



**Sport**

BY RICHARD BECHT

# The cap doesn't fit

A budget cap of \$100 million is causing a furore in the F1 world.

**N**o sport is more at odds with these times of financial hardship than Formula One motor racing. Some might say America's Cup yachting could readily be mentioned in the same breath.

But F1 is always there, the mind-boggling circus that rolls from one country to another throughout every year, attracting with it people who never seem to have a problem spending a few million dollars on a whim.

Therein lies F1's appeal, of course. The notion of so much investment in the pursuit of speed and technical excellence – plus the trappings that go with it – is a potent mix; indeed an aphrodisiac for some.

Others find it all too obscene that so much money can be spent by rich men on their toys while most codes have profit-loss margins pruned down to levels that would never register in F1 thinking.

Whatever the view, F1 takes some topping. It doesn't just represent glamour in sport, it defines it.

It conjures memories of some of the most recognisable names the sporting world has known – from “El Maestro” Juan Manuel Fangio through to Jack Brabham, Jim Clark, Jackie Stewart, Niki Lauda, Alain Prost, Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher.

Grand Prix venues have a certain mystique about them, too ... Monza, Monaco, Spa-Francorchamps, Silverstone, Nurburgring, Hockenheim, Interlagos and so many more.

And then there have been the teams, from the most famous of all in Ferrari – the only survivor since the F1 show started in 1950 – through to the likes of Cooper, BRM, Lotus, Brabham, McLaren, Tyrell, Renault, Williams and more.

That's all evocative but these are in fact provocative times for the world's richest road show.

Not for the first time, it appears to be on unstable ground on a number of fronts. Its death notice has been prematurely scripted before and again talk of F1's demise or at least a slide in its health is surfacing now.

**N**ot unexpectedly, the crunch is biting into some teams' well-being. Honda, for instance, backed out of the game last year. Crowds have been well down at F1 Grand Prix

meetings this year and sponsorship money has shrunk.

All of which has led the sport's governing body, the FIA, to insist on a voluntary cost cap of about \$100 million per team from next year. To say this doesn't sit well with most of the F1 teams would be a slight understatement.

At the head of the queue is Ferrari, which has threatened to take its famous prancing horse emblem away from the game if the FIA introduces such regulations without consultation.

In an environment where the leading manufacturer teams wouldn't blink at lavishing \$500 million a year on their campaigns, it obviously goes against the grain to have restrictions placed on them. All along F1 has been anything but an equal contest; that's why the best – which generally means the richest – have prospered.

Ferrari clearly has clout. It's not just the “face” of F1 racing, it is F1 racing.

Coincidentally Ferrari is having a dreadful year, left behind by the technical advances Brawn-Mercedes has made; its No 1 driver Jenson Button winning four of the first five races so far.

That wouldn't help Ferrari's mindset right now. It's accustomed to being the pacesetter more often than not.

While talk of walking out may well be no more than posturing, Formula One without Ferrari wouldn't be Formula One at all. In the end, money may well talk yet again. ■

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## Most F1 Grand Prix wins by constructors

Constructor	Wins	Seasons
Ferrari	209	1950-2009
McLaren	162	1966-2009
Williams	113	1978-2009
Lotus	79	1958-1994
Brabham	35	1962-1992
Renault	35	1977-2009
Benetton	27	1986-2001
Tyrell	23	1970-1998
BRM	17	1951-1977
Cooper	16	1951-1969