



## F1 Circuits Past and Present - Silverstone

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Hello and welcome to this brand new mini series from Sidepodcast - F1 Circuits Past and Present. As you might imagine, we'll be taking a closer look at circuits, those that have featured on the calendar for a long time, and those that only had a brief outing. Today, we're going to begin with the one that started it all - Silverstone.

Silverstone Circuit is situated next to the village of the same name in Northamptonshire, England. It is one of the tracks with the longest history associated with Formula 1 as it hosted the very first World Championship race in 1950. However, motor racing had gone on there for several years before.

The circuit itself was built on the site of a World War II airfield - RAF Silverstone. The site was opened in the early 40s and featured three runways. Racing enthusiasts gathered to use it as a track towards the end of the decade, and in 1948, the Royal Automobile Club (or RAC) began to rent the site for more organised proceedings. Incidentally, the RAC should not be confused with the UK breakdown recovery service. They used to own that company but no longer. The RAC we are interested in has been organising motor races since before 1950, setting up the first non-F1 British Grand Prix at Brooklands in the 1920s.

The racing at Silverstone initially incorporated the runways as part of the track, and hay bales were used to mark the route. The cross formed by the runways and therefore the track meant that at some stages, the cars were heading straight for each other - not exactly an ideal racing layout. In 1949, they switched to a track that surrounded the runways, leaving them untouched in the centre. It was this arrangement that was used for the first ever Formula 1 Grand Prix in 1950, and from then onwards.

Following this initial alteration, the track has featured many small and several large revisions throughout the years. Lots of safety improvements were introduced, particularly after the tumultuous events elsewhere during the 1994 season. The very fast Hangar Straight was left in tact, but the similarly speedy Abbey Curve was modified to become a chicane.

Ahead of the 2010 season, the track was changed quite drastically to accommodate and welcome MotoGP. The new Arena section was introduced with the Wellington Straight and Village additions, and plans are afoot for a new pit and paddock complex in an entirely new position. Rather than sitting between Woodcote and Copse, the 2011 pit lane will be between Club and Abbey. It's going to be quite a change.

Although Silverstone has always been a feature of Formula 1, for a long while the British Grand Prix was circulated between Silverstone, Brands Hatch and Aintree. In 1987, it was handed to Silverstone permanently, but by then, Bernie Ecclestone was on the warpath. The BRDC own the track, and ahead of the 2005 season, it looked like there would be no appearance from the track on the calendar. They sorted a deal until 2009, and for the 2010 season, Formula 1 was set to be headed to Donington Park.

To discuss the entire Donington saga would take a decade, so suffice it to say that there was not enough investment in the track to make it a viable solution. Ecclestone and Silverstone finally came to an agreement - a 17 year one at that - for the former-airfield to remain on the calendar, providing they make a few changes, including the new pit complex I mentioned earlier. The confirmed race must be a blessing for the infrastructure that has been building up around the circuit, plus with the Force India team just across the road and Mercedes GP a couple of miles away in Brackley, Silverstone really is cementing it's position as the centre of British motorsport.



Along with F1, Silverstone plays host to MotoGP and the Britcar 24 event this year. They welcomed the motorsport/football crossover series Superleague Formula and will see a round of the Le Mans series with the 1000km of Silverstone. Previously it has welcomed British Touring Cars and the European Drift Championship.

The track itself is fast flowing, has smooth corners and a tricky final sector, but there isn't usually an enormous amount of overtaking. The weather can play it's part in spicing up weekends, and despite a potential lack of action, the fans both at the circuit and at home love the atmosphere and the history. The changes in 2010 put Silverstone in a bit of a transitional period, but let's hope they can prove they deserve their 17 year contract.

That's all for this first episode of F1 Circuits. Please let me know your thoughts on this circuit and on this series, you can email me [christine @ sidepodcast dot com](mailto:christine@sidepodcast.com), or leave comments on [sidepodcast dot com](http://sidepodcast.com). Join me tomorrow for the second episode of F1 Circuits.

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