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Published March 2019

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A CIP Catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 78521 589 6 (print)
978 1 78521 627 5 (eBook)

Library of Congress control no. 2018967373

Published by Haynes Publishing,
Sparkford, Yeovil, Somerset BA22 7JJ
Tel: 01963 440635
Int. tel: +44 1963 440635
Website: www.haynes.com

Printed in Malaysia.

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Front cover illustration by Alan Capel.

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*Formula 1 unites human sporting
endeavour with human technological
excellence – a heady fusion*

DRIVING ROUND IN CIRCLES

The great Austrian Formula 1 driver and former world champion Niki Lauda once memorably said, “I’m fed up with driving round in circles”, abruptly turning his back on motorsport to refocus his energies on building a successful airline called Lauda Air.¹

Two years later the racer turned entrepreneur was back at the wheel for a further five seasons during which time he captured a third world drivers’ title. And more than 30 years later he is still involved in racing in his capacity as non-executive chairman of the mighty Mercedes-Benz Formula 1 team. His distinctively gnarled features – the legacy of a fiery brush with the Grim Reaper at the notorious Nürburgring circuit in the 1976 German Grand Prix – are a familiar sight on race day at Formula 1 circuits around the world.²

Lauda’s professed disenchantment with the sport serves to illustrate the polarised extremes of indifference

and obsession that attach to Formula 1. Some regard it as no more than an inexplicable addiction to the spectacle of precocious, diminutive, multi-millionaire, narcissistic adrenalin junkies pointlessly 'driving round in circles'. At the other pole there are those who suffer from an incurable complaint known as 'Formula 1 fever', marked by symptoms of acute fanaticism interspersed by paroxysms of unaccountable euphoria. Lauda, despite his infamously disparaging outburst, is definitely one of the latter (but maybe without the euphoria).

So when the conversation turns to Formula 1, any aspiring bluffer who might be tempted to dip a toe into the piranha-infested³ water of the sport and its history will need to quickly assess what level of interest and knowledge he or she⁴ is up against. If it's someone who quickly shows feverish symptoms – something akin to the ecstatic reaction of Toad of Toad Hall when he first gets behind the steering wheel of a car – you will need to watch out. It's not always the case that the genuine specialist will assume a glazed expression and keep repeating 'poop-poop' until the men in white coats arrive, although it's sometimes not far off that. Disturbingly for the uninitiated observer, 'Formula 1 fever' signals are frequently far subtler and so bluffers must be on their guard.

As the true expert prepares himself to enter that heavenly domain he so loves to inhabit, he will lean forward earnestly, certain in the belief and hope that your answer to his next question will be in the affirmative. It's a simple enough question but very telling:

"Do you like Formula 1?"

This is the moment when the Formula 1 bluffer faces probably his greatest test, and it is vital not to fail it. Common courtesy and a sense of self-preservation will not allow him to say, "No I don't. To me it has always seemed like driving round in circles." On the other hand, "Yes, I can't get enough of it" is a reply fraught with danger. First you could be setting yourself up for an hour or more of Formula 1 monologue. Alternatively, if it's a dialogue he's after, you are opening yourself up to the probability that your limited yet carefully selective Formula 1 knowledge will be cruelly exposed, and a canny bluffer certainly doesn't want that to happen.

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If you have decided that this individual truly has a serious case of 'the fever', then you have to recognise that he has probably followed the sport closely since he was a spotty youth, read countless books and magazines on the subject over decades, may have personally attended at least a couple of Grands Prix a year, certainly watches