



# HORSE



# POWER

From pigeons to kayaks to eggs and spoons, people will race anything they can get their hands on. Some types of racing (model boats and snails spring to mind) will only ever have a niche following. Others are multimillion-dollar industries. Horse racing and Formula 1 fall soundly into the latter group.

By RICHARD ASHER

At first glance, they have little in common. Horses have been raced since ancient times, while car racing has only existed since the late 19th century. Gambling on horses is big, less so in motorsport. Cars can race for hours, while a horse race lasts a few minutes at most. Horses are carefully bred in peaceful countryside, while F1 cars are the result of highly specialised industrial work.

Yet the sports were closely intertwined in the early days and remain more so than you might think. When motor racing came along with its noisy contraptions, it looked to the established sport of horse racing for its structures and terminology. F1's use of words like 'paddock', 'clerk of the course', 'horse power' and even the reference to a car 'running' can be traced back to horse racing.

Then as now, both sports attract (and create) the wealthy and the influential. Both sports have an element of glamour: eye-catching outfits are a feature at both. So is the presence of people who are more interested in looking good than the racing. And that's because F1 and horse racing are so much more than just sport. Let's ask why...



### The Players

Although Red Bull is the team to beat these days, Ferrari and McLaren remain the most influential teams. F1 and Ferrari are inseparable and any world championship without the legendary Italian marque is unthinkable. So when multimillionaire Ferrari Chairman Luca di Montezemolo is unhappy with the rules, for example, people tend to listen.

McLaren's Martin Whitmarsh is also a powerful figure by virtue of his seat at the head of a historically successful and very rich team. How rich? Well, four years ago McLaren were fined \$100 million for their role in 'spygate' (more about that in the Scandals section) and they didn't even need to cut the coffee budget.

The International Automobile Federation (FIA) govern the sport from their smart HQ in Paris' posh Premier Arrondissement. Frenchman Jean Todt took over the FIA presidency in 2009. His previous job? Running Ferrari's F1 squad for all those years Michael Schumacher was winning titles.

But the true ringmaster is Bernie Ecclestone. 'Bernie' is rarely referred to by any specific job title, but the miniscule Englishman is the real power behind F1. During the 1980s the former team owner turned



### The Players

Sheikh Mohammed (estimated to be worth \$18 billion by Forbes magazine, pictured below) is the big daddy of race horse owners. His equine empire includes stables in Britain, Ireland, France and the USA. The 62-year-old's other interests include ruling Dubai and the United Arab Emirates.



Over in Ireland, Europe's biggest breeding centre, the secretive tycoon John Magnier wields considerable influence. Thanks to his trainer Aidan O'Brien, Magnier's studs in Tipperary are a production line for winning thoroughbreds.

### The Stars

Flat-racing horses don't have the shelf-life that racing drivers do, as many retire to stud at three years of age. Establishing your animal as a great is really about having one or two amazing seasons. One example is See The Stars, the Irish horse who swept all before him as a three-year-old in 2009. His astonishing six wins have led many to call him the greatest horse of modern times.

Steeplechase jumpers last longer and run to an older age, so they have a better chance of leaving a legacy. When three-time Grand National winner Red Rum died in 1995 aged 30, it made front-page headlines in the UK.



the sport into the professional show it is today and, even at 81, his grip on the commercial side is as tight as ever. The teams know they have him to thank for the sport's continued success, so they tend to politely agree with his requests.

### The Stars

While the team bosses and Bernie talk money, the drivers get out there and race. Few can command real political power in the sport, but they're the ones the fans pay to watch. And the current crop – the grid features five world champions – is considered to be as talented as any in F1 history.

World Champion Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) is popular everywhere apart from Britain (he's German!), primarily for his raw speed and genuine persona. Lewis Hamilton's careless mistakes have become legendary this year, but he's also mighty quick and has Britain behind him. So too does his McLaren team-mate Jenson Button, who is a touch slower but a better all-round racer.

Ferrari's Fernando Alonso is still rated by many as the best of them all and has all of Spain and Italy behind him.



### The Events

Monaco is still THE race. With its big yachts, casino, history, expensive jewellery and South African princess (!), it's the one race that can get away with telling Bernie where to shove his 'hosting fee'. Other classics include the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa and the Italian Grand Prix at Monza. The calendar is swelling all the time with Korea and India having joined the show in the last two years. Headlining the 20-race 2012 calendar is the return of the United States GP, which will be held at a new track in Austin, Texas.

What of the guys who ride them? Well, they're invariably small – horses don't run well with sumo wrestlers on their backs. Lanfranco (Frankie) Dettori is perhaps the best-known of all jockeys, although the UK-based Anglophile is actually Italian.

### The Money

Known as the 'sport of kings', horse racing has been a posh man's game for centuries – mainly because horses are expensive to own and keep.

Racing may not boast the commercial sponsorship levels of F1, but the prize money (most of which goes to the owner) is pretty impressive. The worldwide average is €17 555 per race, according to the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA). There's also huge cash to be gained from breeding and selling racers, to the point that it's often more profitable for an owner to retire a successful three-year-old to stud than to let it race on.

The recession has had limited impact on prize money and betting turnover, but breeding has been hit. The IFHA reports that the number of thoroughbred foals born in 2010 was down 7.1% from the previous year.

### The Events

Unlike F1, horse racing doesn't have a world championship system that ensures all the big names attend all the big events. If an owner wants to enter his pride and joy in just one race a year, he can. If the race in question is the Dubai World Cup, with its world-leading purse



of \$10 million, then why not? Win that and you certainly wouldn't need to work out the year.

In Europe, the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe is the biggest payday. The French classic has a purse of €4 million, and certainly has the coolest

## The Scandals

Secrets, lies and backstabbing ... such is the soap opera that is F1. Two fine examples stand out from recent years: 'crashgate' and 'spygate'. In the former, previous Renault bosses Flavio Briatore and Pat Symonds ordered Nelson Piquet Jr to deliberately crash at the 2008 Singapore Grand Prix. This ploy brought out a safety car that helped Alonso, then the team's No 1 driver, win the race.

'Spygate' was even better – disgruntled Ferrari technical man Nigel Stepney gets caught passing classified technical documents to Mike Coughlan at arch-rival McLaren. The British team ultimately got the blame and was thrown out of the 2007 Constructors' Championship standings.



Bernie Ecclestone

## The Money

Never mind the millionaire drivers – even junior staff on small teams earn some serious money. That's thanks to the sport's enormous global popularity, its marketing value to dozens of technical companies and Bernie's lucrative TV deals. And never mind recessions. What recession?

"Sport as a whole has coped well through the past 18 months," says

name. Over in America the Breeders' Cup Classic (\$5 million) is the big-money race, but it can't compete with the Japan Cup in Tokyo. The latter is worth ¥476 million (\$6.2 million).

Then there's Australia's Melbourne Cup, also known as 'The Race that Stops a Nation'. Worth \$6 million, it gets its own public holiday and celebrated its 150th anniversary in November 2010.

But sometimes it is about prestige rather than cash. Victory in any of the five English classics – particularly the historic Epsom Derby – is something to shout about. Same goes for the Kentucky Derby in America. The Grand National in England is the world's best-known steeplechase, but the 'jumping-over-fences' discipline is tiny business in global terms.

For a real fun one, though, look to the ancient Italian city of Siena. Twice a year the central piazza is cleared for Il Palio, a completely insane bareback three-lap dash. This madness has been going on since mediaeval times, so if you like history and passion with your sport, this is the race to see.

## The Quirks

Horse racing is right up there with cricket for wacky jargon. Horses don't win races by a time interval, for example, but by such margins as a 'short head', 'head' or 'length'. And don't try measuring your horse's height in metres. The specialist unit you'll need is the 'hand' (10.16cm).

Traditionally racing also uses its own distance measurements. When they speak of a furlong, it means one-eighth of a mile (around 200m).

The term 'thoroughbred' is thrown around loosely, but has a very specific meaning. You can only call your horse one if it can trace its lineage back to one of three stallions: Darley Arabian, Byerly Turk and Godolphin Arabian.

And would you believe that all horses have the same birthday regardless of when they were born? For racing purposes they're a year older on January 1 in the northern hemisphere and August 1 on our side of the world.

## The Gambling

Horse racing without gambling is like ice-cream without chocolate sauce and thanks to online betting it's easier than ever before. Asia is taking full advantage; the continent accounted for 60% of global horse racing bets in 2010 – that's a cool €48 million!

Surprisingly, gambling at racetracks is still illegal in some parts of the US. The fear of skulduggery was a big part of the reasoning behind those old laws, but it's still not entirely misplaced. International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge spoke out about illegal gambling in sport earlier this year, saying: "There are mafia links and mafia people, who manipulate results (by co-ordinating their bets)."

Stephen Curnow, Chief Commercial Officer at midfield squad Lotus Renault. "The multi-year nature of TV deals generally insulates sports rights holders from recessionary dips. Companies will continue to seek out sport as a way of differentiating their brands and capitalising on the positive brand values of F1."

### The Challenges

F1 lives in a curious bubble of wealth and it will survive. The bigger question is whether it will be in such rude health when Bernie is no longer around. It's not clear how the show will be run when the mostly benevolent dictator proves himself mortal.



With evil tobacco advertising a thing of the past, the other major challenge for F1 is keeping itself moving in a greener direction. Despite the phasing-in of hybrid technology (KERS), it must do a lot more if it wants to avoid a PR disaster in the years to come. With so many big corporates involved as manufacturers and sponsors, even F1 cannot afford a bad image.

### F1 in South Africa

South Africa's place in F1 history is assured thanks to the intermittent World Championship races hosted by East London and Kyalami between 1962 and 1993. It's place in F1's future is anything but clear. Hosting a Grand Prix isn't cheap, with Ecclestone demanding a hosting fee of around £25 million from race promoters. To run a race you need substantial help from some level of government and even then it could run at a loss – just ask Melbourne.

One thing's certain – a South African GP at Kyalami won't be happening. F1 has arguably outgrown the facility. A venue with Table Mountain as a backdrop (as opposed to Midrand office blocks) has a lot more going for it. Talk of a race in Cape Town has been swirling around for years, so it was hard to get terribly excited when the latest rumours of a street track around the city's World Cup stadium surfaced. On the other hand, Bernie himself has recently spoken on the record about his desire for a race in South Africa. And Bernie usually gets what he wants.

Cricket – with three prominent Pakistani players, including former captain Salman Butt, recently jailed in the UK over a match-fixing scam – and football have been publicly tarnished by such things of late, and it's unlikely that horse racing is exempt.

### The Challenges

Horse racing faces an image problem with regard to the exploitation of animals. Steeplechasing (known as National Hunt racing in Britain) has long been under fire because of its injury toll and it's unlikely to outlive the 'flat' racing we know in South Africa. The use of the whip in racing is another hot topic. The British Horseracing Authority has



recently brought in new rules limiting jockeys to seven whip strokes per flat race, but rules vary from country to country.

Horse racing is unlikely to ever have the same mass appeal as F1, because far fewer people are interested in it for purely sporting reasons. But the industry remains a big one and the huge cachet in the phrase 'I own a racehorse' will guarantee its survival.

### Racing in South Africa

Racing dates back to the 1800s and is firmly entrenched in South Africa. But exciting though the Vodacom Durban July and the J&B Met are, we still lack a big-money race that would pull international stars. The July offers a cool R2.5 million, but that doesn't translate very well into dollars.

With just shy of 3% of the world's foals born in the 2008–2010 period, South Africa is the eighth-biggest thoroughbred producer. Unfortunately, our sporting rivals New Zealand and Australia are beating us by a short lead.

Prize money is around half the international average, but is still relatively good in rand terms. A total of R36.5 million was up for grabs in South Africa in 2010, which is enough to keep top trainers such as Mike de Kock interested in the South African scene while pursuing overseas glory too.