

CHAMPION

2023

Max Verstappen

ROKT

BYBIT

ORACLE

IT'S ALL ABOUT
THE PASSION

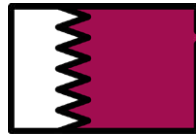
QATAR GP
ISSUE 361
8 OCTOBER 2023



QATAR GRAND PRIX

ISSUE 361

8 OCTOBER 2023



RACE 1096
 Qatar Airways Qatar GP
 Circuit ▶ Lusail International Circuit
 Laps ▶ 57
 Length ▶ 5.419 km
 Distance ▶ 308.611 km

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 With additional material from Tina Nygaard | Alison Volney

WHO WE ARE

DAVID TREMAYNE

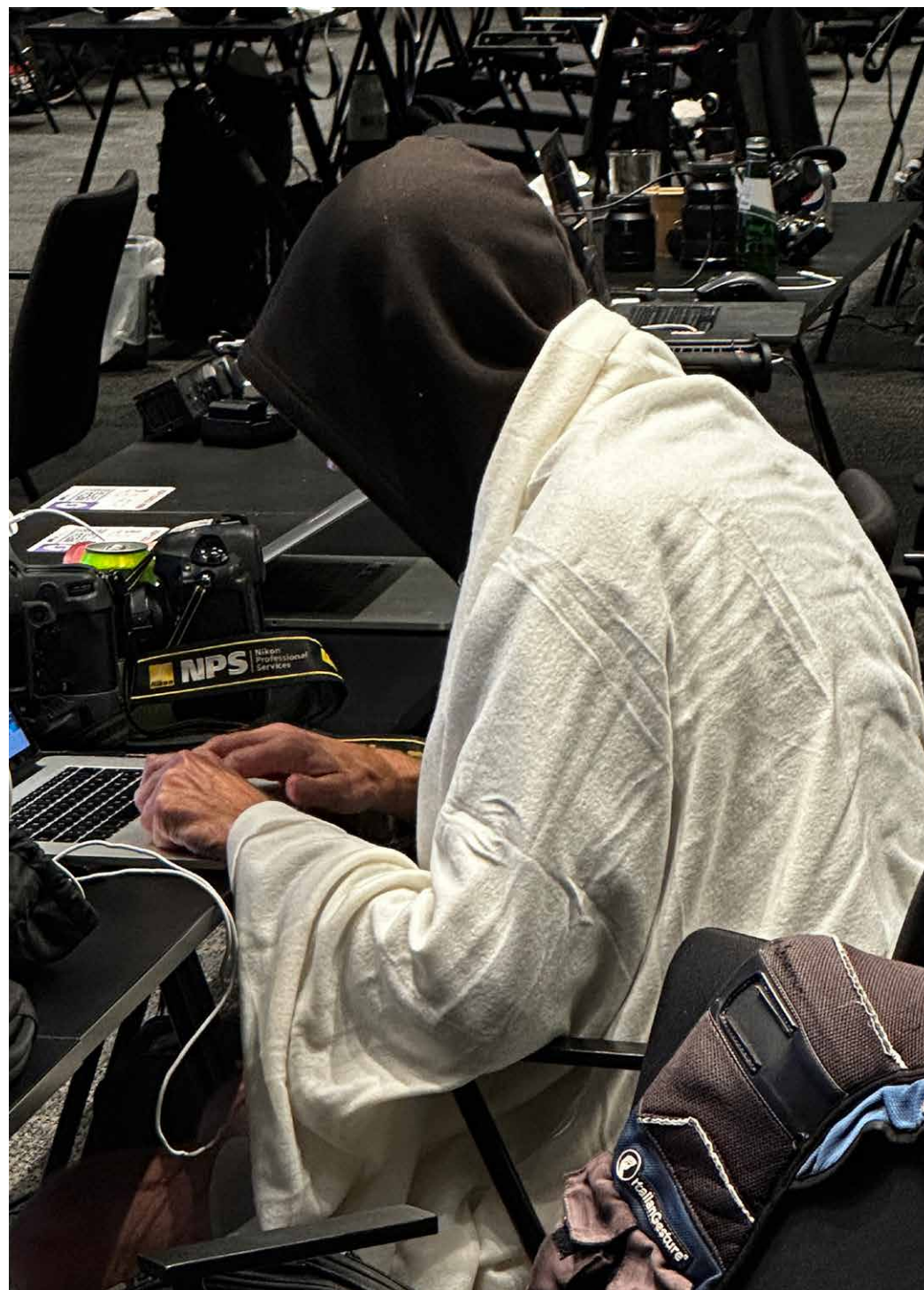
A freelance motorsport writer and former executive editor of *Motoring News* and *Motor Sport*, he is a veteran of 34 years of Grands Prix reportage and the author of more than 50 motorsport books. He reported on his 600th Grand Prix in Russia in 2021. He is a member of the F1 Paddock Hall of Fame and on the FIA Media Working Group. His writing, on both current and historic issues, is notable for its soul and passion, together with a deep understanding of the sport and an encyclopaedic knowledge of its history. David is also acknowledged as the world expert on the history of land and water speed record breaking, has a passion for Unlimited hydroplanes, and is the British representative on the FIA Land Speed Records Commission. A former rocket car pilot, he averaged 275 mph and peaked at 297 in the STAY GOLD jetcar before walking away from a 250 mph inversion while attacking the 301 mph UK land speed record in August 2017. With the rebuilt ROKiT STAY GOLD machine he set two new Straightliners/UKITA flying eighth mile records of 184.685 and 202.508 mph at Elvington on September 11 2023, but an attempt on the outright record had to be postponed due to poor weather.

JOE SAWARD

A professional motorsport writer for 40 years, the last 35 of them in Formula 1, he has attended and reported on every Grand Prix since the Spanish GP of 1988, even during the COVID pandemic, when only two F1 journalists did all the races. This is a unique achievement in F1. A former Grand Prix Editor of *Autosport*, he wrote the best-selling "World Atlas of Motor Racing" back in the 1980s. He went on to be a pioneer in electronic media in F1, launching the award-winning JSBM e-newsletter in 1994, followed by the website www.grandprix.com, GP+, Joe Blogs F1 and the Missed Apex Podcast. Joe also hosts Audience events for F1 fans. A member of the F1 Paddock Hall of Fame and a representative on the FIA Media Working Group, Joe was trained as an historian and is an expert on the Special Operations Executive (SOE), his book "The Grand Prix Saboteurs" having won the Guild of Motoring Writers' Author of the Year Award. He has also written "The Man who Caught Crippen", a non-racing book, plus four volumes of "Fascinating F1 Facts".

PETER NYGAARD

A law student at Copenhagen University, when he began taking photographs at Formula 1 races, he established the Grand Prix Photo company after he graduated in 1982 and has since attended more than 675 Grands Prix. Today he not only takes photographs but also writes and commentates. His company covers every Grand Prix and, with contacts all over the world, can supply photos from almost any motor race. In addition to current photography the Grand Prix Photo archive is one of the biggest in the world, Nygaard having acquired the work of a number of F1 photographers, notably Italian photo-journalist Giancarlo Cevenini and France's Dominique Leroy, plus a portion of Nigel Snowdon's collection. Grand Prix Photo has more than 25,000 photographs on its website and millions more in its offices, which are decorated with a Tyrrell 021, which Peter acquired from Ken Tyrrell. Peter is also a member of the FIA Media Working Group and an honorary member of Fundacion Juan Manuel Fangio.



WHAT WE THINK

The Qatar Grand Prix was an event which sailed rather close to the wind. It was clear from Friday evening that there were problems with the effects of high frequency oscillations caused by the new 'pyramid kerbs' on the Pirelli tyres, with microscopic separations in the sidewall between the carcass cords in the construction of the tyre and the topping compound.

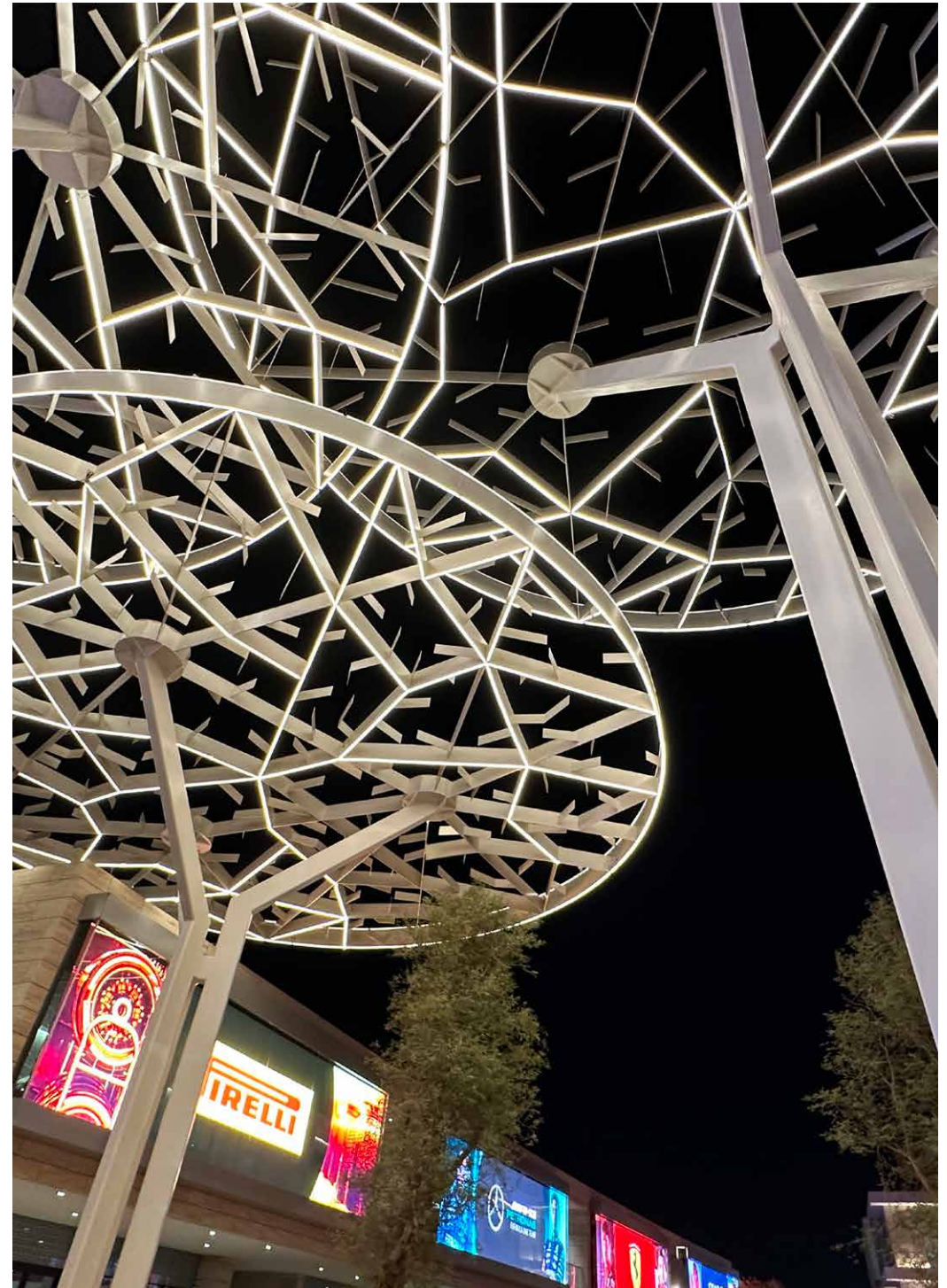
This did not result in any punctures nor accidents, but it worried Pirelli sufficiently to go public with the problem, rather than try to hide it and hope for the best. This meant that first the white lines for track limits were moved in several corners to try to stop the drivers running over the kerbs and it was agreed that the tyres would be examined again after the Sprint to see the extent of the problem. The Sprint had three Safety Cars and that meant that there was not sufficient data to make a proper analysis and so, in order to reduce the risks, it was decided that tyres could be used for a maximum of 18 laps, which meant that the drivers had to stop three times in the race.

This was a rational response to the problem and the teams and drivers agreed that it was a good solution in the circumstances. There was none of the madness that occurred back at Indianapolis in 2005 when the FIA refused to make compromises after Michelin ran into a similar problem and the result was that most of the field was forced not to race because of insurance problems. That was a disaster for F1 in the United States.

The careful handling of the situation in Qatar was commendable, but there were rumours during the weekend that the whole thing might have been avoided. Back in 2021 when F1 raced at Lusail with different kerbs, there were it seems some similar issues but, more worrying was the fact that Pirelli informed the FIA of this potential problem in January this year but nothing was done about it.

It would be wise for the FIA to look into why this happened and how things could be better in the future.

Indeed it would be a good moment to consider the whole issue of track limits and whether there is not a better solution. ❖



HEAT, DUST AND HAIR PROBLEMS

The Doha weekend began in a decidedly odd fashion.

It was Thursday lunchtime and I turned up at the track in 41-deg C (nearly 106-deg F) heat. It was dry heat, which was pleasant compared to the recent races in Singapore and Suzuka where the humidity was horrible.

At some races, the promoters give the media something to welcome them: a branded bag, a notebook, or a drinks bottle (this has been in vogue of late. I have about 20 of them). The gift is designed to make us free good about their event. If you are new to it, it feels like a perk. If you've been around awhile it is a useful thing to pass on to any F1 fans in one's orbit. The problem is that you cannot keep all of them. I have two trunks filled with such things and I've given a lot away. Some of these gifts are brilliant and some of them not so brilliant.

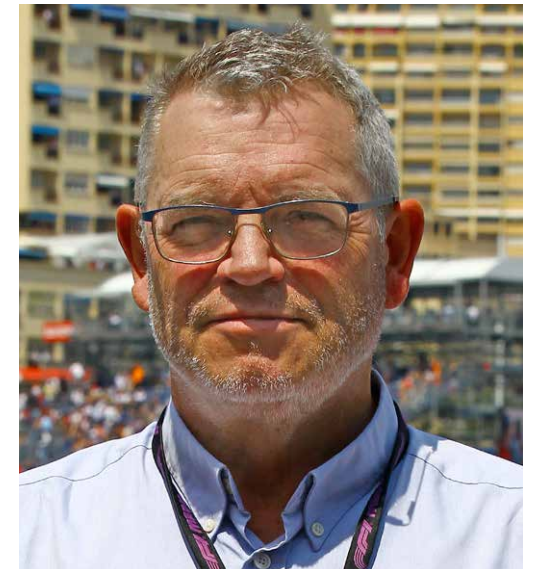
I think my all-time favourite was a long time ago when the Mobil Holden Dealer Team at Bathurst in Australia gave each journo an Akubra hat (think Crocodile Dundee) with a "Press" ticket stuck in the ribbon - with a subtle MHDT logo. Naturally, everyone got the joke, wore the hats all weekend and went home with a nice hat.

Other gifts are just plain weird. When it comes to wacky, the Mexicans play a strong hand, with a lucha libre wrestling mask (you never know when you might need one). Other strange ideas have included identical briefcases for everyone in the F1 press corps (with the inevitable result that everyone went home with the wrong one). Bahrain gives us a number-plate (each marked with a different year) There is less of this stuff these days but in Doha they did a strange thing and gave us each a blanket...

Why would one need a blanket in such temperatures, I asked.

The problem was that the Media Centre had air conditioning and somehow this could not be controlled. It was all or nothing. I heard that some exotic part had not arrived in time and so we were stuck in a refrigerator. To be fair if one was out and about in the paddock it was a great relief to climb into the icebox, but those who did not venture out much, ended up freezing. So the blankets were very useful to stay warm in the middle of the desert.

This is the sort of thing that happens with new facilities and it was clear that the work had not been finished for long. The tarmac looked like it had been laid only a few days before the event began (although a little investigation revealed that the work was finished on August 28). Still, curing new tarmac in



the desert is not easy. In any case, the first practice session was a real rodeo.

The track was almost unrecognisable from the place we visited in 2021. That first event was quite well organised, probably because it was pulled together quickly to help F1 get through the COVID restrictions.

This year was meant to be bigger and better, and it is clear that the will is there. They want Qatar Grand Prix to be considered to be one of the best F1 races... and they have the money to make things happen.

You cannot fault them on their desire to spend money. The revamped Lusail facility is rumoured to have cost something like \$350 million, although to be honest I doubt it was that high a number. The result was very impressive, although it is all new and so not everything was working.

But you cannot help but be impressed with what they have done.

The thing is that Qatar has money. A lot of money. The country has 25.2 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, which these days equates to about \$2 trillion, which explains how the country has zero income tax, zero

sales tax (for now), free healthcare and free education. The country has positioned itself as a knowledge hub for the future and has attracted a string of international educational establishments to set up campuses in Doha. It has one of the highest GDP per capita figures in the world at \$84,000, and it is estimated that this will grow in the next five years to \$107,000.

But it is a desert, with a few beaches along the shore of the Gulf. Before

oil there was not a lot. There were a number of clans, fighting for control of the sand.

This is why Bahrain and Qatar share the same basic flag (with a slightly different colour) because the House of Khalifa moved from Qatar to Bahrain in 1799 after being pushed out of power by the Thani clan.

But it was all pretty insignificant as both were sleepy places where there

was some pearling, some fishing and more than a little piracy. This irritated the British to such an extent that eventually they sailed around the Gulf, bombarded here and there and took everywhere under their "protection" and so they remained until independence, after the oil had been discovered.

Today it is a sparkling place with amazing modern architecture. A lot of this is down to local rivalries with the oil-rich nations all trying to outdo one another. Doha is impressive but the Saudis said: "Just wait!" They are all outdoing each other...

To be honest, this is good for F1 because they will all spend daft amounts of money trying to outdo one another and F1 can sit by and watch. Race promoters from other places will come to marvel at it all and follow suit - if they can afford it.

Still, when all is said and done, Lusail is still a flat place in the desert and when the warm winds blow it is the coiffeur's nightmare, if you don't wear a hat. Not even US politicians and Hollywood starlets can avoid the windswept look...























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F1 TEAM

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F1 TEAM

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MAX IS CHAMPION by Joe Seward

MAX JOINS THE FIRST 11

At 26 Max Verstappen is not the youngest triple World Champion in F1 history - Sebastian Vettel was 25 - but the Dutchman becomes the 11th driver in history to win the title three times, joining a very elite list: Michael Schumacher, Lewis Hamilton, Juan Manuel Fangio, Alain Prost, Vettel, Jack Brabham, Jackie Stewart, Niki Lauda, Nelson Piquet and Ayrton Senna.

When the Sprint race in Qatar was over and Max was World Champion-elect, he was asked if he had been aware of the moment the title became his, when Sergio Perez was caught up in a bingle with Esteban Ocon and Nico Hulkenberg. The reply was typically Verstappen.

“I saw that of course but I was focused on trying to win the race at that point,” he said.

In the end he could not catch Oscar Piastri to win the Sprint but was then able to enjoy the moment.

“It’s been an incredible year,” he said. “A lot of great races and of course I’m super-proud but I’m also super-proud of the job of the team. It’s just been so enjoyable to be part of that group of people. To be a three-time World Champion is just incredible. It’s something I never even really dreamt of, a very proud moment for



myself, for my family, my close family. I think everyone within the team I'm working with, you know, to be able to experience all of this together is amazing. And I said it on the radio already on the in-lap. Of course, we talk about performance and, you know, you can always thank the team for that, but I also find the whole atmosphere and how much I enjoy working with all these people, I find that probably even more important. It's very important to come to the track and know that you have nice people to work with."

Max said that this was definitely the best so far.

"I think the first one was the most emotional one, because that's when your dreams are fulfilled in F1," he explained. "But this has been my best year. Yeah, well, so far, you know, consecutive wins and stuff like that, and the car itself has been probably in the best shape as well. So for me, this one is probably the one I'm most proud of in a way - because of consistency."

Did he know when he first drove the RB19 that it would take him to the championship?



"It's always difficult to say," he said. "It always felt nice. And I thought it had good balance. But you never know what the other teams have come up with over the winter time. We really

expected it to be close into Bahrain. But we were all positively surprised with how good the car was there. But that's one track. And, of course, when you go to the next tracks, and you can

see, you know, the cars always been quick, and especially in the race, like we always had really good race pace. We had a lot of great results in tough conditions as well, where it was easy to

make a mistake as a team, even if you would have a dominant car. But yeah, I think for most of the races, we just did an incredible job.”

Max would never admit to when he thought the title was his.

“Of course the momentum was growing and race after race the gap was getting bigger. So I was just, you know, looking at myself, just trying to go through every single weekend trying to get the best out of it. That for me at that time is more important than dreaming about the title, because dreaming doesn’t really bring you anywhere. It’s about the effort and work you put in to try and achieve your goals.

“I keep trying to improve. And of course, I don’t necessarily think I have become a faster driver, but you have a lot more experience in the car. You grow as a driver, you grow also, I think, as a person in life. And I think all these kinds of things, when I compare to my first season in Formula 1, they help you a lot in terms of just dealing with every kind of pressure situation. In the end it’s all about trying to deliver every single weekend, which is I think very hard in Formula 1.”



And the highlights this year?

“There are a few,” he said. “I think my win in Miami, I really enjoyed. Spa, Zandvoort, but also Suzuka, like, winning the Constructors’ for example with the team there was fantastic. It’s difficult to really pick one to be honest.”

And the future? How many more titles can he win?

It depends a lot also on the package,” he said. “That’s how F1 works. I’m still young even though I’m already in F1 for a while. I have quite a few more years in me to be able to operate at my best. We’ll see how long that is. To be honest, I think it’s more about how long I want to be here.”

There are still have five races left this year. Will that change his attitude?

“Not really,” he said. “I only needed to score three points to win the championship today, but I still want to win, I’m still out there to try and do the best I can. That’s got to be the same tomorrow. When I go to the next race I will try to win again.

“I don’t know how long this is going to last. I’m enjoying the moment and I think that’s also very important. I’ve achieved more than I could have ever even dreamed of, so I’m loving the moment. We’ll see where we end up but it’s already way more than I ever thought I could achieve.

“Sometimes I’m not happy with the performance or how the weekend was going but I always tried to be perfect and I try to become better every single race weekend.

“I’m not in Formula 1 to leave a legacy. I’m here to win and I’m here to try to do the best I can and try to enjoy the moment with the people who helped me achieve these things. That’s, for me, way more important than trying to leave a legacy. When you see those names, you’re like, ‘Wow! its incredible what these people have achieved in their careers and now you’re alongside them. It is an amazing feeling.” ❖

AIMING (VERY) HIGH

Formula 1 would love to have a competitive American team. There is Haas, but the team has never looked strong enough to think that one day we will hear “The Star-Spangled Banner” being played on the podium for the winning Constructor. There’s nothing wrong with having big ambitions, but many in Formula 1 are worried that Michael Andretti and his supporters are seriously underestimating what it takes to be successful in F1... The FIA, however, thinks all is well.

Those who follow motorsport around the world closely will know that Michael Andretti and his backers are expanding operations in a dramatic fashion.

They want to have a team in Formula 1; they want to run four cars in IndyCar (although at the moment there are only three confirmed and the team may have to down-size to three in 2024). Yet this year the best Andretti driver finished only 10th in the IndyCar championship. The team has not won an IndyCar title since 2012 and its last victory in the Indy 500 was in 2017. It is not a stellar record.

Andretti has been more successful in the less competitive Indy NXT Series, where it is running four cars, but it was beaten to this year’s title.

The Avalanche Andretti Formula E team won two races in 2023 with Jake Dennis (right). Rivals Envision Racing, Jaguar



TCS Racing and the TAG Heuer Porsche team each won four victories but their drivers were inconsistent. Dennis won the title, but Andretti finished only third in the Teams’ Championship.

In Extreme E the Andretti Altawkilat team was seventh out of 10 teams.

This year Andretti bought into the Wayne Taylor Racing IMSA team, with the ambition of expanding its operations and venturing into the World Endurance Championship in the future. The team has not won a race this year but goes to Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta next weekend second in the championship - and in the running for the title.

The plan is to expand to two cars next year in IMSA and Honda says it is engaged in “serious evaluations” for a possible future FIA World Endurance Championship programme with its current Acura ARX-06 LMDh car.

Andretti is also co-owner of the Walkinshaw Andretti United team in Australian Supercars, but the team has not won a race this year.

Most recently Andretti is rumoured to have bought into the Spire Motorsports NASCAR operation, although this has yet to be officially confirmed. The team just bought a NASCAR charter for \$40 million and will run three cars in 2024. It has also just acquired Kyle Busch Motorsports, including its successful NASCAR Truck Series team. The deal includes Rowdy Manufacturing, Busch's precision machining business which works with NASCAR teams, automotive and aerospace customers. The sale also includes a chassis-building business and a CNC machine shop. These are all housed in a large facility in Mooresville.

What is clear from all of this is that Andretti and his backers are intent on building the Andretti brand (which has become Andretti Global in recent weeks) into a major player.

The money to put this all together has come largely from the insurance firm Gainbridge, which is run by CEO Dan Towriss (above) with the support of its parent firm Guggenheim Partners



and its CEO Mark Walter. It is also clear that the Andretti Global empire will be partly-owned (perhaps to a large extent) by these backers.

Given the relative lack of success of Andretti's teams in recent years, there is some scepticism about whether or not Andretti will add much value to the

world of Formula 1. The FIA last week announced that it has accepted a bid for Andretti to get an F1 entry. The Formula One group is less certain it is a good idea.

The process that must be gone through to confirm Andretti's entry is anything but clear. The rights of the various

parties to accept or reject an entry are written into the F1 commercial agreements and these are confidential with access to them is restricted to signatories only, so it is very difficult for observers to judge what the Formula One can group can do if the FIA decides it wants Andretti to be a new team.

The FIA Sporting Regulations, which are public information, says (Article 8.5) that “all applications will be studied by the FIA and accepted or rejected at its absolute discretion”, which suggests that it can do as it pleases, but the commercial agreements may (or may not) require the F1 group to agree.

This does not mean that F1 has a right of veto, but suggests that it does not have to offer a new team the same commercial terms as existing entrants if it does not wish to do so.

As we do not know what the agreements say, it is hard to pass judgement on what is now going on. This makes a mockery of claims by both the FIA and Formula 1 that they want the sport to be transparent. If we do not know how entries are decided, it can hardly be seen as a transparent process.

What is fairly clear is that the existing F1 teams do not have any official say in the process. If they did it would be dubious in terms of competition law.

However, F1 controls the commercial rights (and the FIA is not allowed to meddle in them) so it has the right to conclude a commercial deal and the FIA does not have the right to intervene.

Obviously if Andretti is not a signatory to the commercial agreement, it might be able to run cars in the races, but it does not give it the right to prize money. Nor does it give F1 the right to film the cars and use the footage, which means that TV coverage would have to be organised in such a way that no-one would see an Andretti (except perhaps in the background). This is entirely

possible if the team is a backmarker, as the only problem would come when the cars were being lapped.

This would, of course, be a daft situation but clearly the FIA has decided to pull the pin on this particular grenade, albeit after five weeks of caution, during which it was clear that a decision had been made but no announcement was forthcoming.



Why the delay? One presumes that there was a lot of legal discussions to be had and there was a need for the federation to avoid gung ho actions because it is heavily dependent on the Formula 1 group for its revenues - and so needs to be careful not to upset the commercial rights holder, as this could lead to a less generous attitude in the future, if F1 feels that the FIA has been working against its wishes. FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem has been fairly clumsy in his handling of relations with the F1 group thus far. It is clear too that the FIA was under pressure from Andretti, which has been hinted at in the FIA announcement.

This said that Andretti will “proceed to the next stage of the application process to enter Formula 1”, which suggests that the team has yet to clear all the hurdles.

The federation was very keen to highlight the “stringent criteria” and the “robust process of due diligence” which has been going on.

However the statement that the federation “is obliged to approve applications that comply with the Expressions of Interests application

requirements” suggests that this was not a smooth process.

“We have adhered to that procedure in deciding that Andretti Formula Racing LLC’s application would proceed,” FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem (below) said. “In taking that decision, the FIA is acting in accordance with EU directives on motor sport participation and development”.

This suggests that the aforementioned Article 8.5 is not wholly correct as the decision was obviously not made at the FIA’s “absolute discretion” because it was “obliged to approve” the application.

Strangely, the FIA also said that the process “involving all stakeholders” determined which candidates were selected, which is an odd thing to

say given that teams should not have a say in the process, but are clearly stakeholders in the F1 business.

The Formula 1 group responded to the FIA announcement by saying that “we note the FIA’s conclusions in relation to the first and second phases of their process and will now conduct our own assessment of the merits of the remaining application”.

What this means and how much longer the process will take remains to be seen.

What is clear is that Formula 1 is not about to accept Andretti... but it is not clear on what grounds it can refuse.

What is clear is that the other teams have no official say in the matter, although they all have opinions and all of them are negative, although some team bosses do not say so openly.

Andretti responded to the FIA statement by saying that “Andretti Cadillac is honoured that the FIA has approved Andretti Formula Racing’s Expression of Interest for the FIA Formula 1 World Championship.

“We appreciate the FIA’s rigorous, transparent and complete evaluation process and are incredibly excited to be given the opportunity to compete in such a historic and prestigious championship.

“The formation of this distinctly American team is an important moment of pride for all our employees and fans. We feel strongly that Andretti Cadillac’s deep racing competencies and the technological advancements that come from racing will benefit



our customers while heightening enthusiasm for F1, globally.

“We look forward to engaging with all of the stakeholders in Formula 1 as we continue our planning to join the grid as soon as possible.”

The talk of engaging with stakeholders again suggests that others may have a say in the decision, but it is hard to see how that can happen in relation to competition law.

Andretti’s mention of Cadillac is also interesting because it does not have an engine deal at the moment and any engine naming deal would require the provider to agree to a name proposed. The rules make it clear that a car manufacturer would not have to agree to its engines being given the name of another manufacturer.

This rather limits the scope for Cadillac, as it is hard to imagine that any of the engine manufacturers in F1 would agree to having the Cadillac name on their engine covers.

It could, of course, be possible for a deal to be struck with Honda in 2026. At the moment there is no Honda engine in F1, even if we all know that the Red



Bull engines are effectively Hondas. Officially, they are not.

The reason that Honda might agree to a badging deal is because the Japanese firm and Cadillac’s parent General Motors work together already and in recent days Honda launched its 2024 Prologue electric SUV (above), which is a vehicle based on General Motors’s BEV3 electric-car architecture, used for the Cadillac Lyriq and planned Chevrolet Blazer EV. The platform is also being used for the electric Acura ZDX, another Honda brand.

According to the F1 rules, the 2026 engines can be badged differently if the manufacturer agrees, even if it involves another manufacturer.

Starting before 2026 may not be easy for Andretti. Time is short to put a team together and to build cars. Andretti could force a manufacturer to supply it with power units in 2025, the rules require manufacturers to provide engines “if called upon to do so”. But such deals do not include a transmission system if the manufacturer does not want to supply one. The team would

thus have to build its own, which requires time, money and expertise.

The opposition to Andretti comes not because the team is American, despite what some Americans seem to think. The F1 company is US-owned and listed on the New York Stock Exchange and everyone in F1 would love to see more US interest in the sport. F1 accepted Haas some years back.

However there is no doubt that F1 is worried that Andretti is seriously underestimating the challenge. They say (and they should know) that competing in F1 is a huge undertaking and Andretti is being too ambitious. No-one wants to see a US team in F1 fail publicly. There are, inevitably dark suggestions that Andretti and his backers will take legal action if refused.

F1 teams all say that the best way to get into F1 would be to use the money to buy an existing team... (They would say that, wouldn’t they?) But Andretti says nothing is available.

From F1’s point of view it is perhaps a question of whether a big lawsuit is better or worse than a team that fails

LEWIS MAKES HIS POINT AMID THE STRAIN

One way and another, it's been a tough year again for Mercedes and team boss Toto Wolff, and some of the strain has been showing of late

On the personal side there's been the accident while he was holidaying with his family during the summer break where he ended up with his left arm in a plaster cast after coming off his mountain bike during a downhill run and fracturing his elbow. And the subsequent surgery required which obliged him to miss the recent Japanese GP.

Then there was the silly throwaway comment, in a moment of post-race anger in Singapore, regarding Red Bull eventually clinching its sixth World Constructors' Championship, when he rashly declared regarding historic achievements that "nobody reads" Wikipedia, where many of them get noted. He's far too intelligent to make such silly comments normally, especially given Mercedes' own successes, but the fact that he did shows how tense things are at Mercedes despite some



uplift at times in its performances this year compared to last.

I still think that either George Russell or Lewis Hamilton (who was the quicker in the closing stages) could have won that the Singapore with slightly better fortune.

But the downturn in Suzuka was interesting, given the response it provoked from Lewis afterwards.

"We knew our pace in Japan wouldn't match what we had been able to show in Singapore," Toto admitted this week. "They are very different circuits and the characteristics of Suzuka highlighted the weaknesses of the W14. It was therefore important that we limited the damage to Ferrari in the Championship. With six races to go, we are relishing the fight and will be giving it our all to stay ahead, starting this weekend in Qatar."

Indeed so. But for the first time in 2023, when generally it's been felt that the W14, especially with pukka sidepods, works better than its unloved W13 predecessor, Lewis let fly at its behaviour round the 3.6-mile track that all the drivers love so much.

But before we get to that, it interested me how aggressive he was with George. The latter snuck by with a nice move at the chicane when racing resumed on lap five after the initial Safety Car intervention, only to be re-passed immediately on the run down to Turn 1. It was very definitely a 'coming through!' move which obliged George to blink first.

Then there was the moment on lap 15 when the W14 got away from Lewis in Degner 2 and sent him over the bumpy exit kerb. That set George up for a run at him round the outside in the Spoon Curve, but Lewis was having none of that. While he didn't push his team-mate off the road, because that's not part of his driving repertoire, he certainly didn't make it easy for him as he resolutely refused to concede the place. It was if his argument was, 'it wasn't me who made that mistake in Degner 2, it was the damn car letting



us down again! So I'm not conceding anything!'

While Red Bull returned to its normal devastating pace after the glitch in Singapore, and McLaren proved quick enough to beat Ferrari, the Mercedes were exposed once again on the track that really punishes chassis shortcomings. And finishing a distant fifth, with George seventh, wasn't what Lewis is looking for. Nor was the reminder of just how wrong the W14's concept is and how far behind the car still is in some circumstances where true excellence is demanded.

Prior to the Dutch GP, and not long after taking his first pole of the season in Hungary, he had said of Mercedes' upsurge in performance, "I think it's a huge achievement and I think it's something that I feel has been a little bit overlooked, if I'm being honest. Ultimately because we want to win, I wouldn't say there's been the most positive narrative, but I'm really proud of the team and the progress and the steps we have taken with the car."

But, clearly physically drained after battling with the car for the 53 laps in Suzuka, he was downbeat. Pointing out that he'd been screwed by Sergio

Perez's (unpunished) move at the start, he said: "I was fighting the car and giving absolutely everything in the race. It was a hell of a fight. I was really trying to hold on for our position in the Constructors championship because I know what it means to everyone back at the factory. It was a tough weekend because this particular car is such a handful."

And here's the kicker that should have everyone at Mercedes on Orange Alert if the fundamental concept of the W15 isn't going to be all that different, he added: "It felt absolutely the same as it did last year, bouncing and sliding."

And his mien and subsequent comments suggested that he doesn't fully believe that that concept isn't changing enough.

"There are things I've asked for where we've gone in a particular direction for next year," he began. "All of the points that George and I have raised have been listened to. But we've got to hope in the next six months have been the greatest six months of development we've ever had to close that gap. The evidence is there with McLaren, that's the direction in which we have to go."



By that he means running the car as close to the ground as practicable as possible, while avoiding the sensitivity that can create, and then being able to generate greater mechanical grip by softening the set-up. But if you go too low, there is the risk of the porpoising or bouncing of which the Mercedes drivers complained for most of 2022, and at Spa and Suzuka this season.

"Adding downforce just makes the car bounce harder," Lewis continued. "We are still a World Champion team but the decisions made in this period of time are critical to our trajectory."

Tellingly, the W14 lost the most in the sweeping bends with their fast changes of direction that follow Turn 1, where on average Lewis and George

were losing seven-tenths to the Red Bulls and McLarens. It's one of those situations wherein losses there are compounded as the lap continues.

"The issue with that sector, Mercs' head of trackside engineering Andrew Shovlin explains, "is the more you slide, the more your tyres get hotter. And you are already too hot. So basically,

you just get punished if you don't have enough performance there. When the drivers are happy with the balance and when the car sort of hooks up in sector one, you can do some pretty stunning lap times.

Vide Red Bull and McLaren.

If, as is the case with the W14, the rear end has lacked stability most of the year, it doesn't matter how well the front end bites there, you are going to be struggling. And not just in terms of car performance. Driver confidence also gets dented.

"That seven-tenth deficit we have in sector one is just all rear end," Lewis revealed. "Our car has loads of load on the front and not as much as we need on the rear. So, we're a really long way down on that. For me, it's clearly concept. It's 100% clear that's concept and we've got to change that for next year, which hopefully we will."

It's known that Lewis wasn't a fan of having the zero sidepod concept carried through to 2023, and obviously an alternative idea was well in hand for it to have been introduced in Monaco. It was later revised further for Belgium.

"We view it in a bit more complicated way than just what do the sidepods look like," Shov said. "What the sidepods look like interacts very heavily with what's going on with the floor. And the floor is the thing that's generating most of the downforce. You use the word like we're going

down a different [path], or exploring a different concept, but, generally, that, for the teams, will mean that there are changes right underneath the car and it's about putting the bits together above that are going to be conditioning the flow.

"Then the other thing, with a new set of regulations, is working out where you want to target the downforce. Where are you wanting to chase in terms of efficiency or drag levels? And a lot of the work we do when we're talking about going off on a different



development route, is actually saying, where do we think the real value is?

“When your resources are so limited, you need to be very careful about where you’re searching for performance, because it’s got to be fruitful. You’ve got so little tunnel time, the cost cap is making things difficult... You don’t want to be exploring in barren lands, basically.”

Hopefully, Lewis and George will be able to take hope from Shovlin’s concluding comment, as he added: “We’re certainly not clinging on to any concepts that we have had before. We’re very open-minded, and we’ve had a pretty chastening couple of years. We are a team that’s working very hard to try and get back to the front.”

“We think we are on a very good path,” technical chief James Allison said this weekend. “I think we have a good understanding of what ails us. It’s extremely exciting and Lewis is right about the next six months being very important. All of the teams will have half an eye on 2026 with new rules that are coming at us fast, and that will have to be done in 2025 season under the cost cap. So the 2025 car will not be a new one but an echo of what we run



in 2024. So that is going to be hugely important.

“McLaren isn’t really our focus. You tend to look at all of the cars and see how they handle fast, medium and low-speed corners, so you reverse engineer

that from viewing others and deciding what will be best over the season. It’s not so much about how the car looks, but the way it performs on track. It’s a useful guide to let us know whether we’re barking up the right or the wrong tree.”

A third consecutive season of playing second, third or sometimes even fourth fiddle simply can’t be tolerated by the team that won eight straight World Constructors’ Championships between 2014 and 2021. ❖

INTERESTING TIMES AT ASTON MARTIN

Aston Martin won a string of class victories at Le Mans, but the only outright victory was in 1959 with the DBR1 and drivers Roy Salvadori and Carroll Shelby. Now the name is going back...

Aston Martin will compete in the LMH class in 2025 - if all goes to plan.

This will put the company up against Toyota, Ferrari, Peugeot, Glickenhaus, Vanwall and Isotta Fraschini, if they are all still competing by then.

The cars will also be up against Acura, BMW, Cadillac, Porsche, Alpine and Lamborghini which are all contesting the LMDh class, with the Balance of Performance regulations aiming to equalise performance between the two classes.

The programme revives the idea of racing the Valkyrie model at Le Mans but the team is a partnership between The Heart of Racing team and Aston Martin Performance Technologies (AMPT), a company which is owned by the F1 team, rather than by Aston Martin itself. The aim is to run cars both in the FIA World Endurance Championship and in IMSA.



The Valkyrie LMH programme has been on hold since 2020 because of the company's financial problems.

The team is run by British-born racing driver Ian James (49) who started the team in 2020. He should not be confused with another Ian James, who runs the McLaren Formula E team.

The Heart of Racing charity was founded in 2014 by Gabe Newell to raise money for the Seattle Children's Cardiology Research Fund.

Newell owns the video game company Valve, after years working with Microsoft. He is reckoned to be worth around \$4 billion.

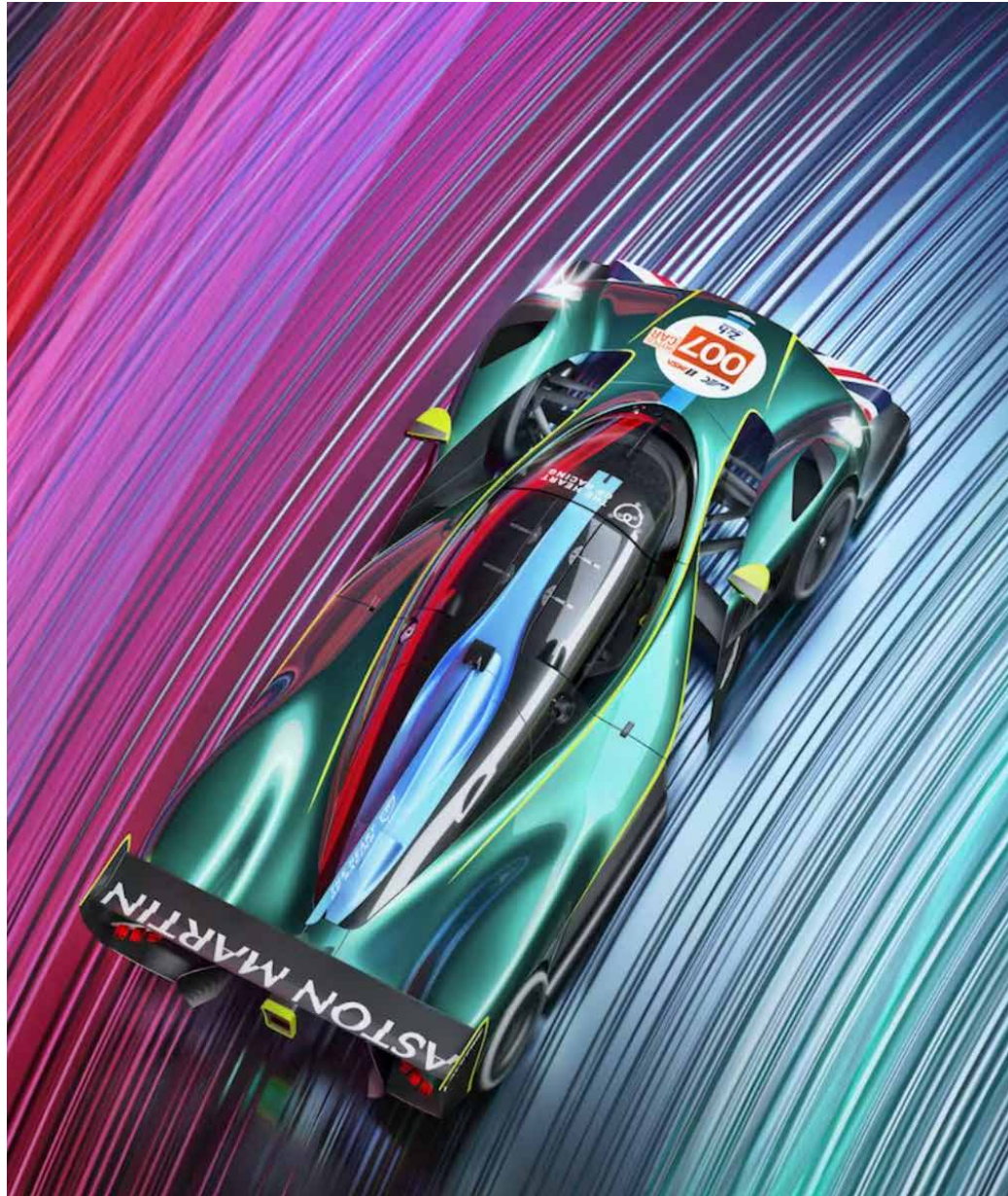
The cars will be built at Silverstone under the guidance of Adam Carter, an F1 engineer with a history dating back to 1998. He was a senior member of the team when Lance Stroll drove for Williams. He subsequently departed

to join Aston Martin as a consultant on the Valkyrie programme in 2022. In January this year he was named engineering director of performance at AMPT.

The LMH will use the same 6.5-litre Cosworth V12 that powers the road-going Valkyrie.

The idea of Aston Martin returning to Le Mans dates back to 2013 (would you believe) when Andreas Baenziger and Florian Kamelger, Aston Martin dealers in Switzerland, pitched the idea to the then Aston Martin CEO Andy Palmer, offering to underwrite the project.

The Swiss set up a company called Nebula Project AG and an agreement was reached for this to pay for development, in exchange for future royalties on each Valkyrie (and its successors) for a 10-year period. Palmer then got Red Bull involved in the design and manufacturing of the cars, agreeing a deal to pay the team for the work, as part of the deal Aston Martin became Red Bull Racing's primary sponsor. The Valkyrie was unveiled in July 2016 with a competition version, called the Valkyrie AMR PRO at the Geneva Motor Show in 2018.



The problem was that Aston Martin ran into trouble, Palmer was ousted and the company was sold to Lawrence Stroll. The relationship with Red Bull ended because Stroll wanted Aston Martin to support his son's F1 career and then in Stroll fell out with the Swiss dealers, the two sides throwing lawsuits at one another in the course of 2021. There were more important problems to save the company and the Le Mans programme was shelved.

The new project is based on the Valkyrie AMR Pro but will run in a non-hybrid capacity. The car may be called an Aston Martin but since the split with Red Bull the manufacturing is done by Multimatic, although Aston keeps this quiet. So in reality it is a Red Bull-designed, Multimatic-built, Cosworth-powered racing car that is badged as an Aston Martin which is being run by Heart of Racing.

There will be some F1 data coming into the programme and there is some potential for information from the programme feeding back into the road cars but whether this actually happens is by no means certain.

The programme will not sell any more Valkyries as the entire production run

of 150 cars, plus 40 AMR Pros and 85 Spiders have been sold, each at \$3 million. That is serious amount of money and this has helped the Aston Martin's books look more solid.

The company is hoping that sales of the new Valhalla (right) will result in an upturn on revenues. The project, which began as a partnership with Red Bull Racing has become Aston Martin's "first joint development integration between our road car engineers and Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant Formula One team's F1 engineering capabilities through Aston Martin Performance Technologies".

The Valhalla features a twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8, supplied by Mercedes. A total of 999 cars will be built with a price tag of around \$800,000. Production will begin in 2024.

In the meantime, AMR GP Ltd, which runs the racing team, has a different shareholder structure and is paid £20 million a year by Aston Martin to promote the brand. The latest AMR GP Ltd accounts revealed last week show that the team made a loss in 2022 of £52.9 million, which was up from £43.3 million in 2021, despite increasing its sponsorship and prize money by £32



million. The team's turnover went from £150.4 million in 2021 to £188.7 million in 2022, while the expenditure went from £107.7 million to £152.0 million, a very significant leap.

But there are still a lot of question marks. For example, the legal action

between Aston Martin and Nebula has yet to be settled and the word is that the Nebula deal was for three percent of the value of each mid-engined Aston Martin car - for a 10-year period.

That means something in the region of \$20 million for the Valkyries sold and

another \$24 million if all 999 Valhallas sell at the price of \$800,000. Thus Aston could be liable for at least \$44 million.

The company admits to having debts of \$1.5 billion. The last full year results for 2022 saw Aston making a loss of £142

million, compared to £76 million in 2021, although revenues and earnings were up. The uncertainty of the future is reflected in the company share price.

The firm was trading at £40 a share in 2018. That crashed and when Stroll bought into the company early in 2020, the shares were worth £4. It has been a rocky road ever since with a low of 89p in November 2022 but this year the shares climbed to £3.97 at the end of July, but have since fallen back to the current £2.50.

In recent days Stroll's Yew Tree consortium increased its stake by 3.27 percent to 26.23 percent, despite the fact that it had previously agreed not to go beyond 25 percent until August 2024. This will not go down with the Chinese firm Geely, which owned 17 percent of the firm but was holding back on buying more. The other big shareholder is Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund which owns around 18 percent.

Yew Tree is still short of the 29.99 percent holding, which would trigger a mandatory bid to buy the remaining shares.



Geely may react by buying more shares and the firm can afford a mandatory bid, which Yew Tree might not be able to do. The goal of the Chinese is to take over Aston Martin and oust Stroll and his supporters. and they may see Yew Tree's latest move as the gloves coming

off. Would the Chinese stay involved in F1 if they bought the brand?

This is complicated because the team is not owned by Aston Martin itself but rather by a consortium of some of the Aston Martin investors - but not all of

them. There is a deal that Aston Martin will pay £20 million a year to the team for the right to brand the team but will Stroll still want the team if his son Lance is no longer involved? Or will he decide to sell the team to recoup losses that have been incurred? ❖

WOMEN IN F1 by David Tremayne

JESSICA HAWKINS TESTS F1 ASTON

Jessica Hawkins recently sampled an [Aston Martin F1 car](#) in Hungary

The 28 year-old stunt and race driver, a British kart champion, podium finisher in the now defunct Formula W series and Team Driver Ambassador for the Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant team, did 26 laps in an AMR21 at the Hungaroring on Thursday, 21st September.

Having joined the team in 2021 she began preparatory simulator work at the team's Silverstone base in 2022 ahead of her F1 test debut, in which she shared the car with the team's Test and Reserve Driver, Felipe Drugovich.

"I want to say a big thank you to everyone at AMF1 Team for having the trust in me, believing in me, and for giving me this opportunity," she said. "It's taken me every bit of blood, sweat and tears to get here. When I first heard it might be a possibility, I could hardly believe it. I've had to keep it secret for months now – which was



pretty hard! It's been absolutely worth it and it's given me really valuable insight. Nothing will compare to the acceleration and braking of a Formula One car and, having looked at the data, I'm really proud of my performance.

"Getting to drive the AMR21 has been a dream come true for me and one I've been ready to fulfil for a long time. I'll keep pushing for more and, in the process, I want to inspire other women and let them know they should follow their dream no matter what it is."

Team principal Mike Krack said: "This is a special moment, for both AMF1 Team and for Jessica, who is an important member of our driver squad. We were really impressed by her preparation for the test. She worked incredibly hard with our simulator team and that made it an easy decision to put her in the AMR21. She approached the opportunity with great maturity; she was up to speed quickly and found a nice rhythm.

"This has been a hugely significant moment in Jessica's journey with AMF1 Team and I am pleased we could give her this next step in her development journey testing a modern Formula One car."



Robert Sattler, AMF1 Team's evolution programme director, concurred. "Jessica excelled in her first F1 test," he said. "After the installation lap we had a small delay as the circuit was hit by heavy rain. That resulted in a green track and on her first proper run there were still some damp patches in a few corners. Jessica progressively built up speed on a tricky track while managing flawlessly the complexity of the AMR21 car. Her feedback was precise and correlated with our data. After three runs, the track had dried and she was already matching the reference lap speeds. Overall, she executed an excellent test programme with a very professional attitude and we hope to see her in the car again soon." ❖



THE 2009 CHINESE GRAND PRIX by David Tremayne

RED BULL'S FIRST WIN

Sebastian Vettel actually scored Dietrich Mateschitz's first Grand Prix win in a Toro Rosso in Monza in 2008, but in the rain in China in April 2009 he set the Red Bull magnate eponymous team on the road to its current 100+ tally with a great victory to beat the dominant Brawn team

The F1 world had almost got used to seeing Jenson Button and his Brawn BGP 001 on pole position, after Ross Brawn and Nick Fry had pulled Honda's ashes from the fire during a troubled winter. But round Shanghai's 5.451 km track, the Red Bulls of Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber took first and second places on the grid, with Fernando Alonso's Renault between them.

These were the days when cars qualified with their intended race fuel loads, however, so the Brawns of Rubens Barrichello and Button were only fourth and fifth. They were expected to start on Bridgestone's medium compound prime tyres, while their faster three would begin on the less durable supersoft compound option tyres, and to have been fuelled to run longer. There should have been much speculation about their ability to sprint away and open the gaps that



would allow them to pit for their first refuelling stops and medium tyres as early as lap 10, but that became academic on raceday when it started drizzle around noon. As that developed into a steady downpour, it was clear that all runners would have to start on wet weather rubber.

Unfortunately, that also meant them starting behind the dreaded Safety Car. Thus Germany's driver Bernd Maylander in his Mercedes led the field out, during which Seb told his team: "There is water on the track, but we've had worse in the past."

"When we start running quick," Fernando told his crew. "The water will disappear."

Meanwhile, chez McLaren, Lewis Hamilton was informed: "Continuous rain, just like on the grid. Radar indicates this will last at least another 30 minutes." Hmm. Deep water, deep joy.

Fernando actually refuelled on the seventh lap, just as it was finally announced that the Safety Car would pull in at the end of the eighth lap.

The Red Bulls led easily, until Mark made his pit stop on lap 14, Seb on 15. That put Jenson into the lead after he'd passed team-mate Rubens on the 11th lap. Behind them there was some great action as Lewis and Felipe Massa were on the move. The World Champion climbed to fifth after passing Kimi Raikkonen's Ferrari and Jarno Trulli's Toyota, but then spun down to 10th in Turn 10 on the 11th lap and had worked his way back up to eighth by the time the Safety Car was deployed for the second time on lap 18. This time Robert Kubica's BMW Sauber had run into the back of Jarno's car in Turn 16. Robert was able to get into the pits but Jarno had to do another lap minus his TF109's rear wing. His wet afternoon was over.

Soon afterwards Sebastien Buemi rammed his Toro Rosso into the back of stablemate Seb's Red Bull, unsighted in the spray as they came upon the slowing Trulli.

"I was lucky," Seb observed. "We build a very strong car!"



He was still leading, but some slick pit work by Brawn got Jenson back out in second place ahead of Felipe, whose was then brought to a halt on lap 21 running in third place thanks to electronic problems.

The racing resumed on lap 23, and with a lighter fuel load Seb sprinted

away from Jenson and Mark. "Vettel is only quicker by fuel effect," Ross told Jenson, "and Webber is also shorter."

But when Jenson missed his raking for Turn 14 on lap 29 the Australian moved ahead to make it a Red Bull 1-2. Then Jenson snatched the place back two laps later when Mark ran wide in

the final corner. The track was super-slippery, but when Mark snatched the place back within a lap in a great counter-attack in Turns Seven and Eight, Brawn saw the warning signs.

Seb made his final pit stop on lap 40, but when Jenson Button found himself only 1.2s ahead and with his own second stop to come, the writing was on the wall. Barring drama, this was going to be the first time in 2009 that a race didn't fall to the upstart Brawn enterprise. Sure enough, a lap later Vettel drew alongside BGP 002 #22 going into Turn 14, and took back the lead with the same calm reassurance fellow countryman Michael Schumacher had deployed in his heyday.

After his stop on lap 42, Jenson could not respond. In dry conditions the Brawn was notably kinder to its tyres than any other car, but in the conditions that day the two white and yellow cars struggled to generate temperature and therefore grip.

"Everyone was struggling, all aquaplaning in pretty crazy conditions," Jenson said. "The last corner was a lake, you couldn't brake for it, and I was really struggling because the tyres

were shuddering with no temperature in them. Every lap I thought I was going to throw the car off, so just to finish the race was an achievement, and it's great to get on to the podium. These guys were extremely quick, their car was working really well – cheeky!

“For me, I felt I was pretty much always out of control! I was just waiting for Mark to appear in front of me, because I was really struggling get heat in the tyres. In Turn Seven and Eight I had no idea where he was, it was such a shock as I couldn't see anything. It was impossible to do anything about it and it would have been silly to try to have challenged him.”

“It wasn't quite do or die,” Mark said with a big smile, “but it was one of the best moves of my career because I knew he wouldn't be able to see that I was there.”

Behind them, Rubens had a heady time of his own on his way to fourth place, having also had some off-road adventures. Further back, Heikki Kovalainen celebrated getting beyond an opening lap for the first time in the season by beating McLaren team-mate Lewis and scoring four points. Lewis drove with his customary verve,



but the MP4-24 just lacked grip and let him down. After the spin on lap 10 he climbed as high as fourth before finally refuelling on the 33rd lap. That dropped him down to sixth behind the Red Bulls and Brawns, and Sebastien Buemi's well-driven Toro Rosso. But

then he slid off the road in Turn 1 on lap 47, letting Heikki past, and then spun in Turn 16 two laps later to let old F3 team-mate Adrian Sutil by in his Force India. He was lucky to avoid involvement when the lanky German dropped it right in front of him on the

51st lap. Sutil twitched off the road in Turn Seven and ripped off his VJM02's front wheels in a spectacular exit.

Timo Glock had an up and down day, with some damaging offroad moments which included a brush with Nick Heidfeld in Turn 14 on the 13th lap,

but as ever he fought back and in the closing stages passed Raikkonen and Nico Rosberg, then Alonso, Buemi and Nick Heidfeld to finish a deserved seventh after a pretty decent run. Buemi survived his heavy bang with Vettel and showed some great ability to resist the sort of pressure only a driver of Alonso's calibre can apply. The Spaniard made it past him eventually, but Sebastien got the last laugh when Fernando spun his way back down to a ninth-place finish, and the Swiss happily grabbed another point for eighth.

Ferrari had a pretty horrible time. Kimi was on the right tyres (which wasn't always the case that year), and for a while he was in the hunt chasing Lewis and looking good at last for some points in fourth place by lap 27. But his refuelling stop a lap later dropped him behind Nico down in 14th place and thereafter he was sunk. Like Jenson, struggling to generate tyre temperature, he fought back up to 10th by the finish, but with Felipe's retirement it was now three races on the trot in which the Scuderia had scored zero points.



BMW Sauber, too, was disappointed. A lack of grip in qualifying persisted in the race, and after he struck standing water and aquaplaned, Robert did his Trulli-clobbering act on lap 18. Later he bent his nose again, necessitating another stop. Nick, meanwhile, could not get his F1.09 going fast enough to stay in the points in the closing stages, dropping to an unhappy 12th, behind spinner Sebastien Bourdais and ahead

of Robert. The German's race was spoiled by the collision with fellow countryman Glock on the 13th lap, and never got any better.

"It was the right decision, and conditions remained very difficult throughout whole race," Seb said of the sensible decision to start behind the Safety Car. "Mark and I were on short opening strategies so we really

had to push to get away from the pack. We succeeded, but it was a very difficult race, with lots of aquaplaning which made it so tricky just keeping the car on the circuit. But it was good not having anyone ahead of me for most of the race.

"I'm extremely happy. This is the second time now in the wet I've won a



Grand Prix. A double win for Red Bull is just incredible.”

Unknown to many, some great engineering back in Milton Keynes had gone into the success after both RB5’s demonstrated an appetite for driveshafts in practice.

“You have no idea what the guys went through last night,” Mark said, “because the cars were breaking their driveshafts after just three laps. They did some work at the factory last night to understand this particular problem and they made a change that turned out to be an inspired one, something one of the guys in our technical department had done. So it was a great, great day for the team, not just here but in Milton Keynes and also in Austria.

“This means a huge amount. Our team have been through a lot and results have slipped through our fingers. Today Sebastian and I pushed each other quite hard throughout the race in tough conditions, and they were getting interesting as it rained again towards the end. It’s just extremely rewarding to get this result, the best result of my career, and I hope to go one step better in the future and this

is another step towards that. But for Dietrich to get his first 1-2, that is just so great for him.”

The success was timely. Mateschitz had pushed team principal Christian Horner to put Red Bull Racing through some tough restructuring during the winter months as the budget was cut dramatically and around 20 jobs were axed, mainly from the testing department. Now Red Bull had 500 compared to the newly lean Brawn’s 450.

Of course, the energy drinks magnate had celebrated Seb’s Toro Rosso win the previous year at Monza, it was a bit of an embarrassment to his main team and acted as a spur. And now the first 1-2 was cooling his impatience to see a meaningful return on the huge investment he had made in F1. And it was becoming past time that Newey and his technical team produced some hard results to prove that they really were the miracle workers that Mateschitz believed them to be.

On the end, of course, it was to be the first of many, Max Verstappen scoring Red Bull’s 100th victory in Canada in June this year. ❖

OSCAR BRAVO

Oscar Piastri may be an F1 newbie, but he is showing signs that he is going to be a very big name in the future.

Oscar Piastri beat McLaren teammate Lando Norris to the top of the timesheets in the Sprint Shootout on Saturday in Qatar with Max Verstappen third, in a strong position to sew up his third World Championship later in the day, rather than waiting until Sunday.

Piastri set a best of 1m24.454s, which ended up being a tenth of a second faster than Lando Norris's best in a session that was marked by repeated track limit infringements and worries about tyres being damaged over the circuit's kerbs. Pirelli had warned that there could be problems after examining the tyres used in the FP1 session, which showed that stresses caused by the kerbs was damaging the structure of some of the tyres.

There were no blowouts nor punctures but Pirelli chose to go public with the problem in case there was trouble, and the word was that the tyre company



had previously alerted the FIA to the potential issue before the season began, based on evidence that had been gathered after the race in 2021. The FIA, for reasons unknown, did not seem to think this was a problem.

In an effort to sort out the problem for the weekend (it being too late to change the kerbing) the federation slapped together a plan to move the white track limit line in the troublesome section of track by 80cm in an effort to keep the drivers off the kerbs. This meant that the drivers were given a 10-minute Track Familiarisation session before starting the delayed Shootout.

This meant that when the Shootout began, the sun was beginning to set. It was Verstappen who set the early pace on the mandated medium compound tyres. Norris was quickly up to second with Russell, Piastri and Alonso next

but a long list of drivers lost lap times. Some were able to recover with a second run but others were scuppered. In total 31 lap times were deleted in the Shootout sessions.

Lance Stroll, who ran wide in Turn 5, fell at the first fence and ended up 16th on the grid for the The Sprint. Another victim was Alex Albon who was 17th, ahead of Tsunoda, Magnussen and Sargeant.

The SQ2 session would claim a bigger scalp when Lewis Hamilton lost both of his fastest laps and so he was left behind as the top 10 went into SQ3. Also knocked out were Pierre Gasly, who just failed to match his team-mate Ocon. The Alfa Romeo duo Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu were split by the AlphaTauri of Liam Lawson (the latter two both losing laps to track limits).

The SQ3 session would see Verstappen lose his first run to track limits, opening the way for the McLarens to get up the top end of the list. It looked like Norris would be the one to get the most advantage from the situation but in the end a last-minute wobble left Piastri in charge. Norris's second place was thanks to his first run.

Verstappen took the third quickest time while the only challenger left for the title, Max's team-mate Sergio Perez was only eighth and showing no signs at all of being a threat to the Dutchman.

George Russell was fourth quickest ahead of the two Ferraris with Carlos

Sainz ahead of Charles Leclerc and then a surprise in the form of Nico Hulkenberg's Haas, which was ahead of Perez, Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin and the Alpine of Esteban Ocon.

"I'm very, very happy," Piastri said. "It was a pretty good lap. I saw Lando on the big screen, he made a mistake at

the last corner, so I don't know what his lap was looking like, but I'm very, very happy. I struggled quite a bit in the first two parts of that qualifying and then got my act together a bit more for the last one."

It made for an interesting line-up for the Sprint Race. ❖



QUALIFYING SQ1

1	G Russell	Mercedes	1:25.413
2	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:25.510
3	L Norris	McLaren	1:25.672
4	P Gasly	Alpine	1:25.829
5	C Sainz	Ferrari	1:25.872
6	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:25.936
7	O Piastri	McLaren	1:25.979
8	E Ocon	Alpine	1:26.072
9	S Perez	Red Bull	1:26.123
10	L Lawson	AlphaTauri	1:26.202
11	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:26.266
12	L Hamilton	Mercedes	1:26.424
13	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:26.449
14	N Hulkenberg	Haas	1:26.450
15	G Zhuo	Alfa Romeo	1:26.669
16	L Stroll	Aston Martin	1:26.849
17	A Albon	Williams	1:26.862
18	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	1:26.926
19	K Magnussen	Haas	1:27.438
20	L Sargeant	Williams	2:05.741

QUALIFYING SQ2

1	L Norris	McLaren	1:24.947
2	G Russell	Mercedes	1:25.027
3	S Perez	Red Bull	1:25.143
4	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:25.199
5	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:25.344
6	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:25.367
7	C Sainz	Ferrari	1:25.433
8	O Piastri	McLaren	1:25.496
9	N Hulkenberg	Haas	1:25.499
10	E Ocon	Alpine	1:25.510
11	P Gasly	Alpine	1:25.686
12	L Hamilton	Mercedes	1:25.962
13	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:26.236
14	L Lawson	AlphaTauri	1:26.584
15	G Zhuo	Alfa Romeo	1:54.546

QUALIFYING SQ3

1	O Piastri	McLaren	1:24.454
2	L Norris	McLaren	1:24.536
3	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:24.646
4	G Russell	Mercedes	1:24.841
5	C Sainz	Ferrari	1:25.155
6	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:25.247
7	N Hulkenberg	Haas	1:25.320
8	S Perez	Red Bull	1:25.382
9	F Alonso	Aston Martin	No time
10	E Ocon	Alpine	No time



SPRINT RACE by David Tremayne

OSCAR'S ORANGE ALERT

For once the colour wasn't wholly associated with Max Verstappen's supporters, even though he clinched his third consecutive World Championship. But the Sprint Race belonged to a 21 year-old Australian rookie in a papaya orange McLaren, who beat the Red Bull driver by 1.8s in a crazy encounter

They cheered themselves hoarse at Red Bull afterwards, and rightly so, as Max Verstappen's journey to greatness continued with a strong second place that made him the first driver to clinch a title in a Sprint Race. But they were pretty happy down at McLaren, too, where Oscar Piastri had driven a beautiful race to score the first win of a career which many believe will similarly see him crowned in due course.

There was plenty of uncertainty as the grid gathered. The windy conditions from qualifying continued with a headwind up the pit straight, and the drama over tyres identified on Saturday morning added to the conundrum. As did the fact that with the Sprint format nobody had had the chance to do any 19-lap runs in practice. In the end, the gamblers who plumped for softs were revealed as George Russell, the two Ferraris, both Aston Martins,

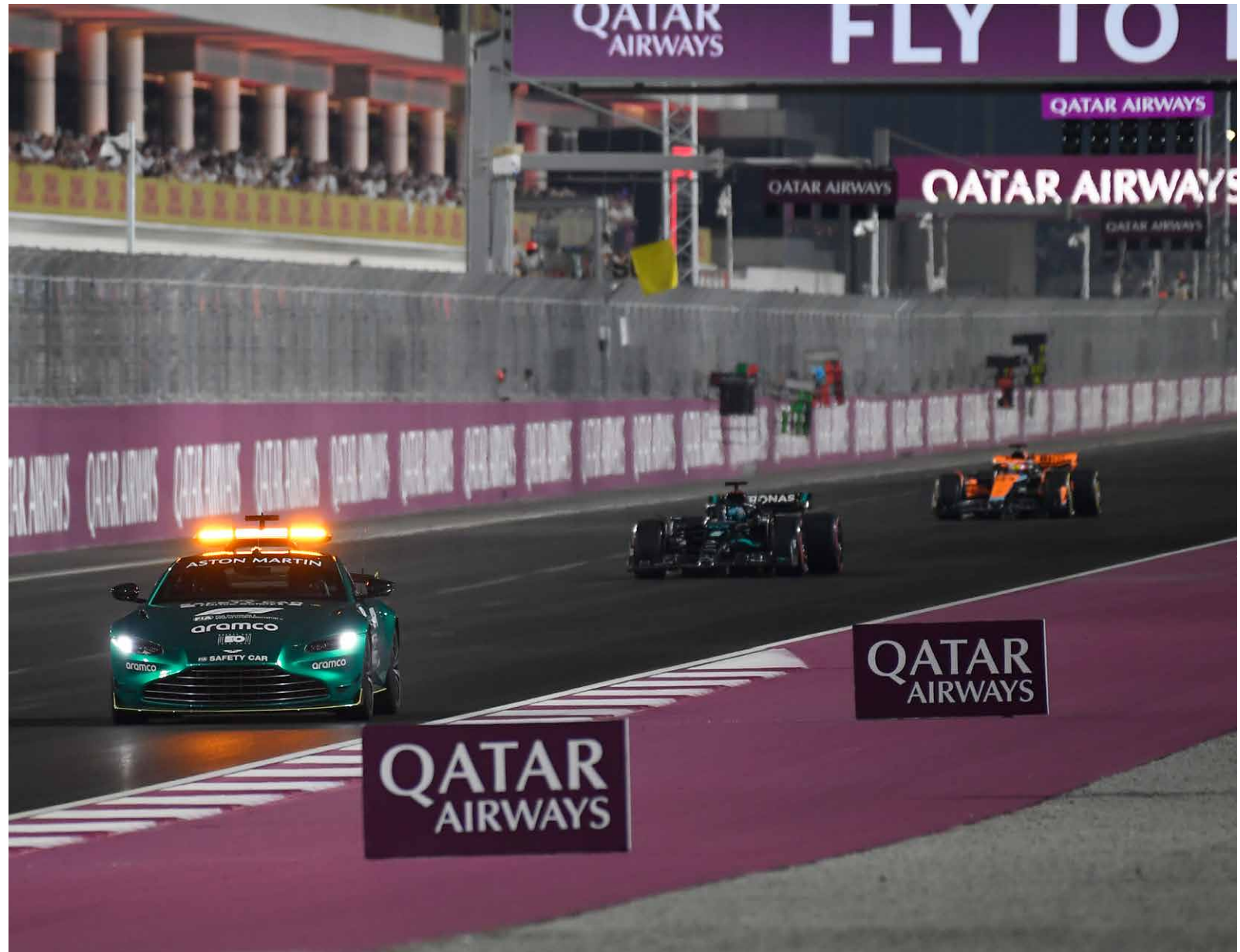


both Alpines, and Logan Sargeant as the tyre covers came off on the grid. The rest went for mediums, and with air and track temperatures of 32.0 and 36.4s degrees respectively, the odds favoured them.

But not necessarily at the start...

Oscar got a strong getaway on his mediums, but so did George and the two Ferraris on their softs. Lando lagged horrible, and Max wasn't all that fast either. As they steamed through the first two corners Carlos Sainz kept himself ahead of team-mate Charles Leclerc, but George muscled past the Monegasque down the inside on the grid, then pulled a superbly aggressive move on the Spaniard in Turn 2 to grab second place. As Max followed Charles, Lando was kicking himself down in sixth from second, chased by Fernando, Esteban, Nico Hulkenberg, Sergio Perez, Valtteri Bottas, Lewis Hamilton, Lance, Kevin Magnussen, Zhou Guanyu, Alex Albon, Logan and Yuki Tsunoda. Liam Lawson's race didn't last long, as he lost control when running at the back and spun into retirement.

Cue the Safety Car.



Bernd Maylander circulated until the third lap when racing resumed. And now George simply blasted past Oscar to take the lead. Pushing hard, he sought to open as big a lead as he could so he had something to cushion him when the inevitable onset of graining on the fronts began, but Oscar calmly settled into second, and waited. Behind him, Carlos and Charles were pushing too, while Max was likewise biding his time. Lando, however, got involved in a terrific dust-up with Fernando, as they ran side by side for about four corners, passing and re-passing, before Lando pulled away and Ferdy got jumped by the opportunistic Esteban. How his old Alpine partner must have loved that!

Further back, the Hulk was fending off Pierre, Sergio and Lewis, who for a while had Lance bothering him with his softs. The former champion proved less easy to push around than Lance's coach, however, and soon the Canadian fell away again. Behind him Valtteri was struggling, chased by Kevin, Alex and Yuki.

No sooner had Bernd pitted, however, than his services were required again on lap four when Logan Sargeant made



an undignified exit in Turn 9 and his Williams had to be recovered.

The race resumed for the second time on lap seven, by which time many soft runners were finding their front tyres starting to grain. Nevertheless, George made a flying start and momentarily it

looked as if Oscar might be attacked by the Ferraris, but he soon stabilised that situation.

Meanwhile, on his mediums Checo moved ahead of soft-shod Pierre on lap eight, and Lewis followed suit on 10, but the next carambolage came

on lap 12. Esteban was moving to the left of Nico as Sergio was trying to pass the Alpine. The Frenchman went to the left side of the German who had just attacked him as his tyres faded, the Mexican the right. They went through Turn 1 like that, but heading for the

Turn 2 left-hander Esteban just clipped the left front of Nico's car. That spun the Alpine, which collected the innocent Sergio as he was trying to go round the outside of Nico on the approach. The Alpine went backwards into the left front of the Red Bull, both becoming instant retirements, while Nico headed for the pits and stopped there. Out came Bernd again for the third time, on this occasion for three laps before racing resumed on lap 15.

"What a shame," Checo said, and you wondered whether he meant his retirement from the race, or the end of his almost non-existent title hopes. "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time with those two guys and ended up taking a lot of damage to my car. We had the pace to go all the way today.

"I think we would all like to be in Max's position today but there can be only one winner and he deserves all his success. I'm very happy for him."

"We had a good start to the race, moving up three positions with some good battles in the first few laps," Esteban said. "We slowly started dropping back with the heavy degradation on the softs and our race ended prematurely when we found ourselves side by side



with Sergio and Nico into Turn 2. I felt contact on my rear right tyre and ended up in the gravel. An unfortunate racing incident."

Nico, the other innocent victim, said, "It was a pity as on the medium tyre I think the race would've come to us. As you could see towards the end, all the soft runners were very ambitious and struggling a lot, and we were in a good position. Ocon was starting to struggle

and that's how I was able to attack him. Perez was coming from the back and was so quick, and somehow got in the mix and I saw him really late as I was focused on Ocon, and Ocon probably didn't know or couldn't see that I had a car on my other side and there was no more room. It's bad for us as today was the day where we could've scored something and I'm very disappointed with that. Today was the opportunity."

The stewards – Felix Holter, Danny Sullivan, Matteo Perini and David Domingo – took the view, rightly, that it was a racing incident, and issued the following statement. 'Whilst Car 31 was moving from the left track edge to the middle of the track between Turns 1 and 2 with Car 27 on his right, the driver was not aware of Car 11 pulling alongside on the right side as his visibility was blocked by Car 27. The

Stewards determine that Car 31 moved in a manner that would have allowed Cars 31 and 27 to negotiate Turn 2 side by side if Car 11 had not been there. Taking all this into account, the Stewards conclude that no driver was wholly or predominantly at fault for the collision. The incident is considered as a race incident and no further action is taken.'

Lewis was lucky here on two counts. First he was able to avoid getting involved in the incident, and second he had risen from 11th to eighth without having to do anything. And now his mediums were coming into their own as those on softs clearly began to struggle badly.

George had led lap 10, but Oscar closed down a 2.5s gap like it had never existed, and simply blasted by the fading Mercedes to regain his lead. Now, as the track went green again for the final four laps, it was his race to lose, especially as after Max had grabbed second from George with DRS on lap 16 the gap between the Red Bull and the McLaren was 2.3s. Perhaps jokingly, Max had said he wasn't going to celebrate his third title unless he won, but whatever the truth of that



he sure wasn't hanging around. Fastest laps of 1m25.945s and 1m25.604s on lap 16 and 17 attested to that, but Oscar was still going quickly enough to stabilise the gap until the final lap, when all that Max could do was narrow it to 1.8s. I have the strongest feeling that won't be the only time in his career that Oscar is going to do that...

"A very stressful race," he said, albeit with a big smile. "When I saw all the

soft guys come through at the start, I thought we were in a bit of trouble, but then their tyres fell off pretty quickly. But the Safety Cars were my friend today, definitely, once Max got behind me.

"But the pace was reasonable and, in a race where you had to manage a lot the tyres and cars on other compounds, I think we did a really good job, so we're very happy.

"Once Max got through into second I thought I was going to be in a bit of trouble, but the pace was good and I managed the tyres well. A first sprint win sounds pretty cool."

Max said he'd looked after his tyres and pushed as hard as he could. "Oscar did very well. I tried everything I could to try and catch up, and gave it a big shot at the end."

When the Safety Car retired to the pits for the third time Lando had Charles all over him and for a while the two Ferraris bullied the McLaren. But then Lando got his head down in spectacular fashion, passing Charles then Carlos on successive laps round the outside to snatch fourth place. And he wasn't finished there as he set out after the fast-fading George. The Mercedes driver had bagged his it to let him stop for mediums on lap 12, but was counselled – correctly as it transpired – to stay out as a stop would lose him any chance of points. But with his tyres dead he was a sitting duck as Lando blasted alongside the Mercedes on the pit straight and round the outside going into Turn 1, and that made it a McLaren 1-3 after a brilliant recovery drive. It was not enough to console him, however.

It must have been as hard for him to see his new rookie team-mate winning before he did, as it was sitting behind the oft-outclassed Daniel Ricciardo at Monza back in 2021, but as usual Lando handled his disappointment with dignity, and beat himself up rather than anyone else for what he perceived as his own shortcomings.



“Oscar has done a mega job, he’s had a faultless weekend,” he said. “I made a lot of mistakes and he hasn’t. He’s capitalised and he’s done a better job, so just hats off to him. For our team it has been a mega day, another podium is great.

“A tough race for me. A bad start made everything much trickier, but I fought

back well, had some fun racing, good overtakes, all the way till the last lap on George. The softs obviously were a lot better for lap one and the opening stages, but they were lucky there were so many Safety Cars. If there hadn’t been, I think easily the medium would have been a better choice.”

Later, he expanded on his feelings. “The frustrations of the last few days take over everything, you know. That’s the way my head works. I’m very happy for the team, very happy for Oscar. It’s not him winning that hurts, though it’s not a nice feeling, just that I messed up this morning and should have been on pole, and I should have been on the front row for the race tomorrow. Could, would, shoulda... I’ll try to reset and focus and not think of it, but it’s impossible not think about it now. But like I said, Oscar’s done a better job than me this weekend and deserves what he’s done today. I’ve just done a bad job. I’ve let myself down, but coming away with a double podium today helps.”

“Both drivers were absolutely excellent today,” team principal Andrea Stella said as McLaren celebrated its first F1 since Monza two years ago. “It’s not easy keep the nerves with the soft runners being fast, but we were anticipating some would start to struggle after a few laps so please stay calm. We hoped the race would come to us. Oscar was very calm and controlled race, so really it was an excellent Saturday, not only for Oscar but for Lando.”

It may only have been a Sprint race, but as Andrea said, “It is an F1 win. Certainly it is an historical moment in Oscar’s career, like his first podium in Suzuka, and for us a P1. Like being quick in quali, we were very strong so it was well deserved and comes from outright pace. It shows our journey is good.”

George somehow clung on to finish an excellent fourth after a bold run, two and a half seconds behind Lando, but just over six ahead of Lewis, who had overtaken Fernando, Charles and Carlos on the last lap after a strong recovery from his slow start.

“I really enjoyed that!” George beamed afterwards. “The first lap was a little bit wild. I had Turn 6 in my mind as the overtaking opportunity on the medium runners. I knew I would have the advantage at the beginning, so I was pleased to pull off the move on Piastri. I was surprised by how quickly the soft tyre dropped off and we were fortunate that there were a number of Safety Car interventions. Without that, we may have finished outside the points. That is what can happen during a Sprint weekend though where you have limited practice and limited



knowledge on the tyres. Having said that, if we were on the medium we would have still finished P4. Nothing gained, nothing lost.

“It was positive to see our pace advantage over Ferrari today. We were on the same tyres as them and we were faster. We are in a great place tomorrow to fight against the McLarens, too. It’s going to be interesting from a strategy

perspective so let’s see what we can do.

“Finally, Max winning the World Championship is fully deserved. It’s an incredible achievement so congratulations to him. We need to raise our game to give him more of a challenge next year.”

Lewis admitted that he felt slow at the beginning on his mediums. “I knew that

the degradation would be high though and that the race would come back to us. Did I know that I was going to be able to get back up to fifth? No, but I was hoping I could the whole time. I tried to position my car the best I could, stay out of trouble and progress one step at a time. The car is still tricky to drive but our pace overall was good. I know I’ve got the racecraft on lock. I just need to work on my qualifying!



“That said, tomorrow we start third. That is obviously a much better place to be lining up than we were today. We should be looking to fight to hold that position. We know it will be difficult to hold the McLarens behind. They are a little further back though, so we will be doing our best to do that. We will be giving it everything we’ve got as always.

“Congratulations to Max too on his third World Championship. He’s driven a great season and it’s a well-deserved achievement. It would be great if we could be in a fight with him tomorrow.”

“It was a very hard Sprint today,” Carlos admitted. “We didn’t have any data on long runs so we decided to start on the softs to try and gain some places at the start and then manage the tyres to defend our position. I managed to get a very good start and for the first few laps it looked like we could fight at the front. Unfortunately, we started losing too much due to graining compared to our rivals who were on mediums and sixth was the best we could hold on to.

“We’ve learned important things for tomorrow and, even though it’s going to be a very challenging race for us,

we’ll push until the end to get some more points.”

Charles described it as an “interesting” Sprint. “I didn’t have any new soft tyres left after qualifying and the Shootout, so we went out on a used set, which was a bit more challenging in terms of management. This could give us an advantage in tomorrow’s race as the medium compound seemed strong today and we have an extra set compared to our competitors who already used theirs in the Sprint. If we take care of the softs, they can be good too, so it should be an interesting race, too.”

There was a sting in the tail for Charles and Ferrari after the race, however, after the stewards deemed the Monegasque had violated track limits on four occasions and thus imposed a retrospective five-second penalty. That dropped him from seventh to 13th. Lance Stroll was similarly penalised, dropping from 13th to 15th.

This was good news for Williams, as Alex Albon had driven his usual feisty race to past Fernando Alonso for the final point, and now found himself getting two.

“We capitalised on everyone’s difficulties today and this resulted in a point, which is now two points following Charles’ penalty, so I’m very happy! We took a gamble with set-up, and we made it work, so I think it came down to good strategy and some good fortune. We’re going to be in a good place for tomorrow, as long as the wind is low like it was in the Sprint, which it looks like it will be.”

Fernando was also pleased to score after all. “We prioritised tomorrow’s race with our tyre choice in tonight’s Sprint and we managed eighth after the penalty for Charles. It was quite exciting with all the on-track battles, but the soft tyres were not ideal towards the final few laps with high degradation. We don’t know how many pit stops there will be tomorrow, so we need to keep our strategy open. We’ve saved a few sets so hopefully we can maximise this and target the top five positions.

“Congratulations to Max for his third Drivers’ Championship; he’s dominated the season and deserves it.”

Partly thanks to the final Safety Car, and tyre degradation, the positions from Carlos in sixth down to Zhou

Guanyu down in 15th were pretty close. Carlos was 1.102s behind Lewis and 1.054s ahead of Alex, who was only 0.004s ahead of Fernando. Behind them around seven seconds covered Pierre, who said “I thought we did a good job to finish close to the top eight, just behind Fernando and the Ferraris,

who were in a similar position to us,” Valtteri, Yuki, Kevin, Charles and Zhou, with Lance another 1.8s back.

And so the Sprint ended, crowning a deserved World Champion for the third time and seeing a rookie take his first F1 win on merit and McLaren join Ferrari

in breaking the Red Bull monopoly. But until Pirelli had a chance to examine how the soft and medium tyres stood up to the rigours of 19 laps, many were still left pondering just what strategies to opt for over three times that distance on Sunday. ❖



QATAR SPRINT RACE

19 laps - 102.689 km

1	O Piastri	McLaren	35.01.297	175.929 km/h
2	M Verstappen	Red Bull	35.03.168	- 1.871
3	L Norris	McLaren	35.09.794	- 8.497
4	G Russell	Mercedes	35.12.333	- 11.036
5	L Hamilton	Mercedes	35.18.611	- 17.314
6	C Sainz	Ferrari	35.20.103	- 18.806
7	A Albon	Williams	35.21.161	- 19.864
8	F Alonso	Aston Martin	35.22.477	- 21.180
9	P Gasly	Alpine	35.23.039	- 21.742
10	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	35.23.505	- 22.208
11	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	35.24.160	- 22.863
12	C Leclerc *	Ferrari	35.26.157	- 24.860
13	K Magnussen	Haas	35.26.267	- 24.970
14	G Zhou	Alfa Romeo	35.28.165	- 26.868
15	L Stroll *	Aston Martin	35.30.820	- 29.523
R	N Hulkenberg	Haas		Accident damage - 11 laps
R	E Ocon	Alpine		Accident - 10 laps
R	S Perez	Red Bull		Accident - 10 laps
R	L Sargeant	Williams		Accident - 2 laps
R	L Lawson	AlphaTauri		Accident - 0 laps

* Leclerc and Stroll were given five-second time penalties for leaving the track multiple times



MAX ON A MISSION

The track was new and very green. The kerbs and the tyres were not working well together. But through it all one thing was unchanged. Max Verstappen was in control in Friday's qualifying session for the Qatar Grand Prix. But McLaren was right there... or would have been without the dreaded track limits

The Lusail International Circuit was almost unrecognizable from the place F1 raced in 2021. The circuit lay was the same, but the track had been completely resurfaced. The rest of the place has been bulldozed and a lot of money had been spent to create new facilities. F1 was impressed.

But there were worries. Two years ago when the F1 cars raced at Lusail, Pirelli found that the cars and the kerbs were damaging the tyres and, so they say, the FIA was warned before the season began. For whatever reason, the message was not acted upon and so it quickly emerged that the same problem was happening again. No-one suffered a tyre failure nor a puncture but after FP1 Pirelli warned that they might.

Up to that point, however, the big worry was a complete lack of grip with new unused tarmac, with sandblowing



across on a regular basis. It was VERY slippery and the cars were sliding all over the place.

“Oh my god, it’s so slippery,” Verstappen told his team.

But Max adapts quickly and by the end of the free practice session Max was ahead three-tenths clear of the nearest challenger, the Ferrari of Carlos Sainz.

That story would continue in the Q sessions that followed in the evening. The Sprint format tends to jumble up the grid a little (deliberately, of course) but it is tough for engineers and drivers to get all the work done in the time available. So everyone is scrambling - and Max scrambles well. In the end he was 0.441s clear of the others, but it was a complicated story with both McLaren's losing their best laps, after the session had ended. This was not a great thing as Norris has arrived thinking he was in the top three and

as then dumped out, while Piastri was being interviewed for third when his time was deleted. Why this happened eight minutes after the chequered flag is a question that needs to be asked - and solved.

But in the end the story was all Verstappen.

“I think we can all be happy with the performance of the car today,” he said. “I’m very happy to be on pole. The tarmac was quite slippery so I was really having to build up lap after lap, but I think we were in a good window and we were improving quite nicely through each run.

“I think we also made the right calls after FP1 heading into qualifying. Overall, I think we can all be happy with the performance of the car today.”

Things were not going well for the only person who could (in theory) stop Max winning the title. Sergio Perez was not looking like offering much of a challenge and his 13th place on the grid reflected the struggle.

“It was quite difficult out there today,” he said. “We struggled for balance a lot and we had so many issues that I couldn’t really fix any of



them. Every corner was different and the conditions here made it tricky.

“It is not over, it is obviously going to be very difficult to pass in the race here, especially with the track conditions we currently have, but we will see what we are able to do and recover from there on Sunday.”

Perhaps so, but it was clear that the title would probably be settled on Saturday with Max needing to score just three points to wrap it all up.

Christian Horner was confident that it would happen.

“We have had a very strong race car all year and I would expect a strong race car again on both Saturday evening and Sunday evening,” he said. “A session of exceeded track limits for many drivers today, not least Checo. He drove well and was through to Q3, but then was removed after having his lap time was deleted. It has been a challenge - but it has been the same for everyone.

“The circuit is evolving quickly and of course the teams have only had one session to sort the cars out, but now the set-ups are locked in for the rest of the weekend.

“For Max the first run was such a strong lap he nailed it in the first sector. He then tried to take a little bit more out on the next lap and made a mistake but with that banker, it was enough today to see him through.”

Once the track limits deletions were all sorted out it was George Russell who emerged second on the grid with Lewis Hamilton third. The Mercs were looking good even if they knew that the two McLarens were very quick as well.

“I am very happy with P2 today,” Geoge said. “FP1 was really challenging. The grip was low, and it was really windy. It was very dusty and sandy on the track. When we went out in qualifying, the track temperature had dropped, and the wind had calmed. The lap times



had improved massively. The car felt good throughout the session, and I'm pleased with where we finished. It's great to have Lewis behind me in P3 now. We can be strategic and work together. We've got our sights set on a strong result on Sunday, especially with both the McLarens and the Ferraris behind us. We know we're going to have a fight on our hands as they will be quick. It's fair to say that the Grand Prix will be a completely different story if this track evolution continues. We're going to have to learn on the job...

"We obviously know Red Bull and Max are in a league of their own. But our fight at the moment is with Ferrari to secure P2 in the Constructors' Championship."

Lewis echoed these views.

"Qualifying is always difficult and today was a pretty average session for me," he said. "It was quite windy out there and difficult at the beginning. We nearly didn't get out of Q1 but fortunately we managed it. We were then right up there in Q2 which was encouraging. We've been a little bit surprised by our pace here today. It's a good surprise and positive for the team. Being on the



front two rows of the grid is clearly a good result.”

Lewis was not happy with the track limits situation.

“I don’t feel like at this track we need to have track limits,” he said. “It’s something that was brought in a couple of years ago. Lando should be up here.”

As it turned out Fernando Alonso was fourth in his Aston Martin, but qualifying was a disaster (another one) for Lance Stroll, who ended up 17th on the grid.

“I am very happy with qualifying after a few weekends where we weren’t as competitive,” Alonso said. “It was very tricky to manage with the slippery track and windy conditions. The car felt fast in FP1 and it felt good again later in Qualifying.”

Stroll said that he was disappointed. So disappointed in fact that there was a storm in a teacup after Lance shoved his trainer out of the way in a fit of pique.

“My first lap was deleted due to track limits and I had to abort my second due to traffic, so I had a big job to do for my final run,” he said. “The car felt OK, but we just didn’t have the pace.”





Ferrari ended up in fifth and 12th with Charles Leclerc leading the way.

“I had to abort my first run in Q3, after running wide in a corner in the first sector and so I only had one lap left to set a competitive time,” Charles said. “It was quite tough to get the tyres to work today: on the first flying lap the rears were not working as expected and the situation only improved when you continued to push, which is not ideal in qualifying.”

Sainz was less happy.

“I struggled with the car balance and couldn’t find decent grip out there in qualifying,” he said. “I’m obviously not happy.”

There was major disappointment at McLaren with both Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri being dumped out of the top three because of track limits. Piastri ended up sixth with Norris 10th, which was a disaster for the team which had been on the pace from the start.

“It’s a bit of a shame to get my lap time deleted at the end,” Piastri said. “It makes life slightly trickier on Sunday, but the pace in the car was decent. It’s a shame we both overstepped the mark a little bit on our laps.”

Norris was similarly disappointed

“I had a correction and oversteer, went off and the lap time was deleted. I should have been much higher up today,” said Lando. “The pace of the car has been amazing, the team have done a great job. I made too many mistakes and paid the price. But right now I’m frustrated that I didn’t get the job done in quali, which is to put in good laps.”

Alpine was looking decent with Pierre Gasly seventh fastest and Eseban Ocon eighth.

“I am very happy to be back in Q3,” Pierre said. “Right from the start of the day, I have had a good feeling with the car and felt in a good place where I feel I could push the car to the limit straight away. I put in a strong lap in Q2, same in Q3 and in the end it’s put us in a solid spot on the grid. Hopefully we can convert it into points. The field is tight, much tighter than I thought it would be, so we will see what we can do to close down some of the cars ahead.”

Ocon was similarly happy.

“It’s great to be back driving in Qatar and it’s been a good day for the team with both cars in Q3 in qualifying,” he said. “Our day started with a busy



Free Practice session and I think we optimised the changes well to head into Qualifying in a good place on car balance. The team did a very good job in turning things around quickly in such tough conditions and everyone has managed the sessions well today. We are in a good starting position for Sunday's race."

Next in the pecking order was Valtteri Bottas in 9th place, but his Alfa Romeo team mate Guanyu Zhou was 20th and last, which was a big disappointment for the Chinese driver.

"I am happy to have made it back into Q3 after a while," Valtteri said. "I felt really confident in the car today. This result is a good reward for the whole team, for the job done over the past few weeks. It has been a positive surprise to be in the top 10 but it shows how we hit the ground running, right from the only practice session – as we intended to – and made all the right calls."

Zhou said that things should have been better.

"We should have qualified much higher up, as we saw with Valtteri, but we never got a chance to even set our final lap in Q1," he said. "It's frustrating,



Logan [Sargeant] decided to overtake me on the start/finish straight and that destroyed both our laps. The track was improving with every lap, and we could not set a lap when it really mattered, It was a completely unnecessary move, but it doesn't matter now – the damage is done and we need to move on.”

Scuderia AlphaTauri had a similar story with Yuki Tsunoda 11th, but Liam Lawson 18th.

“I'm pleased with my performance. On such a high-speed corner track, it's easy to exceed track limits, but so far, I haven't, so I'm happy,” said Yuki. “It would've been good to be in Q3, so it's not exactly the qualifying we wanted, but it's still close to the points, so it's okay. There are places I can improve on, but the car's upgrades are working, so we're feeling optimistic.

“The conditions were tricky today because the wind in FP1 was extreme but calmed down for qualifying, and the temperature dropped, so it was slightly easier to drive. The car turns differently in some corners from one lap to the next because of the wind, but it's one of the track's characteristics that makes it interesting and fun to drive.”



Lawson was less happy.

“Since we hit the track in FP1, I've been struggling with the car, and I know everybody was with the way the track was,” he said. “I think we narrowed down the issues we experienced in

practice, but not enough, and we still have things to look into. The track was quite dusty in FP1, but it cleaned up a lot for qualifying and was a lot better. The final laps felt good, but I was struggling with the handling of the car. There are some corners we need

to look into to find more time because I didn't have the confidence to really push and put it on the limit.”

Williams has hoped for better with Alex Albon 14th and Logan Sargeant in 16th.

“In FP1 we really struggled with the wind and balance, just finding it difficult to find that sweet spot,” Albon said. “It happens with these short weekends; you’ve got to be prepared early and we just struggled, so it’s a bit frustrating. There might be some small changes we can make overnight but nothing that’s going to help us with the wind, which is obviously bad for everyone, but it impacts some cars more than others and we’re one of them unfortunately. Every corner feels different with no rhyme or rhythm, so it’s instinctive driving which is fun but difficult.”

Logan was happier.

“It’s been a good day,” he said. “It’s a step in the right direction and what I needed to do coming into this weekend. The disappointment is that I know I had some margin in the high-speed that I found on that second push but unfortunately couldn’t improve but it’s right there. Coming into the weekend not knowing the circuit, I found my feet really quickly which is important.”

Haas found itself at the bottom of the pile with Nico Hulkenberg 15th and Kevin Magnussen 19th, although there was clearly some pace in the car.





“It was hectic in a way, but ultimately not good enough or fast enough,” Hulkenberg said. “We lacked a bit of pace and balance. Obviously, during a Sprint there isn’t a lot of practice so we couldn’t play with the car or the set-up as much as I or the team would’ve liked.”

Kevin was disappointed.

“It’s a new track for me and I found it a little more difficult to learn than I had hoped,” he said. “It’s actually a pretty tricky circuit to drive and not having been to it before, it’s taken me a while to get on top of it. So, there’s a lot more lap time to find from me.”

With the qualifying done and the focus switching to the Sprint activities on Saturday, it was going to be interesting to see how the track would develop. And whether there would be a problem with the tyres.

But one did need to also ask the question how the tyre problem developed when it was clearly something that Pirelli knew about in advance... ❖

FREE PRACTICE FP1

1	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:27.428
2	C Sainz	Ferrari	1:27.762
3	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:27.909
4	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:27.919
5	S Perez	Red Bull	1:28.016
6	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	1:28.027
7	N Hulkenberg	Haas	1:28.171
8	G Russell	Mercedes	1:28.336
9	O Piastri	McLaren	1:28.380
10	L Norris	McLaren	1:28.441
11	L Sargeant	Williams	1:28.550
12	A Albon	Williams	1:28.590
13	L Hamilton	Mercedes	1:28.679
14	L Stroll	Aston Martin	1:28.690
15	E Ocon	Alpine	1:28.732
16	P Gasly	Alpine	1:28.821
17	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:29.014
18	G Zhuo	Alfa Romeo	1:29.106
19	L Lawson	AlphaTauri	1:29.238
20	K Magnussen	Haas	1:29.502

QUALIFYING Q1

1	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:25.007
2	L Norris	McLaren	1:25.131
3	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:25.223
4	O Piastri	McLaren	1:25.266
5	G Russell	Mercedes	1:25.334
6	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:25.452
7	P Gasly	Alpine	1:25.566
8	E Ocon	Alpine	1:25.711
9	C Sainz	Ferrari	1:25.808
10	N Hulkenberg	Haas	1:25.904
11	S Perez	Red Bull	1:25.991
12	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:26.038
13	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	1:26.058
14	L Hamilton	Mercedes	1:26.076
15	A Albon	Williams	1:26.118
15	L Sargeant	Williams	1:26.210
16	L Stroll	Aston Martin	1:26.345
17	L Lawson	AlphaTauri	1:26.635
18	K Magnussen	Haas	1:27.046
19	G Zhuo	Alfa Romeo	1:27.432

QUALIFYING Q2

1	L Hamilton	Mercedes	1:24.381
2	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:24.483
3	L Norris	McLaren	1:24.685
4	O Piastri	McLaren	1:24.724
5	G Russell	Mercedes	1:24.827
6	P Gasly	Alpine	1:24.918
7	E Ocon	Alpine	1:24.928
8	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:25.079
9	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:25.241
10	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:25.297
11	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	1:25.301
12	C Sainz	Ferrari	1:25.328
PL	S Perez *	Red Bull	1:25.462
13	A Albon	Williams	1:25.707
14	N Hulkenberg	Haas	1:25.783

Grid positions are indicated in blue

* Perez had to start from the pit lane after using additional power unit elements

QUALIFYING Q3

1	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:23.778
2	G Russell	Mercedes	1:24.219
3	L Hamilton	Mercedes	1:24.305
4	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:24.369
5	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:24.424
6	O Piastri	McLaren	1:24.540
7	P Gasly	Alpine	1:24.553
8	E Ocon	Alpine	1:24.763
9	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:25.058
10	L Norris	McLaren	No time



RACE by David Tremayne

MAX AND THE McLARENS

Lewis Hamilton's rare mistake at the start robbed the Qatar GP of Mercedes' unfettered challenge, but as Max Verstappen kept his cool in the debilitating heat to score his 14th win of the season and the 49th of his triple championship-winning career, the McLaren drivers kept him right on his toes

Well before the start of the 53-lap Qatar Grand Prix there was a measure of drama. Following Pirelli's usual analysis of tyres used during FP1 in which tyres that has been used for around 20 laps were examined to check various safety parameters, a separation was discovered in the sidewall between the topping compound and the carcass cords on many of tyres that were checked.

This was most likely caused by the high-frequency interference between the tyre sidewall and the 50 mm 'pyramid' kerbs used extensively at the circuit, aggravated by the propensity to ride those kerbs.

Accordingly, track limits at Turns 12-13 were revised for the Sprint Shootout and a 10-minute Practice Familiarisation Session was held just before the scheduled start, which was delayed 20 minutes.



Due to the frequency of Safety Car interventions in the Sprint, the tyre data available for analysis by Pirelli was deemed insufficient, though some tyres showed the initial onset of the separation in the sidewall between the topping compound and the carcass cords of the tyres.

After consultation with the teams on Sunday the FIA and Pirelli implemented new measures for the Grand Prix on safety grounds:

A mandatory limit of 18 laps of total tyre life per set was to be imposed.

The life of used already tyres would be taken into consideration.

The FIA and Pirelli would communicate to the teams the remaining available laps for each set of used tyres at their disposal for the race and the criteria used to calculate that number.

There was no direct mandate for a minimum of at least three tyre-change pit stops during the race, as first considered on Saturday, but effectively that was what would happen if the race went the full distance.

Any car deemed to have exceeded the tyre life lap limit would be reported to



the Stewards as being run in an unsafe condition.

Chez Red Bull, Sergio Perez would start from the pitlane after his battered car, RB19/01, was rebuilt around a new tub, RB19/02, and a completely new power train and associated gubbins.

At least Checo would start; poor old Carlos Sainz's Ferrari sat in the garage, unable to start because of a fuel system problem that developed once the car had been fuelled and which could not be rectified in time.

The big deal would be who had which tyres left. Both drivers in all five of the top teams in the World Championship points table had one set of new hard and medium tyres, and where Charles Leclerc, Carlos Sainz, George Russell and Pierre Gasly each had three sets if used mediums, the rest had two. Only Sergio, Carlos and Lewis had a new set of softs left, though everyone had plenty of used sets at their disposal. The mandate of 18 laps per set would make choice of strategies interesting...

The oddest seemed to be Mercedes starting Lewis on a set of softs, and he wasn't happy about that. As he did the grid formation lap he told Pete Bonington, "I'm a sitting duck on these tyres."

Unfortunately he didn't have to worry about them for long. George and Max made decent starts from the front row and were running side-by-side as they headed for Turn 1, but on his softer rubber Lewis got a great launch and pulled up level with them. But then as he turned in from the outside, with

Max on the inside, he inadvertently pincered George in the middle. His own right rear wheel and tyre were ripped off as he clobbered his team-mate's left front, and as he spun to a standstill in the gravel George also rotated off to the left. That made Fernando swerve left in avoidance, which seemed odd, but that left the door open for a grateful Oscar Piastri, who slipped from sixth to second down the grippier inside in one neat sequence.

As the Safety Car was deployed, the in-car accusations began.



“Come on guys, two races in a row,” George said, referring to their near-miss in Suzuka’s Spoon Curve last time out. “I wasn’t even looking, I was checking behind,” he added, “then he came from nowhere.”

“I got taken out by my own team-mate,” Lewis said, before naughtily crossing the track and trudging home. It was an uncharacteristic error, the like of which we hadn’t seen since Spa 2022, and later, when he’d seen the replays, he put his hands up to it. “I’m really sorry,” he said. “It was a big opportunity to get some good points for the team and in the heat of the moment, I didn’t really understand what happened. I felt the tap from behind, but I don’t think George had anywhere to go. It was a really unfortunate situation and I feel really sorry for the entire team. Massive apologies to everyone back at Brackley and Brixworth, and I take full responsibility. Everybody is working incredibly hard so it’s massively gutting to have a result like this.”

Given the pace George showed later, when compromised into a four-stop race, Mercedes may well have lost a golden opportunity.



George dived into the pits at the end of the lap for a new front wing and a check-over, and thought his race was all but over. But Mercedes builds very strong cars, and he was soon getting back into attack mode.

The Safety Car went back in on lap four, and the race resumed on five. Max led Oscar over the line, followed by Fernando, Charles Leclerc, Esteban Ocon, Lando Norris (up from 10th already), Pierre Gasly, Yuki Tsunoda, Valtteri Bottas, Nico Hulkenberg (soon to get a 10s penalty for absent-mindedly starting in Sainz's vacant grid slot!), Alex Albon, Logan Sargeant, Lunge Stroll, Kevin Magnussen, Liam Lawson, Zhou Guanyu, George and Sergio.

With three stops in prospect drivers were already realising this would be like driving quali laps in between pitstops, and interestingly Oscar was keeping Max honest to begin with as Fernando and Charles held station without challenging. George, meanwhile, was bravely on the move, having put his concerns about his W14 aside. The guy is a real racer. He was up to 13th by lap six, benefiting from that stop under the Safety Car but now,

because of the incident and the tyre ruling, committed to those four stops whereas everyone else would be able to get by with three. Then he passed Zhou on lap eight and Logan on nine, and by the time Fernando was the first big name stopper on 11 he was up to 10th.

Oscar and Charles followed suit on 12, Lando and Nico on 13, the Haas driver serving his time. George stopped for the second time on 14, but Max kept going for 17. Happily, that put that most excellent fellow Alex into the lead momentarily for Team Willie, which went down very well with those who have long memories of this sport. He

came in at the end of 18 so the fun didn't last long, but it was cool while it lasted.

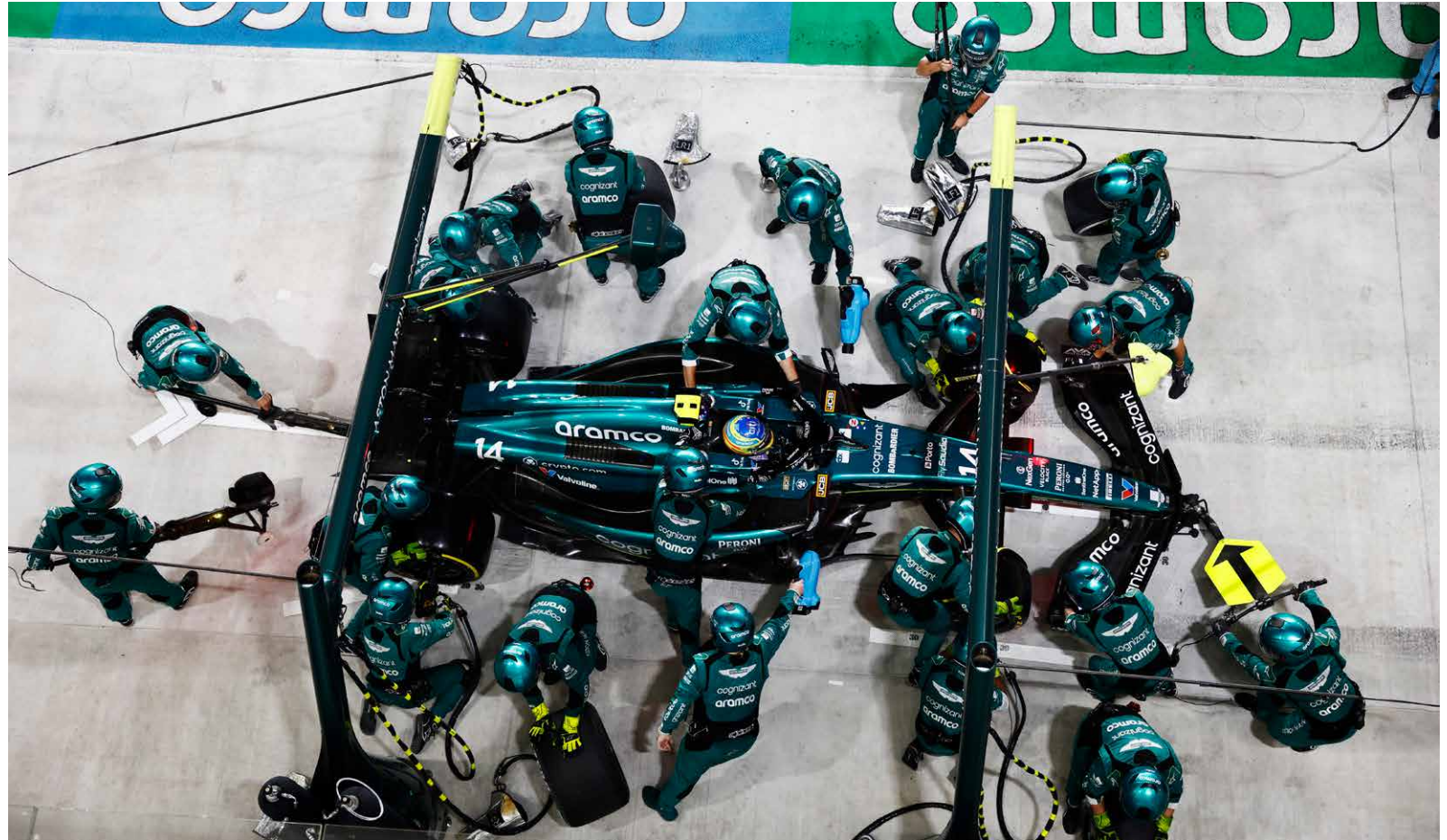
By lap 20 it was still Max to the fore – big surprise – with Oscar still an excellent second from Valtteri (who'd stopped his Alfa Romeo Sauber earlier), Fernando, Lance, Lando, Charles,



Esteban, Pierre and George. Already, this was becoming a lap charters' nightmare...

At this stage the man on the move was Lando, who was beginning to close in on Fernando, but then the next round of stops disrupted everything again. Oscar triggered it on 25, followed by Ferdy and Pierre on 26, then Lando on 27. So now George was running a tremendous second, albeit 22.7s down, and both he and Max were due to stop soon. Checo had risen to third, mainly thanks to others stopping, and he duly did so on lap 31. That was when he served what would be the first of three five-second track limits penalties in yet another disastrous race in the second Red Bull that would eventually see him lapped 12 laps from the end by the team-mate he'd led home in Jeddah and Azerbaijan. George did his third stop on 32, and prepared to fight back all over again.

Max eventually stopped on lap 35, exchanging his second set of mediums for some shiny new hards, and of course he got out without losing the lead not just to Oscar, but to Lando who had cleverly and unobtrusively worked his way into third place after seeing



off Fernando and Charles thanks to McLaren's excellent pitwork. His crew serviced him in 1.8s on one occasion, which is Red Bull territory.

Now we had something interesting happening, as Lando was clearly closing on Oscar, even though the Australian's

tyre management was markedly better than it had been in Suzuka. See how quickly this guy learns? They were separated by 4.7s on lap 33, which is when Fernando made an uncharacteristic error in Turn 2. There must have been something in the dusty

atmosphere that upskittled previous McLaren team-mates, after Lewis's gaffe. The plucky Spaniard slithered over the gravel and then pulled the damndest trick getting back on track right in front of Charles, which was an absolute no-no that looked downright

dangerous to me. Surprisingly, the stewards – Felix Holter, Danny Sullivan, Matteo Perini and David Domingo – let him off with a reprimand. It was a shame they didn't transmit Charles' cockpit commentary on that one... It would doubtless have obliged pious SKY TV's duo David Croft and Karun Chandhok to keep apologising on his behalf for his language for the rest of the race.

With 21 laps and another pit stop for all the front runners to go, Max had just over six seconds on Oscar, as Lando continued to chip away and had set fastest lap of 1m25.948s on lap 33 and clearly wasn't in the mood to cruise. They each made their final stops, this time for hard tyres, on lap 43 and 44, and just as we were wondering whether McLaren might be tempted to do the old Ferrari-to-Felipe "Fernando is quicker than you" trick on their new boy and switch positions, the message came over the radio on lap 46: "Lando, we're going to hold position, bring it home."

"Why do you want to do that?" Lando demanded to know. "I'm quicker." "We're worried about George, he might put some softs on..." he was told.



Perhaps the radio malfunctioned thereafter. On his fresh rubber Oscar had set fastest lap in 1m25.353s on lap 45, but Lando made his feelings clear the very next lap after the radio call as he set a new fastest lap of 1m24.842s compared to Oscar's time of 1m25.236s for the same tour. You could see McLaren's point; here were

33 super-valuable points in the fight against Aston Martin for fourth place overall, and nobody wanted to see them all evaporate in the gravel with two papaya orange cars. But it didn't matter, because while Lando kept the pressure on, Oscar upped his game too. He banged in a 1m24.921s next time around, compared to Lando's

1m 25.062s. Another lap later their respective times were 1m25.098s and 1m25.146s.

Meanwhile, George duly stopped for some used softs on lap 50, and Max for more mediums on 51. Unusually for Red Bull, it was a slow stop (4.0s), as the left front wheel proved reluctant to

come off. But it didn't really hurt him, as he went into the closing laps with 3.8s over the duelling MCL60s, which were now only 1.5s apart. Lando got it closer than that, and as Max headed for win number 49 and his 14th of the season, the orange cars went into the last lap with just 1.1s separating them. But it was enough, and Oscar took the first second place podium finish of his career 4.8s behind Max, and still that 1.1s ahead of his team-mate.

"I think the first stint made my race," Max said, "and after that I managed the pace. But McLaren were quick today so I had to push. It was tough out there, maybe the top five of tough races I've done. We'll enjoy it a little, but there are still some races we want to win!"

As usual, Oscar's open face betrayed how hard a race it had been. He'd probably make a poor poker player. And he looked aghast when interviewer David Coulthard started to make some silly but good-natured joke that Oscar thought for a moment was going to be the preface to news that he had been penalised five seconds for tracks limits. "That would have been crap," Oscar said when he realised, and SKY obliged DC to swiftly apologise to all the

millions of global viewers who must have been brutally offended.

"I'm very happy," Oscar resumed. "Turn 1 was nice, and was definitely in our gameplan, but that was the hardest race of my life. It was hot! As Lando said, with three stops it was basically flat out for 57 quali laps, and

it definitely feels like I've just done that. But another double podium is a fantastic job for us." And in a message to the McLaren team, he added: "Guys, I let you down in quali, but I hope this makes it up to you."

Not surprisingly, this amazing rookie was voted Driver of the Day. Actually

he was driver of the weekend in my book.

Lando, likewise, went into the race seeking redemption. He probably doesn't think he got it, but I'd say he did after a superb drive. With his greater experience of tyre management, I think he'd have been in a with a shout



of the win if quali hadn't been ruined by the track limits penalty.

Looking fresher than either Max or Oscar, he said he was happy with his result. "It was a mega race, and I learned from yesterday to go tight in Turn 1 and it paid off. It was stressful and I'm hot, sweaty and a bit tired. But a 1.8s pit stop. Thank you, lads!

"I think it was a lot harder having three stops because you had to push flat out right until the last stint, and I guess it's the hardest race I've done, so a great challenge. And congrats to Oscar, he did a great job."

George drove his heart out to take a great fourth, the ploy of using softs not really paying off as he never had the pace on them to try and close down the McLarens in the final laps.

"The incident at Turn 1 was absolutely not intentional from either myself or Lewis," he said. "Visibility is so difficult in these cars and especially when you're racing. There are big blind spots and we both have so much respect for one another. We will make sure we come out of this stronger.

"There are still lots of positives to take away from this weekend though. Our



goal is to get P2 in the Constructors' and we managed to outscore Ferrari this weekend. Our pace was very strong too so we can be confident going into these final five races. The Grand Prix itself was incredibly tough. It was by far the most physical race I've ever competed in. It was like being inside

an oven! I was pretty happy to see the chequered flag."

"The positives are that the pace of the car was strong across the weekend," Lewis said glumly, rueing the possible lost opportunity. "George was also able to do a good job of getting back through to score some important points."

The stewards deemed the first-corner shunt a racing incident, but were less lenient with his track crossing and issue his first reprimand of the season and fined him €50,000, €25,000 of it suspended for the remainder of the 2023 season on condition that there is no further breach of similar nature.

"We've had a tough run of races in the last month," Mercedes trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin said. "You do get those in sport, though, and it's a good test of how strong your team is. There's very little else to say about the incident at Turn 1. Neither driver had the intention of coming together. Lewis took full blame for the incident and George acknowledged the role that these sizeable cars can have in such moments. Ultimately both are upset that it's cost the team a lot of points. We know both are committed to making sure we can secure second in the Constructors'.

"We have five races to go and we're looking forward not backwards. There are positives we can take away from Qatar. We had good pace today; George recovered from dead last to fourth. Operationally, the team worked extremely well across a very challenging

weekend. We have a decent car, two strong drivers and a very committed team in Brackley and Brixworth behind them.”

Ferrari missed having two cars in the fight, but Charles maximised the one he had. But fifth was a disappointment after the speed the SF-23 had shown in Monza and Singapore.

“It was a case of damage limitation, with Carlos already out just before the start,” he said. “We had to give ourselves a bit of a margin with the way I was driving and bring it home safely. We expected McLaren to be strong, but not as strong as what we saw this weekend. Mercedes also had a strong pace and I think that George wasn’t pushing as hard as he could.

“Physically, it was the toughest race of my career. That was due to a number of things: very high temperatures, three stops – which meant putting in qualifying laps in every lap of the race – and as a result, much more stress in the high-speed corners.

“Next up is the triple header and we will do everything to finish the season on a high, especially in our battle in the Constructors’ Championship.”



Fernando was very lucky to keep his sixth after that dangerous rejoining move, which was a boost to Aston Martin, even if he did get a roasted backside as a memento. “It was an extreme race today with the hot conditions and perhaps one of the toughest we’ve faced. We also had an issue with the seat being very hot from around lap 15, which made it quite challenging. We were competitive though and I’m happy to finish sixth after a few weekends where we didn’t have the pace. We finished ninth in Monza, eighth in Japan and here I felt like we were in the mix.

“Perhaps as a sport we can think about some measures in the future if we experience these extreme temperatures again.”

Esteban likewise drove a fine race for Alpine and was always in the hunt for points, so seventh was a decent reward. “What a tough and physically difficult race for all of us! In the end, it was a great result for us. We had a great start to move up to fifth and credit to the team too for a well-executed strategy and pit stops. The conditions were extremely tough in the car and I did not feel well physically in the first half of



the race. I was able to pull it together and focus on what I needed to do. We had a couple of good overtakes along the way and we brought home six valuable points for the team. Now it’s time for rest and recovery and then prepare for a demanding triple-header

in the Americas and we’ll look to carry this momentum into Austin.”

Team-mate Pierre Gasly didn’t fare so well, after starting seventh but finishing 12th. Like Checo he got three lots of five-second penalties for track limits violations and also had to

hand a place back to fellow offender Stroll, losing another to Checo at the same time. “There was potential to score points today so, of course, I am disappointed in how the race played out. It was not a good day. It’s a matter of centimetres on track limits - that

is on me, though - and today I paid a big price for it. It's frustrating as we definitely had the pace to score solid points for the team. We had a small energy management issue to manage during the race, which cost me some pace. I probably tried to take too many risks and overcompensate for that, and pushed too close to the limit."

Behind them it was at last a good race for Alfa Romeo Sauber, with both Valtteri and Zhou running in the hunt for points all afternoon and doing some strong work. Zhou notably kept ahead of hards-shod Sergio for many laps in the early going, and raced hard throughout. Six points, for eighth and ninth places, were a huge boost.

Sergio finished ninth on the road, but the third of his five-second track limits penalties dropped him to 10th ahead of Stroll and Gasly. Behind them Alex had a frustrating race in the sole surviving Williams as team-mate Logan bravely ran as long as he could before becoming overcome by dehydration and having to retire.

"Firstly, I'm glad Logan is okay as it's never easy to retire from a race," Alex said. "I think this race goes down as one of the toughest of the year, as I suffered



with heat exposure myself. Our pace was pretty strong, but I need to review what happened, as we were in what felt like a good position, but we ended up falling out of the points. We also struggled with a bit of an overheating cockpit, so we'll also need to review this. The gap to our competitors is closing, so it's a tough weekend to walk away from but we'll review the data and see what happened."

Behind the Williams, Kevin was Haas's better-placed finisher, troubled by

an engine setting problem which his race engineer referred to as Bravo 10 Position 4. "It makes no sense!" KMag roared over the radio. Your guess is as good as mine what it all meant.

"It was unbelievably hard and very hot. It seemed a lot hotter than any other race I've ever done," Kevin said. "I think we had a positive day although not from a points or Constructors' Championship standings perspective. We lost a position there which is very disappointing, but there are five races

left. It's a tight fight with those guys but we've got to hang on and try our best to get them back. We get an upgrade next race and we're all very happy about that, and excited to work with it. We're not expecting a miracle for the first race maybe, and it might take a race or two to really get the most out of it, but there's still some positive stuff to look forward to."

Nico was contrite about the error that compromised his race. "I realised before I stopped but you can't reverse

and the damage was done, so that was obviously a big mistake from me today. That stopped our race before it even started. The conditions were very extreme, the heat, humidity, the pace was incredibly high with the new asphalt, so I think we're all feeling it."

With the Haases 14th and 16th, the AlphaTauris finished either side of them, Yuki 15th and Liam 17th. Yuki was in the mix for a while, but Liam was disappointed with what looks like being his last grand prix for a while.

"It was definitely a challenging race," Yuki said. "My start was good and smooth, I made up places and was in the points. It felt okay inside the car and the balance was also good, but we were just too slow and couldn't keep up the pace."

"It was really tricky out there," Liam said. "From the start of the race we had no speed, and throughout, we were managing some stability issues, so it's something to analyse. It was very hot, and when you're struggling with the car, it makes it even harder to extract the pace. It seems to be my last race with the team before Daniel comes back, so I want to say a big thank you



to the team, and it's a shame to finish like this."

Meanwhile, F1's other rookie will be savouring a hard but ultimately enjoyable weekend. Second in the Sprint from pole, second in the main race for sixth. Oscar had a lot to be proud of.

"A fantastic day for the team as we achieve our 500th podium in Formula 1," team principal Andrea Stella said. "Both Lando and Oscar drove great races in difficult conditions to finish P2 and P3 to add to the success in the Sprint yesterday. A double podium rewards the team both trackside and at the factory for their brilliant work

and my thanks go to them for their continued commitment and dedication to McLaren."

We've all got very used to seeing Max on podiums and grabbing the headlines, and GrandPrix+ salutes his third title. But I think we'll be seeing quite a lot of an Australian up there in future, too. ❖

FASTEST RACE LAPS

1	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:24.319
2	L Norris	McLaren	1:24.842
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17	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	1:27.174
18	L Sargeant	Williams	1:27.983



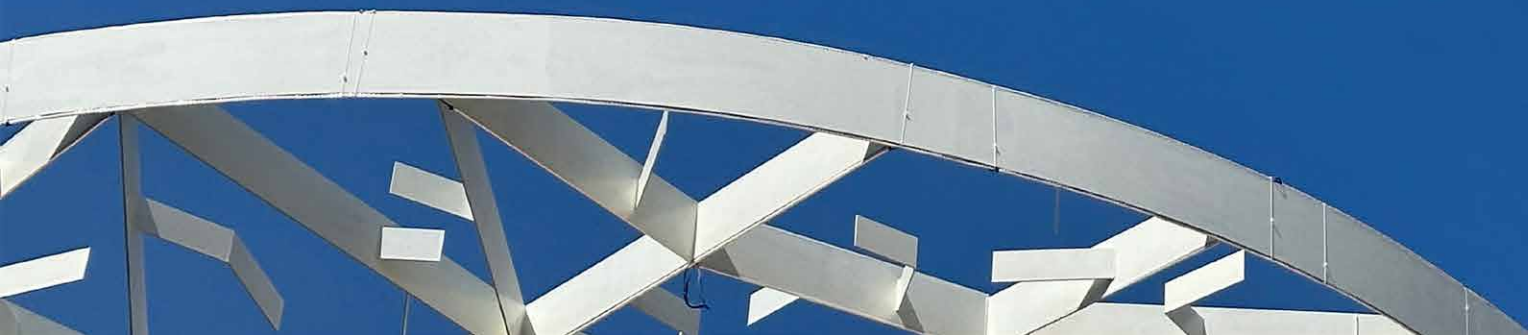
QATAR GP, Lusail International Circuit, 8 October 2023

DRIVERS

CONSTRUCTORS

1	M Verstappen	Red Bull	1:27.39.168	211.250 km/h	1	M Verstappen	Red Bull	433	1	Oracle Red Bull Racing	657
2	O Piastri	McLaren	1:27.44.001	- 4.833	2	S Perez	Red Bull	224	2	Mercedes AMG Petronas	326
3	L Norris	McLaren	1:27.45.137	- 5.969	3	L Hamilton	Mercedes	194	3	Scuderia Ferrari	298
4	G Russell	Mercedes	1:28.13.287	- 34.119	4	F Alonso	Aston Martin	183	4	Aston Martin Cognizant	230
5	C Leclerc	Ferrari	1:28.18.144	- 38.976	5	C Sainz	Ferrari	153	5	McLaren	219
6	F Alonso	Aston Martin	1:28.23.200	- 49.032	6	C Leclerc	Ferrari	145	6	BWT Alpine	90
7	E Ocon	Alpine	1:28.41.558	- 62.390	7	L Norris	McLaren	136	7	Williams Racing	23
8	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	1:28.45.731	- 66.563	8	G Russell	Mercedes	132	8	Alfa Romeo Racing Stake	16
9	G Zhou	Alfa Romeo	1:28.55.295	- 76.127	9	O Piastri	McLaren	83	9	Moneygram Haas F1 Team	12
10	S Perez *	Red Bull	1:28.59.349	- 80.181	10	L Stroll	Aston Martin	47	10	AlphaTauri	5
11	L Stroll *	Aston Martin	1:29.00.820	- 81.652	11	P Gasly	Alpine	46			
12	P Gasly *	Alpine	1:29.01.468	- 82.300	12	E Ocon	Alpine	44			
13	A Albon *	Williams	1:29.10.182	- 91.014	13	A Albon	Williams	23			
14	K Magnussen	Haas		- 56 laps	14	V Bottas	Alfa Romeo	10			
15	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri		- 56 laps	15	N Hulkenberg	Haas	9			
16	N Hulkenberg	Haas		- 56 laps	16	G Zhou	Alfa Romeo	6			
17	L Lawson	AlphaTauri		- 56 laps	17	Y Tsunoda	AlphaTauri	3			
R	L Sargeant	Williams		- 40 laps	18	K Magnussen	Haas	3			
R	L Hamilton	Mercedes		- 0 laps	19	L Lawson	AlphaTauri	2			
NS	C Sainz	Ferrari									

* Stroll (2), Gasly (2), Albon (2) and Perez (1) were all given 5-second time penalties



GRAHAM SMITH

Graham Smith, known in the F1 world as "Smudge", is one of the longest-serving members of the F1 community, with a career that dates back more than 40 years. Today he looks after the logistics of the Red Bull Powertrains race team.

Now 63, Smudge started out in the sport in his teens, although his ambition was to become a chef.

In his early teens, he lived in Sutton, Surrey, which is now an outer suburb of London. As luck would have it, his next door neighbour was an ambitious wheeler-dealer called Dave Price, who was trying to make his name running cars in various UK series. Smith was soon helping out at weekends, working with Price's Unipart F3 team, with a young Nigel Mansell, with Giacomo Agostini in the Aurora AFX British F1 Championship and also with the Rover Vitesse touring car programme.

He went on to study at the Westminster Catering College, a training which resulted in a job working as a chef in the Houses of Parliament. But his life changed when Price offered him a full time job.

Price and his business partner John Bracey had set up a catering company called Meridian Services Limited (MSL), which was soon providing food for five F1 teams, while working with Rothmans in WEC and the WRC. Smudge drove the MSL truck from venue to venue and did whatever else was required. It led to the offer of a job as spares coordinator with the Brabham test team in 1985. A year later he moved up to the Brabham race team and stayed with the team until it closed down at the end of 1991.

He was then asked by former Brabham team manager Herbie Blash to help out with the Yamaha F1 programme, which began working with Tyrrell in 1993. Later Yamaha worked with Arrows

and in 1997 came close to winning the Hungarian GP with Damon Hill driving.

When Yamaha left F1 later that year, Smith was to join the secret Honda F1 team, which featured many former Tyrrell people, led by Harvey Posthethwaite. After his death, Honda decided to team up with BAR and Smith stayed on and remained until Honda quit F1 at the end of 2008.

He would then move on to Caterham in Norfolk for the next six years until that too shut down. A call from Honda kept him in F1 during the troubled McLaren era but there was then more success with Scuderia Toro Rosso and Red Bull Racing. He subsequently became part of Red Bull Powertrains.

Still based in Leatherhead, not far from Sutton, he owns a narrowboat, which is moored on the Grand Union Canal near Milton Keynes, where he stays when he needs to be at the factory... ❖



AN EMOTIONAL REUNION OF 'FOOLS'



Okay, how many of you can remember exactly what you were doing 40 years ago to the day?

Well, this week at least I can tell you exactly what I was doing that day. And another 46 years ago.

On October 3rd 1977 I started my career as a journalist, and in the evening ventured to Motorfair at Earls Court, determined to make the acquaintance of a tall bloke with dark floppy hair who was busy working the crowd that gathered at his Project Thrust stand. His name was Richard Noble. And man, what a part he would play in my life!

On October 4th, 1983, I was, among several other things, sticking my head up the jetpipe of a big gold car called Thrust2 on the Black Rock Desert, savouring the stench of reheat-burned jet A1 and listening to the tick, tick, tick of her metal contracting as she cooled down while the sun started a slow

slide from the Nevadan sky. Not far away that guy, Richard Noble, hung out with his wife Sally and his two young daughters Mimi and Genny, idly toeing the dusty playa with one of his black race boots and waving the Union flag. The girls were probably too little to really appreciate the magnitude of that day the way a lot of the other grown-ups could who had gathered as part of the Noble support team, but Mr and Mrs N were each savouring, for very different reasons, the end of a stressful and bruising but highly successful journey.

For Sally, years of financial hardship, stress and fear for her charismatic husband's safety were finally over. Of all those there that day, she was arguably the most courageous.

For Richard, a dream had at last come true. One run at 624.241 mph, and another less than an hour later in the

opposite direction, at 642.971, had cemented an average of 633.468 mph.

He had deposed America's Gary Gabelich as the fastest man on earth.

And he had brought the land speed record back where it belongs. He had done it, he told reporter Rob Widdows, "For Britain, and for the hell of it!" And if that sounds contrived, it wasn't. Richard has always been one of those much larger than life characters who exudes bonhomie and gusto in equal measures (unless the car isn't working at desolate places such as the Bonneville Salt Flats or the Black Rock Desert) and, yes, he has been known to exaggerate some aspects in the interests of attracting backers. But he's never been a b/s merchant. What you see, if you are smart about the way you live your life or run your company, is exactly what you get. There's no side to him. He has the charisma that makes

chairmen and managing directors summon their financial directors and instruct them to break open the company piggy bank.

Those other adults on the desert that day? Well, among them were: Birgit and John Ackroyd; Brian Ball; Mike Barrett; Ron Benton; Gordon Biles; Glynne Bowsher; David Brinn; Mick Chambers; Richard Chisnell; Lorraine Culkin; Eddie Elsom; Gordon Flux; John Griffiths; Peter Hand; Mike and Ninetta Hearn; Andrew and Charles Noble; John and Ken Norris; Ian Robinson; Simon Walmsley, John Watkins and George Webb. And Trish and I. And here's the thing: there wasn't a single one of us who was there who didn't believe almost as passionately as RJAN himself that this was a massively worthwhile project that was going to succeed. Who wouldn't have jumped through the odd fiery hoop or walked a few rattlesnake-infested miles of road in Gerlach in the middle of nowhere, or defodded God knows how many bloody miles of the Black Rock Desert whose plentiful debris included live rounds of USAF ammunition, to fight the fight and whackermole a whole load of the annoying suckas that



mistakenly thought they were going to stop it happening.

Last Wednesday, a number of those of 633 Club members still breathing gathered at the Coventry Transport Museum, some of us doubtless deluding ourselves that we weren't looking our age, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of that remarkable achievement for Queen and Country. There are, I'm reliably informed, people in the UK today to whom that wouldn't just be of zero interest but who might actively try to discourage such projects, such are the vagaries

of the modern world. (I'm sure future projects might usefully employ them to crawl into a jetpipe to confirm to the pilot that the engine has fired). But to us it was like being a bunch of warriors who had fought the good fight and found nothing they wanted more this day than to meet up again, be grateful that the man who had brought us all together in the first place had such damn good dreams and the nous to make them come alive, and bathe in the warmth of true camaraderie.

Over dinner on a wonderful day ably organised by Andrew Noble (despite

the lingering psychological and physical effects of a long-ago minor chest injury) and his partner Debs Curtis, we toasted the memories of our fallen: design guru Ackers; talented wheeler Bally; project saviour Mike Barrett; Ron 'Give Me More Time And I'll Get The Job Done Sooner' Benton; smiling Gordon Biles; purse strings-holder David Brinn; dyed-in-the-wool engineers Mick Chambers and Gordy Flux and dear old Ken 'Mighty Mouse' Norris and his prodrometer.

And we toasted Glynne, who the next day would celebrate his birthday. He was not with us, but Andrew connected via transatlantic phone line; Glynne was not in some sort of home, but had elected to celebrate the beginning of his 85th year... in Gerlach. The scene of Thrust2's great success, and that 14 years later of its supersonic successor ThrustSSC, in whose design he had played a key role. Richard wasn't the only highly individual character in the mix.

Naturally, he made a speech, and regaled the gathering with several amusing stories including a string of fortunate events, without which life might have become... difficult. Possibly

shorter. Remember how he shunted Thrust2 in a final shakedown test at Greenham Common in mid-1982? After a braking misjudgement he and Mike Barrett ran out of road around 320 mph before Richard did a high-speed turn off and came to rest with the battered car needing a new front end (a process wherein Mike B rose to the occasion to rekindle the morale of the shattered team). It transpired that the reheat had not been installed correctly so the Avon wasn't actually producing full power; had it been Richard calculated they would probably have left the runway around 400. "And if that had happened, I wouldn't be standing here now..."

The other spooky story was how a company called Trust Securities came in at the last minute with some money in 1981. After chasing loads of sponsors for 1983 Richard finally went back to Trust, whose representatives had been surprised that he hadn't done so much sooner because their business had benefited from the association and they were hot to trot. But that had come in a curious way. They'd bought some land to develop in Manchester but had made a huge mistake in failing

to secure crucial access to the large site. There was one remaining householder who was sitting between them and a fortune and was determined not to sell the property in which generations of his family had lived. The Trust men visited in person, geared for a battle to persuade him.

"We're from Trust Securities, and we'd like to talk to you about selling your house..."

The owner bridled, exactly as they had been expecting.

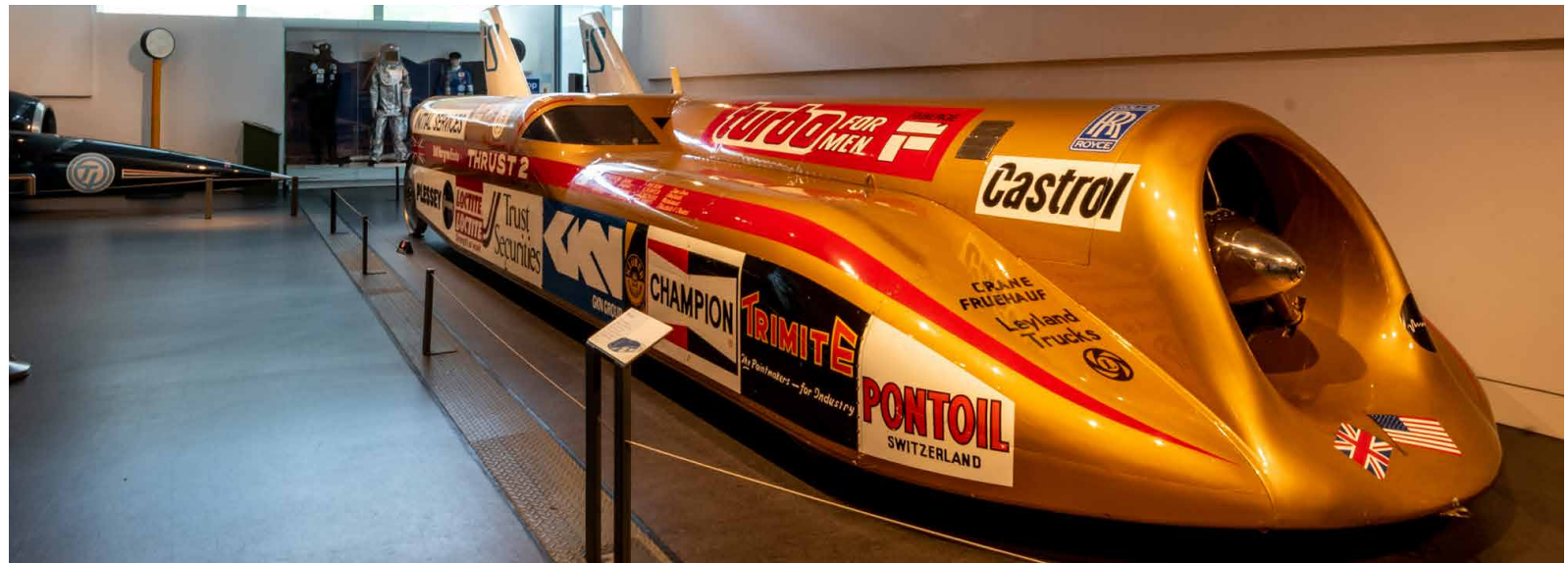
"Wait a minute... Trust Securities... Aren't you a sponsor of Thrust2?"

I'll leave you to figure out the odds of it happening, but he was a Thrust fan; suffice to say, he agreed to sell because of Richard's project. And, of course, Richard got his fresh financial support.

But it wasn't always like that. When he returned from Bonneville in 1981, with a just a new British car and driver record of 418.118 mph to show for it, Faberge's boss Hugh Wickes said, "Look Richard, you promised us gold and you only brought us back bronze." It didn't help Richard in the slightest two years later when, on October 3rd and just ahead of the great success, Faberge elected not to join the Magnificent

Seven who kicked in just enough for another week's running. Oddly enough, neither did Trust Securities. I've always wished the size of their logos could have been somehow downsized; instead, they remain for eternity, giving both companies greater return on investment than some degenerates such as me might think either deserved.

A lot of people think record breaking is just like normal motor racing. They expect the equivalent of a three o'clock in the afternoon start and a contest that will run for 57 laps and be done within two hours, when you get a result. That hysterical laughter you can hear in the



background is Mother Nature wetting herself, and dreaming up all manner of new ways she can screw things up besides throwing bad weather at you...

For reasons that need not detain us here, I've recently found myself singing another yet another motivational 'anthem' in my head: Garth Brooks' Standing outside the fire.

We call them cool

Those hearts that have no scars to show

The ones that never do let go

And risk the tables being turned

We call them fools

Who have to dance within the flame

Who chance the sorrow and the shame

That always comes with getting burned

But you've got to be tough when consumed by desire

'Cause it's not enough just to stand outside the fire

They're so hell-bent on giving, walking a wire

Convinced it's not living if you stand outside the fire



Standing outside the fire

Standing outside the fire

Life is not tried, it is merely survived

If you're standing outside the fire

Well, there we were in CTM's excellent display of Thrust2, ThrustSSC and Bloodhound SSC, gathered together, laughing later after dinner as we tackled Andrew's 'what do you remember of Gerlach?' quiz, shooting the breeze, updating ourselves on such important issues as meeting some of our friends' delightful new partners, swapping pictures of grandchildren or discussing latest projects or whether our old overalls still fitted, or just taking the mickey out of one another relentlessly. The things you do with the sort of people you want to hang out with, who matter to you.

All of us who were there that day, October 4th, 1983, were 'fools' willing to enter a ring of fire to help the one guy whose job it ultimately was to place himself at its very heart. Those are the kind of people The Man has brought into my orbit. And they're among the many blessings I never let myself forget. ❖

PARTING SHOT





THE NEXT GP* WILL BE PUBLISHED FROM AUSTIN ON OCTOBER 22