

F1 TRASH: CIRCUS STARTS ANEW, 50 YEARS ON FROM THE YANKEE CHAMPION

It is the most wonderful time of the year – that's right, the start of the Formula One season. 2010 turned into a nailbiter at the end, with the young and fast Sebastian Vettel of Red Bull pulling out the Driver's Championship over runner up Fernando Alonso of Ferrari and Red Bull teammate Mark Webber by winning the last race with in Abu Dhabi. And so we start the new 2011 season full of hope and expectations for all the teams, but with the strength still where it was last year, with Red Bull, Ferrari, Mercedes and McLaren.

Already the season has been affected by extraneous forces, as it was scheduled to begin two weeks ago in Bahrain; but the turmoil of the crackdown on the Arab Spring in that country, thanks to the aid from shock troops from the oppressive US client state of Saudi Arabia, squelched that and delayed the season start until this weekend's Australian Grand Prix. But the boys are already tearing up Albert Park in Melbourne as qualifying just went off as I write this post. There is a new rule for qualifying in 2011, to be eligible for the grid you must be within 107% of the fastest time clocked in the first qualifying session. This is a concept toyed with once before in F1, but sacked. The premise is that you do not want to many slow cars in the field bugging up the path for the faster vehicles. We shall see how it plays out this time and how the grids fill out with the 107% rule in place.

Another significant change is that Bridgestone is gone as tire supplier for the teams. The new supplier will be Pirelli and all teams are, for once, working closely with the manufacturer to insure that no teams get favored status. The

early reports are that the rubber is burning off slightly faster than was the case with the Bridgestones; the upshot is there may be more pit stops and there may be more of a premium on pit strategy this year. That actually may be a good thing. The other really significant change is that KERS, the kinetic energy recovery system is back. To my mind, that is not positive, and it was not overly popular the last time they tied it; but, again, we shall see how it plays out this time around. A full description of these and other various rule changes can be found here.

Qualifying has just wrapped up with Sebastian Vettel on pole followed by Lewis Hamilton of McLaren in P2, Mark webber of Red Bull in P3 and Jenson Button of McLaren in P4. The top newcomer in the circus this year appears to be young Sergio Perez of Mexico. He looked very fast in the first qualifying round but slipped in Q2; still he looks quite promising. There is one very noticeable absence, Robert Kubica of Poland, who might have made the Lotus semi-competitive had he not suffered a horrid accident in a rally accident near the end of the off season; his injuries will keep him out all year.

The Australian Grand Prix will be televised in the US on Speed TV and coverage will start at 1:30 am (Sunday morning) EST and 10:30 pm (Saturday night) PST.

As starts the 2011 Formula One season, so too started the 1961 F1 season fifty years ago. For all the differences brought by technology and time over five decades, there is much in common. The excitement and anticipation of the drivers, the longing to put the knowledge of the off season testing and tech changes finally to proof in actual race conditions, the first drivers' meetings of the season, the beautiful people and the eyes of the international sporting world focused. There is nothing like the Formula One circus; that was the case then as much as it is now.

✘ Longtime regulars here at the Emptywheel Trash Talk threads will likely remember that I had the privilege of knowing Phil Hill as I was growing up. Phil was the first, and still one of only two (Mario Andretti), Americans to win the Formula One Grand Prix World Championship and his career was immortalized in the excellent biography Yankee Champion by William Nolan. 2011 is the fiftieth anniversary of his championship season. In honor of that, I will be comparing and remembering the races and excitement of the 1961 season over the course of the current season. See here for some simply superb photos from the 1961 season here.

While the 2011 season starts down under in Australia, 1961 opened up with the crown jewel Grand Prix of Monaco, held the weekend of May 12-14, 1961. There was a new engine specification on tap and there was question how the different teams would take to the change and how reliable the new motors would be. Not all teams were up to speed and many were stuck with the old configuration or new motors not quite up to snuff yet; of this group, only Stirling Moss for Lotus was particularly competitive for the year.

The crafty and fast Moss put his skills on display and took the pole over Hill, Richie Ginther and Wolfgang von Tripps, all in the red of Scuderia Ferarri. Stirling did the same on race Sunday, finishing nearly 4 seconds ahead of Ginther and 41seconds over Phil, who rounded out the podium.

So, that is a look at the start of the Formula One season, both now and then. Stay tuned to your Emptywheel dial throughout the year for more exciting F1 coverage. Let loose and trash this place up with any discussion, on any subject you feel like. We have not trashed in a while, so let rip.

On a sad coda, I note the passing of one of the grandest of dames and greatest of celluloid heroines, Elizabeth Taylor. I was captivated by her beauty from the first time I saw her in a

teevee replay of National Velvet, and then, of course, Cleopatra. That was a love of the star. It was during film class in college (I took several) that I came to appreciate Taylor for her superb acting skills as well, starting with the haunting Suddenly Last Summer. Suddenly Last Summer was much more than Taylor though, it was a tour de force that also featured Katherine Hepburn and Montgomery Clift. It still holds up today, and I highly recommend it if you have not seen it before, or have not seen it in a long time. But it was the smoldering performances in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf that left the most indelible impression. Virginia Wolf is still the only movie in history to be nominated for an Academy Award (Oscar) in every eligible category, with Taylor winning for Best Actress. Grand to the end, Taylor left the majority of her estate, over \$600 million dollars, to AIDS research and care charities. Vaya con dios Liz.