

Formula One

ALEX RAYNHAM

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FORMULA ONE

You bring your car to a stop on the starting grid. Thousands of people are by the side of the track, and millions of others are watching on TV. Hundreds of people have worked on your car – designing it, testing it, moving it from track to track. Your team has spent millions to give you the best and fastest car; even the wheel in your hands cost thousands of dollars.

You think about the long story of Formula One, from the forty-eight hour race of 1895 to the ninety minute races of today. You remember the great names of the past, and the champions of today. You think about the other drivers – who will be the bravest today, or the cleverest, or the fastest? A few seconds pass.

And then the red lights go out, and there is only one thing to think about – winning the race . . .

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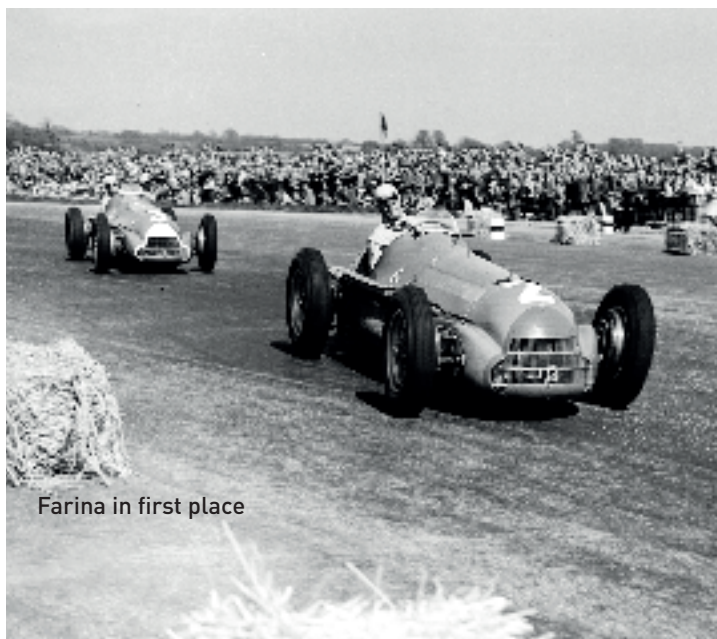


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1 The greatest race

On 13 May 1950, twenty-one drivers started their engines at a race track in Silverstone, England. It was the first race in the new Formula One World Championship. Some of the cars on the track were made by car companies like Alfa Romeo and Maserati, but others were built by a few mechanics. They used engines from other cars, and they built their new cars for less than 2,000 dollars each.

Four red Alfa Romeo cars and their drivers – Fangio, Fagioli, Farina, and Parnell – were in front from the start. Fangio had engine problems and did not finish the race. Parnell's car hit a small animal on the race track, but he stayed in the race and finished third. Fagioli was second, and Giuseppe Farina won the race in two hours, thirteen minutes, and twenty-three seconds.



Farina in first place

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Only twelve cars finished the race that day: the others had engine problems, fires, and accidents. The race was not on television, but about 120,000 people came to Silverstone to watch it. It was very dangerous for the drivers and for the crowd. People stood close to the track as the cars went past them at 160 kilometres per hour.

On 14 March 2010 at three o'clock, twenty-four cars waited on the track at the start of the Bahrain Grand Prix – the first race in the 2010 Formula One World Championship. Each car had cost millions of dollars to build. There were four world champion drivers on the track, and one of them was Michael Schumacher, the most famous racing driver in the world. One hour, thirty-nine minutes, and twenty seconds later, Fernando Alonso crossed the finish line to win the race. More than 50 million people were watching him on television.

When the drivers arrived in Bahrain a few days before the race, photographers and television reporters from all over the world were waiting for them. Today's Formula One drivers are as rich and famous as pop stars, but Formula One is a team sport. Teams of hundreds of people work for months to build the cars, and a 'track team', which can have as many as eighty people, helps the driver in the race.



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Racing to the first corner
at Bahrain, 2010



There are hundreds of books, websites, and magazines about Formula One racing. More than 2 million people watch the races every year at the race tracks, and over 100 million people watch one race or more on television. So why is Formula One so popular?

Perhaps it is the speed of the cars, and their brave drivers. Today's Formula One cars race at over 300 kilometres per hour, and sometimes the drivers have less than a second to decide what to do. The smallest mistake can mean a terrible crash. That is what makes a Formula One Grand Prix the greatest race in the world.

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2 What is Formula One?

There are lots of different car races, with different cars and different rules. Some races are on tracks, but others are on roads or even through fields. The International Automobile Federation (FIA) makes rules called formulas for some types of car race. What engines the cars can have, how big the cars are, how the drivers must race, and what technologies the teams can use – the answers to all of these questions are in the formula. There are different formulas for different types of car race, but the formula for some of the fastest and most powerful cars is Formula One.

The engines of the first Formula One cars were not as powerful as they are today, and the cars looked very different too. When car technology changes – sometimes as often as every year – the FIA changes the rules for Formula One. They do this to keep the races safe, fair, and exciting, but it means that the racing teams have to build new cars each time. If racing teams do not follow the new rules, their cars cannot enter the race. The rules that you read about in this book are the rules of 2010, but of course they may change every year.



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The racing teams

Formula One cars belong to teams like McLaren, Ferrari, and Renault. The teams are also called constructors because they construct, or build, the cars. The racing teams have big factories, and their track teams, drivers, and cars travel around the world. Since Formula One began, there have been many racing teams. There are usually about twelve teams in the championship, and each team has two cars in the race.

Racing teams spend a lot of money, but they also get a lot of money from advertising and racing. Some big car companies like Ferrari and Mercedes have Formula One racing teams. Other teams like Williams only build cars for races. Some companies that do not usually make cars, like Red Bull, have racing teams to advertise their companies.



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The circuits

Formula One tracks are called circuits. The circuits have straights, corners, and chicanes – two or more corners together, which makes cars go slower. Most circuits are about 5.5 kilometres long, and each time around the circuit is called a lap. Each Formula One circuit is different, but races are usually the nearest number of laps over 305 kilometres. For example, cars drive sixty-one laps to finish the 309.3 kilometre race in Singapore.

Just off the track is a place called the pits where teams have their garages. When drivers need to make a pit stop – to change their tyres, for example, or to fix a problem with the car – they move into the pit lane. This is a road next to the track, which takes drivers into the pits. They are usually back on the track about twenty seconds later.

The world championship

The first rules for Formula One racing were made in 1948, but the first world championship was in 1950. There were six races in Europe and one race in the USA that year. In 2010, there were nineteen races in eighteen different countries all over the world.

The first ten cars in each race get points for the driver and the racing team. The rules for points could change at any time, and have changed three times in the last twenty years. At the moment, the winning car gets twenty-five points, the second car gets eighteen points, and the tenth car gets one point. At the end of the championship, the driver who wins the most points wins the FIA Formula One World Championship. The racing teams get points from both of their cars, and the team with the most points wins the constructors' championship.

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The Interlagos F1 circuit
at São Paulo, Brazil



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