



## F1 Circuits Past and Present – Watkins Glen

Hello, welcome to Sidepodcast, you are listening to F1 Circuits - our latest mini series, covering all corners of the globe from the good to the bad, the current to the ancient. If it was or is on the F1 calendar, we want to know about it. This, though, is our final foray in this series, and we'll be visiting a very special track.

The Monaco Grand Prix is possibly the most famous on the F1 calendar, certainly one of the sport's most historical events, and the one that every team and driver wants to win. There's something about the weekend that is special, something people can't quite put their finger on... even if the races can be more about accidents than overtaking.

Monaco was already glamorous before Formula One rolled into town. Initially, it was three distinct areas - Monaco itself, Monte Carlo, and La Condamine, the harbour that joins them. Beautiful houses and peaceful surroundings were the name of the game... right up until the casino opened in the mid 1800s. With high-class gambling and relatively simple tax laws, the rich and famous came flocking to the area, population increased, and the three separate areas sprawled together to become the Monaco we know and love.

The track itself sits mostly in the Monte Carlo area, but particularly enjoys the scenic views of the harbour front. It's a temporary circuit, essentially taking over Monaco for one weekend a year, with grandstands erected and removed as required. Putting the circuit together takes just under two months, whilst taking it down is faster - less than a month.

It was early in the new century when Monaco's car club found a new president - Alexandre Noghes - who started up several motorsport events, including a popular local car rally. The Noghes family suggested to Prince Louis II of Monaco that they might do well holding a Grand Prix, and thus in 1929, the first race around the street circuit took place.

Monaco was on the calendar for the first F1 World Championship in 1950, the second race of the season, and Fangio won it easily. The race was on and off the calendar for the next few years, due to financial and regulatory difficulties, but it has been a permanent fixture since 1955.

That returning Grand Prix in 1955 was an incredible one, as Alberto Ascari not only crashed out of the race, but spun off right into the harbour. He suffered only minor injuries, though, and swam back to shore - safe, if a little bit wet. It's fair to say the Monaco street circuit isn't the safest place you could hold an F1 race. Even now, with safety so much improved and little chance a driver could make his way into the harbour without purposely diving in, it's a serious challenge.

The tight, twisting characteristics make overtaking a problem. Qualifying is crucial - more so than any other track - with so little chance for passing, and just the one or two laps to sort the men from the boys. Drivers have to be on full alert, concentrating their hardest from the second the lights go out and the race begins. There is no margin for error. The buildings are close, the barriers even closer, it's narrow and overbearing. The streets meander up and down hills, and there are added tricks such as the extremely tight hairpin at Loews, possibly the tightest turn in modern F1. Then, of course, there's the tunnel before the swimming pool. It is a widely accepted fact that if Monaco wasn't already on the calendar, with the prestige and, let's face it, money, behind it, the FIA would never allow it to appear on the schedule.

The track has only had limited development since it arrived on the calendar in the 50s, including a couple of chicanes added and widened, plus the swimming pool section. That area was first included in the track layout in the early 70s,



it was redesigned in 1997, and altered again in 2003 to allow for a new pit complex to be built. Even with that, there's still not a lot of room for our 12 teams, 24 drivers and all their many, many guests.

That's all for this episode and this series of F1 Circuits. I hope you've enjoyed our journey around the globe, homing in on just seven tracks this time round. Let us know your thoughts on the circuits we've visited by emailing me [christine@sidepodcast.com](mailto:christine@sidepodcast.com) or commenting on [sidepodcast.com](http://sidepodcast.com). I will see you there.

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