21); 6 Sam Mitchell (Merlyn-Ford Mk20). **CW** Tizzard; Mitchell. **FL** Jones 1m17.590s (91.82mph).

500cc F3 (10 LAPS)

1 Steve Jones (Cooper-Norton Mk10); 2 JB Jones (Cousy-Triumph No2) +6.775s; 3 Darrell Woods (Cooper-Norton Mk8); 4 Nigel Challis (Cooper-Norton Mk8); 5 Mark Riley (Creamer-Jag); 6 Pat Barford (Kieft-Norton CK52). **CW** Woods; Riley. **FL** S Jones 1m56.919s (60.93mph).



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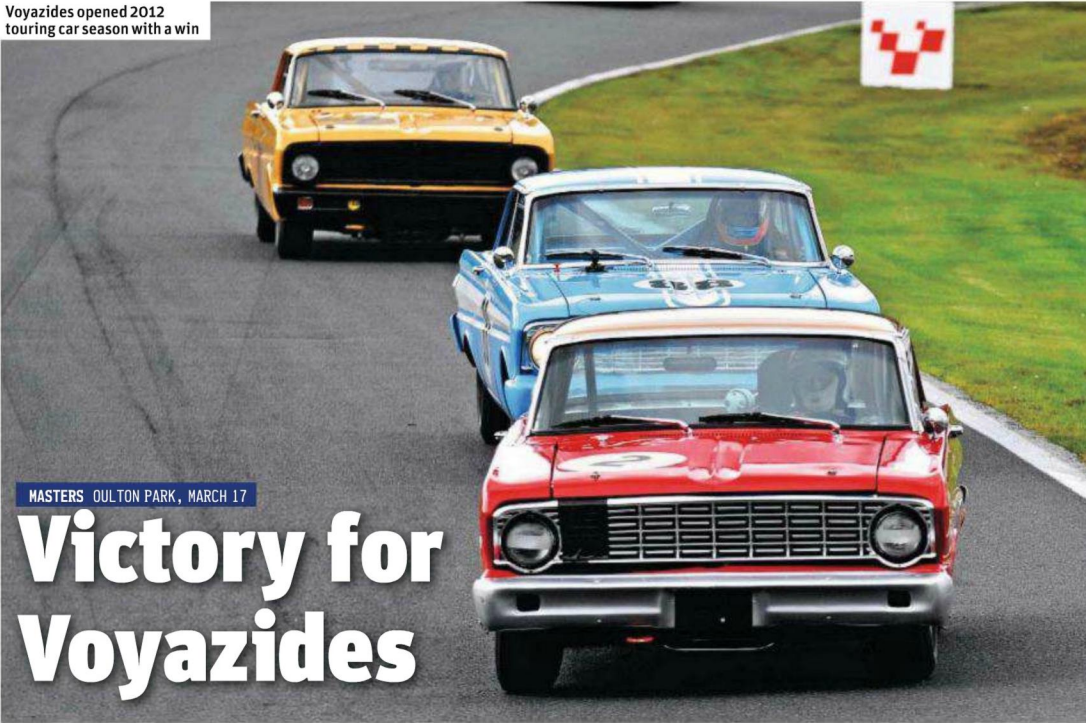
QUICK RESULTS

- Pre-1966 TC **Voyazides/Hadfield**
- World Sportscars **Coplowe**
- Gentlemen Drivers **Whitaker**

“That was agony. Another few laps and he'd have got me”

Whitaker won despite Hadfield's Cobra charge

Voyazides opened 2012 touring car season with a win



MASTERS OULTON PARK, MARCH 17

Victory for Voyazides

LEO VOYAZIDES AND Simon Hadfield claimed honours in the opening Masters Pre-1966 Touring Car Championship round of the season, on a day in which the Greek driver was hunting for three race wins.

Voyazides started his Ford Falcon Sprint, now 100kg heavier under the regulations, and made the early running. Behind him was the similar car of Jason Minshaw, but the local ace copped a drive-through penalty for an out-of-position start. That dropped Minshaw behind Westley Harding (Ford Falcon), but he was able to fend off Masters rookie Simon Garrad, making his debut in the ex-Graeme Dodd Ford Mustang.

Garrad inherited the lead during the pitstop window as Voyazides relayed to

Hadfield and Harding to Mike Jordan. The BTCC team boss put Harding's yellow Falcon at some spectacular angles, but Hadfield's leaden foot was too much for Jordan and he was forced to settle for second. Behind came a superb fight for third between Garrad and Phil Keen (in Mike Gardiner's Lotus Cortina). Keen tried everything he could in the corners, but Garrad had the power in a straight line to repel Keen by just 0.4s.

Voyazides went solo in his Lola T70 in the World Sportscar Masters race, which was affected by a heavy shower before the start. As most of the field switched to wet tyres, Voyazides elected to stay on treaded dry rubber and hope the conditions improved. He tiptoed

away from the rolling start behind Chris Fox (Lola T210) and James Littlejohn (Daren Mk2), but had a massive moment at Druids on the opening lap and dropped to last.

Littlejohn (on dries) caught and passed Fox (on wets) in the opening stint and grabbed the lead, as Voyazides started to make progress as the road dried. Littlejohn took the lead and car owner Georg Kjallgren took the car back into the race ahead of David Coplowe (T70) and Voyazides after the stops.

The T70s soon overhauled Kjallgren but the rain returned late-race, catching out Coplowe who had two spins that allowed Voyazides to increase his lead. However, on the last lap John Bussey (Elva MkVIII) spun heading up

to Druids, Voyazides hit the brakes, swerved and lost the lead to Coplowe who came through for a first-ever win.

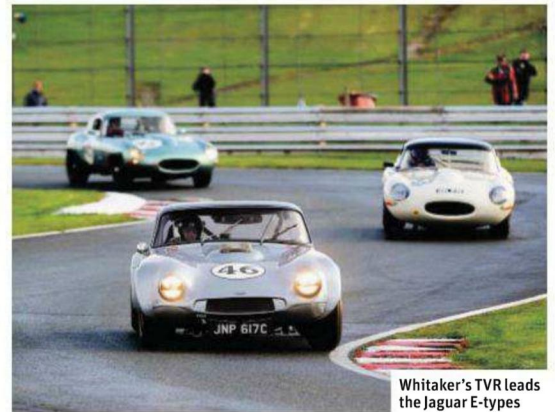
Voyazides leapt from the Lola to his AC Cobra for the Gentlemen Drivers Pre-1966 GT race, but struggled to match the

pace of Mike Whitaker (TVR Griffith), Jeremy Welch (Jaguar E-type) and Jon Minshaw (E-type). The trio traded the lead, despite contact between the E-types, which interrupted Welch's excellent progress.

After a second bout of contact between the big cats, Minshaw retired to the pitlane, allowing Whitaker and Welch to fight for the lead. After the stops, Whitaker headed Mark Pangborn (in for Welch), with Hadfield (in for Voyazides) 73 seconds adrift. However, Hadfield was in superb form and drove every lap as a qualifier. He closed remorselessly on Whitaker, who was struggling with the TVR's fading brakes, and was just nine seconds adrift at flagfall.

Mark Wright (Ford Escort) took honours in the 70s Celebration race after early leader Mark Bates (Porsche 911 RSR) handed over to his brother James – in his first ever race – whose pace was no match for Wright. Father and son Sean and Robert Brown (Ford Escort Mk1) bagged second spot.

● David Addison



Whitaker's TVR leads the Jaguar E-types

Snowdon entertained in 70s Celebration race



PRE-1966 TOURING CARS (29 LAPS)

1 Leo Voyazides/Simon Hadfield (Ford Falcon); **2** Westley Harding/Mike Jordan (Ford Falcon) +54.480s; **3** Simon Garrad (Ford Mustang); **4** Mike Gardiner/Phil Keen (Lotus Cortina); **5** Rob Hall/Ben Hall (Ford Falcon); **6** Philip Burgess (Austin Cooper S). **Class winners** Gardiner/Keen; Burgess; Richard Haythornthwaite/John Powis (Jaguar XK150). **Fastest lap** Hadfield 2m00.977s (80.10mph).

WORLD SPORTSCAR MASTERS (24 LAPS)

1 David Coplowe (Lola T70); **2** Voyazides (Lola T70) +4.322s; **3** Mark Bates (Porsche 911 RSR); **4** James

Littlejohn/Georg Kjallgren (Daren Mk2); **5** Jamie Boot (Chevron B16); **6** Charlie Kemp/Chris Fox (Lola T210). **CW** Bates; Littlejohn/Kjallgren; Boot; Kemp/Fox; Marcus Mussa (McLaren M1B); John Bussey (Elva MkVIII). **FL** Kemp 1m45.540s (91.82mph).

GENTLEMEN DRIVERS (35 LAPS)

1 Mike Whitaker (TVR Griffith); **2** Voyazides/Hadfield (AC Cobra) +90.94s; **3** Jeremy Welch/Mark Pangborn (Jaguar E-type); **4** Mike Wrigley (Jaguar E-type); **5** Allen Tice/Chris Conoley (Marcos 1800GT); **6** Mike Youles (Rochdale Olympic). **CW** Tice/Conoley; Youles;

Simon Edwards (Rejo MkIV). **FL** Hadfield 1m56.241s (83.37mph).

70s CELEBRATION (21 LAPS)

1 Mark Wright (Ford Escort RS1800); **2** Robert Brown/Sean Brown (Ford Escort Mk1) +1m11.782s; **3** Nick King (Aston Martin DB4 Lightweight); **4** Martin Melling/Peter Snowdon (Aston Martin DB4 Lightweight); **5** Mark Bates/James Bates (Porsche 911 RSR); **6** Christian Devereux (Mini Cooper). **CW** King; Bates/Devereux; Devereux; Andy Davies/Jim McLoughlin (Ford Capri Mk1); Paul Pochiol/Mike Wrigley (Ford Capri 3.0S). **FL** Wright 1m53.629s (85.28mph).

PICS: STEVE JONES

PICKING THE BEST FROM A GOOD BUNCH

The British motorsport scene is as diverse and vibrant as ever. Here's what we think will be worth watching in 2012

FORMULA RENAULT BARC

Formula Renault BARC is booming at a time when rival single-seater series are struggling in these cost-conscious times.

The championship has already confirmed 18 entries for 2012; that's three times the number who'd signed up to Formula Renault UK before its was cancelled this week.

Value for money is the order of the moment and FR BARC has clearly benefited from a period when cash-strapped drivers are setting sights a little lower than before.

The old Tatuus chassis used in FR BARC are still relevant training tools for drivers looking to move up the ladder, and can be raced for a fraction of the budget required for FR UK.

The make up of the 2012 grid, which includes the Ginetta Junior champion, an FF1600 title winner, and a host of budget single-seater and ex-UK/European kart racers, suggests FR BARC should be worth watching, especially now FR UK has been suspended.



Formula Renault BARC is looking good for '12

ANNIVERSARY RACES

It's a big year for some iconic cars. The AC Cobra, MGB and Lotus Elan all celebrate their half-century in 2012 and there are a number of special events planned in celebration.

The popular MGB will be best catered for, with both Julius Thurgood and the MG Car Club/MG Owners' Club putting on events. Thurgood's series, for pre-1966 Appendix K cars and interesting variants, will appear at seven HRDC meets, starting with Silverstone at the end of this month. The MGCC's one-off MGLive Silverstone extravaganza will be for similar machines. It will be a 50-minute race for one or two-driver teams, and organisers are aiming for 50 entries.

The Elan will be honoured with two 30-minute races, again focusing on cars that are not too heavily modified. These Classic Sports Car Club events should provide quite a sight at Brands Hatch's Lotus Festival (August 18-19) and at Donington Park on September 15-16.

The grunty AC Cobra contingent get a highly-prized slot at the Goodwood Revival, following on from the event's successful E-type celebration last year.



Cobras will celebrate jubilee at Goodwood

CARRERA CUP & CLIO CUP

Both these categories are benefiting from a nice blend of youth and experience at the moment. That they are both accessible for youngsters and older amateurs means they look like being the strongest elements of the TOCA support package in 2012 (it is currently unclear how good Ginetta's grids are looking).

Many of the young hotshots – such as James Dixon, Jack Goff and James Colburn – who turned last year's Clio title fight into a final-round nailbiter are set to return. The addition of Mini champions Ant Whorton-Eales and Vic Covey Jr, plus Saxmax runner-up Will Davison and ex-Stock Hatch ace Josh Cook, should ensure the action is as frenetic as ever on a



Meadows is a Carrera Cup GB title favourite

grid that's expected to top 20.

The arrival of a new car into the Carrera Cup last season seemed to level the playing field, helping the younger drivers to get the better of old stars Tim Harvey and Michael Caine. They're both off to British GT this season, while reigning champ James Sutton and BTCC race winner Stephen Jelley are also moving on.

This could open the way for 2011 runner-up Michael Meadows to take the crown, but he should face stiff opposition from a strong group including Glynn Geddie (who returns after winning British GT last year), ex-FPA champ Richard Plant, Carrera Cup Australia ace Ben Barker and former Clio race winner Sam Tordoff.

MUST-SEE EVENTS

Picking out the best national events from a packed calendar is no mean feat, but here are five of the best AUTOSPORT is looking forward to:



Silverstone Classic (July 20-22)

This historic event just keeps getting bigger and bigger, with touring cars of the 1975-99 era and Formula 5000 machinery rejoining the party in 2012.

Oulton Park Gold Cup (August 25-27)

A Historic Sports Car Club Bank Holiday treat at the picturesque Cheshire circuit provides a classic highlight of the year. Also look out for big historic events at Brands Hatch, Croft and Donington Park.



Goodwood Revival (September 14-16)

Now in its 15th year, the Revival continues to match some of the best pre-1966 cars with top historic racers and drivers from leading modern series.

Silverstone 24 Hours (September 21-23)

Britain's very own twice-round-the-clock enduro really is like no other national event. Watch through the night as Mosler, BMW, Porsche and Ferrari drivers battle for victory.



Walter Hayes Trophy at Silverstone (November 3-4)

This Kent-engined Formula Ford event has surpassed the Brands Festival as the category's must-see meeting. The entry is always huge and the racing close: last year's winning margin was 0.279s.



Club F3 has been reborn under MSVR

F3 CUP

Club F3 declined to the point of losing championship status at the end of 2009, but the category has been revived under the stewardship of Jonathan Palmer's MotorSport

Vision Racing.

Rumour has it that Palmer has long wished to run his own F3 championship and this year he will realise that ambition, as the 'F3 Cup' is restored as a championship. MSVR has managed to retain

many of the core competitors that raced during the BRSCC days, while working hard to promote the series to new blood. The rules have also been altered to clear the way for a greater number of car-and-engine combinations.

The result is a grid that's looking healthier than for many years in terms of numbers, while the addition of former British GT4 champion Jamie Stanley, British Formula Ford race winner Linton Stuteley, Radical Club Cup champ James Abbott, Monoposto 2000 title winner Tristan Cliffe, former Britcar Production and ARP F3 champion Gino Ussi and 750 Motor Club Toyota MR2 champ James Cross suggests the quality will be good too.



Special Saloons Series should be spectacular

SPECIAL SALOONS & CLASSIC THUNDER

Fans of fire-breathing tin-top monsters are in for a treat in 2012. The Classic Sports Car Club created a stir last year with its Mallory Park event for Modsports, Super Saloons, Thundersaloons and Donington GT machines. Over 30 cars turned out and this season the club has decided to run the Special Saloons Series.

With the cars split into five classes, based (chiefly, though not exclusively) on engine capacity, plus an invitation

class, four meetings will provide the opportunity to see some of the great modified racers of the past.

Also look out for the Historic V8 Racers Association's new initiative, which ran a successful pilot at Snetterton last year.

The Classic Touring Car Racing Club's Classic Thunder series has also showcased some interesting cars over the years, but things look to have stepped up a gear this season. Kumho

BMW champion Garrie Whittaker (BMW Super Touring replica), former Classic Group 1 champion Stacy Vickers (Mazda RX7) and tin-top ace Joss Ronchetti (Holden Monaro) have all built new cars for 2012, and are likely to be joined by a couple of powerful Nissan Skylines. The machinery will be exciting and eclectic, and with some of the best club drivers taking part the racing should be good too.

YOUR SAY

What you think of the motorsport news of the past week



Top job from Sky, even without Eddie Jordan...

Sky is praised to the heavens

The Sky coverage of the Australian Grand Prix was very impressive. This is exactly what the fans were waiting for. Clearly Sky has made a huge investment in its Formula 1 programme and it will surely pay dividends.

For me, though, the only thing that was missing was a more light-hearted touch to the coverage. There is no getting away from the fact that the BBC's Eddie Jordan's comical, tabloid style is what is needed on Sky.

Gemma Coventry, Bracknell

AUTOSPORT.COM

TOP FIVE ON OUR WEBSITE

1. **BRAWN DOWNPLAYS WING CONCEPT BENEFITS**
2. **MERCEDES REAR WING CONCEPT IS LEGAL**
3. **SCHUMACHER TOPS SECOND PRACTICE**
4. **HAMILTON LEADS ALL-MCLAREN FRONT ROW**
5. **TEAMS EXPECT 'FREAKY' START TO F1 2012**

AUTOSPORT.COM PLUS

TOP STORY ONLINE

SECRETS OF THE F1 COCKPIT REVEALED

To read this exclusive feature and many others like it, log on to autosport.com/plus and choose which package you'd like. A month will cost £5.50, a year £46. Includes access to Forix – the ultimate stats website.

WIN!



ROAD ANGEL VANTAGE

This week's star letter will receive a Road Angel Vantage – a dedicated safety camera and blackspot locator that displays the legal speed limit of every road you drive, automatically and wirelessly updating its database every few minutes as you drive. For more details on Road Angel visit www.roadangelgroup.com. Please ensure that your full address is included on all correspondence.

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

- The Aston Martin DB2/4's engine is a straight six, not a V6 as claimed on page 86 of last week's issue. And the 'Lancia' cockpit shot on the opposing page is, of course, the Austin Healey.
- We published the wrong date for the Silverstone 6 Hours last week. It actually takes place on August 26. It is the policy of AUTOSPORT to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please note the issue date and page number when contacting us on autosport.editorial@haynet.com

EDITORIAL CONTACT mail@autosport.com

I have to say that the BBC

coverage was a breath of fresh air. Ben Edwards did a good job, DC seems to have lightened up a bit, Eddie Jordan was mad as a box of frogs as ever, Ted Kravitz is absolutely no loss and as big a fan of Martin Brundle as I am, I didn't miss him one little bit.

I'm not entirely convinced Gary Anderson is a natural broadcaster (yet?), but his technical and tactical insights were interesting and informative.

In short, dear Bernie and friends, I was feeling a bit depressed about the TV

coverage this season, but you know what? Guess where you can stick your Sky package...

Mel Turbutt
Bewdley, Worcestershire

The stripped-down BBC

coverage? Much better than the old version. I didn't miss the patchy grid walkabout and it was good to go almost straight to the heart of the matter – the racing.

I particularly liked Ben Edwards' commentary style which I thought was well balanced and complemented by David Coulthard's input.

The post-race analysis was

good and didn't rely upon the stilted and formulaic FIA press conferences which really told us nothing.

So, in summary, my fears about having to go to Sky were groundless. **Richard Hathaway**
Uckfield, East Sussex

First grand prix of the year

exceeded all expectations. Perhaps the most outstanding Formula 1 debut belongs to Ben Edwards. Great, well-informed commentary with controlled enthusiasm.

Martin Sismey
Northamptonshire

Never thought I'd say this,

but thank you Bernie, thank you Sky. Fantastic coverage of the Aussie GP and at last someone showing the BBC how to cover F1 racing.

Mike Kelly
London

Hats off to Sky for its

excellent coverage from Albert Park. The BBC has a quality pairing in its commentary box with Messrs Edwards and Coulthard, but for me Croftie and MB were simply brilliant.

Graham Read
Wetherby, Yorkshire

THE LATEST GEAR

Desirable new releases for motor racing fans: books, DVDs, models, art and gifts

TAMIYA LOTUS 72D 1:12 PLASTIC KIT

£115 (hobbyco.net)

Model makers of a certain age will recall plastic-kit king Tamiya's fabulous big-scale series of yore. Now, the Japanese purveyor of miniature masterpieces is getting involved in 1:12-scale (translation: not so miniature) kits again, with Emerson Fittipaldi's 1972 title-winning Lotus 72D ready to build.

The detailing is incredible, with working suspension and steering, intricate pipework and cabling on the Cosworth DFV, and photo-etched parts for added realism. You also get a mini 'Emmo' to paint and put on board.


WROOOM! 2011 BOOK

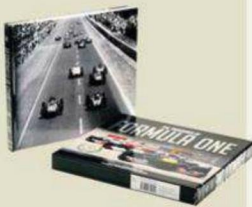
£35
autosport.com/shop

All the highlights – in words and pictures – from the annual Ducati/Ferrari pre-season skiing event at Madonna di Campiglio in Italy. Join Ducati's MotoGP aces Valentino Rossi and Nicky Hayden, and Ferrari stars Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa as they chat during this unique, hair-down event.


OFFICIAL FORCE INDIA F1 FLEECE JACKET

£99.99
autosport.com/shop

Part of the official Force India team apparel, this softshell fleece jacket features all the team's sponsor and partner logos, two zip-closing pockets and breathable mesh front panels for comfort. This one's for all you Paul di Resta fans out there.

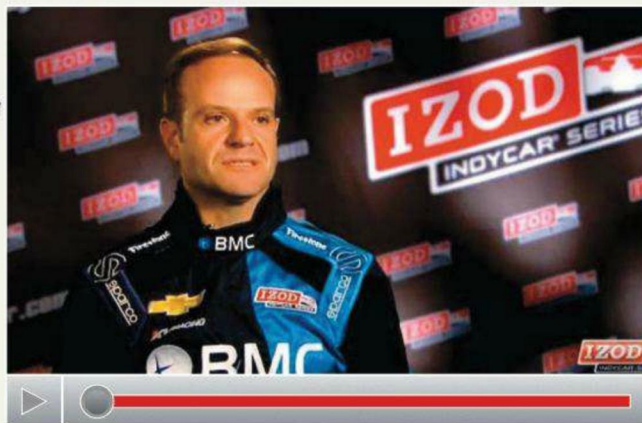

TREASURES OF FORMULA ONE - SECOND EDITION

£30 (Bruce Jones)
autosport.com/shop

Featuring facsimiles of grand prix racing memorabilia from the Donington Museum, the second instalment of this journey through F1 history relives great moments from the past, with key drivers, cars and circuits brought to life in a unique, interactive way.

HOT ON THE WEB THIS

YOUTUBE: RUBENS BARRICHELLO TALKS INDYCAR



SEARCH FOR: Rubens Barrichello Interview Part 1 (3:22)

After 19 seasons in Formula 1, Brazilian veteran Rubens Barrichello is moving to the IndyCar series with old friend Tony Kanaan. Listen to his hopes ahead of his maiden season in the US-based series and check out footage of his early test at Sebring.

WHAT'S ON...

Your guide to the best events taking place in the UK and around the world this week – plus TV and online

LYDDEN

British Rallycross Championship
March 24
Admission: £15 (free for under 12s)
Tel: 01304 830557

The rallycross fraternity roars into action at Lydden this Saturday. There's an action-packed programme headed by Liam Doran in his new Citroen DS3, which will light up the Supercar grid.

BRANDS HATCH

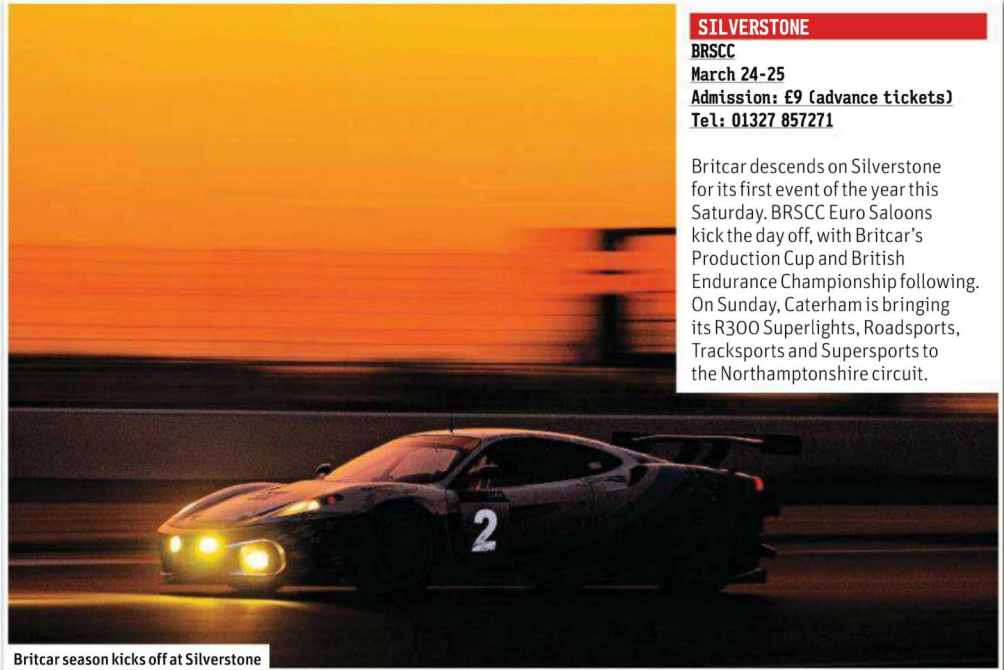
MSVR
March 24-25
Admission: £13 on the gate
Tel: 01474 872331

Project 8 Racing, Production BMW, Monoposto, Club MSV, Trackday Trophy, Club MSV Team Trophy, Champion of Brands FF1600.

OULTON PARK

BARC
March 24
Admission: £13 on the gate
Tel: 01829 760301

North West Sports Saloons, Production Touring Cars, InterSteps, Mini Se7en, Mini Miglia, Citroen 2CVs.



Britcar season kicks off at Silverstone

SILVERSTONE

BRSCC
March 24-25
Admission: £9 (advance tickets)
Tel: 01327 857271

Britcar descends on Silverstone for its first event of the year this Saturday. BRSCC Euro Saloons kick the day off, with Britcar's Production Cup and British Endurance Championship following. On Sunday, Caterham is bringing its R300 Superlights, Roadsports, Tracksports and Supersports to the Northamptonshire circuit.



'Home' race for Caterham squad

MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX

Formula 1 World Championship, Rd 2/20
Sepang, Malaysia
March 25
formulal.com

Malaysia will do much to prove whether Australia was a flash in the pan, or whether McLaren really does have the edge over Red Bull. The heat and humidity will also be an ideal barometer of which team is easiest on its tyres – which could prove crucial over the course of the championship.

INDYCAR

Rd 1/16
St Petersburg, Florida, USA
March 25
indycar.com

INDY LIGHTS

Rd 1/12
St Petersburg, Florida, USA
March 24
indycar.com

GP2 SERIES

Rd 1/12
Sepang, Malaysia
March 24-25
gp2series.com

NASCAR SPRINT CUP

Rd 5/36
Fontana, USA
March 25
nascar.com

BRAZILIAN V8 STOCK CARS

Rd 1/12
Interlagos, Brazil
March 25
stockcar.globo.com

Television

THURSDAY MARCH 22

0215-0245, 0900-0945, 1210-1240

Motors TV

Inside Grand Prix: Malaysia

 0445-0515 **ESPN**
Planet Speed

 0745-0815, 2300-2330 **Eurosport**

Inside IRC: Rally Islas Canarias

0900-1000, 1400-1500, 2200-2300

Premier Sports

NASCAR Sprint Cup: Bristol highlights

 0935-1135 **Motors TV**

V8 Supercars: Adelaide highlights

 1240-1545 **Motors TV**

WEC/ALMS: Sebring 12 Hours

highlights

 1800-1900 **Sky Sports 4**
Racemax

 2000-2115 **Sky Sports F1**

Formula 1: 1994 season review

 2130-2200 **Sky Sports F1**

Legends: Nigel Mansell

FRIDAY MARCH 23

 0145-0350 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP FP1

 0600-0750 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP FP2

 0750-0830 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

GP2: Malaysia Qualifying

 1340-1415, 2340-0015 **Motors TV**

Inside Grand Prix: Malaysia

 1500-1600 **Eurosport 2**

WTCC: Monza highlights

 1615-1655 **Sky Sports F1**

GP2: Malaysia Qualifying replay

 2100-2130 **Sky Sports F1**

Legends: Jackie Stewart

SATURDAY MARCH 24

 0155-0310 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

GP2: Malaysia Race 1

 0340-0410, 2030-2100 **Motors TV**

Inside Grand Prix: Malaysia

 0345-0610 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP FP3

 0355-0420 **Channel 5**
Motorsport Mundial

 0700-0945 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP Qualifying

 1300-1415 **BBC1**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP Qualifying

Rerun

 1400-1500 **ESPN Classic**

Formula 1: British GP 1977 and 1978

 2130-0005 **Motors TV LIVE**

NASCAR Nationwide: Fontana

SUNDAY MARCH 25

 0610-0710 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

GP2: Malaysia Race 2

 0730-1200 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP

 1350-1450 **ESPN Classic**

Formula 1: British GP 1979 and 1980

 1445-1640 **BBC1**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP Rerun

 1730-2000 **Sky Sports F1 LIVE**

IndyCar: St Petersburg

 2000-2330 **Premier Sports LIVE**

NASCAR Sprint Cup: Fontana

 2000-2130 **Sky Sports F1**

Formula 1: Malaysian GP Highlights

MONDAY MARCH 26

 0100-0300 **Sky Sports 2**

IndyCar: St Petersburg

Online

AUTOSPORT.COM PLUS

Coming up in our premium web content this week


MALAYSIAN GP

AUTOSPORT Plus is the only place to be for in-depth analysis of the Malaysian Grand Prix weekend as Mark Hughes presents his Friday form guide, while Edd Straw answers your questions about what's going on in the paddock. Plus read our extensive IndyCar and GP2 season previews as Mark Glendenning and Glenn Freeman get under the skins of the two series that kick off this weekend.



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REVVED UP OVER WHAT'S ON THE BOX

We cast a critical eye over the best and worst of this week's TV coverage



Hold fire Simon: they look a bit grumpy

SKY VERSUS BBC: ruthless billionaire media mogul v dear old Auntie. A luxury v a tax on telly ownership. After months of tedious opinion, the reality of the UK's new F1 coverage was revealed in all its glory last weekend. So how did it play out?

LAZENBY V HUMPHREY 'Nervous' I think is a fair way to describe Simon Lazenby's F1 debut on Sky. At times he appeared overawed. More than once he told the viewer that he was going to back out of speaking to a driver because they looked grumpy. This is the Piranha Club mate: get stuck in. Jake

Humphrey, on the other hand, was cool and calm as ever, although this can border on arrogant and aloof. Still, a comfortable win for the Beeb here.

CROFT/BRUNDLE V EDWARDS/COULTHARD As Jonathan Legard showed, the transition from radio to telly is no mean feat. Much like in his GP2 telly days, Croft was too garrulous, saying 20 words when 10 would do. It's early days and the chemistry with Brundle has potential, but they need to let each other breathe.

The BBC felt more balanced, DC more effortless in his analysis,

while Gary Anderson gave a depth possibly beyond the casual viewer.

Where were the in-race interviews on Sky? I never want to hear from daddy Button again – give me the Lee McKenzie disappointment-ometer any day of the week! Another win for the Beeb.

POST-RACE Easily the worst part of Sky's coverage. Aside from Anthony Davidson's excellent deconstruction of the first-corner clash,

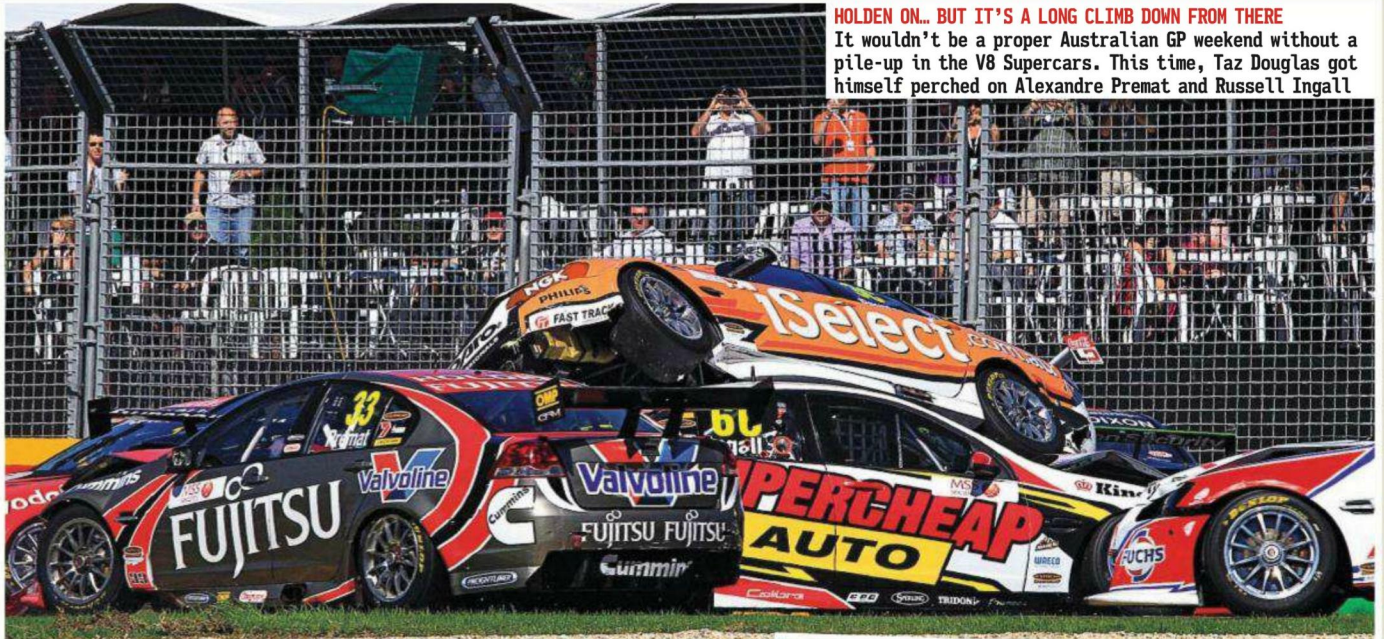
analysis was paper-thin. There's potential, but they need play to the strengths of the Skypad graphics. The Beeb did what's it's done well for years and wrapped up the big stories at the front, but what about tales further down the field?

VERDICT So that's 3-0 to the BBC. A whitewash? Well no, because it was live on Sky and at the end of the day that's all that matters. *Revved Up*

"I never want to hear from daddy Button again – give me the Lee McKenzie disappointment-ometer any day!"

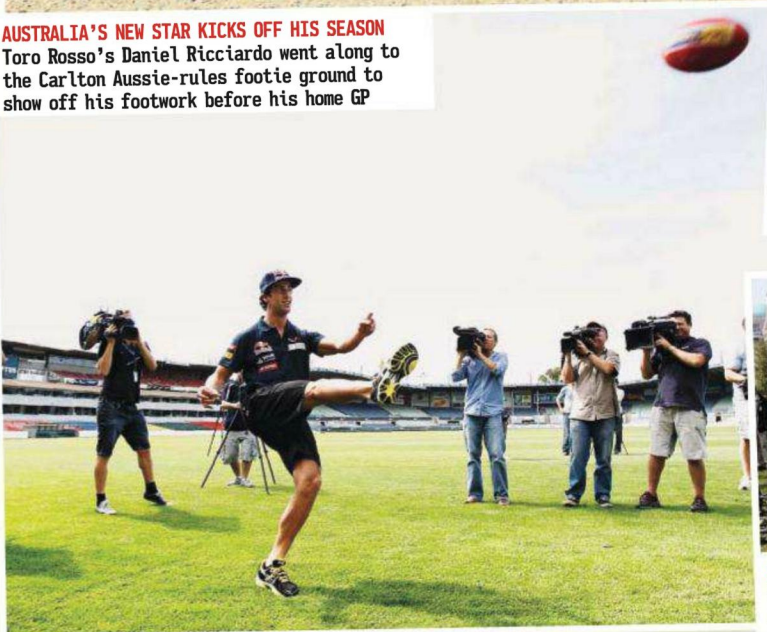
THE WEEK IN PICTURES

Our lensmen pounding the beat from West Sussex to southern Australia



HOLDEN ON... BUT IT'S A LONG CLIMB DOWN FROM THERE
It wouldn't be a proper Australian GP weekend without a pile-up in the V8 Supercars. This time, Taz Douglas got himself perched on Alexandre Premat and Russe'll Ingall

AUSTRALIA'S NEW STAR KICKS OFF HIS SEASON
Toro Rosso's Daniel Ricciardo went along to the Carlton Aussie-rules footie ground to show off his footwork before his home GP



JORGE LORENZO GETS ONTO FOUR WHEELS
The MotoGP star tried one of Addax's old GP2 cars for a day at Valencia. A future career?



STARS AT GOODWOOD'S PREVIEW PRESS DAY
Last week's bash brought out Pirro, Mass, Attwood, Ickx, Mowlem, Donnelly. And Lotuses. And the ladies

NEXT WEEK MALAYSIAN GP REPORT ALL THE BEST ACTION AND PHOTOS FROM SEPANG DON'T MISS IT!

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Carlos Pace's maiden Formula 1 podium finish, Austrian GP 1973



"The Brazilian set fastest lap during a burst that cleared compatriot Carlos Reutemann"

Pace (r) celebrates with winner Peterson and JYS

FOR MUCH OF ITS 54 LAP DURATION, THE 1973

Austrian Grand Prix had failed to sparkle. The dominant JPS Lotus cars of Emerson Fittipaldi and Ronnie Peterson had turned the race into something of a procession, and the fans had already started to trickle away from the Osterreichring when, six laps from the end, Fittipaldi retired, promoting Carlos Pace into what would be his maiden Formula 1 podium-place finish.

Pace had done enough to deserve his luck. In his 22nd grand prix, competing in the Surtees TS14A, the Brazilian had set the fastest lap during a burst that cleared his compatriot Carlos Reutemann and established him in fourth – prime position to benefit from Fittipaldi's woe.

It very nearly slipped from his grasp. In the last two laps the Surtees suddenly balked at picking up the last of its fuel and Reutemann, alerted by his pit crew, closed inexorably. Just 1.3s separated the pair at the flag, but Pace hung on and duly climbed the rostrum for the first time.

"Moco" continued with the Surtees team the following season, but their relationship deteriorated and the partnership ended halfway through the season. Over at Brabham a seat opened – Rikki von Opel opting to retire – and Pace accepted with alacrity when offered the drive by Bernie Ecclestone.

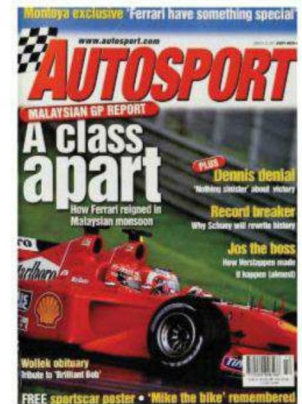
After an unspectacular opening two races he qualified fourth in Austria and then third at Monza. Two races later he followed Reutemann home to complete a Brabham one-two at Watkins Glen in the final race of the year.

He would scale new heights the following year, famously winning his home grand prix at Interlagos – his only success at the top level. Although he was, like everyone else, unable to live with the pace of Jean-Pierre Jarier's Shadow, he took the lead when the Frenchman retired and reeled off the final laps with ease to win and become a national hero.

Though no other victories would follow, Pace remained capable of excellence, even when Brabham decided to switch to Alfa Romeo power – which proved an unhappy marriage in its first year. His enthusiasm remained undimmed and it was with typical zeal and confidence that he approached the 1977 season targeting race victories.

Tragically his hopes would never be realised. Just three races into the season, on March 18, 1977, Pace was killed along with friend and fellow racer Marivaldo Fernandes in a light aeroplane crash in his native Brazil. It was in his honour that in 1985 Interlagos celebrated his legacy and renamed the circuit the Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace, a name it still bears today.

THIS WEEK IN...



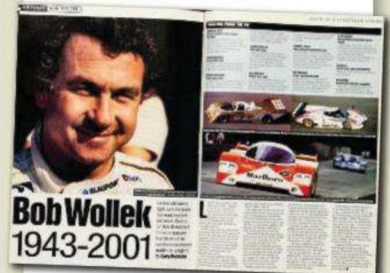
MARCH 22 2001

AUTOSPORT PAID TWO TRIBUTES

of a very different nature this week in 2001, devoting its front cover to Ferrari's emphatic one-two in Malaysia and also paying homage to Bob Wollek, who died in a cycling accident during the Sebring 12 Hours weekend.

Ferrari and Michael Schumacher had delivered a masterclass in mixed conditions in Malaysia, the German winning at a canter despite dropping as low as 11th following a myriad of early slips. Rubens Barrichello fought his way back up the field to finish second, 23 seconds behind his team-mate.

Wollek, a legend of sports car racing, died in a senseless road accident at the age of 57. The Frenchman was killed while cycling outside the Florida venue on the eve of the race. Wollek's passion for the sport never waned and his death marred the 50th 12 Hour endurance.



PIC: LAT



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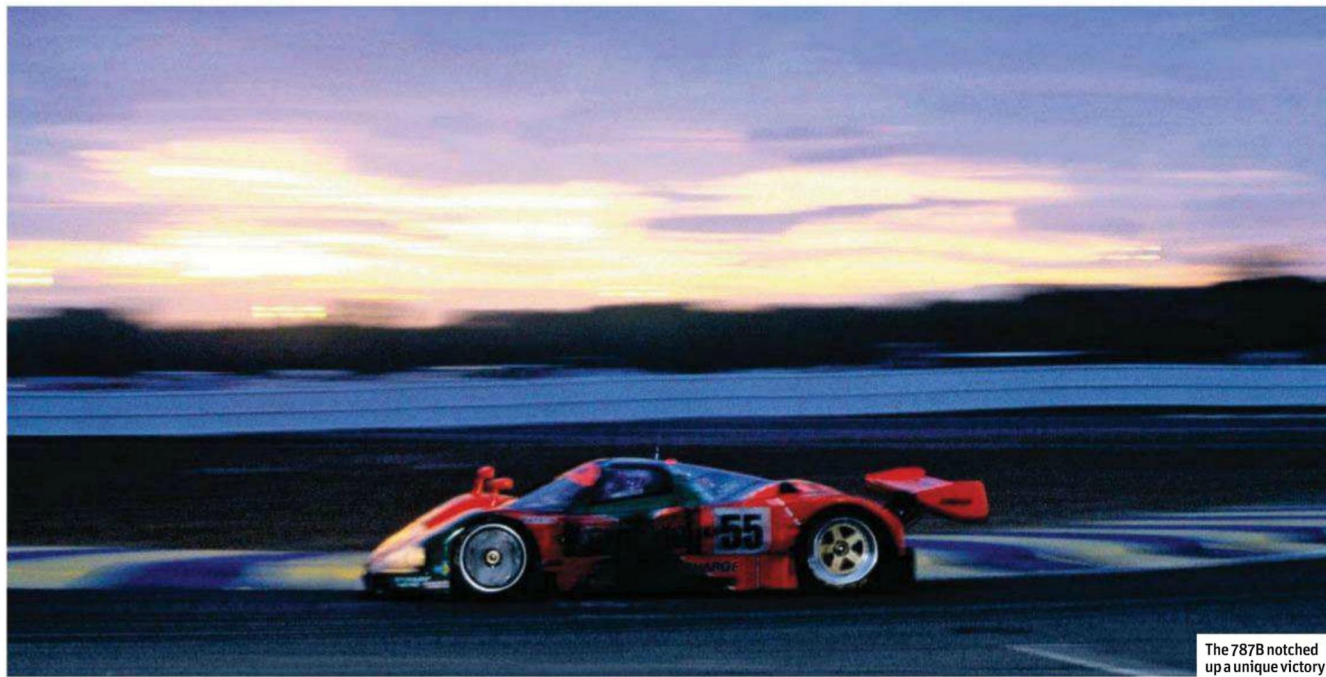
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VOLKER WEIDLER

■ Le Mans 24 Hours ■ Mazda 787B ■ June 22-23, 1991 ■ Only win for a Japanese manufacturer at La Sarthe



The 787B notched up a unique victory

MAZDA'S REALLY SMART

move with its 787B racer was to switch the entry of the car from Group C to IMSA regulations. I thought to myself, 'wouldn't we be better off in Group C?'

That was until an engineer took me to one side and calmly explained: "Better be quiet, Volker, the car is 50 kilos lighter!"

Under IMSA rules, we didn't even have any of the restrictions. Less weight obviously meant we had an extreme advantage, with a lot less wear on tyres and brakes. Not to mention the fuel consumption, which is always critical with a rotary engine.

Up against the Jaguars and Porsches – and even the Peugeots – we were fairly OK, but the Sauber Mercedes were way too strong. We had no chance. So, because of that our ambitions were rather low. Did we think we could finish the race? No. The idea was to put on a really good show and see how long the Mazda lasted.

Together with Johnny Herbert and Bertrand Gachot we formed a pretty good team of drivers, now in our second year together. Right from the start we went nicely with the flow, but also giving it all we had. We were flying. But after

"I saw lots of Union Flags being waved. 'What was that for?' I looked at the pit board: P1! The lone leading Mercedes had broken its water pump"

about six hours we realised: this is going pretty well. We decided we had to finish the race, which meant we had to save fuel. We had to stick to a given average per lap, achieving that by shortshifting, doing no more than 8400rpm. I remember going only half throttle down the Mulsanne straight.

Hour by hour we gained positions until we were P2. At

around 10 o'clock on Sunday morning I took over the car. Two laps behind the leading Mercedes, we were basically just running down the laps. Then, all of a sudden, I saw lots and lots of Union Flags being waved. What was that for? I looked at the pit board: P1! The lone leading Merc had broken its water pump.

At noon Johnny took over the

car for the final stint. No-one realised that he was suffering from not having taken on enough fluids. But he never said a word. Otherwise we would have mounted a bottle in the car for him.

Johnny crossed the line two laps in front, but he never made it to the podium. Only a few people were aware of what was going on. He was completely dehydrated.

So, straight after the podium ceremony we went to the hospital. There was no press conference, nothing. Johnny got all the treatment he needed, but he missed all the celebrations. I returned to the track to join in, but poor Johnny was not with us. He got back by eight o'clock in the evening, just in time for another post-race party with the team in the hotel! ❗

Volker Weidler was talking to Gregor Messer

IN PROFILE



AFTER SUCCESS IN FORMULA

Ford and Formula 3 in his native Germany, Volker Weidler raced in Formula 3000, DTM and German Group C before making it to Formula 1. Unsuccessful in each of his 10 attempts to pre-qualify the uncompetitive Rial in 1989, he built a new career in Japan, with success in Formula Nippon and Group C. Suffering severely from tinnitus, he had to give up racing in 1992. Now 50, he runs the family facility-management business.

NEXT WEEK

Mark HIGGINS



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