



F1 Circuits Past and Present – Series 1 Omnibus

Silverstone

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 its 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.

Kyalami

This is F1 Circuits Past and Present - a new mini series from Sidepodcast taking a closer look at the tracks that have shaped Formula One. We're not just concentrating on the calendar as it stands right now but also investigating the tracks that no longer appear in the sport. Today, we have just one such track - Kyalami.

South Africa began holding motor races in 1934, with various circuits enjoying hosting duties. When the South African Motor Racing Club was formed, though, they decided it would be better to build their own official track. At the end of 1961, construction was complete of the brand new Kyalami circuit.

The Rand Grand Prix was held at the new arena in 1961, and Jim Clark won that inaugural race. It wasn't an F1 World Championship race though, as the track wasn't inducted into the official calendar until 1967 after a few tweaks to the circuit. Pedro Rodriguez was the first man to pick up an F1 trophy at Kyalami, taking a victory for Cooper in a race where only six of 18 entrants made it to the end.

Jim Clark took the first win at the circuit, and Kyalami was also the scene of his final race in 1968. He broke lots of records during the weekend, and took the win in a Lotus 1-2 finish.

Some other notable, and rather tragic, events occurred in the 70s, when American Peter Revson died during testing in 1974. He was replaced at his team Shadow by British driver Tom Pryce. But a cruel twist of fate meant that just three years later, Pryce was killed during an accident also at Kyalami.

Despite the accidents, there was some excellent racing to be had at the track, with a fantastic race in 1979. It was wet, Jody Scheckter and Gilles Villeneuve were fighting for the win, and it went to Gilles - although Jody went on to become South Africa's first and only world champion.

Prost, Piquet and Mansell provided plenty of entertainment over the next few years, but in 1985, it began to go wrong. Renault and Ligier became concerned about the tense political situation in the country. They felt the best thing to do was to keep their teams from attending the Grand Prix, which in turn meant the race was a failure. It was hard to make the books balance when half of the teams didn't turn up.

F1 withdrew from the country as things became even more strained - a State of Emergency was declared in South Africa - and it wasn't until 1992 that the sport decided to make a tentative return. The circuit had been rebuilt and heavily modified, with new pits and a much narrower track. Some of the most iconic corners had been changed beyond recognition and the track felt like a hasty afterthought. The surrounding area was flourishing and becoming an important district despite the track, rather than because of it.

Nigel Mansell led the race from pole position in 1992, winning for Williams. Prost won for the same team in 1993, when the South African Grand Prix opened the season. Financial problems meant that was the last F1 race held at Kyalami. The track underwent some more modifications and has held the World Superbike race and a round of the



A1 Grand Prix series. Recently, though, it has focused on national series' rather than the international events, so although Bernie Ecclestone is keen for F1 to return to South Africa, it may not be Kyalami that gets the gig next time.

Spa-Francorchamps

Hello and welcome to the third part in the F1 Circuits mini series brought to you by Sidepodcast. We're taking a look at some of the tracks that have made Formula 1 what it is, and some of those that continue to do so. Today's circuit remains an extremely popular event on the calendar, it can only be Spa-Francorchamps.

The Belgian Grand Prix has been on the calendar since the very beginning of the F1 Championship - although it took a detour away from Spa during the 70s and early 80s. When the race is at Spa, though, it is the highlight of the season. Everyone in F1, drivers, teams and fans alike, all love the challenge and the racing it produces.

The track began life as a 14 kilometre beast, winding its way through the forests deep in the heart of Belgium. Utilising public roads, it took the shape of an enormous wonky tear drop, with twists and turns, exceptionally fast, and incredibly dangerous. Such a long circuit meant the weather at one end of the track could be completely different to the weather at the other end. How do you set up for something like that?

Fatalities, not unknown in F1, were a particular problem at a track like Spa. When I said a minute ago that everyone loves the circuit... I was wrong. Jim Clark did not like it, in fact he would openly admit his hatred of the place, but he had good reason. On his first race there, in a 1958 sportscar event, he watched colleague Archie Scott-Brown succumb to a fatal crash. A few years later he was participating in the Belgian Grand Prix and just managed to avoid a crash that killed Chris Bristow, whilst his teammate Alan Stacey was also killed - the two incidents within a quarter of an hour of each other.

Given the dangers, safety was always a paramount concern. Armco was added to the circuit and that reduced the number of deaths, but it was still woefully underprepared for incidents. Jackie Stewart's horror crash in 1966 and his subsequent campaign for safety improvements was a real wake-up call for everyone involved. After the Grand Prix of 1970, the race moved elsewhere in Belgium - to Zolder and Nivelles - until a redesigned Spa was allowed back on the calendar.

The new layout cut the course from its epic 14 kilometres to about half that - still long by F1 standards, but a much more reasonable distance to race upon. The major overhaul included several new chicanes to slow speeds down, wider run offs to allow for mistakes and better safety barriers where run offs were not practical. Racing returned to Spa in 1983, missed a year to Zolder and was back full time on the calendar in 1985.

Financial difficulties came to the fore in the new millennium, with the Belgian GP knocked off the calendar in 2003 and 2006. It was a great moment when it returned though, because who can resist what has often been hailed the best corner in F1 - Eau Rouge. Named after the small river that it crosses, the Eau Rouge corner appears at the end of a straight towards the beginning of a timed lap. It flows swiftly up-hill and jinks to the left, to the right and back again, with drivers unable to see what lies ahead thanks to a blind summit. It's just beautiful.

The challenge of Spa - both in track design and weather conditions - means the race can often throw up a surprise. In 2009, Giancarlo Fisichella managed to haul his mid-field Force India to pole position, and fought for the win to the very end - eventually missing out to Kimi Raikkonen to take second place.

Spa doesn't just play host to Formula 1, they also welcome plenty of club racing and is home to a 24 Hours endurance race, plus the 1000 kilometres of Spa, which is part of the Le Mans endurance series. Whoever is racing there, they are bound to enjoy it.



Singapore

Hello and welcome, this is F1 Circuits - a mini series brought to you by Sidepodcast. We are onto our fourth location around the globe, where we'll get a glimpse into the somewhat brief history of the track, plus some of the contentious issues that have arisen there. Can you guess where it is?

The Marina Bay circuit is situated around the streets of Singapore, and it has been on the F1 calendar for just a few years - joining the fray in 2008. The Singapore Grand Prix had been held before - from 1966 to 1973 at a dedicated track called Thomson Road. Off the calendar for over thirty years, there was great anticipation when the Singapore GP made it's big return - mostly because it was to be Formula One's first night race.

Formula One Management boss Bernie Ecclestone always prefers things to benefit the European audiences, for whatever reason, so expanding into new markets meant some rather awkward timezone problems. To combat that, the race was scheduled to begin at 8pm local time, with a lot of floodlighting erected to make the nighttime brighter than day. There were a few safety concerns, and it took drivers a while to get used to their different tinted visors and the shadows they were confronted with, but all in all, the races there have been a success.

Well, I say success. The 2008 Grand Prix was overshadowed by a bizarre crash from Nelson Piquet that brought out the safety car and helped Fernando Alonso win the race. The 2009 Grand Prix was overshadowed by the news that the crash had been planned by Renault, and that they really had helped Fernando Alonso win the race. Although this incident doesn't really have anything to do with the circuit itself, there's no arguing against the fact that you think Singapore, you think Piquet.

The short history of the circuit means there has been little time for modification, but there were changes between the two races that we've seen so far. The original layout was criticised for a lack of overtaking opportunities, and the drivers were not at all happy with how bumpy it was - although as fans, we did enjoy watching the sparks from the back of the cars.

The pit lane was also considered a problem, as drivers would be slowing to enter for a pit stop and could still be on the racing line, given how the preceding and following corners were laid out. This was also changed. Finally, there were concerns about the high kerbing introduced in 2009, but these were fixed between Friday and Saturday practice.

Despite some of the tinkering that has gone on, the Singapore circuit organisers have tried to bring the sport closer to the fans. One big selling point of the track is the grandstand that actually bridges the circuits - meaning fans are sitting on top of a space that the cars go under. This seems all kinds of unsafe to me, but has yet to prove a problem. The organisers also held a competition for local fans to name three of the corners, with ideas being submitted and selected ahead of the 2009 GP. The chosen names were Sheares, Memorial and Singapore Sling. Not as exciting as I'd have hoped, but still a great way to get the fans involved.

Singapore is also keen to get new fans along, with the introduction, in 2009, of F1 Rocks, a group of concerts that went alongside the race weekend. The idea seemed to be to get music fans and F1 fans both to attend, and whilst a good idea in principal, the execution could have been a little better. Well organised, great attendance, but seemingly a separate thing to the motorsport. The event will be back this year, so we'll be watching eagerly to see if they can bring it all together.

So, what of the circuit itself then? It's about 5 kilometres long, and as it is situated harbourside it is comparable to Monaco and Valencia - more like Valencia, really. With 23 corners, it's almost impossible to tell where you are around the circuit at any one time, also like Valencia. With just two races under it's belt, it's hard to tell whether the Singapore track offers good racing, particularly as they have been all about Renault for the past couple of years. The



one thing we have noted, is that the marshals at the track have not been as strong as at some of the venues where racing is more prevalent. There have been a couple of worrying scenes with relatively simple car retrieval, so we're all hoping nothing worse will occur. That's true of every circuit, really though, isn't it?

Adelaide

Hello and welcome to F1 Circuits - a mini series from Sidepodcast that focuses on the tracks that make Formula One what it is. We're looking at the good, the bad, the current and the former, and we're travelling across the globe as we do it. Today, we're going to look at the Adelaide Street Circuit.

Set in the East Parklands area of Adelaide, and owned by the local council, the track wound through the streets for eleven years. As a temporary circuit, the buildings and grandstands were put up and taken down as the season progressed. It was right in the heart of the Victoria Park horse racing track, so the buildings had to be temporary, otherwise people wouldn't be able to see the horses for the rest of the year.

Adelaide was on the F1 calendar from 1985 until 1995, and took up its place at the very end of the season - the complete opposite to Australia's current position. When it was first proposed that Formula One might descend upon the area, a lot of residents were up in arms about it. They had some environmental concerns - particularly about how local wildlife would be affected - but eventually the deal was done and the race was set.

The track itself is pretty wide, and it has an enormous long straight - which is unusual for a street circuit. The rest of the track makes up for it though, with several 90 degree corners, taking the cars round the street corners.

Although it was only on the calendar for a relatively short 11 seasons, the circuit was host to some of the more memorable moments in F1. In 1991, Adelaide held the shortest race in Formula One ever - as the wet conditions saw the Grand Prix halted after just 14 laps. Ayrton Senna was leading the race, and was seen waving at the stewards frantically, to try and demonstrate how dangerous the conditions were.

In 1994, Adelaide was the scene of the controversial collision between Michael Schumacher and Damon Hill - in which a change of direction by the leading Schumacher cut off Hill's attempt to overtake and both of them were knocked out of the race. The double DNF allowed Schumacher to take his first World Championship.

The following year, 1995, the final Grand Prix weekend at Adelaide took place. The Friday practice sessions were underway, and in the afternoon, Mika Hakkinen's McLaren picked up a puncture. He crashed heavily, and had to receive serious medical attention at the side of the track. He was given an emergency tracheotomy by the track medical team before being airlifted to the nearest hospital. It was pretty serious, but Hakkinen pulled through to be back in time for the 1996 season. In fact, even though he had had to miss out on the Australian Grand Prix, that was still the next race on his list.

For the 1996 season, Melbourne outbid Adelaide for the Grand Prix, and the change in location meant a change in calendar position as well. Moving right up to the start of the season, the new date meant we had two Australian races back to back, albeit with a winter in between. It was a tough transition, from the great end-of-season party atmosphere of Adelaide, to the more uptight and jittery opening race, but things soon settled down - both in Melbourne and at the track left behind.

After a few years, things were becoming a bit too quiet. The local government decided they wanted a race back in the area, and so they put on a couple of smaller, touring car races. These days, they're also the location of the popular annual V8 Supercar race - although it is on a slightly shorter version of the track. The long, long straight has been curtailed, cutting off a portion of the original circuit.



Although plenty of fans miss the party atmosphere of Adelaide, Melbourne certainly holds its own in terms of atmosphere during a race weekend. It's clear that wherever the Grand Prix is held in Australia, the fans make it what it is.

Watkins Glen

Hello and welcome, you are listening to F1 Circuits - a mini series from Sidepodcast. So far throughout this series we've covered a variety of tracks that have been and still are on the F1 calendar. Today we're looking at a country that is woefully under-represented on the calendar at the moment. The US Grand Prix may have a future in F1, but for now we're looking at its past at Watkins Glen.

The story begins with a lawyer and sports car enthusiast called Cameron Argetsinger. He used to visit his summer holiday home in the Watkins Glen area of New York, and decided it would be an appropriate place to hold a race. He talked to the local government, and got the necessary approval so that in 1948 the first Watkins Glen Grand Prix could be held.

The street circuit was almost 11 kilometres long, and went right through the centre of the town. Spectators would line the streets, cheering on their favourite drivers. As you can imagine, it wasn't long before an accident occurred. In 1952, a spectator was killed and the prospect of the Grand Prix was reimaged.

Instead of a street circuit, the racing moved to a dedicated track south of the town. The length was drastically shortened - initially using existing streets for a 7 and a half kilometre jaunt, but cut down further when the permanent circuit was installed - now just under 4k. The original street track in Watkins Glen became a listed property on the National Register of Historic Places .

Formula One came to Watkins Glen in 1961. The previous two years, the US Grand Prix had been held in Florida and then California, but both had been rather muted events. The track was prepared for an international level race, as they were anticipating Formula Libre, but it was still a challenge when they were given just six weeks to get ready for F1 to arrive.

The track proved immensely popular and the weekend was a success - made even more so by the fact that no less than seven American drivers took part. One of them, Dan Gurney, finished second, so the fans were happy. Thus began Watkins Glen's twenty year occupation on the F1 Calendar - all the way through to 1980. Its high prize money and challenging circuit made it very popular, and it won a few awards for best organisation as well.

The track was not left unchanged, as safety improvements gradually crept into the sport, so the Glen had to accommodate them. In 1971, the track was extended with four brand new corners, whilst also being resurfaced and widened in places. These changes helped to an extent but as Formula One got faster, so the circuit couldn't keep up. The kerbing in particular was seen as a problem.

In 1973, Francois Cevert was killed during Saturday practice, after hitting a kerb and crashing heavily into the barriers. The high-profile incident raised more safety concerns, but it was for financial reasons that the circuit was eventually taken off the calendar. Reports suggest that organisers had not managed to pay debts to the teams - some saying it was close to \$1 million owed.

The US Grand Prix took a break, and returned in Phoenix and later Indianapolis. It is currently off the calendar, although plans are underway to see it return. Watkins Glen fell into disrepair for a while, until the International Speedway Corporation bought the track from Argetsinger and began to restore it.



The ISC welcomed all kinds of racing, including NASCAR, Can-Am, the International Race of Champions plus Champ Car and Indy Car.

In 2007, a fire destroyed one of the hospitality buildings that contained a lot of original artwork and motorsport memorabilia. Although they could not be replaced, building works were commenced with a brand new media centre recently completed. NASCAR celebrated the 50th anniversary of their debut at the Glen in 2007, and that race was voted the best of the year by Sports Illustrated. In 2008, it was the 60th anniversary of the first ever Watkins Glen race, on the original circuit. Although no longer in Formula One, there's so much history on this track that it will forever be a favourite.

Monaco

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.

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