

Let the show begin!

Bahrain International Circuit hosts the first of three exciting days of racing today in the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2020

● **F1's star drivers set for weekend's first and second Free Practice sessions, kicking off the on-track action today**

● **Formula 2 and Porsche Sprint Challenge Middle East set for support races thrills**

● **BIC modifies Main Grandstand seating to allow for optimal social distancing for front-liners, first responders, and their immediate family members on Sunday**

TDT | Manama

Formula 1 racing is back in Bahrain for a unique double-header, and the stage is set for the first of back-to-back events at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) with what promises to be yet another spectacular

Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix. The top flight's star drivers were busy yesterday wrapping up their preparations for today's start to racing.

A number of them were joined by their engineers for their customary pre-weekend Track Walk, to get a closer examination of the 5.412-kilometre circuit in order to gain additional data for their car set-ups.

They will have to get accustomed to an all-new layout at BIC next weekend, when the F1 Rolex Sakhir Grand Prix takes place from December 4 to 6 to cap the Kingdom's double-header.

The Rolex Sakhir Grand Prix will be an additional spectacle for both competitors and fans, as it will be taking place along BIC's 3.543km Outer Track, where lap times are forecast to be under a minute. The layout will be used for a competitive event for the very first time, and the race will feature 87 laps, which is the highest lap count of the season.

Mercedes head into the Bahrain races having already secured this year's Constructors' championship, but will still be looking for a repeat of their suc-



Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel arrives at BIC

cess at BIC in 2019 when Lewis Hamilton led teammate Valtteri Bottas to a stunning one-two finish.

Hamilton has also already clinched the Drivers' world title, but will be looking to maintain his spectacular form in a season where he proven to be virtually unbeatable, having won 10 of the 14 races held so far including the previous four Grands Prix.

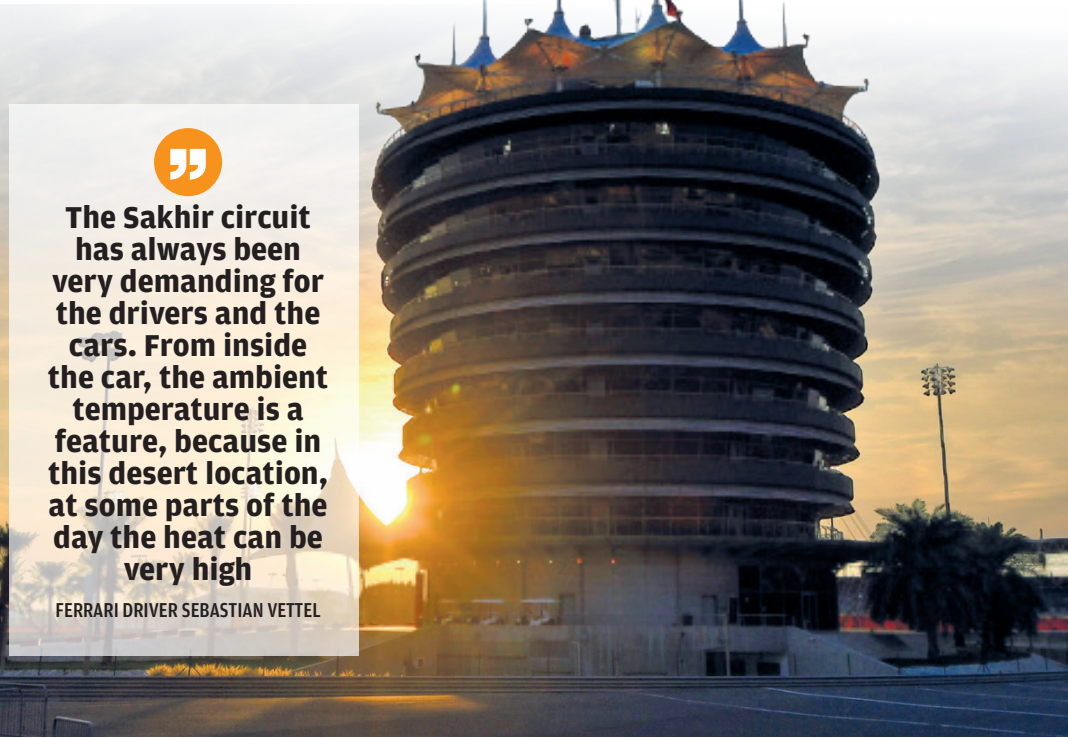
Red Bull Racing (Max Verstappen and Alexander Albon) will hope to mount a serious challenge, as will Ferrari (Charles Leclerc and Sebastian Vettel), who have had plenty of past success in the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Ferrari have the most victories at BIC with six, with the last win coming in 2018 for Vettel, while last year, Leclerc was the pole-sitter and was leading for much of the race, before some late car trouble meant he had to settle for third.

"The Sakhir circuit has always been very demanding for the drivers and the cars," said Vettel. "From inside the car, the ambient temperature is a feature, because in this desert location, at some parts of the day the heat can be very high.

"The characteristics of the track put a premium on traction and also provide a stern test for the brakes, which come under a lot of stress over the course of a lap. It's what we drivers call a stop-go track because you are continually having to brake heavily and then accelerate hard.

Bahrain's F1 double-header is taking place with all precautionary guidelines in place. Although both events will be closed to the general public, frontline health workers and first responders, along with members of their immediate families, have been invited to join. BIC has modified the seating along its Main Grandstand for those attending in a way that allows for optimal social distancing. The circuit has also them provided kits that include a face mask, hand sanitisers and instructions reminding the spectators of all precautionary guidelines that have been put in place to help ensure the health and safety of all.



BIC's iconic Sakhir Tower stands tall as the sun sets in the background

We never raced in Bahrain this late in the year, but it won't change very much in terms of the temperatures.

"We've seen that the car has improved over the past few races and I'm keen to see how competitive we can be at this track."

A strong push

Racing Point (Sergio Perez and Lance Stroll), McLaren (Lando Norris and Carlos Sainz) and Renault (Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon) will also be making a strong push as they battle for maximum points to get the best placing amongst the midfield; while looking to make a surprise will be AlphaTauri (Pierre Gasly and Daniil Kvyat), Alfa Romeo (Kimi Raikkonen and Antonio Giovinazzi), Haas (Romain Grosjean and Kevin Magnussen) and Williams (George Russell and Nicholas Latifi).

"We'll have a bit of everything in the next two weeks: we race on a circuit we all know so well, Bahrain, and then on a completely new layout we never used before," said Raikkonen of the Kingdom's double-header.

"Racing on a new track is something we have done quite a few times this season so by now I would expect all teams to have a tried and tested approach to this challenge and therefore I don't think we'll have big surprises. Still, it will be interesting to see how racing goes on a fairly unusual layout.

"In the end, we will adapt very quickly to whatever the situation is and try to get the most out of the race weekend."

Raikkonen has had eight podiums in the Bahrain Grand Prix since 2004, including five runner-up finishes, but has never won.

He will today be turning over the driving duties to Alfa Romeo reserve driver Robert Kubica, who will return to the cockpit for the first Free Practice this weekend.

The Pole, who already completed three FP1 sessions in Styria, Hungary and Britain this season, will resume his Friday duties at Bahrain International Circuit and continue to work with the team in the engineering briefings and other technical meetings.

Raikkonen will be back behind the wheel for the remainder of the Bahrain Grand Prix weekend.

Kubica commented: "I am very pleased to be back in the driving seat for the first time since August. There is still a lot to fight for and I am confident my work will make a positive contribution to the team's ef-



Alfa Romeo's Kimi Raikkonen has stepped on the Bahrain Grand Prix podium eight times since 2004, including five runner-up finishes, but has never won

forts."

Following today's action, a third 60-minute F1 Practice will be held Saturday (November 28) at 2pm, to be followed by Qualifying at 5pm that evening. It will determine the grid positions for Sunday's (November 29) 57-lap night race, set for a 5.10pm start under lights.

Support series action set

Supporting F1 this weekend will be the FIA Formula 2 Championship and the Porsche Sprint Challenge Middle East.

F2 will be holding its Practice at 12.35pm and Qualifying at 4.15pm today, while the Porsche Sprint Challenge will have two Practices at 11.25am and 7.55pm.

F2 is staging the penultimate round of its 2020 season at the Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix, while the Porsche Sprint Challenge is taking to the track for the first round of its 2020/2021 campaign.



Racing Point mechanics wheel one of their cars down the F1 Pit Lane after coming from scrutineering

Today's timetable		
Time	Series	Session
11.25am	Porsche Sprint Challenge ME	First Practice
12.35pm	Formula 2	Practice
2pm	Formula 1	First Practice
4pm	Formula 1	Press Conference
4.15pm	Formula 2	Qualifying
4.45pm	-Sunset-	
5pm	Formula 2	Press Conference
6pm	Formula 1	Second Practice
7.55pm	Porsche Sprint Challenge ME	Second Practice

Pirelli set tyre allocations for Bahrain's F1 races

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Pirelli have announced their tyre allocation for the two Formula 1 races at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC), beginning with this weekend's Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix.

The top flight's tyre suppliers have nominated the C2, C3 and the C4 tyres, which are the P Zero White hard, P Zero Yellow medium, and P Zero Red soft, respectively.

Pirelli said that this year's tyres are a step softer than the ones used at the 2019 Bahrain Grand Prix. They will have to cope with some of the most

abrasive asphalt of the season at BIC, and, in the case of the F1 Rolex Sakhir Grand Prix next week, the highest average lap speeds of the year.

Tyres in the middle of Pirelli's range have therefore been selected to cope with this varied range of demands.

Today, F1 teams will have two sets of 2021 C3 tyres to sample for each car, on top of the usual allocation for the weekend of two sets of the hard, three sets of the medium, and eight of the soft tyres.

Pirelli have also brought their wet tyres, as is the case for all F1 race week-

ends, for the possibility of any rain.

Meanwhile, Pirelli have nominated their P Zero White hard tyres for Formula 2, alongside the P Zero Yellow medium for the Bahrain Grand Prix and the P Zero Red soft tyres for next week's Sakhir Grand Prix.

This gives teams and drivers another variable to adapt to between events, in addition to the change of layout.

The F2 field tested at BIC back in March, when they ran the new 18-inch tyres introduced for 2020 for the first time. After Sakhir Grand Prix, BIC will host another F2 test session.

