

The Chequered F1ag



A Formula One blog by Stephen English
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TV contracts dominate Hungarian weekend

AFTER Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton infused life into the Formula 1 world championship with recent victories in Britain and Germany it seemed that last weekend's Hungarian Grand Prix would be one of the pivotal races of the season.

The race weekend at the Hungaroring was indeed one of the most important of the season. Unfortunately the action off-track stole the majority of the headlines with news breaking early Friday morning that Sky TV had reached an agreement with Formula One Management, the sports commercial rights holder, to show Formula 1 on its subscription based platform beginning at the start of next season.

The move saw the BBC lose their exclusive hold on the UK rights to the sport, by far and away the choice of most Irish fans as well, and the broadcaster will now show just ten races next season. The move was understandably met with a mass outcry from fans with many bemoaning the fact that in future it will be necessary to subscribe to Sky Sports to see Formula 1. An increasingly vocal sector of fans has said that they will not subscribe to the channel because of the cost involved and that this would lead to the end of casual fans following the sport.

It likely that viewing numbers will decrease in light of this decision but while fans remain the lifeblood of the sport money is still the heart that pumps this blood. This deal will see Sky pay substantial fees to broadcast the sport in the UK, Setanta Sports will continue to hold the Irish rights, with an increasing proportion of the TV revenue likely to be paid to the teams under the terms of the new Concorde Agreement due to be ratified in 18 months time.

Teams stand to profit from deal

SINCE the teams formed FOTA they have gained increasing power within the decision making processes of the sport and as long as their unity stays strong in the coming months they are sure to be in a strong negotiating position when they, the FIA and FOM finalise the new Concorde Agreement. As a result it is likely that they will see a windfall from this deal and in light of the question marks that have been hanging over the ability of the BBC to continue to broadcast Formula 1 it is clear that this deal was the only possible solution to Bernie Ecclestone finding a long term partner.

There was hope that another broadcaster, most notably Channel 4, would step into the void created if the BBC terminated their contract but this was never likely to proceed much further than exploratory talks. With the current market this is the best solution for all parties has been found. The BBC can satisfy licence payers by saying that they are drastically reducing their expenditure on Formula 1, easily the most expensive sport covered by the Corporation, while still having the cachet of being a broadcaster of one of the most popular sports in the world.

It is very easy to look at this deal and ask "what effect does this have on Irish fans?" but it has to be remembered just how much the BBC has revolutionised coverage of Formula 1 since regaining the rights prior to the start of the 2009 season. BBC saw fans given extensive access to the biggest players in the paddock with all the action shown throughout the weekend, it remains to be seen if Sky will continue to provide as much in-depth analysis of the sport in the future.

Supporters of the Sky deal can rightly speak of the huge leap forward in coverage and exposure of the Premier League following the intervention of Sky in the early nineties. Unfortunately there are few parallels between the Premiership and Formula 1 due to the fact that twenty years ago English league football was in dire straits with interest falling off in the top tier. As a result the time was right for a broadcaster to come in and offer to revolutionise the packaging of football.

Can F1 continue to grow?

FORMULA 1 is currently at the height of its popularity with audience figures growing annually and the sport currently in the midst of some of the most thrilling races in memory. With millions of new fans brought to the sport in recent years it is crucial that Formula 1 can maintain their support over the duration of the deal with Sky.

Whether these fans will be willing to pay for Formula 1 will remain to be seen until the end of next season but the fact that this deal has been made shows just how perilous the state of finances at the BBC has become. Even though Ecclestone has made numerous remarks to shock fans of the sport in recent year-championships decided by medals, sprinklers used during races to "spice up the show" being just two-there is no way that he would look to take Formula 1 off free-to-air television in its biggest market if there was another alternative.

Providing a watered down alternative was not an option for Formula 1. Fans now demand the very best with presentation now almost as important as the actual race. This point is perfectly illustrated by the coverage afforded MotoGP by the BBC. As sole rights holders in the UK to a sport that they can provide with minimum outlay they have outsourced production to a Northern Ireland company in an effort to cut costs. Other overhead costs have also been dramatically reduced and with this so has fans appetite to watch the race live; instead many watch it later in the day on tape delay from Eurosport.

If Formula 1 was to follow this lead on the BBC it is likely that many fans would be driven away from the sport and as a result it is clear that even though this is not a deal that was wanted by fans, it is the only decision that could be made for the long term future of the sport in the UK.

Button wins again in changing conditions

IT was unfortunate for Jenson Button that his stunning victory in Hungary was overshadowed by the discussions about free-to-air television but the former world champion marked his 200th Grand Prix start with a stunning performance in changing conditions.

Button was not the fastest driver on the track throughout the race but, as ever in difficult conditions, the Englishman was the most consistent driver and even though his McLaren teammate, Lewis Hamilton, was slightly faster in absolute pace throughout the weekend there was little to detract from Button's performance when he took advantage of a series of mistakes from his teammate.

Even in light of his recent victory in the thrilling Canadian Grand Prix this victory was even sweeter for Button as it showed once again that in changeable conditions he is the class of the Formula 1 field.

HORSE RACING Bar One Racing Dual Race Day

Bar One Racing Dual Race Day at Dundalk Stadium

THE Bar One Racing 'Dual Race Day' will take place at Dundalk Stadium's all-weather horse and greyhound track on Sunday August 14.

Horse racing will commence at 3.05pm with a seven race card. Greyhound racing will take place in the evening at 7:30pm with the annual Bar One Racing Irish Sprint Cup Final.

Ireland's only sprint Classic event, The Bar One Racing Irish Sprint Cup has a total prize fund of €35,000 and a winner's purse of €20,000.

"This is the fourth year that Bar One Racing has sponsored the Dual Race Day at Dundalk Stadium and the seventh year sponsoring the Bar One Racing Irish Sprint Cup Final," said Declan McCourt, managing director, Bar One Racing.

"The Sprint Cup this year is shaping up to be an exciting contest with no shock eliminations. The top Sprinter's in the country are still vying for the €35,000 prize fund and I look forward to seeing who remains to

contest the title."

Tickets are not required for this event and doors open at 12:30pm. Restaurant spaces are currently available and bookings in advance are recommended to avoid disappointment.

"The Bar One Dual Race Day promises to be a great day for young and old alike", said Emma Meehan, sales and marketing manager, Dundalk Stadium.

"With a whole host of kids activities throughout the day, the Bar One Racing Dual Race Day will ensure that the youngsters are just as entertained as the adults. I would like to thank Bar One Racing for their continued support of Dundalk Stadium and we look forward to an exciting race day."

The semi-finals of the Bar One Racing Irish Sprint Cup will run on Saturday August 6 and the draw for the final will take place on the evening of the evening of August 6.



Barney O'Hare, managing director, Bar One Racing presenting trophy to Dessie Gilroy (left of trophy), Jim Martin, CEO, Dundalk Stadium, (behind Dessie and Barney), Gerry Kerley, director, Dundalk Stadium, (right of Barney), Emma Meehan, sales and marketing manager, Dundalk Stadium (far right), Michael Dempsey, then Racing Manager, Dundalk Stadium (front far right), Teresa Wall, IGB (far back left) photographed also with winning connections.

EQUESTRIAN Ravensdale Lodge

Lodge going from strength to strength

THE dressage leagues which have been held at Ravensdale Lodge have gone from strength to strength since they first started some 18 months ago in spring 2010.

After three successful indoor leagues the centre extended the run to include a summer league on their superb outdoor grass arenas and is now half way through this particular league with the number and calibre of entries improving with every week.

Last Tuesday's league date saw international dressage and event riders Jayne Doherty and Sasha Stewart make an appearance with a lorry load of horses for the show.

The sisters have been to Ravensdale Lodge on different occasions and Jayne who is hoping to qualify for the European championships this year and the London Olympics in 12 months time picked the grass arenas at Ravensdale to prepare for her final trial for the European Championships which is scheduled for next week.

"I think Ravensdale Lodge is one of the best facilities in Ireland and the grass arenas are certainly the best in the country for what we do" stated Jayne. "I have my last trial for selection for this year's European Championships next week and I have earmarked Ravensdale for my final preparation between competing at the Olympic test event in Greenwich village a couple of weeks ago".

"We have been really delighted with how the dressage competitions have progressed here at the centre", commented Niall Connolly of Ravensdale Lodge.

"Our indoor leagues have grown in reputation from day one and it is really lovely to see how well this summer league is going, it really has exceeded my expectations. I think it is all down to the wonderful surfaces that we have, both indoor and outdoor, our facilities are second to none and we are relatively close to everyone.

"The competitors all seem to appreciate the facilities that we have here at Ravensdale Lodge and the grass arenas are like a carpet to ride on. It is a real stamp of approval when international riders such as Jayne Doherty and Sasha Stewart come to compete here and it is lovely for everyone to see such a high calibre of competitor and standard of riding".

The summer dressage league continues at Ravensdale Lodge on Tuesday August 2, 16 and 30 with



Clare Murtagh and Charlie at the Ravensdale Lodge Cross Jump league.

a start time of 6pm. Entries can be made directly to the centre by email or phone.

Week four summer dressage league

Class 1: Intro B, # 1 Jill Hobson's Ludovik (J. Hobson) 71.73%, # 2 Clare Toal's Copper (E. Garvey) 70.43%, # 3 Mary Cosgrove's Rio (M. Cosgrove) 70%, # 4 Anna Beattie's Phoenix (A. Beattie) 69.50%, # 5 Nuala O' Hare's Bailie (N. O' Hare) 63.91%, # 6 Nicola Cooke's Luxor (N. Cooke) 63.47%.

Class 2: Prelim 10, # 1 Karina Mc Veigh's Midnight Reflection (K. Mc Veigh) 67.72%, # 2 Elizabeth Curran's Pure Bliss (E. Curran) 66.36%, # 3 Jan Dewhurst's Podge (J. Dewhurst) 63.63%, # 4 Marina Hope's Trinity Life (M. Hope) 62.27%, # 5 Breige Farrelly's Chestnut Ridge (B. Farrelly) 60.90%, # 6 Mary Cosgrove's Rio (M. Cosgrove) 60.45%.

Open Class: Prelim 10, # 1 Sasha Stewart's Young One (S. Stewart) 71.36%, # 2 Jayne Doherty's Rock Night (J. Doherty) 69.54%.

Class 3: Prelim 12, # 1 Maebh Breathnach's Amos (M. Breathnach) 69.60%, # 2 Jill Hobson's Ludovik (J. Hobson) 66.80%, # 3 Karina Mc Veigh's Midnight Reflection (K. Mc Veigh) 64.80%, # 4 Jan Dewhurst's Podge (J. Dewhurst) 64.40%, # 5 Deirdre Vallely's Flagstaff Dream (D. Vallely) 64%, # 6 Eithne O' Hanrahan's Jo Jo (E. O' Hanrahan) 63.60%

Class 4: Novice 34, # 1 Jayne Doherty's Ching (J. Doherty) 67.08%, # 2 Jayne Doherty's Buster (J. Doherty) 66.96%.

Week five horse and pony training

60cm Class: Divided between, Mary Cosgrove's Rio (M. Cosgrove), Jan Dewhurst's Podge (J. Dewhurst) & Linda Mc Cabe's Tikka (L. Mc Cabe).



Samantha Trimbell and Elegant Lady in action at the Ravensdale Lodge Cross Jump League.



Karina Mc Veigh and Midnight Reflection in action at Ravensdale Lodge Dressage League.

Kathryn Magennis' Richie (R. Baird) & Saoirse Murphy's Corballa Belle (S. Murphy).

80cm Class: Bonnie Bray's Jigsaw (B. Bray).

90cm Class: Divided between, Adam Finnegan's Allie (A. Finnegan), Bernard Collins Suzie (B. Collins) & Niall Smith's Wild about Oscar (A. Callan).

Week four Jump-Cross league

Class 1, 1m: Divided between, Clare Murtagh's Mc Ardles Traveller (C. Murtagh) & Eimear Mc Ateer's

Patch (E. Mc Ateer).

Class 2: 85cm Class: Divided between, Laura Sweetnam's Captain (L. Sweetnam), Katie Sweetnam's Keara (K. Sweetnam), Rachel Conn's Carnfagh Lynn (R. Conn), Sharon Cowan's Calin King (S. Cowan), Kathi Clamor's Clonbrack Royal (K. Clamor), Emma Bell's Hector (E. Bell) & Clare Murtagh's Charlie (C. Murtagh).

Class 3: 70cm Class: Divided between, Samantha Trimbell's Elegant Lady (S. Trimbell) & Sarah Richardson's Red Square 8 (S. Richardson).