

THE BRITISH GRAND PRIX IN NUMBERS

35 BILLION

THE NUMBER OF DATA POINTS THE CARS GENERATE AT A WEEKEND'S RACE

7 BILLION

THE \$ AMOUNT LIBERTY MEDIA PAID FOR BERNIE ECCLESTONE'S F1 MANAGEMENT

306,198KM

THE RACE DISTANCE

50

THE TERABYTES OF DATA RENAULT SPORT FORMULA 1 TEAM'S SUPERCOMPUTER GENERATES PER WEEK

18

THE ARTICULATED LORRIES USED FOR GARAGES, OFFICES AND RACE STRATEGY

15

THE TIMES THE TEAM PRACTISE A PIT STOP PER DAY PRIOR TO THE RACE

5

THE NUMBER OF TIMES LEWIS HAMILTON HAS WON AT SILVERSTONE

2

THE NUMBER OF SECONDS IT CAN TAKE FOR A RACE PIT STOP





A DAY AT THE RACES

IF EVERYTHING SEEMS UNDER CONTROL ON THE TRACK, THEY'RE NOT GOING FAST ENOUGH, WRITES *RICHARD WEBB*.

Formula 1 is not just a race every other weekend, complete with bellowing engines and sexy pit girls; it is a round-the-clock circus of business, talent and electronics powered by sheer guts, determination and money.

It's a warm sunny start to the day, and an azure sky peppered with scudding clouds tells me it will be a perfect British summer's day. Big mistake! The weather can be a bit of a lottery here, so you always need to keep an eye out for when the next rain shower may come.

I'm in Northamptonshire, the 'Rose of the Shires', and host county to the home of motor racing, Silverstone, for the Formula 1 Rolex British Grand Prix.

It all started with a call earlier in the year from Infiniti Motor Company's global communications boss in Hong Kong. 'Would you be interested in being our guest at the British Grand Prix?' Would I be *interested*? Er, yes! It's not hard to make decisions on once-in-a-lifetime offers like this one. Before the caller could change their mind, or realise they may have the wrong number, I confirmed – as nonchalantly as I could – in the affirmative.

A fistful of brightly coloured passes flap around my neck in the warm breeze. They're my ticket to gain access to the inner workings of a global spectacle, off limits to the throngs of 'ordinary' fans attending any Grand Prix. It's revealing how a tangle of important-looking lanyards can make you feel, well, important – even if you're not. Gate sentinels eye you suspiciously at first, but they step aside with a smile at the sight of those hologrammed permits, and suddenly the world's most exciting motor sport opens up like a Bluff oyster.

I am whisked through security and immediately see familiar faces. The tartan-kilted Sir Jackie Stewart – a childhood hero – who invites me for a selfie, David Coulthard, Ross Brawn and a veritable who's who of this most glamorous of gladiatorial sports. Then there are the 'A-listers' – apparently – some of whom turn



Richard Webb





LOOKING
AHEAD

THE 2018 BRITISH GRAND PRIX AT SILVERSTONE

Circuits have no real control over how interesting the championship is. If the entertainment is boring or there's no overtaking or the sound is muted, all these things have a big impact on attendance. But

Liberty Media, owner of Formula 1 Management, has poured resources into social media platforms – and it's paying off. Making the drivers, races, teams and cars more accessible to fans has brought the sport to the mobiles of the masses – and has resulted in a younger audience. While reporters like me have been granted behind-the-scenes access, with driver and team interviews, it's the almost 4 million Facebook, 3.5 million Twitter and 3.9 million Instagram followers who are helping to power the sport into one of the fastest growing in the motor racing series.

In a recent survey, the British event was in the top four iconic Formula 1 races that fans wanted to watch. More than 300 000 visitors flock to Silverstone over the race weekend. Steeped in history, this former World War 2 airfield has been at the heart of the British motor-sport scene for 70 years and home to the British Grand Prix more than 50 times. This, sadly, could all be coming to an end. At the time of writing, there was a question mark over whether Formula 1 cars would still be racing there after 2019. Liberty Media is keen to keep a British race on the F1 calendar, but they may choose a street race in London to fulfil their vision for events in destination cities. This would leave Silverstone – the host of the first ever World Championship race in 1950 – out in the cold.

For now, though, plans are well advanced for promoting the 2018 Grand Prix, which coincides with the circuit's 70th anniversary.

to look at me, the latest entrant into the VIP suite. Eyeing me quizzically, they realise I am not one of them, so they return to their far more entertaining champagne and caviar canapé fest to continue being fabulous.

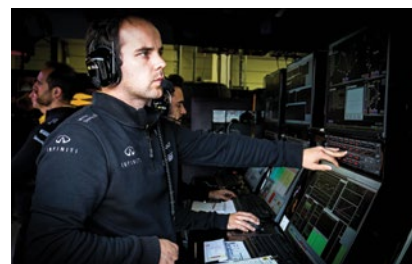
But I am here to witness an incredible sporting showcase, which includes watching the engineers finish building the cars and plan for the race. Fridays are practice days but the biggest buzz is usually the Saturday qualifying session because there are important decisions to make for the next day's race.

Behind each F1 driver, there are more than 1 000 people prepared to push the limits in their race to the podium, but there is a quiet and calm atmosphere that belies the mid-season F1 hustle. My host for the day is Stefan Weinmann, Infiniti's global communications maestro. I start by asking him why they are involved in F1.

'We're in pursuit of the ultimate racing performance. By advancing racing hybrid technology, we're bringing the latest innovation to the track. The technology in F1 is what inspires our performance on the road. You must be competitive to be relevant,' says Weinmann. Earlier in the year, I had driven the Infiniti Q70, with its widely acclaimed 3.5-litre hybrid engine. It is the world's fastest accelerating full-hybrid car, so this investment is paying off where it counts – with consumers.

Our conversation is interrupted as a team driver becomes available for a chat. Without fanfare, I'm introduced to Nico Hülkenberg, who was soon to start his qualifying lap. His reputation as the 'king of chill-out' seems palpable, despite the pressures. I know he is an old hand at Silverstone and ask for his thoughts on the circuit. 'Corner combinations like Maggots, Becketts and Chapel are simply awesome. You must build up your neck muscles before Silverstone because of the high G-force... Silverstone is a truly historic race on the calendar, so you get a feel for the origins of racing there,' he enthuses.

I know that the cornering speeds of the cars at Silverstone are outrageously fast, with one corner taken at 290km/h. What does he think of that? 'It is a little bit crazy, you know, but super-fast and very cool,' he smiles. 'Super-fast and very cool,' I nod in response, as if it were a vital piece of



information that I just had to repeat.

Within the hour, it turns out to be more of a prophecy. He takes Renault's best qualifying and finish of the season, but is pipped by Daniel Ricciardo's charging Red Bull for fifth on the grid. Still, sixth is a fine result for the Saturday qualifiers. And then the rain comes.

On my pit walkabout, I ask team mechanics what it is like when their cars come in after an incident. 'It's every mechanic's nightmare. I don't like to see our car come back in bits and pieces but it does happen. That's racing and you have to live with it,' says Jonny Goodenough, the number-two mechanic at Renault. 'Everything is a contest,' he smiles.

On Sunday – race day – it seems that Lewis Hamilton can do no wrong. Buoyed by the British crowd, he takes the top spot on the podium of his home race on his way to becoming world champion for the fourth time. The enigmatic Hülkenberg manages a credible sixth in the race and 10th in the championship in 2017.

But he's running out of time, even though he's achieved everything Renault expected of him last year. His team mate, Carlos Sainz, will be breathing down his neck again this year, and in a sport where winning is an addiction, it's a paring to watch closely.

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