



F1 and the World (Part 5) – Technology

Welcome to F1 and the World, the latest mini series from Sidepodcast looking at F1 and its place in society. We've already covered the effect that sport has on the economy and the planet, but what relevance does it hold for technology? Today we will investigate.

A lot of arguments for F1 centre around the fact that the useful technology that is created trackside can then be passed on to the cars we drive today. I think I've already alluded to that in this mini series already. But if we're being perfectly honest, some of today's road cars are actually more advanced than an F1 car, especially when it comes to technology. F1 is all about speed and aerodynamics, whereas road cars introduce parking sensors and integrated iPods. It's not really the same thing.

So what technology is F1 helping? Let's start with Force India. Vijay Mallya is the head honcho of Kingfisher Airlines and the owner of the newest F1 team on the grid. It's no coincidence that aerospace and F1 are often seen in the same sentence together. Force India have alliances with EADS and Airbus to share resources, data, and technologies. In 2004, Renault F1 and Boeing formed a research partnership to quote: "collaborate on a number of advanced design and manufacturing technologies." McLaren have partnered with BAE Systems for years.

Actually, this last example is interesting. BAE Systems provide defence solutions for the armed forces, in land, sea and air. They decided the motorsport industry had the technology and the insight to become a good partner. A spokesman from BAE Systems said: "Car racing technology looks promising for refuelling military vehicles in dusty conditions." The Bahrain Grand Prix could be considered somewhat dusty, don't you think? They're also interested in high reliability components and low power consumption, both of which F1 is developing for the ever changing rules.

It works both ways. Qinetiq, a defence and security company, have partnered with Williams for three years, since it was BMW Williams, in fact. They share technology both ways, with Qinetiq able to give back to Williams. They have stronger and more heat-resistant materials that have been used on their military aircraft. They have advanced GPS technology to help determine the exact position of the car on the track – accurate to 2.5cm. And they have cutting edge predictive software to help in design and research when developing the car.

What we have here, is top defence and aerospace companies giving their best technologies to F1 to keep the sport at the pinnacle of motorsport. In return, these companies, Qinetiq, BAE Systems, Boeing, they get demonstrations of their technology in practice, get data from the track, and see what works and what doesn't. Because when it comes to the Ministry of Defence, you want them to have confidence in the technology they have.

So, the next time someone tries to tell you that F1 is wasteful and unnecessary, just argue back. The army need somewhere to test out their new tank's GPS, you don't want them getting lost out in the desert somewhere. Why not make a sport out of it as well?

That wraps up today's F1 and the World. Join me tomorrow when we will gaze into our crystal balls and look at where F1 is headed in the future.