

On Watching Formula 1

Soffa Moriatis Oliver*

For some people, weekends are that time in which they can relax for a while from their work or studies and enjoy going out with friends or family. For others, it is finally the time to experience three days during which the world's most sophisticated cars race at break-neck speeds, where the drama on track matches the ones in TV shows, and where fans morph into a curious mix of engineer geeks and adrenaline junkies. The Formula 1 weekend is a three-day extravaganza that makes regular weekends look like a slow drive through the countryside. It is an exciting festival where speed, strategy, and a touch of insanity come together in perfect harmony.

The F1 weekend starts with practice sessions, where drivers and teams carefully adjust their cars and strategies to the track, like a group of chefs tweaking their recipes before a big MasterChef competition, making sure their soufflés do not collapse under pressure. Fans, meanwhile, dissect every move of the team and the drivers with the intensity of a mother observing what her daughter is wearing for a party, convinced that they could manage and administrate a whole racing team from their living rooms (me and my family are like that). Qualifying on Saturday ramps up the excitement, transforming grown adults into nervous wrecks as they watch their favourite drivers battle for pole position. It is a bit like watching your friend play a video game on hardcore mode, except the consequences of failure are slightly more expensive than a broken controller.

Race day is the crescendo of the weekend, a symphony of roaring engines, burning rubber, and fans' collective gasps. The start of the race is a spectacle itself, akin to a high-speed game of musical chairs, where someone's bound to end up in the gravel. Fans oscillate between euphoric cheers and despairing groans, their emotions as volatile as the fuel in those turbocharged beasts. The race unfolds with strategic pit stops that resemble well-choreographed dance routines using tyres and wrenches instead of dancing shoes. Fans watch with bated breath, offering the TV unsolicited advice, certain that their strategy insights are best.

As the chequered flag waves, fans transition from their roles as professional engineers to social media influencers, giving their humble opinion on the teams' performances and on the result of the race. Discussions and debates erupt, dissecting every overtake and pit stop with the precision of a heart surgeon. Online forums and social media platforms light up with memes, hot takes and, occasionally, actual insights. The passion spills over into Monday, with fans already counting down to the next racing weekend, ready to do it all over again.

Spending an entire weekend immersed in the deep experience of Formula 1 is a moment that goes beyond mere entertainment. It combines the thrill of high-speed racing with the drama of intense competition. Not only that, but we also have the off-track drama which can be mostly compared to the type we see on soap operas. Each racing weekend unfolds a meticulously choreographed performance, like the ones in K-pop groups, having the practice sessions on both Friday and Saturday, as well as the "qualy" rounds, where the destiny of Sunday's race is defined. The sense of community among fans is strong, whether we are on the track inhaling petrol fumes and trying to catch a brief glimpse of any F1 driver or manager, or if we are sprawled on our couch surrounded by everything but healthy food, deliberating as if we were sports journalists on social media. Formula 1 weekends can be defined as the sounds of the engines shouting louder than any neighbour's karaoke night (I might add that my neighbours are very keen on singing Argentinian patriotic songs during the late hours, on weekends) and watching million-dollar machines flirt with the laws of Newton. It is a big party that leaves you wanting more, eagerly awaiting the next race week.

* 3º premio del Concurso Literario USAL en Lengua Inglesa – Categoría ensayo (2024).