

## Chapter 1

# Just the Formula One Facts

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding what Formula One is
- ▶ Discovering who the most important people in the sport are
- ▶ Getting a glimpse at a Formula One car
- ▶ Touring the Formula One tracks
- ▶ Recognising the sport's business side
- ▶ A calendar of events

**F**ormula One racing is, as its name suggests, the pinnacle of motor racing around the world. Small children don't dream about growing up to race in lesser series – above all else, they want to be a winning Formula One driver.

These days, the sport is a truly global circus. At almost every race on the calendar, more than 120,000 spectators cram into the grandstands and spectator banking, all vying for a view of the millionaire superstar drivers. At that same time, in 150 countries worldwide, more than 300 million people tune in to watch the fight for glory in the comfort of their front rooms.

It is this sort of global following that has attracted huge sponsorship and left television stations around the world falling all over themselves to broadcast the races. The huge marketing drives put on by the sponsors have whipped up even more interest in the sport. Nowadays, only the Olympic Games and the football World Cup can boast the kind of viewership, backing, and interest that Formula One has – and those events only take place every four years.

## *Formula One: A Grand and Global Sport*

Part of Formula One's mass appeal is that it is truly a global sport. Not only do the best drivers from many countries fight for glory on the track, but they also use the best cars and the best engines from around the world. A case in point: Spaniard Fernando Alonso drives for the French team Renault under

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Italian team boss Flavio Briatore, even though the cars are designed and built in a factory in Britain. Wow!

The global appeal increases further because, every season, the sport travels all over the world to unique tracks, each of which provides different challenges. Formula One really is like a travelling circus, as the cars, teams, and drivers pop up in Australia one week, a fortnight later arrive for a race in Malaysia, and then head to Brazil for another race two weeks after that.

The fans come from around the world, too. At any given race, you can find not only the local fans, but also others from around the world who have travelled to the event. A quick look around the grandstands at Formula One events inevitably shows a host of different nation's flags.

This mass appeal has been the story of the sport since the official Formula One world championship began in 1950. Before then, although Formula One races took place, there was no officially sanctioned fight for the world title.

### *Drivers and Other Important People*

Like most hugely successful sports, Formula One is jammed pack full with superstar names. Just like David Beckham in soccer or Tiger Woods in golf, the big name drivers in Formula One have millions of fans around the world worshipping their every move and hoping that their man can triumph each time out.

But the drivers aren't the only big names in Formula One. Many of the team bosses are personalities in themselves. Some – like Renault boss Flavio Briatore – are almost as well known for their appearances in celebrity gossip columns as they are for the great work they've done for their teams.

But it is not just the drivers and team bosses who are famous – because even the bosses of the series have their own slice of fame. Bernie Ecclestone, who runs the commercial side of Formula One, is a well-known figure in most households and is well renowned for being one of the richest men in Britain. Max Mosley, president of motor racing's governing body, the FIA, is also widely known.

### *Drivers*

The drivers are, without doubt, the central focus for almost everyone in Formula One. Without the drivers there'd be no racing, and without the great battles, the psychological wars, and the fact that a few of the drivers dislike

one another, there'd be no interest in following each twist and turn of a Formula One racing season.

The best-paid drivers these days earn money that many of us can only dream about, but they definitely work hard for it. They not only have to take massive risks in driving Formula One cars at 200 mph, but they also have to work with the team to get the last tenths of a second out of the car, deal with the media, and attend promotional events for their sponsors. (You can find detailed information about the life of a Formula One driver in Chapter 7.)

For some drivers, the stress of being a successful Formula One star proves too much; they turn their back on the sport and find something a little bit more relaxing to do. For those who can cope with all the pressures and risks – and become the very best by regularly winning races – the rewards can be mighty.

Although the money, attention, and the thrill of driving fast cars are ample rewards for being a good Formula One driver, nothing is better than actually winning. Some aces claim that winning gives them the best rush of excitement they have ever experienced in their lives – but you can make up your own mind by looking at Chapter 11, which explains what happens after a win and how winning a race doesn't signal the end of the driver's day.

## *Team bosses*

There's a saying that behind every great man lies a great woman. In Formula One that saying still applies, but with a slight rephrasing: Behind every great driver lies a really great team. The team makes sure that the drivers have the right machinery running in the right way. Each driver knows that, without these machines, he wouldn't be able to get anywhere. Regular Formula One racing driver David Coulthard once famously remarked that he would look pretty stupid sitting on the grid with his bum on the floor and no car around him.

The leader of the team – the man who pulls the resources and personnel together – is the team boss. There is no perfect job description that covers every team boss in the pit lane because they all have unique ways of running their teams. BAR boss David Richards has been hired by his team's shareholders to run the outfit, while Minardi boss Paul Stoddart owns 100 per cent of the shares in his team. Others have some share in the business.

Although a driver can achieve race victories very quickly in the sport, especially if he's signed to a leading team in his first few years of Formula One, a team boss requires many, many years to turn an outfit into one of the best, a task that requires that he do the following:

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- ✓ **Recruit the best staff:** If a team is successful then it is obvious that the best staff in the pit lane will want to come to you. Every front-running team in Formula One has the best designers, the best mechanics and the best engineers. The fight for glory is so intense though, that staff often move around – tempted by big money offers – and teams often go through phases of incredible success followed by periods of lacklustre form.
- ✓ **Buy the latest computer technology:** Formula One is about high technology, which is why many experts from the aerospace and computer industries have found employment in the sport. Nowadays, entire cars are put together on computer screens and the kind of technology often only used by the military is brought into action. Teams can no longer afford the process of trial and error when it comes to building their new car or improving their current one. Tests must be carried out employing state of the art high-tech systems.
- ✓ **Build a car that can take on the very best in the field:** No matter how good your staff, or how expensive your computers, a Formula One team is always judged by the speed of their car. There is so little difference between all the cars in the field that the fight for glory is intense – and that is why teams seek out the tiniest advantages in every area of their car. Rules and regulations can be changed, handing certain teams an advantage, and when new technology is found to improve speed teams try and keep what they are doing a secret for as long as possible.
- ✓ **Find a way to pay for all of preceding:** This is no easy task. In fact, it's why modern team bosses have to be as good at attracting sponsorship and business backing as they are at running racing cars.

The huge prizes for success in Formula One, which include the prospect of earning millions of pounds in extra sponsorship backing or television rights money, mean that team bosses also have to deal with an incredible amount of politics within the sport. There are often arguments revolving around money, the changing of rules and even the threat of protests against rival teams. There are agreements in place to make sure there is no foul play – and rule books to be followed (or to try and get around) in a bid to make Formula One an even contest.

To find out more on the responsibilities of team bosses, head to Chapter 6. If you're interested in the rules teams have to abide by, go to Chapter 4.

### *The Top Cats: Ecclestone and Mosley*

But the sport's leaders are not just restricted to those who run the race teams. There is Max Mosley, the president of motor racing's governing body, the FIA, who looks after regulating Formula One. And then there's the sport supremo Bernie Ecclestone, who has helped Formula One evolve from a

sport that not many knew about in the 1970s to one that's beamed into almost every household in the world today. Eccelstone's exploitation of Formula One's commercial rights has paid dividends for everyone. It's also made him one of Britain's richest men.

## *Rockets on Wheels: The Cars They Drive*

When you ask people what a racing car looks like, a lot of them describe a souped-up road car, with a big engine, massive tyres, and a really good paint scheme. Some of them may even imagine that the doors are sealed shut to increase safety when out on the track.

A Formula One car, however, is a very different beast to anything else you see on the road. It is the ultimate prototype machine, featuring design ideas, technology, and materials that many people associate more with a modern day fighter jet than with an automobile.

Because they aren't required to be street legal, Formula One cars have evolved differently than road cars. Their design has been centred on the quest for speed rather than comfort, and they are almost literally rockets on wheels.

### *Key elements in the design*

Following are some of the elements and characteristics that make up a Formula One car and give it a completely different appearance to other types of racing cars (see Figure 1-1):

- ✓ **Open wheels:** Unlike the road car sitting in your garage, one of the most obvious elements of a Formula One car is that its wheels aren't covered. In this way, Formula One cars are similar to the US—based Champ Cars and the cars in the Indy Racing League.
- ✓ **Central cockpit:** Formula One design teams don't worry about the comfort of passengers – because they don't have to. Formula One cars have room for only one driver. The cockpit is mounted in the dead centre of the car, which is vital for a car's centre of gravity.
- ✓ **Agile and lightweight:** Believe it or not, a Formula One car weighs a fraction of what a road car weighs. The use of high-tech materials, including carbon fibre, has made modern Formula One cars super-lightweight and, therefore, very fast.
- ✓ **Lack of bumpers:** Formula One is a no-contact sport, which is why you won't find any safety bumpers at the front or rear of the car to fend off the attention of other cars. Instead of bumpers, you find aerodynamic wings.

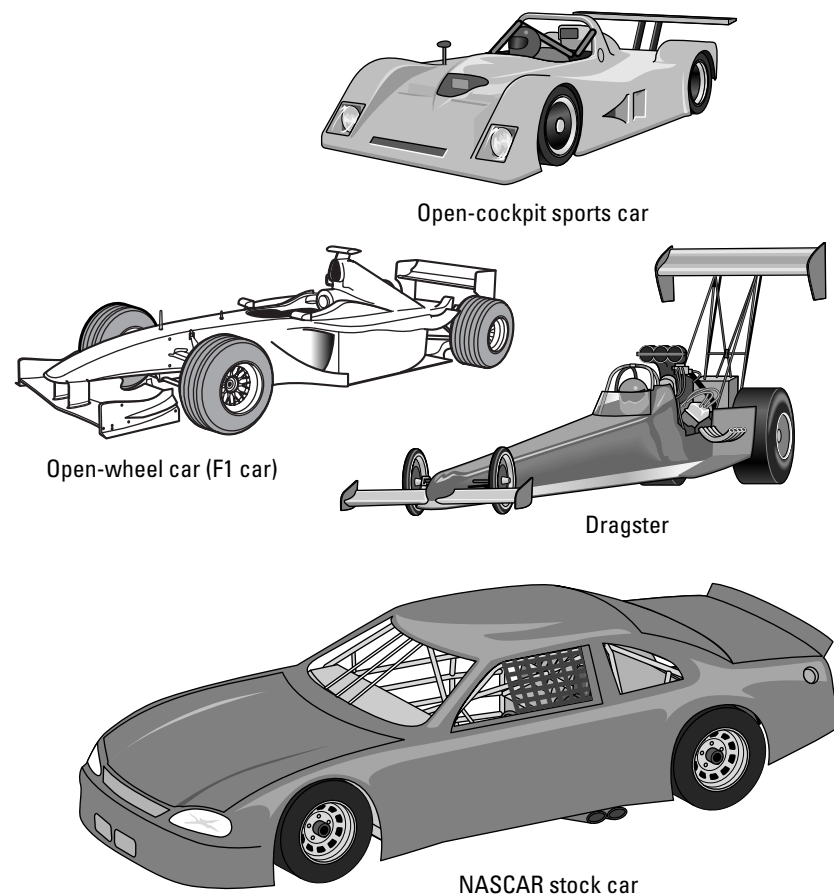
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✓ **Aerodynamic wings:** The front and rear wings of the Formula One car, which are designed to push the car down onto the ground, are very exposed – which they have to be if the car is going to be quick. (They also provide perfect billboards for sponsors.) These wings are the result of months of research in high-tech wind tunnels.

In general terms, a Formula One car is the ultimate single-seater, open-wheel, racing car. You can find similar looking machinery in Champ Cars, the Indy Racing League, Formula 3000, and Formula Three. But while these other cars look the same as Formula One cars, none of them is as fast over a single lap as a Formula One car is – even though some cars, like top-level dragsters, can accelerate faster and reach higher top speeds for a short period of time.

To find out more about what defines a Formula One car and what is underneath the bodywork, take a look at Chapter 5.



**Figure 1-1:**  
Formula  
One cars  
look very  
different  
to other  
racing cars.

## *Prepping the car for maximum performance*

At this top level of motor racing, each team *must* use its equipment to the absolute maximum. If the car has just one weak area, all the rival teams will do their best to exploit this weakness for their own advantage and the team is likely to suffer. The cars are made ready for race performances in three ways:

- ✓ **Off-season testing:** The intense competition that exists in Formula One racing is the reason that Formula One teams conduct months of testing each winter to hone and perfect their cars. In these tests, teams and drivers will evaluate new tyres, new car parts and maybe even new design philosophies in a controlled environment where there is no pressure to go for outright lap times. Race meetings have rigidly structured programmes that the teams run through to ensure that their car is absolutely perfect for the race.
- ✓ **Pre-race testing:** Teams get to shake down their cars in the week before a race and they can use this time to evaluate new parts or new electronic systems. Some teams also get an extra two hours of testing on Friday morning to try out new components. To understand just how a team gets from turning up at a track on the Thursday before a race to actually being in a position to triumph in the race on Sunday, take a look at Chapter 8.
- ✓ **Adjustments during the race:** When the race is underway, teams can't just decide to sit in the grandstand and see what their driver can do. Strategy decisions must be made, radio advice must be given to the driver, and vital refuelling pit stops must be attended to. For more on how these activities affect the race's outcome, see Chapters 9 and 10.

## *Up and Down and All Around: The Tracks*

Every race provides a new challenge for the teams and drivers – and that is because each track on the calendar is unique. Circuit designs have evolved dramatically over the years although Formula One has traditionally not taken place on ovals – even if the Indianapolis 500 was part of the World Championship from 1950 to 1960.

Some venues have been on the calendar since the 1950s, like Silverstone and Monza, with their track designs and facilities being upgraded over the years, whereas new venues have appeared recently – like Malaysia and Melbourne. Every track has different characteristics, with different top speeds, unique corners and very different layouts.

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### *The Right Stuff for Business*

Formula One is not a sport for those without money. It is not like football, where you and your mates can buy a ball, use some jumpers for goalposts and then play to your heart's content for hour after hour.

No, Formula One eats money. The massive development costs, the use of space-age technology, plus the expertise required to create a winning car, means that a single lap of a track effectively costs more than £3,000. And before you start digging into your savings thinking you could afford a few laps – the insurance is probably many times that again.

With such a high cost, only the very best teams in the world are ever successful in Formula One. In the old days, a rich team owner was able to fund a season himself; cars and engines lasted the whole season and drivers' wages weren't that much. But nowadays, cars and engines are modified for every race, and drivers' salaries cost many, many millions of pounds.

Luckily, the growing expense of the sport has been matched by the huge following it has around the world, which means sponsors are only too willing to pay teams a lot of money in order to get their logos onto the sides of cars.

Without sponsors and the money they bring to the sport, Formula One as we know it wouldn't exist. In fact, a team's success on the track very much depends on how well it can attract sponsors off it. It is no wonder that modern day Formula One teams employ sponsorship and advertising experts to help them find this much needed money.

#### **A "rich man's playground"**

In the early 1900s, Formula One racing was purely the domain of rich gentlemen who found no better way to spend their money than to go racing at weekends. This scenario didn't change for several decades, although teams began to realise that they could actually pay drivers for their talent, not just because they were paying for the racing seat.

The growth of sponsorship in the 1960s, allied to greater media and public awareness of sport,

helped lift Formula One until it really exploded in popularity in the 1980s – thanks to widespread television coverage. Now there is almost no holding it back.

For more details on the incredible popularity of the sport and its growth from a "rich man's playground" to what it is today, see Chapter 2.



Of course, sponsors don't just hand over the money in exchange for a few well-placed stickers on the car. To make the most of every pound they spend, the sponsors create huge marketing campaigns, schedule big promotional events, and produce television adverts and billboard signs, all taking advantage of their relationship as a Formula One sponsor. So important and time-consuming are these sponsor-driven events that some say Formula One is a sport between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. on a Sunday and a business every other minute. Head to Chapter 3 to find out more about the business side of Grand Prix racing.

## *Getting the Most Out of Formula One*

If you enjoy watching Formula One races, then the sport can be absolutely magical. It takes place at weekends, when most people are free – free to sit in front of their television sets to enjoy the spectacle in the comfort of their own homes or free to travel to the event itself and enjoy the spectacle in person. Whether you're watching from your front room or the grandstands, you'll discover that each race is guaranteed to throw up enough surprises, excitement, and intrigue to keep you glued to the edge of your seat right up to the fall of the chequered flag.



Finding out about different tracks in each country can be a bit of a daunting prospect – especially when you consider that 16 or 17 races usually appear on the calendar each year. If you're thinking about travelling to a race, head to Chapters 12 and 13, which will be a huge help. They tell you all you need to know about how Formula One decides where to go each season, as well as providing pointers on how to actually get there yourself.

## *Getting the lowdown*

Formula One is one of the world's most exciting and most interesting sports. It can provide you with a lifetime of enjoyment if you make the effort to understand a little bit about it.

Although a few decades ago it was almost impossible to find out the latest goings on at the races – television did not cover it, newspapers were not really interested in it, and the Internet was not invented. Nowadays you're hard pressed not to suffer something of an information overload. You can find hundreds of Web sites that give the latest Formula One news, numerous television programmes that analyse the races and profile the stars, and newspapers that cover the latest gossip amongst the Formula One fraternity. Finding your way through this minefield of information can be a bit intimidating unless you take some advice from the experts. For help go to Chapter 17 where you get tips on finding the information you want.

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