



Formula E-Brief – Your big puffy friend was there

Christine: This is Formula E-Brief - Your big puffy friend was there. On this show we discuss the highs and lows of Hong Kong, what Formula E can do better, and the surprise of a contact sport.

Mr C: So, the F1 season is over and that is just about all we have to say about that. I don't think we need to expend much more in the way of oxygen discussing it. What is, perhaps, an amazing coincidence, or nothing like a coincidence at all... the Formula E season began one week after the Formula One season ended, which gives us, given that we've got a lot of time, and a lot of energy, and a lot of... we haven't expended much on our Formula One coverage this year, so we've got a lot of motivation to be doing things at the end of the year, which hasn't been the case in the past. We thought we would take a look at what Formula E had to offer, a serious look, like put a bit of effort into this. And see what Formula E has to offer us this year.

Christine: Yea, if you've been looking at the Sidepodcast website at all over the past few days, the past week or so, you'll see it's kind of exploded with Formula E content. Apparently we're a Formula E website now.

Mr C: Well, it's worth giving it a proper try because I know before the very first Formula E season, we were into the idea of it. We liked what they were selling, we were impressed by their approach. I know there was a lot of posts on Sidepodcast, we discussed it in some podcasts but I think once the season got going, once they started racing in anger, we found that we couldn't keep up with two simultaneous racing seasons, because it does terrible things to your body clock, sometimes the races clash, you know, you have to pick one or the other. And at the time we were doing a lot of Formula One stuff and really it was very difficult to do Formula E justice in the first season. Second season, third season, I think we just sort of, it just passed us by, didn't it?

Christine: No, no, no, let's be honest. I watched a few of the races in the first season because Franck was in it.

Mr C: Yes he was!

Christine: Then he ruined his racing career and my interest in Formula E. So, I ignored it since then.

Mr C: So you've just been having an epic three year long sulk?

Christine: Yep.

Mr C: Interesting, okay, but are you over it now?

Christine: I am.

Mr C: Okay, that's good.



Christine: That's about as long as my grudges last, just for future reference.

Mr C: Righto. So, we've put a bit of effort, you've done a heck of a lot of work, a lot of research into understanding Formula E in the past two weeks. You've done a lot of posts on Sidepodcast, you've started another Formula E podcast 'It Only Takes E Minute' which is your one minute round up of Formula E news, a bit like F1Minute. You've done a whole bunch of those already. You've been doing posts on Formula E, you've done your research, you've got into it, you've heavily invested in it for the last two weeks.

Christine: I have and what I would like to say is that all the content I am producing is not for Formula E experts at all, because I am an idiot and I'm very, very new to it. But what I am enjoying is producing the content helps me to learn about it, you know, and we have a winter, an off-season, and we're very grateful that the Formula One has finished because it wasn't the best. And yea, so we've got energy and I want... I'm excited, I want to learn about this new sport. It's growing, and it seems like it is the future, it's only getting bigger and it's going to be great.

Mr C: So is it fair to say that this show is a guide or maybe a transition podcast, for people who have been following F1 and who are also interested in learning more about Formula E, to come on the journey with us, to learn with us as we investigate, because we really are Formula E rookies. We have no experience, we have no expert views on this at all, but we are finding our way and seeing if there's anything there that may pique our interest.

Christine: May Piquet our interest.

Mr C: You... oh no. We have new drivers, we have new names, which can only mean new puns, right? Oh god help us. Go on then, kick us off, what have we got to discuss? We watched two races, what have we learned so far?

Christine: The very first thing I want to say is that there's just great coverage. There seems to be access to a lot of stuff. Like I said, I was coming into this trying to gen up on what I didn't know, and there's complete races on YouTube just available to watch whenever you like, in full. It's amazing, it's like a breath of fresh air, because obviously being Formula One fans, we're not really used to people actually wanting you to see the content.

Mr C: And Formula One, to be fair, is trying to open up but it's doing it very, very slowly. Whereas I guess Formula E have come into it knowing they are the underdog, knowing they've got to generate interest and they've got to find fans, they've got to reach out and meet new people and share what they're creating with as many people as possible.

Christine: Yea, and the official website has loads of news and videos, and there's a new podcast this year, so it came out, I don't know, like an hour after the first race had finished, there was a twenty minute podcast catching you up with everything that had happened.

Mr C: Amazing, that's incredible. Much credit to them for that. I think I should actually say that last year, the reason that I'm sort of interested in Formula E in the 2017/2018 season, is that there was a race in New York which was well publicised and was very exciting because it was the first time in however many hundred years or whatever that there had been a race in New York City, motor race in New York City. And



Formula E beat Formula One to the punch so there was a big, there was a lot surrounding that race and I paid attention to it but when I looked into it to see whether or not I could follow it any way, shape or form, Formula E were streaming the whole weekend on YouTube. Like all the behind the scenes stuff, all the build up, there was so much coverage. I think I just watched wall-to-wall Formula E for two whole days. It was incredible, and I've never seen anything like that in Formula One and that's part of the reason why I'm excited by it now.

Christine: And it does seem to be on a hundred different channels on British TV, and you looked at the TV guide and said it's... there are 53 different Formula E shows or something across the weekend, which is just a ridiculous amount, but it has to be said, the Eurosport coverage leaves a lot to be desired.

Mr C: We have watched Le Mans on Eurosport, so we know they can do good motorsport TV, but the commentary team, the pairing they had for this weekend, they were nowhere near as good as Jack Nicholls, Dario Franchitti and Bob Varsha, who were the alternative commentators on other channels. I got to hear some of those during practice, so they covered on YouTube, we could watch free practice in the UK, but we couldn't watch the full race on YouTube in the UK. It may well be, for the Morocco event, that we end up with some kind of proxy solution or VPN to make sure we can pretend to be in another country.

Christine: It seems like an odd lineup, that's an odd selection of three people to put together but it really works.

Mr C: It's genius and I don't know if somebody sat down and decided that would be incredible or it just sort of went that way. You wouldn't think any of those would work together, but I think Jack and Dario are my new David Croft and Anthony Davidson. You know how much I loved those, right, ten years ago or whatever. They were F1 for me. And I think those two are Formula E for me. And Bob Varsha's new, or we don't really know, we don't hear a lot of him in the UK. It's a great trio, they make a great commentary trio and it's a shame in the UK we couldn't hear them live. Channel 5 were running on tape delay and Eurosport were the only place we could watch it live, legally, so that's what we did, and it was a disappointment compared to what the alternative might have been.

[Sweeper]

Christine: Another thing we're not quite used to that Formula E does is having all the sessions of one race in one day, so all the free practice, qualifying and the race itself. That didn't work so well this time because the timezone meant that, well I could only watch and had to just read up quickly what had happened before but I really liked the concept of it all happening and that's it, you're done.

Mr C: It was an unfortunate timezone for us for the opening grand prix, because you want to learn as much as you can, you want to watch as much as you can and free practice started at midnight, I think. Qualifying we completely missed and then we had to wake up at 6am for the race. It's a very compressed day, isn't it, there's an awful lot to be packed in, which I kinda like because if a driver has a problem in free practice early in the morning, say they damage their car, there's a heck of a rush to get something ready for qualifying, for the race. You could ruin your day with just a bad practice. I think it keeps, it gives a lot of energy to the event. It's non-stop. Free practice was just, it was chaos. Everybody was trying to, there's only 45 minutes or something, on Sunday Free Practice 3, and that's all you get, that's all you're going to do on the second day. How many Formula One practice sessions have we watched where there's an empty



track? Where nobody's come out, where nobody needs to do a run? I don't think I saw an empty track at all during this weekend. Of all the sessions, all the things we managed to catch, at no point was there just an empty track and nothing to see. There was always something going on.

Christine: You were really excited after the practice session before the second race, and I don't think I've ever been excited at a free practice Formula One session.

Mr C: No, it was great! They're really throwing the cars around, they're trying to find the limits. I guess, it may well be, it's hard to tell because we're rookies at this and maybe it will settle down but there were drivers in the field who weren't experienced in Formula E, so they had to get a handle on the cars very quickly. There hasn't been much testing, I think maybe in Valencia there was a test but that's not a street course. The street course was bumpy, and the cars are reasonably hard to set up. They're also new cars, so the teams are dealing with the new cars. You've got changes within the team, manufacturers like Audi coming in. You've got drivers who aren't experienced in Formula E, they're trying to get the most out of it. So you might find as it gets near the end of the season, it's not as crazy, it's not as exciting and maybe it was just a one off. But I very much enjoyed everything that I saw this weekend.

Christine: It was a double header with a race on Saturday and a race on Sunday. It was a bit weird because the first race was 43 laps and it was all out craziness, drivers overtaking each other, and crashing here and there and everywhere. The second race, it was only two laps longer, but it seemed to make a complete difference to the way they went about it. They had to be fuel saving and it was all about strategy, and I mean, I don't know why there were the extra two laps unless that is what they want to do - differentiate between the two days - but I did think it was really interesting how something so small can make such a big difference to how a race comes across. But I even enjoyed the second race, even though it was a lot calmer, and you might say a little bit more boring, but I liked it because it was about the energy saving which is just like refuelling in Formula One, which we love. And because they only have one type of tyre, there's none of that trying to keep on top of that strategy either. So it was quite simple for an idiot like me to follow.

Mr C: It was a breath of fresh air coming out of the Formula One announcement from Pirelli, that they're expanding their tyre range to all the colours in the rainbow now. Pirelli in F1 are trying to very much be the centre of attention and they don't seem to like it when nobody talks about their tyres. Michelin, in Formula E, seem to be far more content just to be there. It's like, we're here too. You want tyres? We've got tyres. You want tyres for the rain? We've got those. You want tyres for the dry, you want tyres for rough tracks, you want tyres for abrasive surfaces? We've got it all covered with one piece of rubber. We've just got one compound, and that's it. We're just going to bring it and it's just going to deal with everything that you throw at it and we don't need to be the headline. We don't need to be the story. Your big puffy friend was there, of course, he's larger than life.

Christine: Yea, I was gonna say that actually, probably the reason that Michelin don't need to be shouting is because they have a big mascot who is on the podium waving, being ridiculously cute. I do love him, I do love Bibendum. Pirelli don't have a mascot, maybe that's what they're missing.

[Sweeper]



Christine: It wasn't all good, I mean, every motorsport has its problems. This one, they were two very embarrassing problems. Two races, two race starts, both of them failures.

Mr C: Go on.

Christine: Well, the first one, they had to... the cars did get underway but they only managed, I don't know, half a lap, a lap, before there was a pile up at one corner, traffic jam because they couldn't actually get round the corner. That caused a lengthy red flag delay, it seemed like it took so long because the FIA didn't really know how to handle it? They didn't know what order the cars should be in, they didn't know how they should restart. That was quite annoying. It turns out they don't have red flags very often, it was the first red flag Formula E has had in a very long time so they've probably forgotten or don't know how to deal with it. But then on the second day, the starting lights failed so they had to start behind the safety car.

Mr C: Mm, yes. There's no glossing over either of those problems. It's street racing, you're going to get situations where an accident causes a traffic jam, I think we saw it in Macau not too many weeks ago. One false move in a very tight and twisty street circuit and that will happen. What you'd like to happen immediately afterwards is for organisers to know exactly what they're doing and to get everything restarted as soon as the track is cleared and that just didn't happen. One thing that I think worked in Formula E's favour is, as frustrated as fans were at home and wishing they would get on with it, Alejandro was pacing up and down the pit lane saying exactly that to the media. I think, you know, it felt like he was on our side and wished they could just get the damn race restarted.

Christine: Yea, he is our people.

Mr C: Yes. So that felt good. The second problem is, I think, much bigger. I don't know how you successfully start one race and then fail to start the next one, when the procedure is exactly the same. That took, again, they just took so long to fix the problem.

Christine: The other thing I was a little bit disappointed about was actually FanBoost, because I was quite excited about it, you know, it's a unique thing. Voting for people, influencing the race somehow. But actually, I think I only saw, across two days, I only saw one person use it and yea, it didn't seem to have any effect whatsoever.

Mr C: No. It's not as obvious as something like DRS. It's a nice alternative, I think. If you're not a fan of DRS in Formula One but you understand that these cars find it hard to, you know, it's hard to pass an identical car on an identical track and you sometimes need something to give you that extra bit of pace and FanBoost seems like it might be the right solution but there are so many rules around it. You can't use it until the second half of the race, in the second car, when you only have so much energy available. It seems like they've made it very constrained, whereas it would be better if it was more free. If fans are going to the effort of voting for their favourite driver, was it five days before the race you had, you can tweet every single day for your favourite driver. You can put a lot of effort into it and it feels like fans can get behind it, but when you go to all that effort then it just gets wasted, or you don't see it because the cameras don't catch it or it didn't really have any influence on the race at all, you do wonder if maybe next time you maybe just won't bother.



Christine: Yea. And I felt during the races we were missing some of the radio content that we get in Formula One. I think they had issues with the communications, didn't they, because of the buildings. But most of your city circuits are gonna have buildings around them, so they may have to do something about that. You were quite upset that they weren't really editing the radio, either?

Mr C: I have issues with Formula E radio. Maybe on paper it seemed like a really good idea - Formula One filters the radio, someone edits it, someone puts it together, you can manipulate that radio. You can sell a certain kind of entertainment with that, and that could be perceived to be a problem. It seems like Formula E have taken the opposite stance and they don't, they just broadcast everything live, without any filter. Which is a concern, I think in practice, Alex Lynn was effing and blinding that he'd missed third gear. Here's the thing, one of Formula E's greatest strengths, I think, is that the cars are quiet.

Christine: Yes.

Mr C: You can go to a Formula E race, you can sit in the grandstands without the need for earplugs, ear defenders, or any risk of ruining your hearing. Therefore, Formula E is the ideal motorsport for families with small children.

Christine: Yea, we saw lots of pictures on the TV of kids just running around, leaning up against the fences, no ear defenders necessary.

Mr C: It's pretty much the only motorsport where that's true, where you don't have to constantly keep an eye on your kid to make sure they've got ear defenders on. That, you know, they're still going to have some hearing left at the end of the day. And therefore, Formula E should be targeting parents, it should be saying 'it's safe, we're not going to destroy your children's hearing in the same way Formula One definitely will if you're not careful.' And then to turn around and broadcast all of the swearing, like Radio Swearing. That may as well be, that's probably the name of their channel. It's terrible, it really is, the language is quite strong. And you understand that, you don't want the drivers to have to self-censor themselves. It's an emotional sport and they've got a whole load of other stuff to be worrying about but it seems like somebody could just bleep it, or cut it, or do whatever, you know? Without ruining, without editorialising it, without adding undue influence. Just bleep the swears, just make it family friendly. It's not a huge ask, I don't think, and I think that's something that Formula E can do much better than it currently is.

Christine: The sound of the cars is probably one of the most controversial things about the sport. It's a reason why plenty of people don't like it. But I really, really loved it. I think that the fact you can hear everything. Those cars are tanks, they are bumping into each other like I've never seen. You can hear everything: squeaks, bumps, crunches. And it's so visceral to hear it all. It feels like you're really getting involved with it. I thought it was brilliant.

Mr C: I tell you what I found, when... I know people go on and on about Formula One and the lack of engine noise recently and how the V12s were so much better but really loud engine noises that echo off of the Swiss Alps, or I don't know, the Austrian Alps when we're at the Red Bull Ring, those kind of echoes and the reverberations and delays you get from an incredibly loud sound. It puts distance between the fans at home and what you're watching on television because it sounds like they're a long way away, it sounds like they're in a very big space. Whereas with Formula E, it sounded like, when two cars came together, it sounded like they came through your living room. It sounded like they crashed into your house.



Christine: It did! Yea.

Mr C: It was really close and you don't get that with really loud sounds. There's a nice contrast in there. You lose some emotion from the engines but you gain so much more.

Christine: It does feel like you can, because you can hear it all, it actually sounds like they're making an effort, and so you almost know more that the driver is putting their all into it.

Mr C: I am totally convinced that Formula One fans that want louder engines are all crazy. They are all crazy, they're all wrong. They're all gonna go deaf and they're all crazy. That's my take on it. I think Formula E engines, electric engines, are the future, the sound of the future.

[Sweeper]

Christine: Two other things I wasn't totally happy with over the weekend. I thought we were promised grid kids but they didn't appear.

Mr C: In Montreal, which was the last race of last season, I think the event organisers, not Formula E but the local organisers, swapped out grid girls for local karting talent. So children or people who are aspiring to be motorsport drivers of the future, boys and girls, holding the placards, the number placements for the grid. And it seemed to work really well. There was a great response from fans, I think it made Formula E look amazing, and following... in the weeks that followed, I think Alejandro said it's a great idea, we're gonna use it, we're gonna use it next season, it's coming back. And I was looking forward to that, and we didn't get that this week.

Christine: No, Jack Nicholls on Twitter said he thought it was a local promoter thing, and isn't gonna be a regular issue. But you know, if you're Formula E, just put your foot down, say no, grid kids or nothing.

Mr C: It would have been better. Again, it's a more family friendly thing, right? It's perfect.

Christine: You want your kid to be watching saying I wish I was there!

Mr C: I want to do that, I can be that person. I can be a person on the grid, I can be a motorsport talent of the future. I want to get picked for that. It's another missed opportunity. There's so much untapped potential in Formula E still, and I'm sure they're working on it, I'm sure there are good people who don't need us to tell them this. I'm sure they've got their own ideas and they are getting there, and it's all very complicated stuff that just takes time to come to fruition, but I feel like just a couple of times you could just say, just think about it a bit more and you could make this so much better. Because the grandstands were not packed, let's not pretend that this is the most popular motorsport in the world. It was, they were desolate during practice and they were, you know, there were people there during the race but not a huge amount of people. It's in a city centre, in a massively populous metropolis, isn't it? I mean, Hong Kong is huge. It's surrounded by skyscrapers and it's on a weekend, so it should be more popular than perhaps it is. I suspect it's because they're still missing opportunities which are right in front of them.



Christine: And the other thing is the stewards getting involved right at the last minute and stripping people of their wins post-race. That's just, I mean, that's a standard motorsport complaint, but it was disappointing for our first weekend to end with the person on the podium not actually being the winner.

Mr C: Yea, our first look at Formula E ended with an appeal which has gone to the stewards, which I don't think has been resolved at the time we're recording. I guess it has to go to the FIA or something now.

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: It's put a damper on the final, like, the overall impression of it. The race didn't start properly and also it didn't end properly.

Christine: Didn't end properly.

Mr C: That's not good.

Christine: Everything in between was brilliant.

Mr C: I think we found some, because obviously it's a different motorsport and in the past Formula E was accused of being a retirement home for Formula One drivers. So, some faces were familiar to us, we've been through a lot with Buemi. Vergne was obviously a staple in Formula One. There were a lot of drivers, Heidfeld we've obviously talked about in podcasts long ago. So you have some familiarity but you've found new drivers. We've found people we've never heard of before.

Christine: Yea, I mean, Mortara is my new favourite.

Mr C: Is he?

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: He was the standout driver for both days. He did a really, I mean until he lost it on the final lap, but apart from his one mistake, he was a stand out drive. I'll tell you what the other thing is, it's nice to have familiar names but it's nice to have a change. We've been doing Sidepodcast now for, I guess, eleven seasons we've covered. In that time, we haven't crowned eleven Formula One champions. Räikkönen in the first year, and there was Button in his Brawn, and last year Nico Rosberg was world champion. But apart from that, Lewis has scored four and Vettel's scored four.

Christine: Yep.

Mr C: So eight years of repeat drivers winning the same title again and again, that's not a great strike rate. And what you get with Formula E is, a guarantee that neither Vettel nor Hamilton are going to win anything, which is fantastic.

Christine: That's all you ask.



Mr C: That's pretty much... the thing is, you look at Formula One in 2018, you say, well, it's gonna be between Hamilton and Vettel. Whereas at least here, even in Formula E terms, the favourites, the two drivers, the two championship protagonists didn't do at all well.

Christine: In the small amount of research that I did, watching some of the coverage of previous events and stuff, it felt like Buemi just dominates everything, but I didn't see him all weekend.

Mr C: No, he crashed. He crashed out in practice and he was rubbish. He broke down, or his car stopped in the first race, and he crashed on the second day. And Di Grassi, who is the reigning champion, he got the weekend handed to him by his rookie teammate. Sorry, not his rookie teammate, his less experienced teammate. That's amazing, that's brilliant. Imagine Bottas just turning up in Formula and just showing Hamilton the way. It seems like there are more opportunities for drivers to shine in Formula E. It's less of a car championship.

Christine: Also what it is, so you're watching a Formula One race and Lewis is winning and you're like, well, you know, Bottas could come up and catch him or something could happen, this could happen, but you know that isn't going to happen and he is going to win. But when you watch Formula E races, even if someone was dominating, it really does feel like anything could happen. You can't just take your eyes off it because they could crash in the blink of an eye.

Mr C: Every corner matters. It very, very much does. And there's not so much of a racing line, you don't really... there is an off line and there's a dirty side of the track and stuff but because it's temporary, because it's a street circuit, it never really gets a chance to rubber in and because tyres aren't super-sticky tyres that aren't laying down rubber in the way that Formula One tyres do, you don't get these racing lines so you can fly up the inside of somebody and still stop and still make the corner. And you can bash these cars. These are really, really solid cars to race.

Christine: They are.

Mr C: You tap two cars together, they don't explode in a shower of carbon fibre. They, mostly, can keep going with bits hanging off them. Things break and stuff, but it's a bit of a contact sport, which you're not used to in Formula One. You can muscle your way past, if you need to. And that makes a difference too.

Christine: And so I am really excited for the next race, it's actually a shame that it's not till January.

Mr C: The season is shorter. So how many rounds we got, 14?

Christine: There are 14, a couple of them are double headers.

Mr C: So it's a manageable season, that's the important thing. It's not gonna kill us to cover this.

Christine: No.

Mr C: If you're interested in Formula E... I think I should, it would be remiss of me not to promote your Factbyte Factbox coverage. Because even though you've never paid much interest in this sport, you did an exceptional job of lap by lap coverage, at six o'clock in the morning. You were barely awake. You were



barely awake, you were covering a sport you barely know, and I still think, I was reading it back this afternoon, it's such a great lap by lap coverage. If you're interested in Formula E and you're thinking of paying more attention to it in the future, you're going to be doing the Morocco race, we're gonna follow the next race for certain.

Christine: Yep.

Mr C: We're gonna follow it at least until the F1 season starts next year, then we'll see if we can balance two or one or the other has to take a back seat. But I think, keep an eye on Sidepodcast, because there will be more Formula E coverage. Because we're into it, right, we're excited by this.

Christine: Yea, it's great.

Mr C: I think our first impressions were more than met, and I think it's worth our time. Did you feel like it was worth getting up at 6am?

Christine: I did. I thought it was worth getting up at 6am two days in a row and I would probably do it again tomorrow if I had to.

Mr C: Good lord! And what was your personal lowlight and highlight?

Christine: Well, my lowlight I think we've already touched upon, a race starting behind the safety car for no good reason. But my highlight actually is how the drivers seem to interact a little bit more with each other. Because, during qualifying I think they were all watching one TV screen and drivers from different teams were all stood next to each other and chatting which was fun. And then also, after the first race, and Dario was interviewing Heidfeld who was saying he was furious with Vergne, who was literally stood just off camera.

Mr C: There's nowhere to hide.

Christine: No! I'm furious with this guy, I mean I've talked to him but I hate him. He's right there.

Mr C: Jev's like, yea, I don't care. But yea, okay. My lowlight actually, I don't think we've touched on yet is, I felt like the live timing solutions or support you have watching the timing screens at home: very janky. Very old school, nothing like we've come to expect with Formula One.

Christine: We have been spoiled a little bit.

Mr C: We've gone back in time on that. The driver tracker thing works at about four frames per second. It's virtually impossible to read the race control messages that scroll... very... slowly... across... the bottom... of...

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: I'm bored.



Christine: And there's no history of it, it's there and then it's gone.

Mr C: Live timing needs a big revamp. But my highlight is the fact that I didn't see or hear Christian Horner talking about things that were none of his business all weekend. And that's all I ask for. That's basically all I need in life.