



## Episode 8 – Donington Park vs. Silverstone

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[Intro: Rich Reich, Keeping Up With The Race]

**Chris:** Hello and welcome to Sidepodcast, Episode 8 – Donington Park vs. Silverstone. Is anyone else completely bored of testing?

**Me:** Bored.

**Chris:** It's just so dull. I was interested to start with because you want to see who's going to be fast and who's not but after the initial conclusions drawn: Renault are slow, Honda are slow, Red Bull, we're not sure.

**Me:** Sandbagging.

**Chris:** Ferrari are fast, and Hamilton is fast. There's really very little to look out for.

**Me:** There's no rumours either, no rumours, no conspiracies, no theories, nothing to really get your teeth into at all, is there?

**Chris:** So, we thought we would make our own news. Not in a making things up kind of way, but in a reading into things kind of way.

**Me:** Okay, pre-season kind of stuff, then.

[Sweeper]

**Chris:** At the beginning of February, it was announced that Donington Park had been sold to a new company called Donington Ventures Leisure Ltd.

**Me:** Easy for you to say.

**Chris:** The company was founded by Simon Gillet and Lee Gill, the first being a customer focused executive from large companies such as Marks & Sparks, and the other with a background in software and the Royal Navy, plus a father involved with racing sponsorship. So between them, they've pretty much got the ambition and the customer focus that they'll need to bring F1 back to the track. The big question is whether they'll have the cash to invest in such a proposition. Supposedly their funding is coming from themselves, a property investment company and a bank. All very vague and nameless entities.

**Me:** A property investment company? Any other information other than that? Just a property investment company? That's always a suspicious title, isn't it?

**Chris:** That's all I could find out.

**Me:** Easy way to hide things, to call it a property investment company. It's got to be Bernie.

**Chris:** Do you reckon?



**Me:** I don't know, he's got a lot of money.

**Chris:** Why would he want F1 at Donington?

**Me:** Well, that is true. I don't know, to be honest with you, there's not a really good reason why he would want to do that, other than possibly Bernie might need a legacy. He's getting old, right, he's been doing this for years and years and years. He's having less and less say in his company, where he's sold out to so many people along the way. So he's not got much say, he's getting on a bit, maybe he's trying to make a legacy for himself. Maybe he wants to rename it Donington Ecclestone Park or something.

**Chris:** Ecclestone Park.

**Me:** I'll tell you what he's trying to do, then, here's a theory for you. Maybe he wants to have the British Grand Prix at Donington for the next 25 years, so he's secretly signing a deal with himself that no one will be able to get out of, it will be the Bernie Ecclestone Grand Prix of Europe. I don't know, I really can't think why he'd want to do it, but I can't think why anyone else would either. So he's as good a choice as any, really.

**Chris:** Despite the fact that it was pouring rain yesterday, we decided to go and have a look for ourselves, see if it does have the potential to ever hold a Grand Prix.

**Me:** It has, in the past, hasn't it?

**Chris:** Yea, in 1993 Bernie finally gave in to pressure from the previous owner Tom Wheatcroft and allowed the European Grand Prix of the season to be held at the Donington Park circuit. It was a very wet day, but it was one of Ayrton Senna's best drives, seeing him pass five cars to take the lead on the very first lap. He went on to win it and the event is well remembered for that. It was also given the award for the Best Organised Grand Prix of that season. Who even knew there was such an award?

[Sweeper]

**Chris:** We got a few photographs of the outside of the circuit but they wouldn't actually let us in. A very surly security guard said the track was closed and that was it. We couldn't get near the track but we did go into the Grand Prix Collection. Advertised on the website as the largest collection of Grand Prix racing cars in the world. There are over 130 exhibits, with cars from the 1930s right up to, well, to about 2000.

**Me:** What's the first thing we saw?

**Chris:** The first thing you do is you go through a door which is inconveniently not labelled pull or push.

**Me:** You are a harsh critic.

**Chris:** Well, only because I did the wrong thing, and then I stumbled through the door, and embarrassed myself. The first thing you actually see is a framed poster of about 30 driver signatures. But we could only recognise one of them, and couldn't make out any others.

**Me:** It was so badly scrawled, that I added my own signature to it. No one will notice, from here on in, I was driving in the '93 Grand Prix.



**Chris:** The first room also contained a giant fire engine and two ridiculously posh looking cars that weren't racing cars at all.

**Me:** No, it was a Bugatti Royale, and I forget what the other one was.

**Chris:** No, because it wasn't a racing car. And we were there to see the F1 cars, so who cares? There were old cars everywhere. It was eerily quiet in the first room, but later, they did start playing Meatloaf, so that helped.

**Me:** Did it?

**Chris:** The next exhibit actually had Ye Olde Formula 1 cars, so we were getting on familiar territory, although these were from the 1950s, so a little bit before my time.

**Me:** Yea, they had a pre-sponsorship McLaren there.

**Chris:** It was orange.

**Me:** Before Marlboro.

**Chris:** And there was a helmet with the driver's blood type scrawled on it. Obviously, they were very hopeful about the safety of these cars.

**Me:** Talk about optimism.

[Sweeper]

**Chris:** Next up was the Williams collection. It contained F1 cars from year to year, so it was really interesting to see how the cars developed over time. Except where there was one year missing and it looked to be quite an important developmental stage. The most interesting one was Nigel Mansell's red 5, so called by Murray Walker. Those must have been the good old days when you could tell the cars apart by the giant numbers on them.

**Me:** Just like you can with NASCAR these days.

**Chris:** Yea, yea, we all know you've been converted to a NASCAR fan.

**Me:** I did. I watched Daytona this week.

**Chris:** Set up your own podcast. Moving on, there was also Jenson Button's Formula 1 car, that he debuted for Williams in 2000. And some lovely looking green Jaguars, which aren't Williams cars.

**Me:** They were a nice colour.

**Chris:** I miss the Jaguars.

[Sweeper]

**Chris:** The final exhibit proudly proclaims that you are entering the McLaren Hall. As soon as you walk in you are surrounded by red and white cars. Unfortunately, we were a bit distracted by the fantastic pictures that hung around the room. They had a collection from Keith Sutton, one of the worlds leading motorsport photographers.



**Me:** Well, he is until I get my camera.

**Chris:** Yea, sure. They were all pictures of Ayrton Senna and some of them were really beautiful. They hung around the room from the ceiling and were numbered so you could look at a corresponding sheet and find out what they were and when they were taken.

**Me:** There were all sorts of good'uns. My favourite was the Detroit photographs.

**Chris:** With the bit skyscrapers in the background.

**Me:** They don't race there anymore, but that must have been a great place to be.

**Chris:** Of course, they housed the car that Senna won the 1993 Donington Grand Prix in.

**Me:** That's the MP4/8 to you.

**Chris:** There were also overalls belonging to David Coulthard and Mika Hakkinen, and some really creepy models of pit crew in their black suits. I didn't like them even though they were behind glass. That was it for Formula 1 cars, except that there were a couple near the gift shop, including a tusk nosed Williams.

**Me:** Ah, yea, I've not seen that one up close before, that was quite interesting. It looked completely different to all the cars that surrounded it. Williams tried a new front nose concept a couple of years ago, it didn't really work out, looked great though, very original. It was cool to see that one.

**Chris:** There was the green 7Up Jordan that Michael Schumacher made his debut in and the Benson & Hedges Jordan that Damon Hill managed to win at Spa in 1998.

**Me:** It was wet.

**Chris:** A Jordan!

**Me:** It was wet! It was quite a good race actually. Didn't they finish 1 and 2?

**Chris:** Jordan?

**Me:** Yes!

**Chris:** Okay. The gift shop was actually interesting because they had a lot of old stuff in there, so you know, those season review DVDs you can buy off the Official F1 site.

**Me:** Yea, we got one for 2005, didn't we?

**Chris:** They have those going back for years and years, like '70s. They've also got the ITV F1 Guides for 2000 and 2001. It's mostly older stuff, which is good if that's what you're looking for. But I did notice the t-shirts were still BAR Honda ones.

**Me:** Yea, that's not so good. A lot of the merchandise was quite out of date, actually.



**Chris:** A lot of the stuff in the collection seemed to be a few years out of date. Like everything only seemed to go up to about 2000. For instance, there was a shelf with information on each Formula 1 World Champion, the years they won and information about them. But it only went up as far as Michael Schumacher. I was a bit miffed not to see Alonso there.

**Me:** Wonderful.

**Chris:** Outside, there are old style petrol pumps and a statue tribute to Senna and Fangio. The Wikipedia entry on Donington says that there's a Senna tribute just outside the memorabilia shop. Nothing about the Collection itself, the hundreds of Formula 1 cars inside. It's just outside a shop that sells hats and books.

**Me:** Yea, but it's Wikipedia, so you could just change it.

[Sweeper]

**Me:** Okay, so that was Donington.

**Chris:** The track was a no-go area, but the Collection was alright, and worth a look. However, our journey was all about whether it could hold the Formula 1 race, and to properly judge between Donington and Silverstone, we thought it would only be fair to go on to the current race track. It was much harder to get to Silverstone. Donington is basically up a motorway, along a dual carriageway, and then just five minutes on regular roads. Probably wouldn't be too hard to make it even easier to get to, you know, just make it's own direct road.

**Me:** You can get to it from the other motorway as well. It's at a junction between two motorway points, and there's an airport right next to it.

**Chris:** So, if you had a helicopter, that would be good. Silverstone is just ridiculous. It has much better signposting, but that's only because they have to otherwise no one would be able to find it. It's miles off any main roads and really quite tucked away.

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**Chris:** When we got there, we drove around and took a quick look at the Spyker factory which is just over the road, and then we asked the security people if we could have a look inside. He said "Sure," and let us in.

**Me:** He did, but in fairness, we happened to arrive on an open Track Day, so he was never going to tell us to go away, like the guy at Donington.

**Chris:** Well, he was much friendlier, anyway.

**Me:** He was much friendlier about it, wasn't he? Because it was an open day, we also had free reign to roam where we liked, so we had time to take a look round the pits, have a look at the pit straight, wander over the bridges, take some good photographs.

**Chris:** The facilities are quite clearly, hugely superior to Donington. There are big signs, and plenty of buildings and car parking, and roads dedicated to the circuit. At Donington you travel along a pot-holed road, look at some tiny signs to try and locate the paddock. At Silverstone, you'd have to be some kind of idiot not to be able to find it. The whole thing just has an atmosphere about it as well. When we stopped, I could sense what it would be like to be



there on an actual race day, with all the excitement and anticipation of it all. Donington was just, you know, basically it was a dump.

**Me:** That's a bit harsh. I would call it unloved would be a better way to describe it.

**Chris:** Run down.

**Me:** Silverstone's not perfect, there's a bridge there which should be condemned, really, and that leads right over the main pit straight. It really is unbelievable that you can even walk across it. So, there are some improvements to be made at Silverstone, but Donington didn't look like it was up to much. Certainly at the moment.

**Chris:** If DVLL...

**Me:** Who?

**Chris:** Donington Ventures Leisure Limited.

**Me:** That's a great name, rolls off the tongue that one.

**Chris:** Yea, if they want to get the F1 race held at Donington anytime soon, they're gonna have to invest some serious time and money into improving the facilities. And the personality of the security staff as well.

**Me:** I guess it depends what their long term plans are. I mean, from what I've read, it seems like the first plan is to try and get some more races there to try and build up the infrastructure as they have it.

**Chris:** But there's nothing there.

**Me:** No, there isn't much there at the moment, it is a little bit out of the way. Infrastructure, if you look round Silverstone there are businesses built around Silverstone. There's the technology centre, all sorts of F1 and memorabilia outlets based around it. There's a whole ecosystem that exists around the Silverstone location. So it'll be interesting to see whether something similar happens around the Donington area, I guess, whether they encourage that kind of thing, or whether it's exclusively going to remain as a track. They hold concerts there at the moment.

**Chris:** Yea, Oz-fest.

**Me:** It depends what their long term plans are, it's difficult to guess. At the moment though, it's not looking good.

**Chris:** But the other thing is, we're comparing Donington with Silverstone, and you know, Silverstone is clearly the winner. But if you compare Silverstone to like China, it's a dump. They really need to start investing in the circuits, because otherwise how can Britain be the home of motorsport?

**Me:** Now you're onto an interesting subject, because we have a government who refuse to support the motorsport industry and to support places like Silverstone, but will throw money at the Olympics. So I guess it's just a question of priorities. Would you recommend anyone goes to the Donington Collection though?

**Chris:** Absolutely, yea.

**Me:** You enjoyed that bit.



**Chris:** Yea, it could do with updating a bit, but it was good for history.

**Me:** A bit of TLC. But now they have new owners, that could happen, hopefully. It was a good day out, but you're still gonna back Silverstone for the British Grand Prix, that's assuming that we have any British Grand Prix, of course.

**Chris:** Until something better comes along.

**Me:** Until Bernie changes his mind.

[Sweeper]

**Me:** So that completes our week of no news.

**Chris:** Yep, next week we'll be back making up some more stuff.

**Me:** Yay.

[Out: Rich Reich, Keeping Up With The Race]

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