



THE TENNER



10 Ways to rev up F1

F1 is in danger of becoming a snorefest. Sure, Herr Schumi isn't winning everything any more, but now it's just someone else leading from start to finish. Implement these suggestions and we might see some actual... dare we say it... overtaking.

PUTTING THE BURN IN BERNIE: RICHARD ASHER

1 MORE OVERTAKING

The dramatic pass is the Grand Prix equivalent of a perfect yorker or the genius goal. This is where drivers show their art and make their fame. It should be actively encouraged because it's what the sport is all about. Not clever strategies, as some may think.

Unfortunately, the frequent pitstops and the design of the cars both actively discourage overtaking. Why risk a pass on the car in

front when a stop is just around the corner and you can vault him during that process? Schumacher doesn't see why he should, and from his point of view rightly so.

On the other hand, if you know you're making more stops than the others then it can be imperative to weasel your way past. But we've seen enough times that you still need a major speed advantage to manage it. The kind of speed advantage that Renault has on Minardi.

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Juan Pablo Montoya has shown that overtaking isn't impossible in F1. But there should be jockeying in every race and not just once or twice a year. It should be possible for a skilful driver to defend from a faster car for a few laps, but it should never be easy like it is now. The newer circuits are commendably being built with overtaking spots in mind, the aerodynamics of the cars still make passing a steep task. The closer you get, the more your rival's "dirty air" ruins your own performance.

2 MORE SLIDING

Why is rallying getting so big these days? When you think that "racing" just isn't part of that solitary sport, it's a worthwhile question. People turn out on the stages because a WRC car is a spectacle in its own right. The drivers labour at the wheel because the road surface is normally sliding around beneath them — meanwhile they've got some of the world's most powerful engines itching to kick them forward. And that's a good show.





Formula 1 cars used to move sideways too, but modern aerodynamics and traction control are just too good for that. You just don't see drivers having to catch slides as they push the limits. Let's face it – they look like they're on rails.

At the risk of being called bloodthirsty, I'd be inclined to blame the safety crusade that followed Imola 1994. The FIA has cut engine capacity since then as it tries to slow the cars down. It never takes long for the speeds to creep back up again, but the aerodynamics and tyres always remain a step ahead.

It's hardly surprising, given that teams are spending millions on round-the-clock wind tunnels and tyre testing. But even physics has its limits – and any aerodynamicist could tell you how to make the cars as tricky as the high-powered but lethal era before wings appeared in the late 1960s.

A radical step would be to get rid of wings altogether. That would fundamentally alter the shape of the Grand Prix car – and also a lot of advertising space would be lost. So it's not going to happen.



3 LESS ELECTRONICS

We just don't need computers in sport. Any sport. The world has enough IT people, and most of them don't even like sport!

For the last couple of decades there has been some mighty sophisticated electronic and computer wizardry going on inside Grand Prix cars. I wouldn't pretend to understand it all, but I do know that there's something odd about a driver telling you after his first F1 test drive that the hardest thing of all was "flooring the throttle and learning to trust the traction control".

The fact that teams can remotely adjust engine settings from the pit garage whilst the car goes around the track is not all that impressive in this day and age. Leave that sort of thing to NASA

and let F1 be about great drivers taming impossibly fast cars again.

Policing of traction control became so hard when it was banned that they had to re-legalise it. Now there are arguments about what constitutes startline launch control. Yawn. Just ditch it all and there won't be problem. I mean clear all the computers out of the garages, scrap the radio masts and pull out anything electric that isn't required for an internal combustion engine. Go back to analogue cockpit displays and make the drivers change gear themselves.

The great engineers are the people who have come up with mechanical and aerodynamic solutions to making cars go faster. The great drivers are the ones who drive them unaided on the track. Let them do their stuff.

4 LESS FUEL FOR QUALIFYING

There's been a gradual turn-of in the last two years as the sport's rulers have fiddled with qualifying in an effort to produce a better race. In one way or another since the start of 2003, drivers have been qualifying with the same fuel levels (and tyres) that they will use to start the race. There was a feeling after 2003 that this played a big part in spicing up a memorable season – but dreary 2004 showed that simple close competition was more likely the cause.

The problem with qualifying on race-fuel is that you take away exactly what made qualifying worth watching. When everyone went out in the fastest single-lap setup then you could see which car/driver combination was the outright fastest over one tour. With pure speed the only object, therein lay the pleasure and point of watching. These days drivers are not only competing on unequal terms against the clock, but thanks to the secretive teams nobody even knows who is carrying what! It's hard to think of any other sport that keeps its fans in the dark that way. Nowadays qualifying times are utterly meaningless until they are analysed with a calculator after everything becomes clear on Sunday. By which time it's more than a little academic.

This year's twisted aggregated qualifying system is over-complicated at its best. Although the first part is run under low-fuel conditions it is only half-relevant. And that's precisely why the TV stations aren't bothering to show it.

5 NO REFUELLING, BUT KEEP TYRE STOPS

Watching a Grand Prix in the refuelling era is a hard slog. To appreciate what's going on, you've got to sit there with a calculator, and a pretty advanced timing monitor and think hard for two hours. And even then, you can get it all wrong because nobody except the teams knows exactly what's happening with the fuel loads.

Refuelling is only there to disguise the fact that there isn't much racing on the circuit. It's not really popular, not to mention an unnecessary danger and expense. Few people except commentator James Allen get worked up about two-stop strategies, three-stop strategies, X kilos of fuel and X seconds of stationary time. It's Sunday afternoon!

I'm not against pitstops themselves. They can add much to a race that might be dull. But there are too many variables and unknowns for that to happen at the moment. In the early Nineties, drivers would stop for tyres once, twice, or try to go the distance. And everyone knew who was on hard tyres and who was on soft ones. Hard tyres meant long life but





less grip, soft tyres the reverse. A simple, riveting plot. I'd propose a return to tyre stops only, though this season the opposite is happening. The new rules now prevent any tyre changes, but the tyre companies have quickly come to terms with what's needed to go the distance. And since it's the same for all (except Bridgestone-shod Ferrari) that only creates stalemate. Refuelling will stay, as will the secrets and lies. So you'll always have a situation where the race would be so much better if you knew everything you knew at the end, at the beginning. Huh? Exactly.



6 MORE STREET CIRCUITS
An almighty cheer went up when Michael Schumacher came limping out of the Monaco tunnel on three wheels last year. It was the only time that the metronomic German

tripped up until the title was sealed – and it happened on the last true street track on the schedule.

On street tracks everything is different and weirdness is normal. Schumacher hasn't won at Monaco since 2001! And that's conclusive proof that the narrow confines of a city venue bring a whole range of other factors into play, besides mind-numbing technical efficiency.

The mental challenge is unique compared to the usual tracks where you can hardly even see the barriers they're so far back. More than anything, the usually very generous margin for error is reduced to nothing – and some drivers handle that better than others.

People like Keke Rosberg and Ayrton Senna were supreme on the streets – and in their day you usually had at least three such races each year. Speed around these places has a lot more to do with the driver – he needs to sense where the limit is and go as close as he can without going over the edge once. And that's largely in the mind. A true champion should show he can race on roads.



7 FEWER GRANDS PRIX

This year features an all-time high of 19 races, and the sport has probably already gone way over its limit with that. With a pretty steady line of booming Asian economies building up circuits, you could have 30 races in no time – theoretically at least.

But even at 19 races the calendar is begging for a prune. And that's basically because too much of a good thing is a bad thing. If golf had 14 majors, for example, then they'd stop being all that major.

Grands Prix lose their own identity – and people will stop trying to keep up – when they're on all the time. Many of the newly-built circuits look exactly the same on the TV screen anyway, which is not a good start.

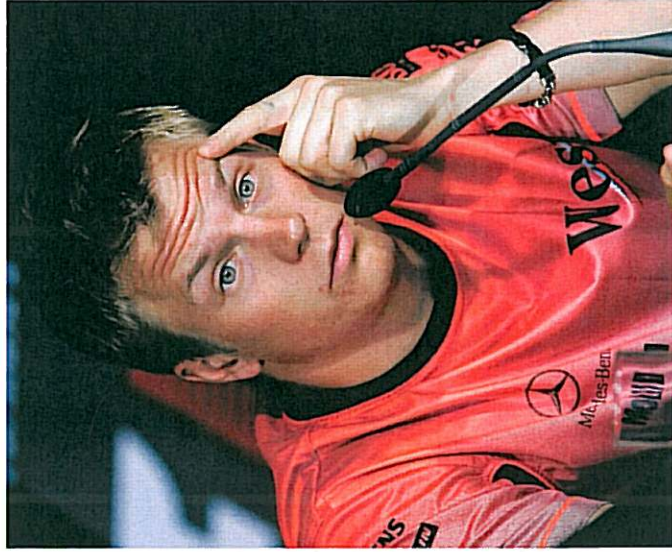
Individual races have lost their souls as sporting events. The screen graphics are the same, the procedures and timings are identical. There is very little to make one race different from another – they're all just rounds of the world championship aren't they? Commercial boss Bernie Ecclestone seems to be of the view that you can substitute Monaco for India and Silverstone for Dubai.

That's highly contentious. The races should be bigger and the championship smaller. Indianapolis, Monaco, Spa, Monza and other historic venues should form the core of a reduced schedule of about 14 or even 12 rounds.

8 MORE PERSONALITY

Any sport is enhanced by its personalities. Foul-mouthed tennis players, thuggish rugby stars and prissy soccer prima donnas tend to divide opinion, but they get people interested. The more a competitor is able to show character and be himself, the more genuine and human is the show.

Sadly Formula One has become the world's most corporate sport.



With enormous multinational companies (Renault, BMW, Toyota, Honda and Mercedes) involved, the drivers have become flag-bearing employees. And that means that a clean, PR-friendly face is part of the deal.

As sportsmen, drivers are pretty much the opposite of that. They enjoy a carefree and often playboy youth as they climb the ladder — just ask them about their visits to Macau in Formula 3. But when they reach Formula 1 and the world can take notice who they are, they're shattered.

Press conferences are an absolute doze these days. Drivers won't cause offence and they can't discuss their strategies. They say the right words, get out of there and then speak the truth to their teams. Yes, there is an element of that in any branch of sport, but the blatant PR drive in Formula One is easily the most sickly. At least one top British team is known to write completely fictional driver interviews in its own fan magazine.

It's all rather short-sighted. The fans are not idiots and they won't be fooled. People loathe a fix. And then the corporates will be sitting without the P in their PR.

AND TO REALLY SHAKE THINGS UP...

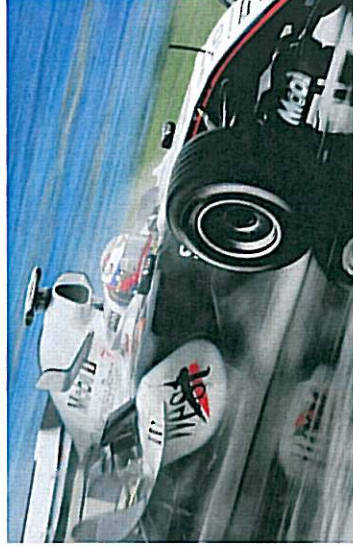
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FLOOD THE TRACK

The wet races are always the best, whether the conditions are consistent or not. The reasons for that are clear — the driver gets to influence the car's speed a lot more than usual, and the too-efficient aerodynamics play less of a role.

Then there is all the guesswork — choosing the right tyres can be tricky without an accurate forecast. A wet track introduces all kinds of variables and makes for some hairy moments.

Since artificial flooding is easy enough, this could be a chance for the viewers to know more than the teams for once. They



could even have a laugh at their expense.

This is the era of reality television. Why not have a viewer vote at various intervals in the race? The topic: where and if the track should be flooded again. Compelling stuff it would be if you could then get a graphic saying "turns 7-10 will be flooded at 13:47". The days of making tea mid-race would be long forgotten as you waited for the drivers to come harping down the straight and find a small pond at the end of it.



10

HANDICAPPING

Not unheard of in motorsport. The World Touring Car championship, for example, penalises successful drivers with a weight penalty at the following race. But that's all rather dull and does nothing to enhance the viewing of any given race.

What we need is a clearly-defined set of targets that make life harder for any driver that's having a good run. There are the obvious ones, like making him start at the back of the grid or running a wet race on slick tyres. But there are better ways to draw out the drama. Let's use Michael Schumacher as an example. In order for him to claim any points from the race, he needs to overtake at least six cars for position — and not all in the first 10 laps! No point in disappearing from pole position, so all kinds of possibilities arise. Especially if it's a championship showdown!

Wouldn't it also be interesting if he had to hop out of his car for 10 laps in the middle of the race and let some youthful non-F1 driver (from second-tier category GP2 perhaps) with much to prove go out and give it his best before handing the car back over. Nobody would want to miss that — it might leave Schuey with a crashed wreck, just a little extra work to do — or the world might discover a new star! **SAI**

