



An Aside with Joe – That’s the thing that goes bang-pop, bang-pop

Christine: Welcome to An Aside With Joe - That's the thing that goes bang, pop, bang, pop. Before we get started, a quick note to say the audio in this show suffered during recording. We wanted to let the ever awesome Joe share his wisdom so have done our best to minimise the damage, but if you prefer, there's a full transcript of the show available on sidepodcast.com.

Mr C: It's been so long since we spoke to Joe Saward, Formula One introduced and then scrapped an entire qualifying idea. An entire concept came in and then went and we haven't had chance to catch up with Joe so we must do that right now. Let's set the record straight, Joe, how are you and how is F1 now that qualifying is fixed?

Joe: Well, qualifying was just one of these silly things due to a bunch of people making decisions without thinking them through, so once that was beaten out of them with the baseball bats of public opinion, gradually we're sort of moving in the right direction. There are some technical regulations that have gone through for 2017 which I happen to think are bone-headed, but at least the engine side of it is good. But the chassis side of it doesn't make a lot of sense. And in fact, I understand that eight of the eleven teams don't want to have it now but unfortunately they voted for it a month ago so now they've got it. It's all fundamentally bonkers but that's the way the sport is politically at the moment.

Mr C: And what specifically stands out to you as nonsensical in these new regulations?

Joe: Well, changing the cars. Because if you want a convergence to occur... the original aim of changing the cars for 2017 was to make them sexier looking, to make them faster and to close up and make the racing better. Rule number one with convergence, if you want to converge anything, you keep it the same. Everybody catches up and the field catches up. If you have new things the teams have different resources, the rich teams can spend more time in the wind tunnel and therefore the gaps open up, so it's not rocket science. Unfortunately, it seems to be rather more rocket science than members of the Strategy Group can figure. Now, to be fair to them, apparently the cars will look sexier. I don't know, will they be any quicker? Probably not, because the cars are developing so fast at the moment that the whole idea of having lap times that are five seconds faster is just silly really, because we'll be there within this season, I would think. So the five second thing is nebulous anyway. Not that anyone in the grandstand can see the difference anyway. So, really, it's just a means of spending a lot of money that the small teams can't afford in order to spread out the field. Whether or not there'll be more overtaking is another matter. The cars are wider and there is supposed to be a certain amount of ground effect, but ground effect doesn't guarantee overtaking and there's a sort of myth going on that this will be the cure for everything. Ground effect is not necessarily the cure for anything. But there we are, these people, they make their decisions and, as one says, they've made their bed and now they have to sleep in it. Nothing much we can do because they're the only ones who get a say.

Mr C: And the reason that the teams voted for this and are now against it is what?

Joe: Oh who knows, they were smoking pot that day. Sometimes you just never know, there's political reasons they do things, there's all kinds of reasons they do things. A whole bunch of promoters the other day



on the Formula One Commission just decided with Bernie Ecclestone and the man from Rolex to vote against a tyre regulation which all the teams and the tyre manufacturer wanted - what was all that about? I think it was probably to do, they wanted to prove that the F1 Commission didn't just agree every-thing. But you know, it's all secret, we don't really know what's being voted on anyway, we can vaguely keep up with it but it is bonkers, the current government structure.

Mr C: The positive is, you've got some solid and understandable and decent engine regulations passed and approved.

Joe: Well, vaguely understandable, yes. It's basically a means of reducing the costs to the teams, to the smaller teams. It's not a huge amount but it's at least something, and there's a lot of good things going on. If you go onto Twitter and YouTube and Facebook nowadays, you're suddenly finding lots and lots of Formula One footage going up there because Bernie Ecclestone got hit on the head with a brick or something and...

Mr C: Saw some sense.

Joe: And realised that social media was something quite important. I think it's probably something to do with the plummeting TV viewing figures but eventually, someone hit him round the head with a baseball bat hard enough for him to accept that social media is important. So now we have some things happen-ing. It'll take a long time to catch up from the damage done, but nonetheless, it's a good sign.

Mr C: Do you have any insight into what caused that change? Is it the fact that something like MotoGP are doing so well at social media?

Joe: Oh, I don't think anybody pays any attention outside the walls of Formula One but yes MotoGP is doing extremely well, but I don't think that's the reason, I think the reason is probably the fact that somebody may have whispered in his ear that if he doesn't start changing things, he's going to get rode out as CEO. I think there has to be an element of that in there. Also the fact that he's given up fighting, he gave up fighting the engine thing, he's still sort of making noises about how it can all get swept away but he doesn't really have any power to do that anymore so it's interesting to see that he has backed off on the engines and he has backed off on the social media. Hopefully, he'll back off on slagging the sport as well, but I think we're getting to a point where pressure is being applied because CVC are getting desperate. They want to sell it and the only people who want to buy it are, I think, are smart enough to realise it will only have the value if it's fixed before they buy it, as opposed to buying it and trying to fix it. At the price it's being asked by CVC, you wouldn't buy it in the state it's in, so CVC need to fix it in order to get the price they want. I don't think we'll see any fast moves on the selling front but I think we will see a move to-wards getting the sport into a much better place. I think that will involve the buyers doing deals with manufacturers, doing deals with the FIA before it all happens, as opposed to trying to sort it all out after-wards.

Mr C: And all that should be good news for fans who don't want to see it go down the tube.

Joe: Absolutely. The current owners of the commercial rights have basically asset stripped the sport. The best thing to do is to find someone a little more enlightened as a future owner, hopefully, anyway, and to try and build up the sport and make it better and richer. I don't know what we're going to do about pay television, it's a tough question that one. But I'm told, I don't know because obviously I don't live in Eng-



land, but I'm told that you can watch a lot of Sky quite cheaply if you want to see races and you can still see some on Channel 4, but obviously it will all go to Sky eventually. But having said that, Sky has got to work out how to do it properly. It's no good having it all behind a paywall if nobody's buying so they're going to have to give some stuff free to air to lure people in. So we'll see how it develops, but I think the plummeting viewer numbers have been pretty disastrous and it's not just pay television countries as well. Even the switch to Channel 4 has reduced the viewing numbers quite dramatically as well.

Mr C: Sure. Because of less promotion.

Joe: Well it's less promotion. It's not the BBC. Channel 4 is just a small channel, really, when you boil it down. I'm sure they're doing a fine job, I don't know, I haven't seen any of their programming. I've seen the crews around, they've probably got about half as many people as Sky have got. I guess they're doing the best job they can with the money available.

Mr C: I'd say it's quite good, Christine? We watched it.

Christine: Yea, I've seen bits and pieces, they seem like a competent group of people, so...

Joe: They're mainly ex-BBC.

Mr C: Yea.

Joe: With the exception of this sort of hunky bloke who I haven't actually spoken to yet, who stands next to Coulthard and looks hunky.

Mr C: Is that tall Steve?

Joe: Yea, I guess it is. I don't really know, I honestly don't because I haven't had any interface with him as yet. I've seen DC and the crew wandering about but in terms of what they're actually doing, I don't know. Because oddly enough, whenever I try to watch things in a foreign country, you get this thing, this message come up saying 'eh eh not allowed'.

Mr C: That is a problem. I mean, they can only put so much effort in and only do so much when they're working to a limited timescale.

Joe: Yes, yes, I think that's a fair point. I don't know, we'll see how things go. But I think that Formula One has to get itself together, not just in terms of producing a better TV show but also in terms of not being negative about the sport. There's just far too much negativity. It's beginning to turn around now and people are saying good things. We've had three good races and the Russian Grand Prix wasn't great but it wasn't disastrously bad. We had a fairly decent shunt at the first corner and some catching up that was necessary. Okay, Nico Rosberg's won all four races but that doesn't mean it's bad television or bad racing. I mean, the racing in the midfield has been spectacular, some of it. What can you do? If Ferrari aren't doing the job and catching up, what can you do? I don't believe that one should slow down the winners just because the others are a bunch of wombats. I think that we just have to wait for convergence.

Mr C: We're back to 2017 again.



Joe: Well, we are but convergence is what happens if you leave a Formula the same for a period of time. One of the reasons that the racing was so close before the new engines came along is that the engines were all pretty much researched to the hilt so they were all pretty closely matched. Once we had new technology, then of course, you have people that did it right and people that did it wrong, and now everyone else is trying to catch up, or not as the case may be. Honda would help their cause considerably if they hired some people who knew what they were talking about but they have this policy of hiring only Japanese people. Which, to me, is daft. One can't change cultures easily. The advantage, if they do ever get it right, is that once they get to that point nobody else will be able to catch up because they won't be able to hire Japanese people.

Mr C: Right.

Joe: That's what we had before in the '90s, Mr Goto from Honda, who had led the great Honda engineering team in the Williams and McLaren days, he was hired by Ferrari but in terms of what use he was, getting them information, is another question. His English was pretty good but complex technical issues are quite complex and very often one of the problems we've seen in the past is that people who struggle with English, struggle to get up to speed. Because lots of the engineers are speaking only English. If all the engineers at Ferrari spoke Japanese, it wouldn't be a problem.

Mr C: How do you rate McLaren's improvement?

Joe: It's gradual, but you know, they are chipping away at the problem. The problem, based on what we've seen so far in testing and in the races, the car goes round corners quite fast, it just doesn't go down the straight very fast so you can think up lots of reasons why this would be, but I can only think of one of them and that's the thing that goes bang-pop-bang-pop in the back. If that doesn't go bang-pop fast enough, they're going to be slow. I think it's fair to say that as Honda improves, not just in speed but also in reliability, they will get better. But that takes time. The trouble with all this technology nowadays, it's so complicated that everything takes time, and you just have to grin and bear it, and Mercedes did a particularly good job back in 2014 and thereafter, and so we have to wait for everyone else to catch up. They will catch up, it's not the end of the world, we're not going to watch Mercedes... the other thing is, Mercedes Benz, the return on the investment. If you win too many times in a row, it becomes a negative rather than a positive, so they need to balance up... if you're expected to win, the only headline is when you fail. They have to balance how long they stay in at the same kind of level if the other's can't catch up. Because if the others can't catch up, it doesn't really work. Then you get to a situation where, we've been through these cycles before, you get to a situation like it was in the 1930s, grand prix racing only had two teams that could win and that wasn't healthy at all.

Christine: We have been through this cycle before, most recently with Sebastian Vettel. And he's making a bit of a name for himself this year with a new nemesis in the shape of Kvyat - whose side do you fall on, Joe?

Joe: I think in Bahrain, Vettel made a lot of fuss about what was a very good manoeuvre by Kvyat and then in Russia, Kvyat made a mistake. He made a mistake because he probably underestimated the levels of grip on the race track because it was cool and he just drove into the back of Vettel, and punted Vettel into,



guess who, Dan Ricciardo. And then to add insult to injury, they're pottering off down the next straight and Vettel lifts off because he thinks his car is not working properly...

Mr C: Because he's just been hit.

Joe: Yea, he's just been hit so there's something wrong with it. So he backs off quite dramatically and poor old Kvyat has got nowhere to go. I feel for him in the second case, the first one was a mistake. The problem is, it's not a good time to be making mistakes at Red Bull because in the finest traditions of the mad axemen there, they're looking at Max Verstappen being in the team next year and they're looking who to throw out the window, and Kvyat's the man who is teetering on the balcony right now.

Mr C: So, do you think that Red Bull pressure has launched him into these incidents?

Joe: No, not at all. I think he's just a young driver showing what he can do and I think he's very talented but Red Bull, as I've said many times, have a weird attitude towards these things. They've thrown out some really class drivers over time just because it didn't suit the purpose. For me, yes you can argue that they wouldn't be Grand Prix drivers if Red Bull hadn't paid for them to get there, that's true. But then again, if you take the best drivers because you've got money and then throw half of them on the heap, is that serving any great purpose? Yes, it gets you two guys who have won Grand Prixes, I think there's only two so far in the Red Bull schemes, that'll be Sebastian Vettel and Daniel Ricciardo. But you know, in exchange for that, there's probably a dozen or fifteen drivers all very good to a lesser or greater extent, whose careers have been seriously damaged because generally speaking they don't get picked up after having their time at Red Bull. How many have been picked up elsewhere? There's an awful lot of them in Formula E at the moment, but they're just sort of falling from a great height because they get taken to Grand Prix racing on the back of Red Bull money and then when the Red Bull money stops they have nothing left but a very long drop.

Mr C: And do you think that might happen with either Verstappen or Sainz?

Joe: Well, I don't think anything bad's going to happen with Verstappen because he's clearly a class act and he's doing an absolutely terrific job again this year. I feel terribly sorry for Sainz because he's extremely good but he's just not quite as good as Verstappen. They dumped Jean-Éric Vergne who was almost as good, and actually better in some seasons as Dan Ricciardo. Okay, he may not be as bright as Daniel Ricciardo in terms of engineering, but he was quick. And there's a whole bunch of people like that, Buemi of the world, Alguersuari, Liuzzis, Friesachers, you can go back, Neel Jani, Scott Speed. I can't even remember them all but there's a ton of them. It's just Red Bull's rather bizarre policy of throwing people out of the aeroplane.

Christine: In a slightly similar fashion, McLaren had to draft in Stoffel Vandoorne to replace Alonso for one race, and he did a really good job. Do we think that either Button or Alonso should be worried?

Joe: Should be worried should be in the past tense, I think. Stoffel Vandoorne arrived in Bahrain and sank a very, very large axe into the back of Jenson Button, I would suggest. I'm sure he did with it a smile, he's not a bad fellow, it's just that his time has come and in his view, the other chaps are a bit too old, probably. We have to see now if Jenson Button and Fernando Alonso can do things that the team will think that Stoffel can't do. But I think the fact is that Stoffel has got all the signs of a really class act, and I think at the



end of the year, the door will be open for one of the two drivers at the moment, and I don't suppose it will be Fernando Alonso.

Mr C: If Fernando stays, how do you think he will fare against such competition?

Joe: That's a very, very interesting question.

Mr C: I won't finish that sentence but you know what I'm saying.

Christine: He doesn't like fast rookies.

Joe: Well, you should ask Johnny Herbert, he apparently has a view on this, which is that racing drivers slow down as they get older. The fact is that they do slow down as they get old, it's very rare that a man aged 35 is as quick as a boy aged 19 because when you're 35 you have more things that are valuable to you and at 19 you just don't know any better because you're crazy. What happens is that your experience cuts in, so it's a calculation really. Because experience is very important in Formula One these days, probably too much so actually, because we tend to have the same drivers... I mean some of these drivers have had careers going for seventeen years which in Formula One terms, that's generations. Every so often it's good to have a clear out and some new faces. I think that's what's happening now, we've got some very good young guys coming in, led by Vandoorne and Verstappen, but there's also Pascal Wehrlein. It's nice to see Kevin Magnussen's got back in, and there's a few others out there who have got the look about them of being, these guys are a bit special. It's good to see that because you need to change the names occasionally just to add to the story.

Mr C: Let's talk about Magnussen quickly, seeing as you've brought him up. Magnussen versus Palmer. Palmer has said he's had a few issues with his car in the opening races, he seemed to be slightly better in Russia so perhaps there's something to that. Magnussen has done pretty much everything that Renault have asked of him.

Joe: First of all you've got to remember in terms of up to date experience in the last year, Jolyon did a lot more testing than Kevin did. One thinks of Kevin, because he had a season of racing in 2014, as obviously going to be somebody who's going to be better than Jolyon. The thing about Jolyon is, it's easy to overlook him because his progress has been very solid as opposed to fireworks, but that doesn't make him any worse than anyone else. It's just he's had to work his way up the ladder, whereas Kevin, Stoffel, Verstappen, these guys come in bang, crash, wallop. In some respects, a driver who has worked his way up is maybe stronger anyway, because emotionally and psychologically, they've had to take some battering. Whereas some of these young guys haven't. There's lots of pros and cons and there's also perception is the reality in Formula One. Rightly or wrongly, Jolyon isn't seen as being a rising superstar, which perhaps he should be but it's very difficult because depending on the team you're on, at the end of this year, if Jolyon's beaten Kevin in that car then he will be a superstar because Kevin, we know, is very quick. When you get thrown out of a team because of two world champions, it's not necessarily a bad reflection on you it's just the fact that you're in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mr C: Who else has starred? Can we talk about Haas?

Joe: We can!



Mr C: They've come into Formula One with a different business model, Christine's face lights up at the mere suggestion of such a team. Have they impressed you?

Joe: Of course they have, yes. They played the rules as the rules existed and they did it right. People say it's another Ferrari, it's not another Ferrari, it's not that good. Their infrastructure is nothing to compare and we've seen that, there have been a few screw-ups because it's a new team fundamentally. But Grosjean's driven an absolutely blinding season so far, it's just been absolutely brilliant, and he was brilliant again in Russia. He's a real class act, these days. I think up against him, poor old Gutiérrez has been struggling but there are times when Gutiérrez is just as quick as Grosjean but he doesn't seem to do it in the races. That's down to experience probably more than anything. I mean Grosjean's been through the mangle in Formula One enough times to be tough as nails and he really is tough as nails. He's a grown up, now, if you like. That's very important. Drivers change over time, look at Nico Rosberg now, he's a grown up too. He's a much better driver. Lewis isn't falling apart with the pressure, and that's true, he's just had a run of bad luck. Things keep breaking for him, but as they grow up and as they become more stable human beings, before they lose their speed, there's this sweet spot where they can do great things and I think that's what we're seeing with Grosjean at the moment, he's doing great things in that car.

Christine: I always knew that he would. I had faith.

Joe: A lot of people... if you have speed, you have speed. Speed is something you can't make if it's not there. You might be wild, so you can slow down a fast guy but you can't speed up a slow guy. That's the bottom line of it. Maldonado was very fast but he just never learned how to control it, apart from that one day in Spain that is still a complete mystery to everybody. But there are these other guys out there with this fantastic speed. The interesting thing about Verstappen is that he seems to have this maturity much earlier than other people, you've got to remember he's three years younger than the other youngest driver, who I think is either Wehrlein or Kvyat. And he's driving like a guy who's 28. This is why he's so special. I think also to a large extent Stoffel's got a lot of that too. There's this sort of calm about them when they're racing that you see in the great drivers, you just recognise that there's something there that's special.

Mr C: Let's mix it up a bit, you were at Formula E very recently.

Joe: I was.

Mr C: It was hosted in your home town, what did you make of the event up close and personal?

Joe: Well, first of all I don't think one should compare it to Formula One because it's completely different. It's not trying to be Formula One, it certainly isn't Formula One. And it can do things that Formula One can't. What they are doing very well is that they are using modern technology and they're using television and social media very, very well. Their promotion is very good. There are lessons that could be learned from that for Formula One. They can go to places that Formula One cannot go. We cannot go and race around Les Invalides in Paris, it just wouldn't happen because they're electric, they make no noise... or they make a strange noise rather. They're not classic racing cars so... The other thing is, they're attracting a different kind of audience so the people coming in are new to racing and we should applaud that because these are the kind of people who might say well, this Formula E's alright, what's that noisy stuff, I wonder if



that's any good either. We should actually be working with Formula E to try and draw in new generations because their demographic is much better than Formula One's demographic in age terms. Now, as to the actual event, it's a one day event fundamentally, so a lot gets squeezed in. It tends to be, because a lot of these events are new, certainly in Paris, there's a lot of things that could be improved upon in terms of the organisation. That's clear but it's a toe in the water. I think next year will be much better. Some very good quality racing drivers in there, very few drongos. The cars are bog standard basic, but they are very basic cars and not very interesting. But that means they're all quite closely matched in terms of performance because there's no endless hours spent in wind tunnels and CFD programmes and all this sort of rubbish. They're just basically big old go-karts. And the interesting thing is the power train in the back, which is relevant, interesting. Overall, the camerawork was extremely good. What they do is, they do the-se low and fast shots which get the idea of speed when they're not very fast, but they're fast enough not to be disappointing. If you go in a helicopter shot in a Formula E, forget it, it'll take three weeks to get to the corner but that's not how you film it. The trouble with Formula One is, half of Formula One's cameras are too busy focusing on Rolex. Everywhere you go there's a Rolex sign, and for me, the cameras spend far too much time on the trackside signage than they do on the cars. And that means also that a lot of the camera angles are high, which means that the Formula One coverage is not as dramatic as it should be. So, again, I've seen some changes recently. We've seen all kinds of new technology sneaking quietly in, and there's a lot more new stuff coming so, you know, I don't think anything's disastrous, I just think we've got to learn from each other and get along and do it. Anyway, all things considered, as I don't have a French Grand Prix to go to, and there's a hint in there somewhere, I was happy to get the Metro and go and watch a Formula E race. I enjoyed myself, it was a good race. It was unfortunate it ended under yellows because it was building up into a nice little fight, and I saw some great overtaking manoeuvres and some great racing. I thought Robin Frijns was quite brilliant, although apparently he's not in Formula One because he has an attitude problem or something but in terms of his talent, he's quite remarkable because he pulled off manoeuvres that you think, wow, how did he do that? And he never really got a proper chance in Formula One, so there you are. So that was it really, I was able to leave quite quickly, I didn't have to report about it, that was nice. I didn't have any hassle getting home or even getting there, so apart from the fact it was freezing cold, it was a terrific event and I think it's good for everybody.

Mr C: And Paris looked great on the TV.

Joe: Yes, and you know something? When the people in New York see that, they'll go, well, why don't we do that?

Mr C: Huh!

Joe: And that's the kind of thing. You see, Formula One will never get into New York in the city streets, anyway. It'll never get into a lot of places because of the noise, and this is the daft thing about 'let's increase the noise'. Duh. Why do we want to increase the noise? People don't want noise, the demographic we want, small children is what we want to see coming to races, their mummies say 'no, you can't go because your ears will be blasted out by these lunatics.' Formula E, they don't have that problem, you just have this strange whirring, whistling noises. Sounds like kettles. It is, nonetheless, something that should be thought about. And the other thing, of course, if we're trying to save energy, the last thing you want is more noise because noise is energy.

Mr C: Sure. Energy wasted.



Joe: Energy wasted. Correct. So Formula One, we have a lot of ear damage between us because of all the years we've been kicking around listening to this stuff. Let's try and get into the 20th century even. Let's do some catching up with the world because I think we got left behind a little bit.

Mr C: Joe, we're going to have to wrap it up because this microphone is driving me crazy. It's a shame we haven't got quite a clean audio signal this time but it's great to catch up with you. Always good to get the inside line on Formula One and please, please, do catch up again soon.

Joe: Okay, no problem, I shall do that.