

ALL CHILLY ON THE AUSTIN FRONT

Yes, it was that cold and windy Tuesday at Circuit of the Americas in Texas, for the lead up to this weekend's United States Grand Prix. The Formula One pit lane and paddock area was not populated very much as team crew members bustled most hurriedly back to the warmer confines of their garages. No F1 cars were visible, few pit boxes were installed along the Pit Lane fence, and there were only a few fork lifts moving things. Most of the forking was for the third and second story hospitality suites. On the ground level, the F1 paddock/hospitality area was pretty much established and the final finishing touches of beautification, bells and whistles were in progress.

Each year it seems the teams try to outdo themselves in the appearance of the paddock entrances to their garages. Those teams that have won Championships have their appropriate decals proudly displayed. One of the Red Bull team members told me that even though the team had won the 2013 Championships, they weren't displaying their decals until the first round of the 2014 season in Melbourne Australia. Because of its overwhelming use and branding of its iconic red, the Ferrari team stands out in the paddock and pit lane. The team has its brand on every single thing you can imagine. It even brought back its smoking area, the only team to have such a place behind its garage. Lotus has named Heikki Kovalainen to drive the USGP and Brazilian GP finale race. KIMI RAIKKONEN's name had been up on the garage Monday to Wednesday morning but now it is gone. Wednesday's pace will pick up as all the FIA F1 officials arrive and begin their official duties, including the track inspection.



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PROFILING YOUR F&C CHIEF: KATHY MALECK

Kathy has worked eighty Formula One Grand Prix's since the 1997 Long Beach Grand Prix. Since then she's worked F1 races in twelve countries on four continents. Her resume includes a 1985 'World Tour' to Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, US, Canada, Australia and The Netherlands. She averaged five GP's a year after her first at Long Beach for all years until about 1996. One thing about being a F1 F&C marshal that many don't know - it's always a volunteer assignment. There's no payment for the coveted position.

Since LBGP Kathy has worked all the USGP venues, except Watkins Glen which stopped after 1980. Her resume includes COTA, Dallas, Detroit, Indianapolis, Las Vegas, and Phoenix, often as Flag Chief. She also has worked 25 Canadian GP's in Montreal, and for years helped with their chief with assignments of the US F&C folks.

Kathy also was part of the 98 SCCA Race officials and marshals who were invited by FIA to work with and train local volunteers for the 1985 Curacao F3 race, which was held to qualify the circuit for 1986 Curacao F1 race - which never occurred. Getting the necessary approval to work all those overseas races was not easy. Back in the day it was a complicated process requiring written permission to obtain the FIA sign off. Kathy did, and held a FIA International F&C license while they existed. For the Indy races, she held a FIA International Chief's license.

Kathy started working races at age 17, which was below the legal age for marshals at the time. I'll let Kathy tell you how she pulled it off. She joined Land O'Lakes Region of Sports Car Club of America, and has held just about every position there is to be had including Regional Executive, Race Chairman, Event Organizer, and for four years - driver. Yes, Kathy raced FV and Spec Racer cars- being Land O'Lakes FV Rookie of the Year. In SCCA, Kathy has been awarded three top awards:

The 1986 Gordon Smiley Award, presented to the SCCA racing enthusiast who has done the most in the past year to promote motorsports, both nationally and internationally. The winner is chosen from nominees set forth by a panel of motorsports journalists, then approved by the Board of Directors and/or the Smiley family or its representatives. The 1992 John McGill Award, presented for significant contribution to the Club Racing Program. The winner is chosen by the Club Racing Board and the Vice President of Club Racing.

The 1995 Woolf Barnato, SCCA's highest award, presented to the member who has made the most outstanding long-term contribution. Winners are nominated by the last three recipients and approved by the Board of Directors. In addition to all of her F&C involvements over the years, Kathy has also been working with SCCA Pro Racing since 1988. Among her roles is Operations Coordinator for the Pirelli World Challenge Series and Field Staff Manager for SCCA Pro Racing. It's even more intensive and busy than it sounds, but again, Kathy can tell you all about it.









CHATTING WITH CHARLIE

One of my F1 weekend highlights is my chat with CHARLIE WHITING, the FIA F1 Race Director, Safety Delegate and head of the F1 Technical Department. Charlie said "It's always a pleasure to come to America. There is such a wealth of experience from all racing categories come together here. I feel comfortable."

He also has some reassuring words for those marshals who have concerns about being replaced by mechanisms. "I don't think light boards will ever replace flaggers. We will always need flag marshals. A flag marshal can use body language to add emphasis to a flag situation, which can never be done by a light board. Marshals are more likely to see something first and immediately react."

Light boards are operated on each corner by dedicated marshals, and Charlie said the use of them has been embraced by F&C marshals, who take pride in their work. The marshals have demonstrated how they want to learn all about them and are proud to have been given the job.

Light boards, which have been in use for the past four years, might have a use in F1 testing. They work extremely well. They have visibility from a distance and can be operated remotely which means they could be utilized in areas where it wouldn't be safe for a marshal.

We talked a little about the two F1 reserve drivers who will run the first Friday F1 practice - ALEXANDER ROSSI of Grass Valley CA for Caterham, the first American in some years; and DANIL KAVYAT of Russia, for Toro Rosso - where he will race full time in 2014, replacing DANIEL RICCARDO, who is moving up to Red Bull Racing to drive with 2013 World Champion, SEBASTIAN VETTEL. Aussie MARK WEBBER is leaving F1 for sports cars. Charlie has been following Rossi's career since he first saw him race, and is very impressed by the young man. A driver must hold a FIA Super Licence in order to participate in a F1 session. Both Rossi and Kavyat do as they have won races, championships, run the Young Drivers' Test, and/or run 300 km in a current F1 car in the last 90 days.



















Wednesday at COTA

Wednesday at Circuit of the Americas saw somewhat of an uptick in activity in the Formula One garages and paddock, but overall it was very low key, more contained and less frantic than I've ever seen for a Wednesday. The continuing chilly weather might have had some bearing on that. The front side – Pit Lane – was bathed in sunshine much of the day, but the temperatures remained in the very low fifties, F. On the backside of the garages, in the paddock/hospitality area, it was all shaded and extremely cold.

Wednesday night the temperature dropped to 34F/1.1C . Brrr that's cold. But things are looking up. Temperatures are said to rise markedly as the weekend progresses. Now if that forecast for rain proves false, we'd all be happier. Never more than this weekend – so far – will tire warmers be more crucial. The ongoing saga of the unknown driver for the second Lotus F1 Team seat continues. The day started with KIMI RAIKKONEN still being shown as the driver, but by midday, the sign was blank. Everyone expected an announcement on Thursday as the first F1 practice is Friday morning. One Lotus Team wag told me the sign was still blank as the new one was still being printed. He spoke in jest but probably was spot on.

LEWIS HAMILTON/Mercedes will drive the NBCSN Hot Lap for the F1 TV broadcast. His vehicle will be a gorgeous, expensive ($200,000) Mercedes SLS Black Series tricked out with four Go-Pro cameras. One can never have too many of those. The car was parked in Pit Lane Wednesday afternoon – in front of Sahara Force India, being carefully looked after and buffed by a Mercedes team member. No one knew why it was parked in that location, but no one was complaining, and it drew its fair share of appreciative onlookers. By the way, Pirelli may be the official tire of F1, but the Mercedes has Michelin tires.
The Red Bull team has a special paint formula done up in its paint shop, which shows iridescent when seen from the best angle. It is stunning, and pictures don't do it justice.

SERGIO PEREZ/McLaren made his own gracious announcement Tuesday that he wouldn't be back at McLaren next year. Being young and into social media, Twitter was where the word was first seen. McLaren was equally as gracious in its response. Each thanked the other for their good times. There were no details from either side regarding things going forward. There are two support races for the weekend – Ferrari Challenge and Formula Vintage. Little has been said about the specifics of this group, but one driver on site already is ART HEBERT of Larkspur CA with his 1977 Chevron B39 F. Atlantic car. This lends credence to the chatter that the group might be Vintage Atlantic cars. Time will tell … and then, so will I.

Thursday the pace picked up. FIA conducted its track systems checks, with a Sector Marshal on each corner to test the light boards and all the communication equipment. FIA did its track inspection, and the scrutineers got to work getting the cars through the rigorous F1 technical inspection process. There was a lot more hustle, and finally the Formula One cars were seen.



What does an Aussie do in Austin Texas?



Having spent the four days prior to arriving in Austin at the NASCAR Phoenix race, it was great to finally touch down in Austin again where we were reminded that it's great to be weird which the locals are proud of. Lynne and I travelled to the Capital Building and Archives Building looking around at the JFK artifacts. Then a lovely lunch at Willie G's before a trip out to the track. Tuesday was back at the track obtaining passes then a trip to the airport and for me my drive on the wrong side of the road since 2006 heading home to the Drury Inn North. Wednesday Ron, Ruston and I visited University of Texas for the day looking around the 40 acres including a photo op in the stadium then purchasing some genuine UT merchandise. Then off to Hopdoddy Burger Bar for one of the best burgers in the state, however made a mental note to never trust a friend with the choice of hot sauce (Sriracha thanks Ruston); it is a great concept burger bar and a bit of fun at the same time.

Once we were fuelled, we headed off to Top Golf in Austin which is a new and sensational way for everyone to play golf. No real experience needed as you take turns in hitting balls. In between we sat back and enjoy a drink under the heaters watching golf on TV. It's not cheap, but everything great costs more.

Our next visit was to Red's Indoor Shooting Range just a few minutes down the road and it was bit intimidating walking into a shooting range for the first time. I had shot rifles before but never a handgun. Which one to shoot? The Glock17 was our choice so we shot off 100 rounds and it was great. 10 foot, 20 foot then I tried the 60 foot distance and managed to hit the target with each one. It was exhilarating. So where to from there?



We ate at Rudy's in 2012 so we were looking forward to another meal and we were not disappointed. The best lean meat and BBQ sauce then a quick trip to Red Rock Outlets for some more Puma runners. ☺ Thanks Austin.

Regards Richard McLean Editor – richjo@outlook.com













