

F1 Guide (Part 2) – Race Weekend

[Intro: Cedar Falls, Car Crash]

Welcome to the Sidepodcast Guide to Formula 1. You've heard the introduction and you know what F1 is about, so now you want to sit down and watch a race. The first thing you need to do is find out when the next race is on. The calendar for each year is available a couple of months before the season starts, and is published on many different websites. The official sites have calendars and countdowns, many blogs will post about the dates to come. A quick Google search will point you in the right direction.

The coverage you get will depend on where you are in the world. Here in the UK, we get both qualifying and the race on the TV, but have to rely on the internet for all the practice and testing results as and when they happen. Of course, if all else fails, you can subscribe to Sidepodcast for race reports and all the news you need to know. Anyway, shameless plug over, what can you expect from a race weekend?

Races usually take place every two weeks, but it seems to be getting more and more erratic, sometimes having races weekly, and then an entire month off. Once the teams have arrived at a circuit, the race weekend can really begin. Friday practice is so called because it takes place on the Friday before the race. It consists of two sessions, both 90 minutes, and the teams can run what they want, when they want, to get a feel of the track and the conditions. It's not always an accurate prediction of who's going to fare well during the race, but it can give you a good idea of who's fast and who is lagging behind. The teams like to get the fastest times because it's good publicity for them and their sponsors.

Saturday morning consists of another practice session. This one is 1 hour long and is more indicative of what is going to happen in qualifying later that day. Track conditions will be improving all the time, as the cars get more rubber from their tyres onto the tarmac, and again, drivers will be striving to get the fastest time.

The qualifying format has changed several times over the years, but the idea behind it is still the same. Throughout the hour-long session, the teams will run their cars to find an ultimate fast lap – one that will dictate the position they will start in for the race the following day. If a car fails to secure a time due to driver or mechanical error, it is most likely they will start at the back of the grid. Where you position yourself in qualifying is more than just aiming to get first – you also have to think about where on the track you end up. The racing line favours the driver in pole position, and when in grid formation, two cars are staggered next to each other all the way back, so the second place car will suffer the worst track surface.

Sunday is race day. Teams will get their cars set up and their drivers ready, and then wave them off around the track to form their grid position. All the mechanics are welcomed onto the grid to make their very last minute preparations and escort their famous guests around for the pursuing cameras. The atmosphere before the race begins is feverish and the anticipation is almost better than the race itself. However, it's when the track is cleared of people, and the drivers head off on their parade lap, that you know something good is about to happen. The five lights come on one by one and when they go out, its go, Go, GO!

Sorry, almost turned into a commentator then. The first corner is usually the most exciting, with 20+ cars bundling and jostling for position. After that, the 50 or so laps of a race fly by, with retirements, overtaking and pit stops, until eventually the winner crosses the start finish line for his share of the glory. The top eight drivers receive points, as do the top eight constructors. The race winner, and those in second and third get to partake in a little champagne on



the podium, whilst receiving their trophies. The winning constructor of the day also receives a magnificent trophy for their contribution to a great race day.

After that, there's just time for a debrief in the following press conference, where the top three talk about how tough the conditions were and what they did to outsmart their fellow sportsmen, before everyone goes home for a rest.

Next time on the Sidepodcast Guide to Formula 1, I'll be looking at pit stops in more detail.

[Out: *Cedar Falls, Car Crash*]

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