

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / What's gone WRONG at Ferrari? Will Leclerc ever win a title with them?

After a 2022 filled with strategy and reliability mishaps, this year was supposed to be when Ferrari turned their undeniably quick car into a championship winning machine.

Two races down and the team look a long way off the pace.

So what next for Ferrari?

This is the Sky Sports F1 podcast.

Hello all.

Welcome to this week's episode.

Alongside me for this one, I'm joined by two people who know Ferrari very well, but for slightly different reasons.

First up is Felipe Massa's old race engineer with Ferrari and someone who spent a decade at the team, Rob Smedley.

Alongside Rob is fellow F1 podcaster, co-host of P1 with Matt and Tommy and Ferrari and Charlotte Claire fan Matt Gallagher.

Hello to you both.

Rob, I want to start with you.

You're joining us from Italy, which is very appropriate for a chat about Ferrari.

Yeah, it wasn't planned that way.

I just, we come back here, obviously we still got lots of friends here, as you said I was here for 10 years.

I'm still trying to put that sentence, that introduction together, which is Felipe Massa's old race engineer.

So I don't know whether you're referring to my age or the fact that I was his race engineer.

But anyway, I'm not a race engineer anymore, I'm way past all of that nonsense.

Now we come back here quite often, we got lots of friends here.

You never kind of, my kids were born here, my kids have grown up now, but they come back with us.

Yeah, it's just a cool place, lots of good memories, lots of good friends.

I'm sure Florence is much nicer than the UK at this time of year, Rob.

Matt, how are you?

I imagine this is going to be a slightly painful 45 minutes or so, talking about Ferrari and their problems this year.

Yeah, I was going to thank you for having me on, but then I realised what the topic was.

But no, it's great to be on, and of course, we have to dive into what's going on at Ferrari, otherwise nothing will change.

But yes, it's going to be quite difficult, I think, because there's not a lot of positives that we've seen at the start of this year.

Yeah, all right, well let's get into it, and maybe we actually can start with some of the positives.

Certainly in terms of qualifying pace, Ferrari have looked okay in the first two races.

Clare, only two tenths behind the Red Bulls, just on qualifying pace alone, but obviously in the race, it's been a lot harder.

I want to kick things off as well by quoting Fred Vassar, who said, we have to stay calm,

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it's not like everything is going wrong.

So Rob, when you hear that from Fred Vassar, the team principal at Ferrari, what do you think?

The way that Fred has approached this has been fairly consistent from the start, which is good.

And I also think that there are positives, we'll get into it, we'll get into the details later on.

But if you look at where the Ferrari is qualified in the first race, compared to then what happened on the Sunday afternoon in Bahrain, and then what the weekend was like in Saudi Arabia, the car is fundamentally all right, whether or not it's a championship-winning car, is a little bit of a stretch at the minute, but clearly the car is all right, you can't qualify that close to the Red Bulls, and the car not be good.

So there's some elements of the car which are obviously not working, and it doesn't work in every single condition, so it's not what we would describe as a benign car, it's quite peaky, but they've got something that can work with definitely.

Matt, in terms of the context of last year and the disappointment of that season, having all those reliability issues, having the strategy calls that didn't go right for Ferrari, is it perhaps more the case that it's more disappointing this year, the fact that you can't just start the year with a car that's right up there with the Red Bulls?

Yeah, I suppose our expectations were a bit higher than where we started off in 2023 for Ferrari, I think that, yeah, there was a lot of mistakes last year that were painful to watch because some of them were absolutely in Ferrari's control.

This year, yeah, I agree with Rob, the car seems all right, but the problem is the gap to Red Bull has increased dramatically.

If you actually look to the lap times from Saudi, the Ferrari was actually seven-tenths a lap slower compared to what they were doing in 2022, so they've taken the step backwards. Other teams have taken a step forwards, the likes of Aston Martin, for example, and of course, Red Bull have extended that gap to a margin where they're literally coming over the team radio and going, Max, could you just slow down?

There's no race.

There's literally no race.

Just stop.

Just stop trying.

And obviously, Max wants to go as fast as he wants, and that's great to see.

But Red Bull are in that position, that luxurious place to be where they don't have any competition at the moment.

As a Ferrari fan, that's really painful because every year we're like, maybe this year, oh no, not this year.

Rob, that lack of competition means that what I want to understand is what's going on at Maranello right now.

What would have been happening if you'd had a bad run of results in your time?

What would have been the process back at Maranello?

Would you all be back on a Monday morning in the office all discussing and trying to work

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out a strategy for the next few races, for example?

Yeah, you know, I don't think that changes whether you're, you know, if you're a top team in Formula One, your hard work and huge amount of effort is no different to, you know, when I was there and we had years like, pick a good year, 2004, you know, I can't even remember how many races we won, but we won a lot, and we had a lot of one-tuos.

It's no different to that, to actually the year later, 2005, which was an abject disaster in terms of, you know, comparative results to 2004.

I don't think that ever changes.

I think that's just the mindset of Formula One teams and the individuals that push those teams forward is that you're always working hard.

But certainly, I think one of the differences I would suspect is that with a new team principle, so with a new, what is effectively, chief executive of your business, which is Fred, then, you know, he can allow himself to kind of come in and make, you know, reasonably big strategic changes in terms of the technical direction or in terms of the overall direction of the team, because there's not that legacy of, you know, this is everything that I've been setting up for the last two years and now to kind of come in after two races and chop and change and do everything differently, you're kind of then highlighting the rest of the business that you've planned for the last two years hasn't worked.

I think Fred has the luxury that he's got time on his side so he can come in and now, you know, after two races start to make the necessary changes or changes of direction at least, I think, in terms of the technical elements of the car.

But it will just be business as usual, you know, they'll understand they've got problems, you know, like I always say that the first rule of solving a problem is you've got to admit you've got one, so as long as they're all grown up about it and they're able to just say, look, we've got a problem, let's be transparent about it, here are the areas of the car that has a problem, here's the areas of the operation and the business that also has a problem, because it's never one thing, there's no magic bullet, because I know you're all ready to come together as a group of people, transparently identify your problems and then put a solution in place, then there's light at the end of the tunnel.

We've heard Toto, haven't we, at Mercedes talk about this no blame culture, this idea that, you know, we win and lose as a team.

Is that Rob, something you can relate to at Ferrari or, you know, when it did go wrong, did you know about it?

Oh, you certainly know about it, I mean, you know about it milliseconds after it's gone wrong, there's absolutely no doubt about that, but I think that, you know, again, and it comes down to the individuals that, you know, work in Grand Prix teams and have successful careers in Grand Prix teams, you don't need to be told when something's gone wrong, you don't need to be told when you're doing a bad job, you know, every individual is, there's no, there should be nobody harder on each individual in Ferrari, especially at the senior level than that individual themselves.

But it is true that you have to succeed and fail together.

Once you start laying the blame at individuals or individual departments door, it becomes

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very difficult, it becomes very toxic, and Ferrari have to be very careful that that doesn't happen.

I mean, when I was there, you know, I think the absolute master of that, if I can call one person, that would be Ross, Ross Braun, who was my, you know, who was the leader of the technical department at the time, and Ross just did, you know, for all the duration that we were there together, Ross just did a fantastic job in being able to protect the organisation, or at least the technical organisation, let's say, that's the better we're putting it, from unnecessary distractions, you know, again, you don't need to be told by the executive committee that you're doing a bad job, you know, if you're at Ferrari, your reason for breathing is that you win Grand Prix and you win Formula One World Championships. Being less, if you're resting on that, you're in the wrong, you're in the wrong business and you're definitely in the wrong part of the country to work in a Grand Prix team. So I think every individual will know, but they've just got to be left to get on with it.

They've got to have a clear direction from the top, a clear strategy, a clear set of benchmarks and solutions of how they're going to get through it.

And then it's just a case of getting on with it and being brave, you know.

I want to get some tweets as well from some of our fans, so a tweet from Kieran, why have Ferrari struggled to get a championship in recent years, money and talent is not an issue for them.

It's clear they've got the drivers, I think most people would agree, certainly Charles is a champion in waiting, but why do you think over the last couple of years they've struggled?

Well, Formula One is very dependent on having a car that's capable of winning championships.

I think last year in particular, the reason why it was so painful was that it went for a very long time where you genuinely believed that Ferrari could have won the world title.

But there was always that feeling that they wouldn't be able to outdevelop Red Bull.

So right at the beginning of last year, I remember saying a lot of the time, like, Ferrari need to make the most of this particular occasion of being the quickest car.

And of course, Red Bull tripped over themselves with a few mechanical issues at the start and you're thinking, right, Ferrari have to capitalize on this.

But then you had so many different mistakes, so many different moments that could have gone differently, but when you actually look at the face of it, even as a Charles Leclerc Ferrari fan, you can say that Red Bull would have won the world title no matter how many of the mistakes.

If you'd just taken all of them off, Red Bull were too quick at the end of the year.

So I just think Ferrari haven't produced a car good enough over the course of a year to win the world title.

Vettel had some great opportunities fighting Hamilton.

He had a few moments, of course, that were questionable to say the least, a back who comes to mind as one, but they just haven't had the car really.

I mean, Alonso, when he was there, he was able to absolutely rag the life out of it and how he went into a championship decider in a Ferrari I will never know because that

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car wasn't good enough.

So yeah, just a quicker car in a nutshell.

Simple as that, quicker car.

I think we've kind of discussed the team itself and where they are, but I want to get into the drivers and I've got a question here from Al Tweet.

So Charles is going to be a world champion one day.

Do you see it with Ferrari?

Oh, God, what a question, eh?

It's difficult.

I'd love to get into a time machine and see how long I'm going to have to wait for Leclerc to be a world champion, but it's very difficult.

I think if they are able to iron out some things that not even to do with the car, just the way in which they go about their strategy and their calls and so on, if they're able to iron that out, then they definitely have a better chance.

I think it's more about if Ferrari can keep him long enough for him to stay around until they do have a championship winning car.

I am going to go with a no, but that's probably because I am so pained over the last few years that it's hard to look anywhere else.

If you're pained now and you have lower expectations, I'm sure in the future, you're just going to surpass your expectations.

It's going to be better.

That's what we'll hope.

Rob, I don't know if you noticed, I thought last year with Charles' body language, I thought it changed throughout the year.

I thought at the start of the year, when things, obviously they went very well for the first three races, but after that when things didn't go their way, I felt like he still carried himself with, he towed the party line, he still came out and spoke very highly of the team.

As the season progressed, you saw him look a little bit different, it was harder and harder to justify those things by the team.

I just wonder, in your experience, when you're dealing with a driver, obviously you had an amazing relationship with Felipe, but how do you manage a driver who is sort of kind of, you can see him just drifting and drifting perhaps a little bit away from the team?

That's a really difficult one, to be honest, and I think you've got to do everything.

The best thing that a team can do with drivers like Max, drivers like Lewis, who just want to and expect to win every single weekend, is deliver a car that can do that.

But equally, those drivers also have their part to play, so I'm going to kind of back the team in this occasion.

It's very hard for drivers, guys of my age, you've perhaps been involved in the sport for 25 years, you've taken every kind of kick and punch that can come at you and you're used to it.

A lot of these guys are still in their 20s, so they haven't quite yet been through the middle of life and therefore understand how to deal with every single situation.

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Perhaps it's fair to say that they don't always deal with things in the best way, certainly when they sit down on a Monday and think about how they reacted about the team, they'd certainly be able to reflect that they could have done it better.

What I would say is that it is the job of the driver, and if you ever need an example of this in history, it's Michael Schumacher, it's the job of the driver to ride through the highs and the lows, because it's easy to all talk about how great your culture is, talk about how great the team is, talk about how great the aerodynamics are, the strategists, everybody else, everybody on the planet when you're winning, that's easy.

What's hard is when you're not winning, and that's when you see the metal of people come together.

Going back to my time in Ferrari, when we were winning 15 out of the 17 races or whatever, to talk well about it and to see how great the culture was, and how great we all were and keep slapping ourselves on the back every five minutes, it's easy, but once you get into those difficult periods, that's when you see the true character of the team and the individuals come out, and I think the drivers have a key part to playing that because if you, after a year of difficulties, after a period of difficulties, you shouldn't be turned on the team and tell them it's all their fault.

I think that's unfair, and I think that, so my view on this is that the team has to supply the drivers and the top three, four drivers in Formula One, they have to be supplied with a great car, but you also have to have a level of realism in that as well, that you can't have the best car in every single Grand Prix, every single year, it's just not possible.

Look at what Mercedes is going through this year and last year, at some point, somebody hungrier and better will come along and do produce a faster car with a hungrier driver, and you've got to accept that and regroup and think about what you're going to do, but you've all got to play your part, including the driver.

I just want to pick up on something you said about Michael and how he galvanised the team. Are there, do you see anything in Charles, or Carlos for that matter, do you see anything in the Ferrari drivers at the moment that makes you think they do have that in them and that if they can weather this storm, they will be the right drivers to take Ferrari further forward?

It's difficult to say because when Michael got to Ferrari, he was already, I'm rubbish in Formula One history, so I'm probably going to get this wrong, but I think he was a two-times world champion, correct me if I'm wrong, yeah, good, we're not in, yeah, I knew that, and that, you know, with Jordan, wasn't really with Jordan, I knew that was with Benetton, but he was a two-time world champion, right, and he had kind of already got his feet under the table of what it meant to win world championships, and I think what he saw there was he saw a team that once it was operating at anywhere near full efficiency, it was going to be an unstoppable machine, and him and lots of other people around him made that happen, so it's difficult to draw comparisons right now because I think that Charles and Carlos are at different stages of their career and life, but certainly if I go back to what I said before, you know, through all the difficult times, Michael, I never saw him once even privately complain about individuals or complain in a way that wasn't creating, you know, what I call a positive conflict, that it wasn't a positive critique to say, look, we've got a problem, let's just

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be transparent about this problem, but let's all like head in this direction, you know, he had complete trust in the technical team, and that trust was borne out, so when he did have to ride the troughs, he was there as a motivating factor, you know, and helping the team and saying, it's all right, I trust in you, I know you would produce a good car, and eventually, you know, we did produce good cars, and we did produce cars that were worthy of winning world championships, so, you know, to go back to the question, I just don't know with Charles and Carlos, they certainly have the ability within themselves to be able to do that because they're both first class drivers and first class sportsmen, and both team players, I think, you know, I don't know them personally very well, you know, that say hello to, but I would say that both of them, from what I observe and from the people that do know them very well, who I am close to, I think they both have the ability to do that.

And if any team is going to want team players, you know, at the top, it might be Ferrari. Matt, I want to get in a tweet here from Freddie, do Ferrari need to do the Mercedes approach with Hamilton and Bottas and clearly make Leclerc a number one driver, i.e. do you see the benefit of having a number one driver at Ferrari right now?

No, I'd say that they probably need both drivers as motivated as they possibly can.

And Carlos, who he's a race winner, he clearly has ambitions to become a world champion.

I feel like lining that out would not be particularly good for his motivation, I believe as well that on the flip side of that, Ferrari need to know when they need to swap the drivers to maximise the points, for example, Leclerc coming through and there was definitely a discussion as to whether they should have swapped the cars in Saudi.

But and then of course, last year as well, there were moments of hesitation.

The British Grand Prix springs to mind as one moment where you had Hamilton literally catching the two drivers and they weren't making the swap until laps and laps and laps later when finally they changed it.

And there isn't that decision that just jumping straight on it in a race and knowing, right, we have to swap the cars now, the drivers will do it, make that decision and they can maximise results.

Now, yeah, that didn't work out in the British Grand Prix because of other reasons where of course they left Leclerc out when the safety car came out, which still doesn't haunt me at night.

But yeah, I feel like there needs to be more sort of precise decision making and quicker decision making as well.

All right.

So that's kind of the drivers.

I know we mentioned Fred Versailles at the top, but I just want to get back to him and his role over the next year, two year, three year plan or whatever.

Rob, what kind of job has he got on his hands now at Ferrari?

Is it, I guess the question is ultimately how long is it going to take for us to see his changes within the team?

I've got a rule that you should be able to see good people who are effective and can just get on with it.

And by the way, are allowed and given the tools to be able to get on with it.

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You'll see changes within six months.

So you're not going to see anything instantaneously because that would just be folly to expect that.

But certainly within six months, you can start to see the green shoots of the strategy that he's going to put in place.

So I would say probably the middle of this season, the middle of this season, we're going to start to see differences because don't forget, if you think about in reality, your first month is just doing interviews and talking to the media, running around trying to learn 5% of the people's names that you meet.

And then after that, you can start to get a feel for the place.

You can start to understand how the place works.

And then you can start to make changes after, say, three months.

But the green shoots of those changes, you're not going to see for another three months or whatever until they start to take shape.

So I would say, yeah, middle of the season, we should start seeing the positive effects of Fred Vassar, hopefully.

And Matt, when he was appointed, what was your first reaction?

I felt a little bit sorry for Bonotto, really, because he'd finally got the team into a position where they were winning races.

They were challenging.

Yes, there were a lot of mistakes on the way, and that's probably one of the reasons why they've gone, right, OK, we've got a good car now, but we're making too many mistakes. But I guess as a Leclerc fan, it was nice to see Vassar take over after, of course, his close workings with Charles, previously, when he first entered Formula One, and clearly has that knowing he knows Charles Leclerc's talent, essentially, is what I'm trying to get at.

And Fred Vassar, who knows?

Who knows what he's going to be like running a top team?

He seems like a very likable character, but it's hard to judge an appointment just yet.

The only thing that, as I say, was more about Bonotto and feeling like perhaps he deserved another year or two to see if he could iron out those mistakes that he'd crept in, but he'd still pushed the team forward.

So I felt it was a little unfair.

You probably will both think I'm crazy here.

I wonder if they could have worked together, and I wonder if you could have had a situation.

Well, yeah, because Bonotto, obviously, he's been at, well, I'm sure someone you know, Rob, very well, he's been at the team since 95, I believe, and he would have been able to know all the structure, all the kind of inner workings of Ferrari, how to deal with the top boards and board members of Ferrari, but also then you can have maybe Vassar, who's the slightly more public, friendly figure, maybe he does a bit more of the media kind of stuff and the race weekend stuff.

I don't know, Rob, do you think I'm barking up the wrong tree there?

I think you've got to have one boss.

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And the reason why you've got to have one boss is you've got to have one direction. Now, there are structures, there are Grand Prix teams where the team principal is effectively as the CEO of the business, and all strategy, big decisions will come from that person. And then there's other Grand Prix teams where the team principal runs the racing element, if you like, with less strategic input into the team.

So yes, of course, it can work.

I think that as long as there is a clear structure and everybody knows what they're doing, then of course it will.

But quite often, because of the personalities that are involved, it's very difficult because having two people trying to make the big decisions and you get big decisions then by committee, you end up with diluted strategy and direction.

Certainly, I can tell you, just from my own personal opinion, I definitely wouldn't want to do that.

If my name was above the door, then I'd want to be making all the decisions.

Yeah, that makes sense.

Rob, just give us an insight as well into that role as Ferrari team principal because it's kind of the national team, it's the football manager, it's that number one person on the front of the sports pages.

Every weekend there's a Formula One race, maybe every weekend there's not a Formula One race, but in Italy, the Ferrari team principal is a big, big role.

Yeah, I think all the senior guys there, especially the ones that are rolled out in front of the media, it's a massive responsibility.

There's no doubt about it, as you say, and I've said this myself in the past, you can describe Ferrari in Italy as a religion, definitely.

It's the national team and therefore you are representing the nation, not just a brand.

So it is tough and you don't need thick skin, you need rubber skin.

Because I think the problem with it, not the problem, but the reality of the situation is it goes through cycles and I can remember this myself personally, you'd be held up on a pedestal and you'd be thought about as being the best things in sliced bread and four, six weeks, two months later, people are literally spitting at you in the street.

So it's a tough dichotomy to be honest and you just have to ride it out, you know, none of it is, you kind of have to blend the highs into the lows so that you just get a single emotional viewpoint on it all to give yourself that equilibrium that you need to be able to keep delivering day in, day out, because that's the important bit, right?

When people are telling you how great you are, it's important not to listen to it and it's equally important when people are telling you how rubbish you are and that happens.

So I think that Fred is going to go through all of that, he's a good guy, he's been in this sport, in motorsport for a long, long time in senior positions at Grand Prix before he came into Alpha Romeo and in fact there was, I told you I was rubbish on history wasn't it because there was a bit in the middle between, between our Grand Prix and Alpha Romeo which was Renault.

So you know, he's been there, he knows what it's like, it's a different intensity, a different pressure in Ferrari but he just has to get on with it, you know, it's part

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of his job.

Matt, I want, I want us to give, give some reason to be optimistic about this season for Ferrari.

I'll kick things off, perhaps the fact that it's a really long season.

We've got 23 races this year and we're only two races in and yeah, maybe it's not going to be a world championship winning car, maybe, we obviously don't know that just yet but you know, there is a, there is a clear room for improvements throughout the season and there are going to be a lot of races to do that.

What else can you tell the Ferrari fans as, as a reason to be positive?

Well, I think Ferrari fans, our expectations are now through the floor so anything that happens that is good, we will, we will enjoy with both hands probably.

Fans and Leclerc are still an incredibly strong teammate partnership and yeah, it's been difficult to start with and Leclerc has already run out of control electronics which I'm trying to, trying to get over because that's going to mean a few more grid penalties but no, positives Matt.

Yeah, I mean, they're still quick in qualifying.

As much as Max didn't actually qualify in Q3 and Saudi, which I don't think anyone would have seen unless you are a Red Bull fan.

So yeah, there are still going to be opportunities I think to get in the mix if they do have that qualifying pace.

I think more of the, if you're looking for a close championship fight, you want to be perhaps looking towards Aston Martin rather than Ferrari just purely because of the amount of wind tunnel time and what not that they have but I'm hopeful as well that, you know, they're bringing small updates for Australia, hopefully their whole correlation between the wind tunnel and what actually goes out on track is slightly more accurate than perhaps what they've seen when developing the car over the winter.

So yeah, I think let's see, let's see if they do close the gap a little bit but it might take a little while.

Rob, we've obviously got this month break as well in April, which, you know, it hasn't really been a thing in Formula One and obviously that might give teams, I don't know as an engineer how you would have felt if you'd had three races down, you then get a whole month and I know that's not a huge amount of time with obviously development, you know, it's not an overnight thing but it does give you a bit of time to catch up, doesn't it?

A bit of time to take stock.

I think more than anything, it gives you time to focus because the organisation is just purely focused on development rather than operations so, you know, you don't have to get a huge chunk of your organisation on a plane and get them to go and do all that Grand Prix racing nonsense, you can just get them all kind of headed into, you know, being really focused on development and understanding and picking the last two events.

I think that when you're, this is an opportunity for not just Ferrari but for all of the teams, you know, it is an opportunity because when you're right in the midst of racing, you sometimes can't put your head up and it's not always easy to see the obvious things that are in front of you because you're just headlong into delivering races and just trying to maximise

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those races and that means that obviously there's a large chunk of your organisation that isn't doing that but they are drawn towards what's going on at the racetrack, you know, and they will get involved in that to some extent even though their job is back in the factory whether it's the design office or the wind tunnel.

Once you don't have that and all the little niggles that come out of race weekends as well because you have little reliability niggles and, you know, little things that perhaps, you know, don't go quite right so then you've got to kind of turn your organisation into dealing with that.

Once all that's gone, like we're going to have in April, Ferrari will be able to concentrate fully on the job in hand which is, you know, trying to get their act together and produce a faster Formula One car and maximise that car at the track as well because I think it's important that we understand that, that, you know, it's not just about bringing a fast Formula One car, it's also about, you know, maximising it and getting the most points out of it as you can every single weekend.

And I guess Imola in mid-May is probably going to be the acid test, right, coming back home in front of the Tifosi is going to be when they're going to want to be able to be challenging at the front.

All right, I think that's kind of everything for Ferrari thus far, hopefully we've managed to paint some positivity at the end there of where they could go this season.

I want to get your guys' thoughts just on one other thing as well before we let you go.

Stefano Domenicali has been in the news the last few days saying that he's a supporter of cancellation of free practice sessions which are great for the use of engineers but that the public doesn't like.

So I thought as we have an engineer and member of the public, if I could call you that Matt, I'm not sure.

Wow, I've been called a lot more, thanks.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm not sure if we'll quite get down that route but go on Rob, make the case for practice sessions as an engineer because look, from the outside, I'm going to guess if you could have 10, 12, 14 hours of practice, you'd want them, is that right?

Oh, and the rest, and the rest.

People like me, we just tinker with Formula 1 cars all day long, you forget about the racing bit, we just want to do our, we just want to have fun.

I think that my opinion is that we've got a decent balance now, I mean if you look back in the day, we were doing like 35,000 kilometres of testing more, 50,000 kilometres of testing per year plus lots of running on the Friday and all the rest of it.

I think it's hard now, especially with the little teams and the amount of capital investment that the teams can spend each year with a cost cap, that you can get rid of the free practice element altogether.

I think that is hard.

So there has to be some element where the cars can run on the track where it's not for points or positions on the grid, otherwise there's no track time left because winter testing is so short and then if there was no testing as Friday has become during the year, it just

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becomes harder and harder on the technical team and harder for exactly what we're talking about here for teams to be able to understand their cars and then catch up because you can have the best computational fluid dynamics, simulation, wind tunnels in the world but if that's not correlating directly to the track and the performance on track, you could have understand why that isn't.

The only way you can do that is by running your car on the track.

So I do agree with Steph that perhaps it can be slightly more entertaining for the public but as you've just deridedly said that Matt G is a member of the public, he can tell us about that because I only see him at this side of the fence.

So for me it's really exciting.

I just get really into it and just wish it'd go on for about 10 hours.

So from a member of the public, it's funny actually, I've literally just come off a podcast recording about this.

I've seen the reaction from Formula One fans and I'm kind of more mixed in with the hard cores that tend to absorb all the content and whatnot and we did a poll actually and 37,000 people voted and 84% said they wanted practice sessions which is quite a heavy skew towards loving a bit of practice but then again if you look at the worldwide population there's probably not that many that watch practice in comparison to quality in the race. So for me as a fan, especially if you go to a race and you're scrapping all the practice sessions, what's left?

Practice is usually the time where you can see the most of the cars, they'll go round and you can just relax and Friday is usually a lot cheaper as well from a fan perspective.

That yeah you're wondering okay what does it get replaced with and for me personally I like sprint race weekends but only as a occasional one that pops up now and again.

I don't want that to be the full calendar year personally because I've been a Formula One fan since I was a child and maybe it's ingrained in me that you have practice that builds up to quality and then the race and that's how you steadily get through the weekend. So I do wonder where Stefano is going with this and perhaps he wants more and more and more sprint races.

That's where I kind of see the direction going because of course there is one less practice session.

FP2 is basically null and void if you're a fan watching because qualifying has already happened and it's just purely from an engineer's perspective to find out what tires and the degradation and so on.

So from my side don't get rid of practice.

Maybe there can be ways of tweaking a sprint race weekend to make it a little bit more exciting but don't go down the route of it being just, it just depends whether you see it as a sport or entertainment and then if the lines get blurred or too heavily weighted in one way it could be quite, it's not going to please everyone basically.

No, what would, what would.

My idea was that you could have, you know like the wind tunnel time gets tapered depending on where you finish in the championship or maybe depending on where you finished the race before is how much practice time and maybe actually you only get a certain amount

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of practice.

If you finish first in the race you barely get any practice time for the next race.

Red will get one lap, that's what you're saying.

Yeah, Red will get one lap of practice and the team at the bottom get 80, 90, whatever laps I don't know.

I don't know.

I don't know.

Oh, let Rob shut that, don't shut down that idea again.

Yeah.

Go on.

I think it's a great idea, I'd do it.

You wouldn't be saying that though if you only got one lap, if your team are winning and you only got one lap of practice, I'm sure that would be very, very frustrating.

Yeah, Rob, I guess it is that thing that F1 has, isn't it, right, the sport of the entertainment. It's the thing that it will always come down to, is it a sport or is it entertainment?

And I guess you sit and most of us would sit on the sport side, it's got to be primarily there to be a sporting event.

Yeah, but I think we've done a good job as a sport in the last however many years because there was, let's say, an anxiety amongst the hardcore Formula One fans when Liberty first took over that this would get very, for want of a better word, you know, like Americanised and become like a franchise system or whatever, and it hasn't, you know, from what I see and certainly, you know, my time in Formula One, you know, the Liberty Media organisation, that was, they only ever did good things for the sport, you know, predominantly they do good things with sport, they're not afraid to experiment, they're not afraid to break the status quo, and I think what we've ended up with is, of course, they want to push the bounds of entertainment, but they do that with a lot of respect to the DNA Formula One, so we've never gone down, you know, artificially, teams being able to artificially win races, you know, it has to remain one of the most difficult things to do in a sporting arena to win a Formula One Grand Prix, and it is, you know, having been in teams that, you know, where we've won lots and having been in teams where it was very difficult to win one, it's such an immensely difficult thing to do. When you layer on top of that, you've got to win 18 of them or 15 of them that win a world championship in one season, it's, you know, we should never allow the sport to deviate away from that challenge, not being as immense as it is now, but you've got to keep it entertaining as well, you know, it can't just be for middle aged male population sitting watching it on linear TV, you know, you've got to bring new audiences in, and we've got to bring diverse audiences in, and you only do that by tweaking the format, and I think Liberty have done a great job of tweaking the format, but remaining true to what is really Formula One.

Yeah, no, I would agree. Great, well, thank you, thank you very much for both of your company. Matt, you're going to be up early, I assume, for the Australian Grand Prix?

Oh, yeah, be doing our Twitch watch-alongs at whatever time it will be, 5.30 in the morning I think, so coffee at the ready, but I can't complain, there are Australian F1 fans out there that do this every single weekend, so I will complain, but I also know that I shouldn't

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be.

Absolutely, and Rob, will you be tuning in live, or will you maybe watch it on record?

Absolutely not a chance, I will wake up at normal time on a Sunday morning and open order sport, there are, orskysports.com and check your one.

It's going to be an early start for sure, that's what we've got time for for today, thank you very much for your company, thank you Matt, thank you Rob, we will be back next Tuesday after the Australian Grand Prix, until then, bye for now.