

## The Great Debates – Should classic F1 circuits be so highly rated?

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Hello and welcome to the fifth episode of The Great Debates, a mini series brought to you by Sidepodcast in search of the reasons behind some of the endlessly discussed topics. In this series, we're not looking for answers – these are debates that almost have no answer – but instead highlighting the subjects that most F1 fans have some kind of opinion on. We've covered races, drivers and teams and now it's time to look at another aspect of the F1 circus.

The powers that govern Formula One and decide what direction its future is going to go in are always trying to expand the brand and keep the sport a global phenomenon. The calendar has changed significantly throughout the years, and there is a growing trend for European races to drop off the calendar and be replaced by new, shiny tracks in exotic locations.

But is this a good thing for the sport? Should F1 be broadening its horizons to new and untested locations, or would it do better to prioritise the familiar and beloved European circuits. I've unravelled five points to this debate, so let's take a quick look at them individually.

First up, location. Generally speaking, the much loved and classic European races that have dropped off the calendar, or are threatened with that fate, are in the middle of rolling countryside, that is hard to get to and has little to support an annual community rocking up and staying for the weekend. Whilst beautiful, Spa Francorchamps is an incredibly rural destination, and Silverstone is notoriously difficult to get to when the traffic starts to build up. On the flip side, newer locations such as Valencia, Singapore and dare I say it Sochi, are in city centres – great for visitors, perhaps not so brilliant for locals. Singapore, in particular, have turned the idea of a race weekend on its head, including concerts and entertainment, and offering all the things a city can that a field in the countryside cannot.

The next item on our list is the layout of the track. Almost as a direct repercussion of the location argument, those classic tracks have had the luxury of time and space to build brilliant racing layouts – a mixture of corners, fast and slow sections, with unique areas that make them classic – Eau Rouge springs immediately to mind. Meanwhile, the newer tracks may be a dedicated build or may have to wind around existing street circuits, but no matter which, the track layout never seems to deliver fantastic racing. Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Russia, Azerbaijan, the list of new tracks that have tried and failed is growing constantly. A new track designer could help this situation, but if it is a street circuit, they can only work with what is already there.

Next up, facilities. Part of this relates to the first debate about location, in terms of fans having to stay in rainy British fields in flimsy tents for three days, versus a pricey hotel in the city streets adjacent to the race track, but there's more to it than that. A new build allows for the facilities to be built better – high tech medical centres, nearby research and development complexes, a bustling paddock, and some beautiful, maybe even comfortable, grandstands. The tracks themselves are neat, clean and new, compared to crumbling race tracks with old buildings and a squeeze of a pit lane. But then again, there's something to be said about the familiarity, about the less than pristine nature of a classic track. Where a new event can sterilise the atmosphere and the excitement, a well-known and much loved circuit simply serves to ramp it up, regardless of what facilities are available.



That brings us on to the fourth of our five points, atmosphere. Who can deny the camaraderie on display in Spa, the incredible party going on in Brazil, the intensity of a weekend in Monza? Compare that directly with empty seats in China, or the disinterested crowd of Russia, and it's immediately obvious why classic tracks are so highly rated. They bring in an audience, and not just any audience, knowledgeable and passionate fans.

Which leads us to our last item, history. Monaco is always the example to use when it comes to discussing the history of a particular track. Up until I saw the madness of the Baku track, I would have said that Monaco would never be signed off as up to scratch for an F1 event if it was introduced today. But the long history it has in the sport, and all the weight of expectation and anticipation that comes with it mean it is a staple on the calendar. Races that have history create stories and that's why the classics have gained their status and are held in such high esteem. But, let's not forget that they all had to start somewhere, and just because a race is new doesn't automatically make it bad. Maybe in twenty years' time, we'll all be anticipating the race in Azerbaijan at that classic Baku circuit. Then again maybe not.

Thanks for listening to this episode in The Great Debates mini series, we're rocketing our way through our seven short episodes – just two more to go! I hope you're enjoying the topics we've covered so far, you can always let me know what you think at [sidepodcast.com/contact](http://sidepodcast.com/contact) and do join me again tomorrow for our penultimate episode.