



The Great Debates – What is the ideal length of an F1 season?

This is The Great Debates, a mini series by Sidepodcast, and you're listening to the sixth of seven episodes. In this series we're looking at some of the topics that are endlessly debated, usually with no definitive answer and that's good because I'm not looking to provide answers, just shed light on the conversation. Yesterday was all about circuits and today we're continuing that theme but moving to a different aspect of the F1 calendar.

The length of an F1 season has changed drastically over the years. The first F1 World Championship included only seven races that counted towards the final scores. Seasons have ebbed and flowed, with races on New Year's Day or lengthy winter off-seasons, from the races that do and don't count towards the championship to the compulsory twenty event seasons of recent years.

In the 1980s, the season was about 13 or 14 races long. When I started watching F1, it was up to 17 or 18, and now, in 2017 we're talking about 20 and 21 race events, and there are still plenty of locations that would still love to be added to the calendar.

Many F1 fans would say the more races the better, bring it on, a race every weekend if you can. NASCAR seasons contain well over 30 races and other sports, such as tennis, go through a full year with various tournaments on almost constantly. But, of course, there's an argument to be had that the defined season with a clear start, a clear end, and a reasonable length allows for the narrative of a championship to unfold – the long story of how a driver ends up winning the title, whether it be in dominant form, or with a down-to-the-wire finish. If F1 was on all the time, it would dilute the story, and with the racing itself more often disappointing than not, it would do it no favours to be clogging up the TV screens every weekend.

Whilst to full on F1 fans, more races means more fun, that isn't the story for everyone. At this point in my F1 fan life, I watch and enjoy when I can but can't prioritise the sport over real life the way I used to. The more race weekends there are, the more chance there is for real life to intervene and for me to miss out on the fun. Equally, getting new fans on board may be easier if there is a limited set of events to watch – the Crashed Ice format of four or five events a season had us hooked immediately – but then again, there's more chance of them stumbling upon the sport or giving it another chance if it is on screens more often.

Meanwhile, there's the teams and drivers to think of. Well, not so much the drivers although there's no argument that they work hard to be good at what they do. The teams of mechanics and engineers though, are hard at it from the moment they arrive at a location to the moment they leave. Unpacking equipment, setting up cars, repairing cars, managing a race, packing, moving on, and that's before we even talk about the endless travel and opportunities for jet lag.

The more races there are, the more tired these crews will be. We've seen the summer break enforced recently to make sure employees take a break, but they are still visibly tired and clearly ready to stop by the final race of the season. If there are more races added to the already busting calendar, then teams are starting to talk about having to double up on race crews, having relief squads to take over when the A team are too tired to continue. This would increase the costs of participating in F1, which in turn could put some teams off joining in the first place.



This debate is a really tricky one as there is no right answer and not even an answer that seems more logical than the others. It's truly a matter of opinion how long a race season should last, depending on how the sport affects your life and what you put in and get out of it. However, it's a debate that we are likely to see take centre stage as the calendar creep we have seen in recent seasons continues, and the strain on the teams starts to become a real issue.

That's all for this penultimate episode of The Great Debates, which means we have just one more episode in this series to go. Do let me know what you think about this particular topic, or previous debates we've discussed, or the show itself, by getting in touch at sidepodcast.com/contact. I'll be back tomorrow with our final Great Debate – can you guess what it might be?