

WELCOME BACK TO ALBERT PARK

Welcome back to Albert Park and the Formula 1 Rolex Australian Grand Prix for 2024; another Melbourne race sold-out well in advance.

The Australian drivers Daniel, Oscar and honorary Australian Valtteri Bottas are back chasing the all-conquering Max Verstappen. Today's Officials Gazette will provide an overview of the 2024 race meeting and what you are likely to see this weekend. No April Fool's Day this year, but always expect shenanigans. The Melbourne weather should be sunny and warm most of the time, but overcast conditions are expected during Friday and Saturday. This could change at a moment's notice, so expect rain.

Whilst Max has shown his brilliance as World Champion for the last 3 years, the best of the rest are level pegging's and it should be an interesting battle of the teammates in 2024. There has been so much change in the off-season and during the first two races that is hard to keep up to date. Lewis to Ferrari in 2025 and we have a new CEO at Motorsport Australia – Sunil Vohra. We also have a new CEO of the Grand Prix Corporation – Travis Auld, and the Formula One paddock is constantly rearranging itself as people are fired, poached, on gardening leave and re-poached.

Lots of our regular Drive to Survive favourites like Gunther Steiner are gone, but change is inevitable in Formula 1. If you're fast, then you've got a drive; and if you bring millions in sponsorship, then you have a drive. It's always a tight balancing act between youth and experience. Snooze and someone else will take your spot.

The Officials Gazette team regulars Ron Searle, Lynne Huntting, Michael Shaw, yours truly Richard McLean will be joined by Eva Kosinski this year. Most of you will know Eva from the muster team, but Eva will also be out and about with our photographers asking some hard-hitting questions, so say hello.

It is truly amazing how much life has changed since 1996 when Albert Park fired back into life with Formula 1 cars. The cars, drivers, track layout, grandstands and the general infrastructure that supports this fantastic event were very different. Treasured people we worked with us all those years ago have sadly left us and are sorely missed. Some officials have retired, and some have moved onto different stages and activities in their lives; but there remains a core group of stalwart officials who continue to serve. We thank them for their perseverance; and at the same time, we welcome all the new officials plus the large international cast.

The 3:30am o'clock wake up time and late finish times make extremely long days for all officials especially when travelling over an hour to and from the track, so stay hydrated, well fed and rest when you can. You'll need it.

2024 promises to be both a very long year and a massive year full of change with so many drivers out of contract. Who will go where and why? Stay tuned to Formula 1 and hold on. Melbourne: the track is ready, the drivers and teams are ready, and now it's over to you, the best officials in the world, to make it happen.

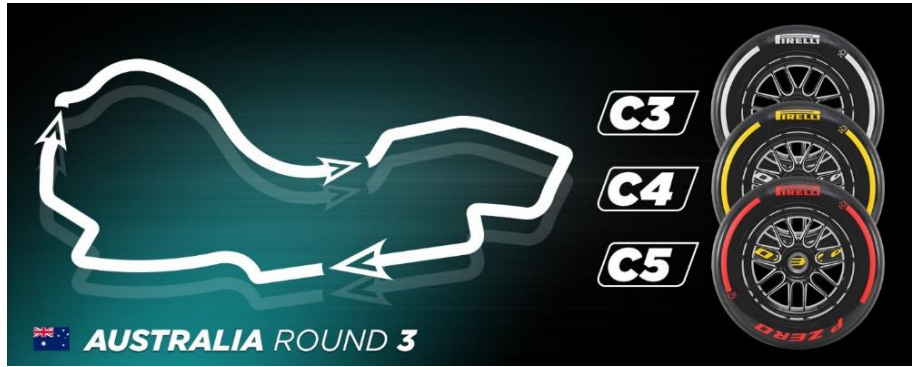


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Please email or text your photos and corner insights from around the track to the Gazette team and we will be around to photograph you and your team. Head to the Motorsport Australia app Sportity for all the latest 2024 and also 2023 issues.

TYRES (courtesy of Pirelli)

Pirelli’s C5 tyre – the softest of the five slick compounds available this year – will make its debut at the Australian Grand Prix: round three of the 2024 season. This has been nominated alongside the C4 (as used in Jeddah) and the C3, which is seen at practically every race.



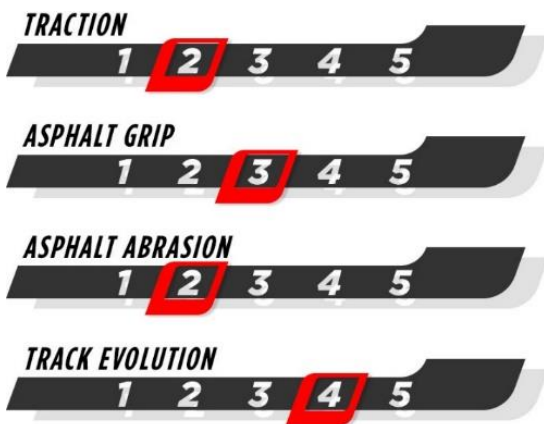
This is a softer selection compared to last year, when the C2, C3, and C4 were chosen, but it’s not the first time that the softest compound has been seen in Melbourne. Back in 2022, Pirelli brought the C5 to Albert Park as the soft nomination (when it was paired with C3 as medium and C2 as hard, leaving out the C4).

The decision to go with a softer selection was taken after analysing last year’s race, which centred around the C2 with 10 drivers using it for 47 of the 58 laps, and three drivers running it for more than 50 laps. The 2023 Australian Grand Prix was characterised by numerous stoppages, including three safety cars and three red flags, with two restarts from the grid and one rolling restart.

The Albert Park track is made up of 14 corners, having recently been redesigned to make it more flowing. It’s still tricky to overtake on, although not as hard as it was in the past. Historically, a one-stop strategy has been the favoured option, but the move to a softer tyre nomination might change that – as well as creating situations where the pace difference between the cars as a result of varying levels of tyre performance helps overtaking.

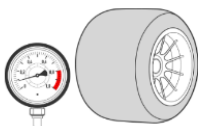
The C5 remains unaltered from 2023, but it's the compound that has up to now been used least on the current generation of cars. It wasn’t nominated for either of the two opening races this year, and just 140 kilometres were covered on the softest compound in the 2024 range during the single pre-season test in Bahrain from 21-23 February. Lewis Hamilton was the only driver to complete a true long run with it, while the Williams drivers mainly used it for a series of in and out laps. Only two other teams, Ferrari and Stake F1, selected the C5 for the Bahrain test: an abrasive track that is not particularly suited to the softest compound. So, it remains something of an unknown heading into this weekend’s Australian Grand Prix.

The Albert Park weekend is a firm favourite in the world of Formula 1, thanks to its stunning location and the buzzy atmosphere of host city Melbourne. The track itself isn’t too hard on tyres, with degradation being a bigger factor than wear. It’s now the beginning of autumn at this time of year in Australia, and this can spring a few weather-related surprises, with temperature swings and rain all having made their mark on the race weekend in the past. There’s a packed program of support races from Thursday onwards: as well as Formula 2 and Formula 3, there’s also the Porsche Carrera Cup and Australian Supercars championship, which means there will be plenty of rubber laid onto the track to influence grip levels.



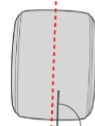
MIN. STARTING PRESSURES (slicks)

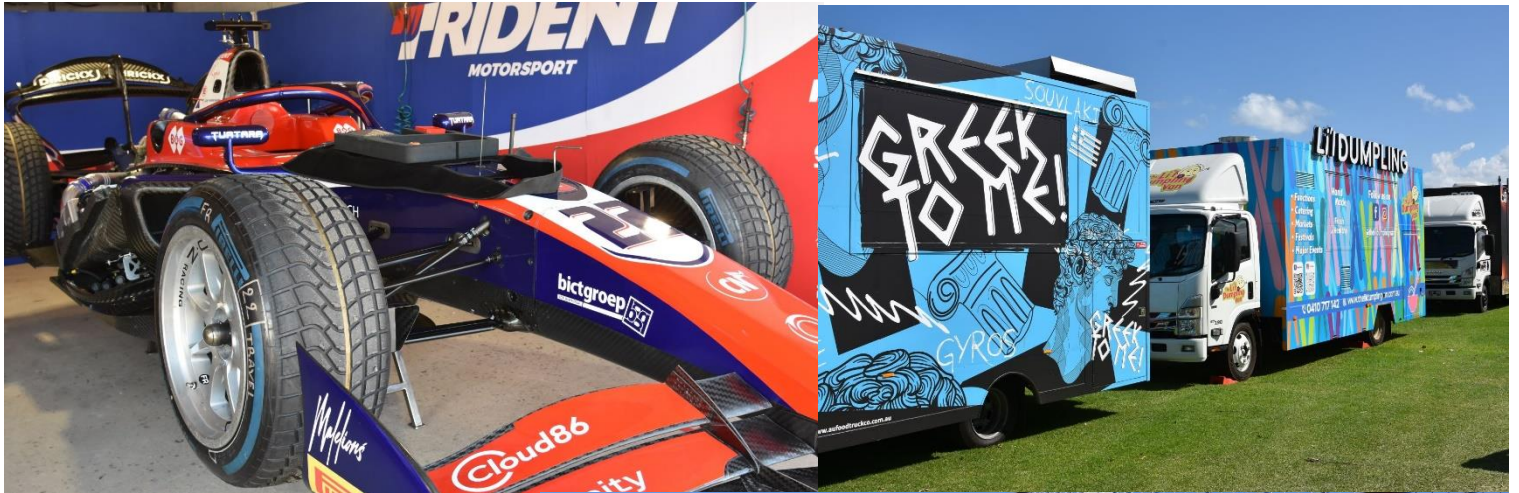
24.0 psi (front)
21.5 psi (rear)



EOS CAMBER LIMIT

-3.25° (front)
-1.75° (rear)





F1 IN 2024

Here we are at the third race of the 2024 F1 season already and if you think that's too late in the season, you'll love that next year Melbourne returns to being the opening round.

With close enough to no rule changes that affect the Australian Grand Prix (there are changes to the Sprint race format,) instead we'll do a team-by-team rundown.

HAAS

In the most disappointing news for Drive To Survive fans, Gunther Steiner has left Haas. His replacement, Ayao Komatsu, has signalled a new management style which has so far been working. The American team has banished most of its tyre life issues of the last few seasons, providing Nico Hulkenberg with a point in the last race, while teammate Kevin Magnussen collected penalties galore. There is still a long, long way to go before they can claim lasting improvement; but the signs are promising that it's heading in the right direction and should again be knocking on the door of some points.

Gunther may still be around as he was in Adelaide for the annual Motorsports Festival last week and is doing commentary for German F1 coverage on RTL. He has been added to Australian Channel 10's broadcast team for the Melbourne F1.

SAUBER

Sometimes you kick, sometimes you get sponsored by Kick. In a transition year or two for the Swiss squad as they move from Alfa Romeo backing to being a fully-fledged Audi entry (Audi have now bought the whole team,) they have title sponsorship that names the team Stake F1 Team Kick Sauber. It's a bit of a mouthful but could be worse (see the next team.) This has bought an easily spotted car with its black and fluoro green livery. It's just a shame for Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu that good results won't be easy for them to achieve. New team managements haven't yet put their stamp on how the team is run, meaning there hasn't been a lot of development compared to other teams (don't think that that means there's been no development.) Zhou nabbed an 11th in Bahrain, showing they're not a long way away from previous seasons at the very least; but Saudi Arabia was an unmitigated disaster, where neither car had a clean pitstop.

RACING BULLS

The Visa Cash App RB F1 Team, aka Racing Bulls, previously AlphaTauri, previously Toro Rosso and before being bought by Red Bull, Minardi, has the most exciting drivers, at least as personalities. Daniel Ricciardo gets a full season to prove his worth to the Red Bull bosses; although he is having to beat his Japanese teammate, Yuki Tsunoda, who has turned the radio blue when things go wrong but is fast when it goes right. RB (it's quicker this way) have not covered its selves with glory at the first two rounds, where neither driver has been able to show his best work, including a woeful pitstop for Dan in Saudi Arabia taking his race from bad to worse, and then the worst with a late race spin. It's going to be a tough season for this team unless they find some magic solution; but at least they're not the slowest.

WILLIAMS

Alex Albon has continued his rising standing as an F1 driver, as he's gelled perfectly with the Williams team. The team has built a competent car which is able to shine a few times in the year, allowing its drivers to steal points. Logan Sargeant moves into a second year with a lot to prove. An inconsistent first season was just enough for him to hold onto his seat, helped by bringing some financial backing, and glimpses of the speed he showed in F2 (he finished fourth in the 2020 season, including two wins.) No points yet, but Albon especially has been knocking on the door of the top 10.

ALPINE

Alpine came away from pre-season testing in a dour mood. Its car was too heavy and too slow. Sadly, for the French, neither Pierre Gasly nor Esteban Ocon have been able to improve on this. Both cars have remained steadfast at the back of the field, only moving up through the misfortune of others. The workers at Enstone will be working hard on improvements, but don't expect any significant improvements here.

ASTON MARTIN

The green machines were the talk of the town in the first half of 2023, but they tailed off significantly by the end of the season. Fernando Alonso fought valiantly all year after a string of early podiums; but Aston Martin's development went in the wrong direction when a mid-season update made the car worse. Both Alonso and Lance Stroll have been battling their new car more than anyone else on the grid, including an unfortunate race-ending brush with the wall for Lance in Saudi

Arabia. The team has been hiring new workers to try to move up the grid, but it just hasn't translated into results in 2024 yet.

McLAREN

2023's Most Improved Award winner began the year as it didn't last year. A reasonable pace and fighting closely with the Mercedes drivers have given Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri aims of more improvement and better results as they did last year. Piastri's Sprint race win was an amazing result for his first season of F1; and it doesn't appear to have gone to his head, as he's knuckled down for a difficult fight with his teammate. Norris, meanwhile, is using the lack of race wins as motivation to spur himself and the team even further up the grid this year.

FERRARI

Charles Leclerc and most of Carlos Sainz will hit Albert Park with renewed hope that they can challenge the Red Bull juggernaut. The Ferraris have started 2024 better than last year, but still not quite as fast as they need to be to win races. Leclerc has a fourth and a third and has a good chance of another podium. Sainz started with a podium but followed that up with appendicitis and emergency surgery. F2 driver Oliver Bearman stepped in at the last moment and produced a brilliant effort to take points on his F1 debut, though had to bow out of the F2 races. Look out for Ollie in the F2 support races as he is fast. Sainz should be back in the car after his weight loss program; and while still a little tender, wanting to get more points in his final year at the scarlet team.

MERCEDES

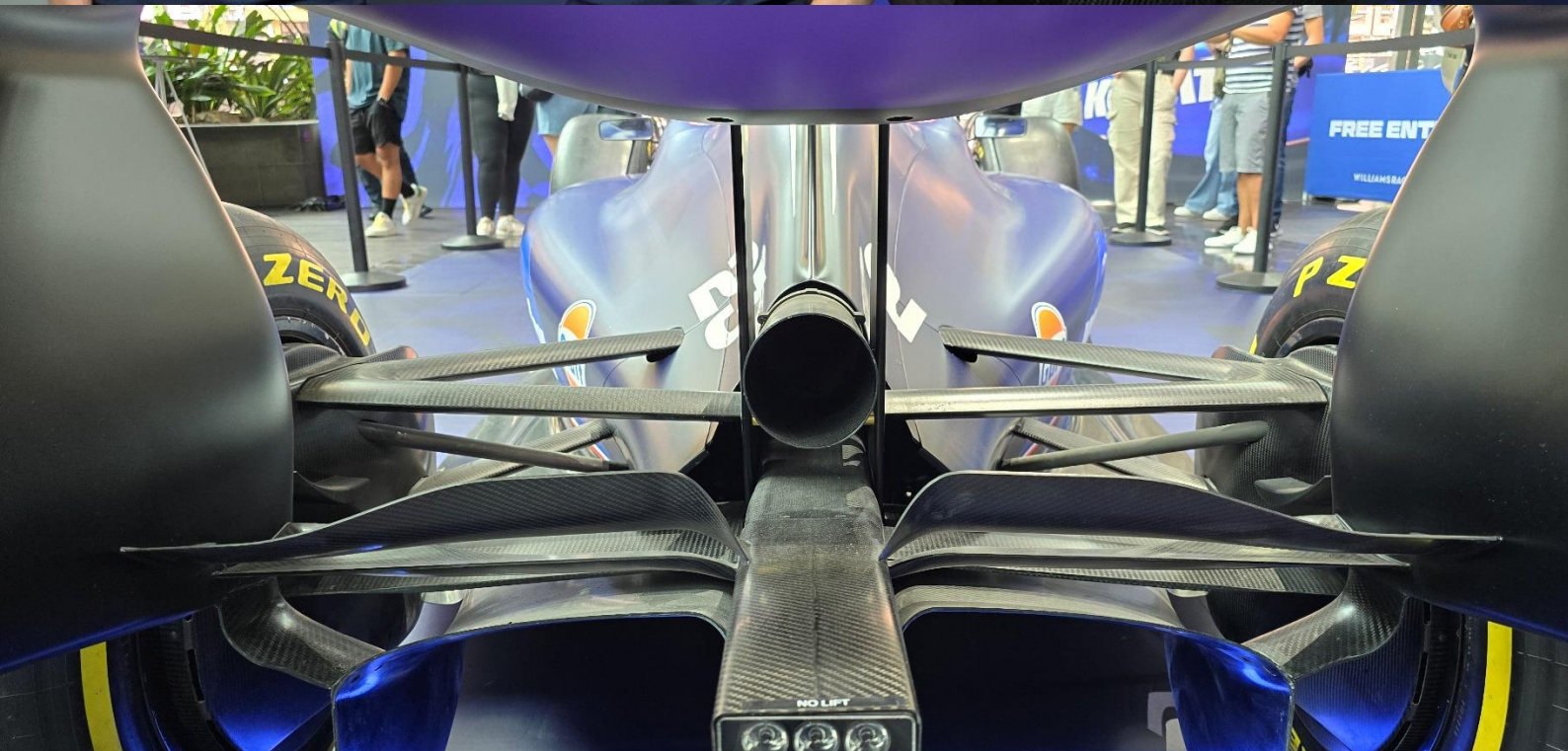
Lewis Hamilton and George Russell were talking up huge car improvements over last year's Frankenstein's monster when the team dropped its zero sidepod concept. But the results haven't backed this up yet. There are issues with bouncing again, which need to be overcome; but there have been signs that this car has the potential to be faster much more than the old car. Hamilton has already announced he's leaving for Ferrari next year, so Russell will get all of the secret squirrel updates, especially in the second half of the year. Though going by previous seasons, Mercedes will be as fair as possible between them. Both drivers are clearly hungry and fast, just don't expect a podium on pace alone.

RED BULL

It's business as usual on the racetrack for Red Bull Racing. Max Verstappen is continuing his 2023 domination by easily winning the opening races in Bahrain & Saudi Arabia, which puts him on nine wins in a row again and in a position to break his previous win record. Sergio Perez has started his year well with two second places; though his qualifying pace is still too far behind where he needs it to be as his job is on the line. Perez's contract is up at the end of the year and there's a queue of Red Bull drivers lining up to take it, with the Racing Bulls drivers and Kiwi Liam Lawson, who raced very well when subbing for Ricciardo last year, all putting their hand up alongside rumours of others being wooed. Off the track, there appears to be a lot of infighting. We won't go into detail here, as it's been all over the motorsport press; but there are internal battles that are threatening to break up an extremely successful racing team.

Qualifying will be extremely tight, especially between the Red Bulls and Ferrari; but the race may be another Verstappen show. Teams have had the opportunity to bring updates to catch up to Red Bull and we'll soon see if anyone can close the gap at the front.







First GP: 1996

Number of Laps: 58

Circuit Length: 5.278km

Race Distance: 306.124km

Lap Record: 1:20.235 Sergio Perez (2023)

FIA SCHEDULE

F1

P1 Friday 12:30
P2 Friday 16:00
P3 Saturday 12:30
Qual Saturday 16:00
Sprint Race
Race Sunday 15:00

F2

Friday 10:00

 Friday 17:30
 Saturday 14:15
 Sunday 11:35

F3

Friday 8:50

 Friday 14:00
 Saturday 11:15
 Sunday 9:05

