



The Great Debates – Can you compare F1 eras?

Hello there, F1 friends, and welcome to The Great Debates, the latest mini series from Sidepodcast. The intention here is to shine a light on topics that cause conversation amongst everyone involved in F1, always have done and likely always will do. We have covered six topics in our journey so far and now we're on to our seventh and final debate, and it's a big one.

There are two specific things about Formula One that, when combined, make it both wonderful and unique – the jam-packed history of the sport dating back to the 1950 inauguration of the world championship and even before that, alongside the ever-increasing pace of change that keeps the sport moving forward.

However, these two brilliant aspects converge upon each other to create one of the hot topics of Formula One that will never be resolved: Can you compare F1 eras? By that, I mean, does it mean anything to say Lewis Hamilton has equalled Ayrton Senna's record of three world championships? Or that Rubens Barrichello was one of the best drivers ever because he started the most races? Or that Michael Schumacher is a better champion than Juan Manuel Fangio because he has two more titles to his name?

F1 is so bound in data, statistics, facts and figures, that it feels like you can make statements like these and argue your case. But the sport is so different now than when it started, so different now than ten years ago, even.

Senna battled hard for his championships, Hamilton has had a couple of dominant seasons with more time each year to make the difference. Barrichello started young and stayed a long time in F1, but in a series that was expanding its calendar as each year went by allowing for the race starts to rack up. Schumacher was an incredible driver but moulded a team around himself, employed some questionable tactics and may or may not have had some assistance from the governing body along the way. Suddenly they don't seem so comparable at all.

And yet, they are all doing the same job – driving as fast as possible in cars that are designed to go as fast as possible given certain conditions. They're in the same sport, and more than anything, we want to compare them, to discuss the relative merits and disappointments, to decide who really was the fastest driver or the greatest champion, the best qualifier or the worst teammate to have.

Even within the same year, things get tricky. It's a well-known adage that if you want to see how a driver is doing, you can only compare him to his teammate. Same car, same machinery, same situations. That doesn't even bear fruit, though, as there are other things to consider: team orders, favourable strategies, just that cursed bad luck that plagues some drivers more than others. Comparing teammates on a very basic level is hard enough, let alone crossing the boundaries of seasons and even decades.

But it's human nature to look for the story behind the achievements. What would the youngest F1 driver mean if he wasn't breaking a record set by previous drivers? How can we relate to the four consecutive championship wins by Sebastian Vettel if he wasn't standing on the backs of giants? With such a vast history to draw from, despite its differences, it's hard not to want to pit one success story against another, or analyse failures based on what's happened in the past. It may not be accurate but it helps us process the



information in front of us. It helps fuel the debates that have taken place and will continue well beyond the end of F1 as we know it.

So in the end, I think the answer is no, you can't compare F1 eras, but oh boy, that isn't going to stop us from trying.

That's all for this episode, and this mini series. The Great Debates has come to an end, although the debates themselves will rumble on indefinitely, I have no doubt. I hope you've enjoyed the show, do let me know your feelings about any of the topics discussed within, just visit sidepodcast.com/contact to air your views. Enjoy the conversation, enjoy the sport, and thank you for listening.