

Races to Remember – Britain 1950

Here we are then, the final episode in this series of Races to Remember. We've covered a wide spectrum of races from enormously close battles to wet races, to chaos, to a mixture of all three. Now we're travelling back to the very beginnings of the championship – Britain 1950.

The very first race of the newly created Formula One World Championship was held at Silverstone on May 13, 1950. The airfield had hosted the first British Grand Prix just two years earlier, and that race was only ever supposed to be a one off. It was so successful though, that the Grand Prix returned the next year, and when the time came, the official F1 Championship couldn't ask for a better place to begin. Although the race at Silverstone was the first to count towards the championship, it was actually the fifth Grand Prix of the season. Fangio had dominated at a couple of the previous races, and was expected to do well. It wasn't a particularly sunny day, but even the royal family – King George VI and Queen Elizabeth - turned out to see what the cars were capable of. 100,000 spectators lined the track, eager for the 70 laps to get underway.

Alfa Romeo brought four cars to the circuit, for Fangio, Giuseppe Farina, and Luigi Fagioli. The fourth was for a local driver and guest to the team, Reg Parnell. Ferrari were not in attendance, but Maserati had six cars. In total, there were 21 entrants, so those two teams had half the field locked out already. The previous two years had seen Maserati dominate at Silverstone, but in 1950, the Alfa, in the hands of Fangio, was definitely the car to beat. Farina managed to take pole position, ahead of Fagioli and Fangio. In fact, the entire front row of the grid, which in those days featured four cars in front of three, in front of four, etc, was full of the Alfa Romeos.

As the race got underway, Fagioli got past Farina to lead, but couldn't hold the position and gradually dropped back to third. There was some talk that the team were simply playing, the drivers changing positions simply to keep the crowd amused. There may be something to this, as Farina headed up the first nine laps, then possibly handed over to Fagioli for five, until Fangio jumped at the chance for one lap. Farina quickly took his lead back again. Fangio barely got a taste of the glory, and his afternoon was to get even worse when his engine blew up on lap 63. Fagioli had been sat behind his teammate until then, but moved through into second place. The remaining few laps were uneventful, there were no more changes for the lead. Parnell was third, although he was almost a minute behind, with reports suggesting he may have collided with a hare partway through the race.

Only 12 cars finished the Grand Prix, with the winning time just over 2 hours and 13 minutes. One driver, Joe Kelly, wasn't classified though, as he finished 13 laps down, and fell out of the minimum completed distance. Farina's victory saw him become the first driver to score the hat trick of Pole position, fastest lap and the victory. His good form, and the competitiveness of the Alfa Romeo saw Farina go on to win the championship in that first year as well.

That's it for this episode, and this series of Races to Remember. I hope you've enjoyed looking back at some of the more eventful Grand Prix. If you've got any feedback or suggestions, I'd love to hear it, you can comment on sidepodcast.com or email me christine@sidepodcast.com. Thanks for listening.