

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Can Aston Martin really challenge Mercedes and Ferrari?

One race down, 22 to go. Red Bull were rampant in Bahrain, securing the 1-2. However, just behind them, the battle to be best of the rest is hotting up. Do Ferrari and Mercedes have a new challenger in Aston Martin and Fernando Alonso. This is the Sky Sports F1 podcast.

Hello, everyone. I hope you're well. Welcome to this week's podcast. We have some new debut guests on the podcast this week. Alongside me, a man who needs no introduction, Simon Lazenby, F1 presenter, F1 analyst, Naomi Schiff, and returning to the pod, our analyst, Karine Chandog. Hello, all.

Hi.

Hello, Matt.

Hello, Matt.

Hello, hello, hello.

Nice to see your hair game is as strong as an episode one, still holding on to that second best position in the past.

My Holkenberg, just one or two steps away. Look, Naomi and Simon, you were in Bahrain. Simon, start with you. How was it? How many Bahrain, how many first races have you done there with Sky F1? What, 11?

Yeah. No, I think this is 12. Now, I think this is the 12th one. So first year was 2012.

So if you, if it goes inclusive, then yeah, 12. So yeah, it's good. Back in the desert with, with gnomes and Nico and the whole gang. Sadly, Karine wasn't there, but I can't wait to see him in Saudi Arabia. That will be, that will be an absolute pleasure.

I'll give you a big cuddle when I see you.

I've heard you did some exploratory stuff on the Formula E the other day in terms of kebabs. So what, yeah, I'm looking forward to coming, getting a bit of those going down in Jeddah, all over my shoes. I look forward to that.

Sorry, wait, hold on. I didn't ask the question. Yeah, Bahrain was good, Matt. It was great. It was, you know, look, let's face it, Red Bull dominant. It's kind of like from the neutral's perspective, it's going to be, we're just hoping that somebody can take the fight to them. But Fernando Boyd is all, didn't he, gnomes?

He did, he did. I mean, this weekend was a bit of a rollercoaster. I'm sure we're going to get into it. But just to share some thoughts as well on the first race of the season, this is not my 12th, only my second with Sky. So still as exciting as it was last year, I guess last year was slightly more, I'd like to say, you know, we weren't exactly sure what was going to happen. Brand new regulations last year. So there was a lot more things up in the air wondering what would happen this year. Obviously the cars are just an evolution of last year's cars, but still some teams took us by surprise. So that's been really great to see. And yeah, this weekend was very exciting. I will say Simon did spill kebab all over his shoes in Bahrain as well. So he's not going to have to wait until I didn't put out standard.

Well, those white ones, because I saw him rocking some trendy, you know, early 20 year old white ones in a very just a bit of a Friday, those are the ones.

New season, new threads, I think is probably the thing.

Karin, where did you watch the race?

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I was at home. My wife has gone off across the pond. So I was at home with two children under the age of four. So unfortunately, I didn't get to watch any of Simon and Naomi's wonderful words of wisdom. But I did manage to turn it on for the formation lap and watch Crofty do his thing as he does. But yeah, no, I was I enjoyed watching the weekend. Okay, do you jump and scream watching Formula One? Or are you a lot more kind of? No, my son was shouting a lot because he's a big color science fan. And but I was mainly saying things like stop spilling the popcorn or don't kick your brother and things like that.

Different way of watching.

Sometimes as Simon knows.

All right, so much to get into today. Thank you very much for all your responses to our question, our big question for this week's podcast. Alonso and Aston Martin, are they the new challenger to Mercedes and Ferrari? Lots to unpack. Fernando said, after his third place on Sunday, that it was too good to be true. So the big question, Naomi, are Aston Martin and Fernando Alonso here to stay?

I certainly believe that they are. I can't see why they wouldn't be. Obviously, after a couple of races, we'll have a little bit more of an idea of how they fare on different types of tracks. But, you know, all throughout testing and all throughout this weekend, they were right there. Not just Fernando Alonso, but Lance as well, even though he missed out on all of testing with all his injuries, despite the pain that he was in, he was still, you know, able to be in the mix with the top three teams. And I think that has a lot to say about where that car is and how strong it really is. You could see it really come alive in the race. We knew that they had some pace, but throughout the race, they kind of, you know, manage their tires even better than Ferrari and Mercedes. And that's why they were able to take the battle to them. So I think they've got a lot of potential in that car. And if we have a development race alongside the race on track, as we did last season, then I think they'll just be able to keep up and make sure that they get even closer potentially to Red Bull.

It's quite frightening when you think it's a customer car, isn't it? It's a customer team effectively beating the works team. And I think that's one of the things that got Toto so much on Sunday and saying it's the worst, you know, the worst day of his racing career and all that is the fact that, yes, he went over, he's good friends with Lawrence Stroll. And so congratulated him on beating them purely on pace. But for them to just abandon the concept, we thought it might take until Imola before they abandoned it, but they threw it away after qualifying. It felt like he just was conceding defeat early and say, look, I've had enough of this. We've got to move on. I don't know what you thought, Karun, but it was, I thought it was really, really early and kind of a statement from Toto, say, I've just run out of patience.

I think they have to though, they have to make a decision now. And I go back to last year, you know, it's all very well for people like Perez, the press conference to be saying, oh, it's a copycat of our last year's RBAD, there's three Bulls on the podium and, you know, everyone making these statements. The reality is last year, they started the year Aston Martin with a car that wasn't very good. They put their ego aside. They were willing

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to throw away the time and effort they'd invested in that and ultimately make the decision for Barcelona to produce a copycat Red Bull upset a lot of people at Red Bull last year. But it meant that they kind of wrote off a big chunk of last season while they had to understand. When you go off and just copy something, it doesn't mean you fully understand it. We've seen that with people like Haas before where they've had a copycat Ferrari but couldn't set it up. So I think Red Bull were annoyed by it and they're still annoyed by it, but Aston spent last year understanding the philosophy, then they've improved on it and they produce this car, which is based on already a strong package from last year. And if I look at the timeline, it's like building a block of apartments. Think of a rule cycle of four years as a four-tier apartment block. Mercedes have got to think about, listen, do we throw away, do we knock down the first two years that we've built and build three tiers in the same time that everyone else is going to build just the last year for the next year? And that decision will have to be made now because the architecture and the layout and the concept of the car will get signed off by April for all of the teams. So where are we now? 7th of March, in the next couple of races, they have to make the decision of do they abandon this concept and go with a whole new plan for next year. So I think Total is right to feel tense and frustrated because clearly there's a design team there that's told him, we're going to stick with this concept. It's going to work. We've understood what went wrong last year. Let's make it happen. And Simon's absolutely made the point there that last year, they were saying to us, won't they say that they thought, oh, you know, we've got all this potential, it's untapped, all this potential. Hang on. I think that's why he's more annoyed this year than he was last year.

The rear of that car, the rear of the Aston Martin is effectively a Mercedes, isn't it? So you look at the engine, the gearbox, the hydraulics, the rear suspension is exactly the same as the Mercedes and the Aston Martin are exactly the same in that area. So effectively, they know that it can work with a roughly Red Bull concept. What's come out of Dan Fellows' mind, because it has come out of his mind, and Crofty and I went to see him on Saturday night and he was talking about the fact that it was just, you can't unsee what he saw. There's chief aerodynamicist at Red Bull.

I'll tell you also, I mean, the other thing is that they also rent the wind tunnel, don't they, from Mercedes. So, you know, you can't really go to the old, our wind tunnel belt is slipping a bit and we're getting some correlation issues, which other teams have had, because clearly the Mercedes tunnel is fine.

I think perhaps this can be summed up as well. Perhaps the excitement this weekend, know me, in the fact that we now have someone else coming to the party. I mean, Aaron on Twitter, he replied to our, replied to our message, said, it's great to see another team fighting for a change and it's good to see Alonso back on the podium. I guess that ultimately is why everyone is getting so excited about this.

Totally. I mean, I think over the winter, I can say at least for myself, I don't know about you guys, that my hopes over the winter was that we would have a three-way battle at the front of the grid. And in my mind, that was Red Bull, Ferrari and Mercedes, because they're just our usual suspects. And I guess you can say Aston Martin have totally thrown a spanner in the works. I didn't see it coming. I don't know if you guys did, but it was definitely

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exciting to see, you know, new faces at the front, not necessarily new and Fernandez obviously been there before, but in recent times, we haven't seen him or Lance being really involved in the mix like that. So just to have a new team and also not just from the driver's perspective, but from the rest of the ecosystem at Aston Martin, seeing new faces, speaking to new people, it's exciting for us. And I'm sure that it's exciting for the viewers at home as well.

Yeah. Let's cast our mind back to silly season last summer when Alonso signed for Aston Martin. He obviously saw something in that team. I mean, Simon, just try and put us back in that moment at the beginning of August when he signed. And there were quite a few raised eyebrows, weren't there, when he actually made that decision?

Yeah, because I mean, it was nowhere near it, was it? I mean, it was miles off where they are this year. If you look at the gap, well, I think the difference between what happened in qualifying last year in Bahrain and what happened in qualifying this year in Bahrain for Aston Martin, they are by a long way that the biggest gain is it's something like 2.4 seconds is the difference between last year and this year. And as Karun was talking about just a little bit earlier, the fact was that it was this beast spec car that came in around May time of last year. And then you got the influence of this dream team of designers that Lawrence has put together. So it's not just Dan Fallows, right? He'd come across from Red Bull. You had Eric Blondin, I think we pronounce it Blondin. You're the deputy tech director. I mean, he was chief aero guy at Mercedes for five years up until the middle of last year. It's Luca Fobato as well, who was ex-Alfa Romeo. And when we were talking to Dan Fallows on Saturday night, he was saying like, it's not just me, it's lots of things, it's lots of different people coming across into creating this kind of super group that Lawrence wanted to put together. And I think it was that and the overall vision that Fernando was talking about that attracted him there. Probably, you know, 15 million quid as well might have swung it in his favor and a longer contract because that was the point. He wanted to go there and he wanted to continue racing for a while. And wow, what a decision it looks like now.

And what I mean, this is the thing, right? You know, that whole process could have been avoided by Alpine. If they were dragging it out because they didn't, they were so concerned that in two years time, he'd be too old that they dragged the whole thing out. And they didn't want to offer him a two year deal upfront, which is what he wanted. And you know, listen, he's come out the big winner, hasn't he? Out of that entire saga, we're all Oscars in a McLaren, the back row of the grid, on nearly the back row. And then Alpine had Casley on the back row of the grid. Okay, he came through the race, but Fernando's the big winner for a change. I mean, how many times has he gone it wrong?

Totally, yeah. I mean, I wonder if it's worth just going through that for people and just reminding everyone of his journey. You know, he obviously won his two championships with Renault, but then all of those decisions, Karun, since have been, they haven't led to championships. Let's put it like that.

Yeah, I think there's there's a few key ones, right? Like, I think the fallout with Lewis in 2007, you know, where they fell out so spectacularly there, and basically gifted Kimmy that title, you know, took him away from McLaren. And McLaren then Lewis won the

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championship in 2008. So that's two years ago, Fernando shoulda woulda coulda. And I think Ferrari as well, when he when he left Ferrari to go to McLaren Honda. Okay, at the time, Ferrari were pretty miserable in 2014, the first year of the hybrid. But it came good, wasn't it? And, you know, I think I still believe Fernando would have won the championship in 2018 at Ferrari that year. He, you know, he was very, very good and consistent and he could have delivered. So yeah, but fair play. It's come good for him. And and I mean, thank God for it, wasn't it? That was was the most exciting bit of the Grand Prix. So thank God for Fernando. No, me, I want to I want to ask you about Fernando the driver. And look, I'm going to put you on track now. And I'm going to say Fernando is coming in your mirrors, like he did to science, like he did to Hamilton at the Grand Prix that the weekend just gone. What do you what's going through your head? What are you thinking? It's funny, because I think that's a very good way to put it. Because when you're on track, it's a lot about demeanor and body language. And there are some drivers that you know you'll have a clean battle with. There's some drivers you know you need to worry about. There's some drivers you know you need to be scared of. And I think Fernando is definitely one of those drivers that you have to give a lot of respect to. And you know that he's kind of the guy you wouldn't want to play chess with because he's always three steps ahead. And that's just in everything he's thinking about when he's in the car. But he knows where to put his car. He knows exactly where to make the moves. He knows exactly how to defend. I mean, to be fair, he spent over two decades in the sport. So he's collected an insane amount of experience, which obviously is the most important thing. Seat time trumps everything else. But you know, he's also just a very special driver. And I think they're every now and again, you get these kinds of drivers in all sorts of categories that just really stand out. And Fernando is most certainly one of those. So I just like to say I wouldn't want to see Fernando coming up in my in my mirrors.

Definitely not. And Simon, what about I mean, Naomi mentioned it there, we know with almost two decades of experience in Formula One, he's not only bringing him himself as a driver, but he's bringing his credentials as a someone who knows Formula One cars really well, he can provide great feedback to engineers and that whole process can be more streamlined. Yeah, I mean, there's no one better. We're talking about Fernando being a happy driver when he's got a good car. But I also think he, you know, he's just he's always effective whatever he does, he he will drag the best his level best out of that car. You know what you're going to get. I still think if you shoved everybody in equal machinery, I don't know what you think, Naomi, Karuna on this one. But I can't see him being far off Lewis or far off Max Verstappen. I think I think Max might might just take that. I think he's pound for pound the best driver on the grid. But I think Fernando has been operating at that level for 20 years, you know, he's he's won a couple of more. He's won he's won the World Endurance Championship. He's won two titles. You know, he's been around the sport since 2001. You know what you're going to get with him. I've always liked I've always liked the fact he kind of relishes being the underdog too. He's had loads of underdog drives. I think in our very first year doing this, I think in Valencia, I think I remember him. Like, yes, he had a bit of luck, but he raced from something like 11th to take

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a win. He's just he's just cool. And he just gets it. And he knows exactly how to get the best out of the car. 100%. And I think that's exactly what we want to see. And when you say, you know, if they all had equal equipment, who would come out on top? Obviously, the equipment is not exactly the same between the teams we're talking about and the drivers we're talking about. But this is the battle we want to see who's going to outsmart who on track. Max, as you say, is obviously another one of those drivers that's just, you know, a step up. So is Lewis. But I don't know, I as much as I've grown up always looking up to Lewis and as much as I grew up on carting circuits with Max, knowing that Max would win everything. I think Fernando might just trump them in the sense that he's so much more mature. He's been in it for so, so, so long. I think even last year, we could see it in the LP in that there were moments that he was just extracting the absolute maximum out of that car. And in an on track battle, he always gets the one up somehow. He's just always knows exactly where to put his car. So yeah, I mean, in my ideal world, I'd love to see them all in one team and see, you know, who comes up on top, because there's a few drivers who I would say I'm the kind of driver who needs a car around me that really works like great, great setup. I need it. I need a good car, a good setup. I need the car to be doing what I want to do for me to have confidence in it. But there's some drivers who could drive a wheelbarrow faster on the track. And those three are definitely those types of drivers. So let's give them some wheelbarrow. And let's see who can make a sky F1 feature if I've ever heard one for Silverstone.

You tell me, I tell you what, the other thing is, to your point there, Nomi, about this weekend and exactly about what kind of summed up Fernando Alonso is that they didn't actually, the Aston Martins have the straight line speed of the Ferrari, the Red Bull, even the Mercedes. So he didn't get his overtaking done where you'd expect it to be sort of turn one, turn four. I think he was kind of, he said he had to get creative and he did it like turn 10, 11. And that was, I think, just racecraft and the guy that just knows as you, as you just said, they had to position the car.

Karun, what about the fact that I think he just had a lot of fun on Sunday? You know, that was evident, I think, in the team radio calls. It was evident with the smile on his face afterwards when he spoke to Nat. Is that part of it? He's just enjoying himself. Yeah, but this is a guy who just loves racing. He loves driving. There's days off. He's at his own go-kart track driving around with the 15-year-old kids in his academy. That's what he gets a buzz out of day in, day out. You know, Fernando's not someone who goes home to his wife and kids and has a quiet life in Switzerland. This is a guy who thrives on being in a race car or a car or whatever day in, day out. And I think he was part relief. I think because, you know, when you go into a new team, into a new season and a new challenge, you don't fully know how it's going to play out till the first Grand Prix. So I imagine there was some element of relief that actually all of that potential is true and it's all played out. And the other part is that, you know, as you say, the joy of success because he had a brilliant race.

Penny for the thought, Simon of Sebastian Vettel, leaving Aston Martin last year.

Well, I mean, if you're a Sebastian Vettel, you're thinking, what on earth have I done? What on earth have I done? I mean, he'll be sick, man. Probably thinking to himself,

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that could have been me. But I think he was just, I don't know, maybe I got the impression that from Lawrence's perspective too, if someone like Fernando comes onto the open market, you're just going to, you just want to snap him up there. You're just, you're just going to go for him. And I think I, it's all sweetness and right now, and he's saying all the right things. But Fernando is brilliant at that to start with. I just wonder if, you know, if you'll maintain that level of optimism as the season goes on, certainly if the car's right up there, it, yeah, happy Elon's, as I said, is a man who gets the job done. So they need to keep him sweet.

Yeah. Naomi, I was going to ask you about this in terms of the relationship between, between Lance and Fernando and how, you know, let's be honest, Lance's dad is paying the wages of Fernando. So how, if Fernando keeps beating Lance throughout the season, we don't obviously know that that's going to happen. But if he does, that's going to be quite an interesting one to watch, isn't it?

Importantly, if, if Lance brings the battle to, to Alonso, what will that look like? But I mean, I guess it's, it's very challenging. It's a situation that he's going to have to manage very well, because, you know, we've seen Fernando, we've heard him before on the radio, I've sat with other drivers on track. We saw it almost happen yesterday or not yesterday, sorry, two days ago now, when Lance accidentally, you know, just outbreaks himself and, and, and clipped the rear of Alonso. And he was on the radio constantly saying, I've been hit, I've been hit, I have a penalty been issued. And I think he didn't realize in that moment that it was Lance. He spent all weekend praising Lance. And I think that probably has something to do with the dynamic at the team. But it's going to be definitely one to watch out for because, you know, Lance is obviously a lot younger. It's only his seventh season versus, you know, Alonso's 23rd season in Formula One. I think he'll put his arm around him a little bit. I also believe, I don't know what you guys think that this might be the team where Fernando retires. So I think it's also about, you know, what legacy he wants to leave for himself, how he wants to be seen. I think he hasn't always had the best reputation in terms of how he works within a team. I guess his sort of quote unquote selfishness as a driver, which I personally think is something that all drivers need to have to some extent. But he obviously hasn't had a great reputation with that in the past. I think it's going to be something he's going to be quite conscious of in his last stint. But especially even more so now that, you know, his teammate's father owns the team, which is quite an awkward dynamic, I would say.

No, that when he came in Lawrence at the end of the first thing he said, it is, I love his draw the way the way that Lawrence speaks. And he goes, you know, I'm just proud of my son. You know, that was the first thing I mean, Alonso's got the podium, but it was a great story. He's broken his wrist. He admitted this to us further and a toe and he gets in and he does that. I think reputationally, this is the most important weekend of Lance's career because, you know, it just shows a lot about his character, which I think was doubted before, perhaps unfairly.

Yeah, for sure. And I think, you know, maybe sometimes he just doesn't come across extremely motivated. But I think this weekend he proved he proved that he was very motivated and that he was going to do everything it took to get back in the car, despite the condition that

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he was in. And from what he told us, he even shed a tear, you know, after that touch with Alonso, he obviously had quite a lot of lock on the steering and he shed a tear. That's how much pain he was in. So for him to do the entire race, because I was obviously the longest stint all weekend, and to finish sixth, you know, hats off, that's that's a big achievement. And I can understand why Daddy Stroll is very proud of him.

I've got a couple of tweets here. Just about I want to throw it forward really and just look at how Aston are going to evolve over the season. This is Hamish on Instagram after next two races at different circuits, it will be clear where Aston Martin stands. They made a huge step forward, go Fernando. So Karun, what what are your expectations in terms of because obviously, you know, we know Mercedes, we know Ferrari are going to be on the development

train, they're going to be wanting to get these cars up to scratch as quickly as possible throughout the season. Do Aston Martin also have that capability? And will they also be able to challenge going forward, you know, consistently across the season?

I'm more concerned for Mercedes, if I'm honest, out of the two teams you mentioned. I do think Ferrari, the circuit in Bahrain wasn't wasn't good for them as a track layout. You know, this is a circuit with very high rear tire wear. And they they had a car that was too biased for one lap, essentially there. And as soon as the tires start to wear, they get, you know, start to slide around. And I don't I don't fully buy the the sort of comments coming out of the team that they got the setup wrong, and they were as fast on the first stint and they just couldn't get the time because at the end of the day on the first stint, Max pulled away at an average of 0.68 per lap. So that's still nearly seven tenths of lap, which which is a hell of a lot. So but I think Jed, which is a less abrasive surface, a circuit which doesn't hurt the rear tires as much, will just bring the balance back towards Ferrari. I think Carlos in particular doesn't like a car which has an unstable rear end. And you could see how he just dropped away, didn't he? You know, at least Leclerc sort of went with Checo on the first stint. And Carlos just he was sort of 10, 12 seconds back. So I think they will be in better shape in Jed and Australia, two circuits where tire wear isn't anywhere close to as bad as this and same at Baku, right? You know, the long straights for the tires to cool down. So they'll be back in play for the next three. My concern for Ferrari is the fact that their reliability is already looking pretty shaky. You know, before the first race, they had to change the control electronic unit on Leclerc car, then the engine went pop for a reason I don't think has been publicly confirmed yet. So yeah, big concerns there. Mercedes just, you know, I'm surprised Toto has not been down to Simon's house and raided that booze cabinet behind him because they were all looking pretty depressed on Sunday. And I just think there's no easy answer. That's the problem.

Yeah, I agree with you. All dynasties fall though, don't they? And I think that's what's happened. I think Mercedes, when we get into that again, without getting into who they have lost over the last two or three years, and what they've got left having got the concept wrong and Red Bull getting it right, I don't think that's helped matters. You know, you know, you've lost James Vowles, you've lost Andy Cowell, you've lost James Allison, who's gone off to the kind of Ineos project. And then, you know, more than that, I mean, they

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lost like 15 engineers, didn't they, to the Red Bull Power Trains project. So I think they're it's there in a transitional phase. That's why that's what I reckon. I mean, I know Martin made the analogy that was it Ferrari was he said that Mercedes were a little bit like Liverpool, but Mercedes are definitely a team in transition. And I think, you know, you could probably liken that to Liverpool right now.

Naomi, what about the comments from Toto this weekend? I mean, we said at the top one of the worst days of racing he's ever had. He said on Saturday, I don't think that the package is going to be combative competitive eventually, that they need a radical change of the car. Like, this is race one. I mean, if he's saying this now, it's only going to get worse. No. And also things weren't really that bad. I mean, yes, they were very much off the pace, but that was that didn't come as a surprise throughout the weekend. We saw that that kind of would be the case. But I'm not sure why he felt that it was really the worst day ever. I'm pretty sure that they've had worse days. But I guess it might just be the fact that you know, when Niko and Lucy each other, that's just an example of where it could have been way worse. But I guess maybe for him, it was just really that coin drop moment where it was kind of confirmed that really they were still very much on the back foot and, you know, didn't really make much or any progress in the winters in the winter period. I guess that for them is probably what's so hard to digest at this point. I'm pretty sure they've got, I mean, Lewis is obviously, you know, he mentioned it in the exclusive with Simon, the lie detector test that he is here for his eighth title. He's waiting and he's going to stay for it. But for him to be in this position is not putting him in any sort of position to get that eighth title. And I'm sure that there's a lot of pressure internally from both drivers. But I guess even more so from Lewis, because he's not getting any younger. He's obviously got Fernando to look up to in terms of how far you can go. But, you know, the time is of the essence. And, you know, they spent an entire season struggling and being so, you know, unhappy with where they were at with the car. So to have had this whole winter period and to come back, you know, even potentially a step backwards from where they were at the last race last season, that I guess is what's so tough to accept. And as well as Simon said, especially when your customer team has managed to smash it. Lewis, he's not going to win the title this year, is he? I mean, the car's just not there. So if by some amazing turnaround achievement, he wins it, they come back next year. And that means, you know, they love to commit now. He will be the oldest person to win a world championship

since Jack Brabley. Where have you pulled that one from? Where have you pulled that one from, eh? If Fernando doesn't beat him to it though, if Fernando doesn't beat him to it. You've got, you've got, you've got.

What does that say? That's my wife, that's my wife, that's not mine. That's not mine. Jesus. What about, I mean, look, this is this is crazy talk now, but what about Fernando and Lewis at Aston Martin, at the, at that team together, going for a world title? Couldn't happen. It won't happen.

I don't think that'll happen because hang on a second. What do you, sorry, son, hang on, let's just go with the other car. Come on, why not? Come on, Baker. Why not? Lewis can't win it with Mercedes. He's desperate to win an eighth. He goes, Aston Martin, they've

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made such good, good progress. I'm going to go with them. Just saying. And you're going to, you're going to be the one to tell Lawrence to sack his son.

I think, I think there's going to be more, I think there's going to be more likely to go to Ferrari in that case. That's right. That is right. Yeah.

But I don't think that he's going to leave Mercedes to be there. I think he's very much a team player. He's also said that he wants to, you know, leave his legacy there and be a part of the team, just like Nicky was. So I don't see him leaving last minute after all these years with the team. Don't you know, not to Aston, but I do think, I wouldn't, I can't, how can you rule out a move to Ferrari if they, if they stay like this? I mean, he's so desperate, isn't he? He's so desperate for that eighth that, you know, if Ferrari did manage to stay on the coattails and they were the nearest to Red Bull, I mean, beginning of next year, he's not put his pen to paper yet. Has he on this contract? He was definitely waiting to see how this year's car fared. But I think that the relationship, the great relationship he has with the team and with Toto will endure. It's just, I don't think you can ever rule out a move to Ferrari for racing drivers, because it's their dream. And he said it, he said it before.

What about a move to Red Bull?

No, can't see it.

This is a speculation. I was hoping we'd get.

I'll tell you, I'll tell you who will be thinking about a move to Ferrari or Red Bull, though, is young Lando Norris, like looking at where they're at. And, you know, as much Simon, you know, we were talking about before the season about McLaren locking him in and Zach doing an amazing job of contracting him in for that four-year period. I do wonder, and I think if they're smart, they would have created some sort of exit clauses. You know, if, for example, McLaren don't finish in the top four of the Constructors Championship in two years in a row, is there an option for Lando to look elsewhere? Because outside of your, shall we say, traditional top three teams, you know, you've got Fernando and Lando, your two top drivers on the grid, aren't they? And the fact that he's fighting to even get a car into Q3, there's got to be a bit of frustration there, I mean, I mean, miserable weekend for McLaren. Awful, awful weekend. Finished plum last, six stops, topping up the pneumatic system, and then, you know, a failure for Fosca Piastrini in front of the Bahrain. He's at their second home, Grand Prix. Again, you know, you've got to wait, I think they've got a big upgrade coming in in Baku, isn't it? I think is there is their next big upgrade for McLaren. But James Key is going to be feeling a little bit of pressure. That team there at McLaren, because I just thought they were moving in the right direction. You know, Zach got the Alonso, the GP2 engine out the way, the changes came in, they got rid of Boullier, you know, bought in Seidel, Seidel's gone. I mean, it's, I think they've got, you know, I just saw a tweet out this morning for them saying back home with work to do, but boy, they've got some work to do, haven't they? Because that's just, yeah, I think the interesting thing is, you know, I remember speaking to someone at Red Bull in Brazil last year, and at the time they were saying how on a weekly basis, they are fighting not to lose people to Aston Martin and some going to Alpine, but they were really struggling to stop people going to Aston, but they weren't losing any people to McLaren.

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And I, you know, it's interesting, isn't it? You could just see how the, you know, they've had that group of people there for a period of time. But as you said, Simon, recently, you know, people like Seidel have gone, I think losing Pat Fry a few years ago was a bit of a loss as well. I really rate Pat, I think what he does in terms of just bringing a degree of calm around the team is brilliant. But yeah, you know, they need to have a think, don't they? Because if they've got the new wind tunnel coming, which is great as a tool, the tools are only as good as what you put in it, which is designed by people. So, you know, you kind of have to have that going hand in hand infrastructure along with a personnel. Okay, one thing I just want to talk about for this season as well is the cost cap and how the cost cap is going to influence development across the season. Because, you know, already if teams are looking at having to completely overhaul the car, that's going to obviously cost a lot of money. And within the cost cap, that's going to have certain parameters and not be possible. I mean, Simon, how do you think that's going to impact this year? Well, I mean, what we do know, the early evidence is certainly not affected verbal yet. So it's not come in yet. The reduction in their wind tunnel time, which is effectively 63% of Aston Martin's who are down in seventh, they've got 100% as it is per se. And then it's the 5% increments. I think time is going to tell on this one. And I think in terms of hopes for the season, we have to hope that it does start to influence or close the field up because the whole point of these regulations was that we were going to get a closer pack. I think as far as the midfield is concerned, that's already happening to some extent, it was great to see so many different teams in the mix for everything, kind of below Mercedes and Ferrari and Aston Martin, that race for fourth. But it's that top tier. So I think, as you know, the period after six months, effectively halfway through the season, it's reset, dependent on championship order, and maybe towards the back end, that's when it's going to kick in. And some of those might be fighting for races, might be able to get close to Red Bull. But I think that's one of the hopes that we're all clinging to is that from the neutral's perspective, it does play a role back end.

How exciting, Simon, do you think the story will be of Ken Maxx with every race?

That's very exciting.

Well, I mean, I certainly hope for Maxx that that's the case for him, but I certainly hope for us that that's not the case because what are we going to talk about all season?

I mean, we had to do it for seven years with Mercedes really up until 2021. We're very skilled at doing this. You can change the narrative just slightly, but you know what?

As you say, thanks to the cost cap and thanks to the new regulations, there's definitely interesting things going on besides at the front. So that's at least exciting. I mean, Williams scoring points on their first race of the season, that was also a bit of a plot twist.

Exactly. I mean, that was a great story. I think that was almost the second best story of the weekend. Don't you in that, you know, Alex Albon, there's one, you're talking about good drivers throughout the grid. I really hope this is a season where he at last gets a car where he can prove that, you know, on his day again in F2 and in karting, he was on a par with George Russell and Lando Norris. And I think he's really growing in an environment that wasn't obviously as pressured as that second Red Bull. And I hope for his sake,

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he could do pretty well. But then again, Logan Sargent also showed that they've got a decent second driver. He was right on the tail of Alex Albon. They both had great starts to the race. That Williams looks really good on a Sunday.

Logan was the really of the weekend for me. I mean, obviously, Oscar didn't really get much of a chance to show his potential during the race, but I think hats off to Logan Sargent. I mean, he finished the race less than 10 seconds, I think it was behind Alex and his debut race. That's closer than Carlos was to Charles and closer than Perez was to Max. So well done to him.

Yeah, I think we, I think, well, I've got to put my hands up and go because I didn't, I put him as a third of the three rookies going into the season. And actually he qualified as a best rookie ahead of DeFries and Oscar. Simon, did they, did they seem pleasantly surprised Williams? How good they were this weekend? Or do you think they were expecting that?

I think Valsey, when you saw James Valsey, we all stopped to congratulate him and it was the first time I'd seen him this year because we weren't at testing. You know, he is a very pragmatic guy. And by all accounts, as we're coming through the airport on the way, on the way back on, on Sunday night, we were talking to, and was talking to a couple of the Williams guys, engineers, and they just say, this guy is, is fantastic. He's come in with this kind of Mercedes winning mentality. And he's just saying, this isn't good enough. Even this weekend, it wasn't good enough. I think, I think the expectation is that they can challenge in the midfield, particularly on a Sunday, I think they've got some work to do on their, their Saturday pace, although Alex said he could have got it into Q3, but for that issue.

But I think, I think they're kind of dealing with it race by race. And again, if you look at the gaps between where they were in qualifying last year and this year, I think Williams was second only in games to Aston Martin. So that tells you enough. And Alex was really chuffed, wasn't he? When he came in, came and spoke with us in prez.

Yeah, super happy, which you can only understand. I mean, having spent a season out of the car and then a season at the back of the grid, I think for someone like him, much like Lando actually, to see a lot of his peers that he competed very closely with in F3 and F2 doing so well at the front of the grid. I think it's, it's unmotivating to go racing when you've got a car, you know, can't get off the back, the back of the grid. So I think he was obviously more surprised, I think then, you know, the question was, were they surprised? I think they didn't expect to get into the points. So you could tell by his, you know, the way he looked, how happy he was, the smile on his face, that it took him by surprise and that actually he was back in it racing, at least in the midfield.

Great team radio as well. When he, when he got, when he got his point at the end, it was brilliant. Great to hear. Any other business? Anyone, any stories we've missed? I mean, Bottas in his classic Bottas Sauber Anonymous way, sort of snuck into the point. Like, honestly, I, I looked afterwards and I saw, I actually saw a tweet from him going, you know, pH, having a beard or something and I thought, I had no idea. I just completely missed it.

Classic Bottas under the radar with his new mullet and tash combo, which I think looks

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pretty, well, quite, go on Simon, what do you think it looks like?

A little bit ratty, if I'm honest. I think he needs to bulk out a bit.

Solidarity with Valtteri and his, and his mullet.

One final thing, Estaman Ocon, saw him, he was on our flight on the way, on the way back on the little hop to Dubai and I kind of walked up with that and he was there and we kind of, we were trying to say, you've got to laugh. I mean, you have to laugh. It was like a bit of a shard on Friday because, you know, it was laughable. The fact that it was lined up on the, he does that, he lines up on the grid like that quite like anyway. So he thought it was hard done by there to get the five seconds and then, you know, for not serving the penalty correctly and then having to speed in the pit lane to make up this time 20 seconds. I mean, it was just a disaster for him, wasn't it?

For Estaman Ocon.

Right. Well, that seems like a good place to round it off. Thank you very much for your company this week and what a difference all the liking and subscribing last week made. We got to number one in the podcast, in the sports podcast charts. So thank you, everyone, for your liking, subscribing, following, all of that makes a huge difference. So look, we're going to have to try and stay there now, aren't we? Fingers crossed.

All right, guys, thank you so much for your company for the last, for the last hour or so. Look forward to the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, which is next week. We've got a weekend off, but we will be back on the Tuesday before the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. We hope you can join us then. Thanks very much. See you later. Bye-bye.