



Ancillary F1 – McLaren Electronic Systems

This is Ancillary F1, a mini series brought to you by Sidepodcast, focusing on those companies that contribute to the sport, but don't compete for the title. Yesterday we looked at tyre manufacturer Bridgestone, and today we'll be taking a look at McLaren Electronic Systems.

The McLaren Group of Companies includes McLaren Racing, McLaren Cars and McLaren Electronic Systems. The Group started out as Ron Dennis expanded his Formula 1 team to encompass more and more activities. Dennis is the Chairman and CEO of the company, while Martin Whitmarsh is the COO.

McLaren Racing is obviously known for its Formula 1 success, McLaren cars are an elite and popular road sports car, but we need to look at McLaren Electronic Systems.

The official blurb of the company says: "It is a leading exponent of the group's technical prowess and design philosophy. Its goal is to provide the automotive electronics customer with a complete range of products which are reliable, yet at the very limits of technology." That's as clear as mud, obviously.

What the company does, then, is provide the high tech stuff. Although not limited to Formula 1, they also provide for the aerospace, marine and medical industries as well as home entertainment systems for you and I. However, F1 is the bit we're interested in, and McLaren Electronics supply many useful bits of technology, including:

- Sensors, for tyre pressures, temperature and speed.
- Refuelling regulators.
- Trackside telemetry, for lap analysis, graphs and charts.
- System monitors, for car setup, tuning, and configuration.

In 2008, McLaren Electronics were handed the contract to supply the standard ECU to all teams. This immediately caused controversy, of course, as McLaren Racing were perceived to perhaps gain an advantage from the close association.

McLaren Electronics have teamed up with the Microsoft Corporation to develop the system, and they manufacture the units for every team on the grid. An ECU is designed to monitor the powertrain, gather data, and send it back to the garages in real time. With up-to-date information to hand all the time, the idea is for strategy decisions to be made quicker, setup and tuning to be verified and data to be compared from current and previous laps.

However, the McLaren Standard ECU is thought to be at least 50 % less powerful with barely any of the memory of its predecessors. It was actually designed to be a lesser model than the previous ECUs due to the ever-present desire to cut costs. The current ECU took a lot of getting used to for teams and drivers alike, as the unit was well over 30% heavier, and allowed for engine braking and traction control to be banned.

There are rumours that the ECU can also be used to override the control of the cars in the future, particularly in terms of a safety car period. With the safety car rules under review, one option appears to be allowing the ECU to reduce car speeds in case of an incident, and thus increase safety.



Whether this will come to pass very much depends on the other teams. They cannot be happy with one team having greater access to the group that makes the ECU, even if there have been no incidents as yet. Meanwhile, McLaren are confident that the company is separate enough for it not to be an issue.

That's it for this episode of Ancillary F1. I'd love your feedback on this series and the standard ECU. Leave your thoughts on the voicemail 0121 28 87225, or at sidepodcast.com. Join me again tomorrow for our next look at an ancillary company.

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