Auto Action *.COM.AU* SINCE 1971

AUTO ACTION'S 2023 AGP GRAND PRIX
FORMULA 1 TEAM-BY-TEAM EVENT GUIDE

Formula 1 is on our doorstep once again with another record crowd expected to swam Albert Park for the 26th Melbourne Grand Prix.

There are plenty of reasons to get excited ahead of the big race with a new Aussie to cheer for in Oscar Piastri, a resurgent veteran driving an underdog to unexpected success, an intriguing inter-team rivalry at the front of the grid, plus a competitive midfield just some of the storylines.

Just like last year papaya will be poured all over the stands, but this time they will be supporting #81 rather than #3.

Following Daniel Ricciardo's departure, 21-year-old Piastri has stepped up to McLaren and will race in his home city for the first time on the biggest stage.

Despite dealing with an uncompetitive MCL60, the young Aussie has punched above his weight and outdrove his highly-rated teammate Lando Norris in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, the front of the grid has only featured one team, Red Bull.

The defending champions have kicked off 2023 ominously with a pair of 1-2 finishes where Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez evenly shared the spoils.

With the RB19 expected to be well planted in the high-speed sweeping corners of Albert Park, the fight for the Sir Jack Brabham Trophy could be a two-horse race.

Last year's winner Charles Leclerc has been held back by a battling Ferrari, while Mercedes has also appeared a step off the pace.

The revelation of the year has undoubtably been the irresistible combination of Fernando Alonso and Aston Martin.

The pair have combined for two unexpected podiums so far and the Aussie fans will go wild if they see a hat-trick.

Rain will be a wildcard given it has hardly been seen at Melbourne Grands Prix of the past.

Red Bull is in the box seat, but it is in the middle of a 12-year winless streak down under and could more misfortune get in its way?

A huge crowd is ready to welcome the Formula 1 world across one massive weekend in Melbourne. The 26th Melbourne Grand Prix will be the second around the recently redesigned layout designed to improve racing. Last year Ferrari and Charles Leclerc dominated, but 2023 could be a different story with Red Bull looking strong.

TRACK STATS

QUALIFYING LAP RECORD:
- Charles Leclerc 1:17.868
- Ferrari F1-75 (2022)

RACE LAP RECORD:
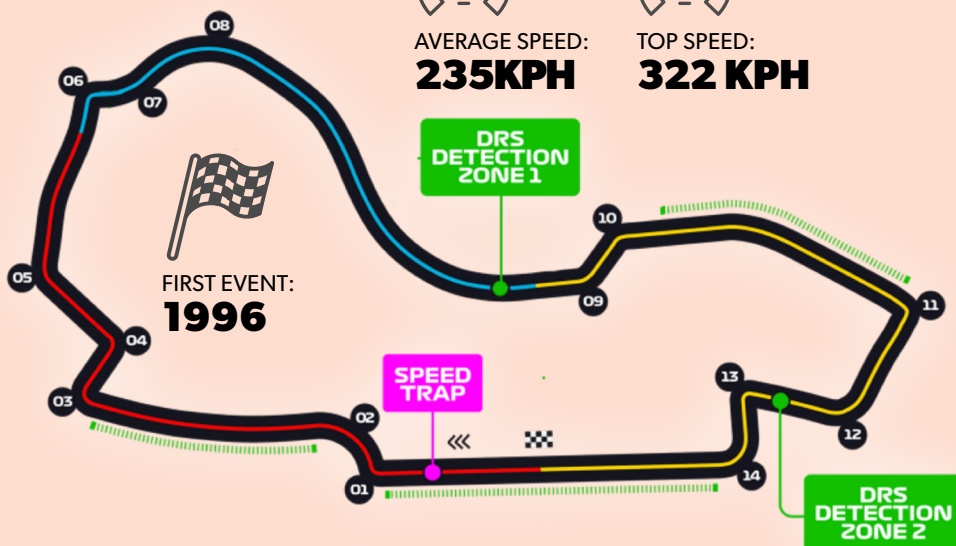- Charles Leclerc 1:20.260
- Ferrari F1-75 (2022)

FIRST EVENT:
1996

TRACK FACTS

DOUBLE TAP TO ZOOM

TRACK LENGTH:
5.278KM

DIRECTION:
CLOCKWISE

AVERAGE SPEED:
235KPH

TOP SPEED:
322 KPH

DRS DETECTION ZONE 1

SPEED TRAP

DRS DETECTION ZONE 2

TRACK SCHEDULE (ALL TIMES AEST)

THURSDAY, MARCH 30

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
10.30-11.00	Porsche Carrera Cup	Practice 1
11.25-11.55	Supercars	Practice 1
12.30-13.00	Porsche Carrera Cup	Qualifying
13.15-13.45	Supercars	Practice 2
14.45-15.00	Supercars	Qualifying (Race 1)
15.10-15.25	Supercars	Qualifying (Race 2)
16.50-17.35	Supercars	Race 1 (19 laps)
18.00-18.35	Porsche Carrera Cup	Race 1

FRIDAY, MARCH 31

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
8.50-9.35	Formula 3 Free	Practice 1
10.00-10.45	Formula 2 Free	Practice 1
12.30-13.30	**FORMULA 1 FREE**	Practice 1
14.00-14.30	Formula 3	Qualifying
14.50-15.25	Supercars Race 2	(15 laps)
16.00-17.00	**FORMULA 1 FREE**	Practice 2
17.30-18.00	Formula 2	Qualifying
18.25-18.55	Porsche Carrera Cup	Race 2

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
9.30-9.45	Supercars Qualifying	(Race 3)
9.55-10.10	Supercars Qualifying	(Race 4)
11.00-11.40	Formula 3 Sprint	Race
12.30-13.30	**FORMULA 1 FREE**	Practice 3
13.40-14.00	Historic	Demonstration
14.25-15.10	Formula 2	Sprint Race
16.00-17.00	**FORMULA 1**	Qualifying
17.25-17.55	Supercars	Race 3 (13 laps)
18.25-18.55	Porsche Carrera Cup	Race 3

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
9.05-9.50	Formula 3 Feature	Race
10.20-10.50	Supercars	Race 4 (13 laps)
11.35-12.35	Formula 2 Feature	Race
15.00	**FORMULA 1**	Race (58 laps)

LIST OF RACE RESULTS

2022: Charles Leclerc
2019: Valtteri Bottas
2018: Sebastian Vettel
2017: Sebastian Vettel
2016: Nico Rosberg
2015: Lewis Hamilton
2014: Nico Rosberg
2013: Kimi Raikkonen
2012: Jenson Button

2011: Sebastian Vettel
2010: Jenson Button
2009: Jenson Button
2008: Lewis Hamilton
2007: Kimi Raikkonen
2006: Fernando Alonso
2005: Giancarlo Fisichella
2004: Michael Schumacher
2003: David Coulthard

LIST OF POLE POSITIONS

2022: Charles Leclerc
2019: Lewis Hamilton
2018: Lewis Hamilton
2017: Lewis Hamilton
2016: Lewis Hamilton
2015: Lewis Hamilton
2014: Lewis Hamilton
2013: Sebastian Vettel
2012: Lewis Hamilton

2011: Sebastian Vettel
2010: Sebastian Vettel
2009: Jenson Button
2008: Lewis Hamilton
2007: Kimi Raikkonen
2006: Jenson Button
2005: Giancarlo Fisichella
2004: Michael Schumacher
2003: Michael Schumacher

MOST WINS
4 Michael Schumacher

1
MOST POLES
8 Lewis Hamilton

MOST PODIUMS
9 Lewis Hamilton

TEAM AND DRIVERS ARE IN 'CONSTRUCTORS CHAMPIONSHIP' ORDER

MAX VERSTAPPEN - 1ST

1

AGE: 25
DEBUT: Aus 2015
STARTS: 165
BEST QUAL: 1st (x21)
PODIUMS: 79
BEST RESULT: 1st (x36)
BEST AUG GP: 3rd 2019

MAX VERSTAPPEN has started his pursuit of a hat-trick of Formula 1 world drivers' championships in ominous fashion. Verstappen carries a one-point lead over Perez having been the fastest driver on the grid. Despite "not really finding my rhythm" the Dutch cruised to a simple win in Bahrain and

RED BULL

looked untouchable in Jeddah until a driveshaft drama reduced him to 15th in qualifying. He still soared to second to defend his championship lead and was still disappointed. In the box seat to end Red Bull's Australian Grand Prix drought and secure his first Melbourne victory.

2ND - SERGIO PEREZ

11

AGE: 33
DEBUT: Aus 2011
STARTS: 237
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 28
BEST RESULT: 1st (x4)
BEST AUS GP: 2nd 2022

THE LOFTY goal of Sergio Perez hoping to beat Max Verstappen in 2023 has got off to a solid start with the Mexican in the slipstream of his esateemed teammate as the arrive in Melbourne. After finishing second best in Bahrain, Perez hit back to claim an impressive

win in Saudi Arabia after a poorly timed Safety Car cost him at the same venue 12 months ago. Although Verstappen started 15th, Perez still had to fend car #1 off during a tense final stint and the result will be a big confidence booster for the experienced driver ahead of Melbourne.

LEWIS HAMILTON - 5TH

44

AGE: 38
DEBUT: Aus 2007
STARTS: 312
BEST QUAL: 1st (x103)
PODIUMS: 191
BEST RESULT: 1st (x103)
BEST AUS GP: 1st 08/15

LEWIS HAMILTON has been forced to scrap for his results and sits fifth in the championship coming to Australia. The W14 may not have enough pace to push the seven-time world champion into race-winning contention with a pair of P5's the best he could manage, but

MERCEDES

progress was made in Saudi Arabia. Hamilton was encouraged by his improved tyre life at Jeddah despite battling with the set-up all weekend. The Brit has a strong record at Melbourne with last year's fourth his only non podium since his 2014 retirement.

6TH - GEORGE RUSSELL

63

AGE: 25
DEBUT: Aus 2019
STARTS: 84
BEST QUAL: 1st (x2)
PODIUMS: 9
BEST RESULT: 1 (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 3rd 2022

MELBOURNE WAS the scene of George Russell's maiden Mercedes podium and he would love nothing more than a repeat result in 2023. But that will not be easy with both Red Bull and Aston Martin appearing further up the road in terms of car speed. Russell battled in

Bahrain to finish seventh before putting in one of his "strongest weekends" at Jeddah. He momentarily had the P3 trophy before eventually getting P4 after Alonso's penalty was retracted. However, Russell will still be aiming high after beating Hamilton in a straight fight.

FERNANDO ALONSO - 3RD

14

AGE: 41
DEBUT: Aus 2001
STARTS: 357
BEST QUAL: 1st (x22)
PODIUMS: 100
BEST RESULT: 1st (x32)
BEST AUS GP: 1st 2006

THE STUNNING start to the Fernando Alonso and Aston Martin partnership has been the feel good story of F1 2023. At 41, Alonso has proved he has lost none of his magic by producing two storming drives to raise a century of F1 podiums. It is something few

ASTON MARTIN

thought possible just a month ago. Seeing Alonso at full flight again has been joyous and whilst Piastri will be the fan favourite, the Spanish veteran will get the next best roar, especially if he scores just his second Australian podium since 2007.
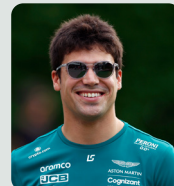
7TH - LANCE STROLL

18

AGE: 24
DEBUT: Aus 2017
STARTS: 124
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 3
BEST RESULT: 3rd (x3)
BEST AUS GP: 9th 2019

AT ONE stage Lance Stroll was concerned he may not race in Australia. A cycling accident on the eve of the season sent Stroll under the knife and ensured he missed pre-season testing. However, the Canadian defied doctors expectations to be on the grid in Bahrain and

finished an impressive sixth. His Saudi Arabian GP was reduced to 16 laps due to an engine issue. Stroll only has one points finish at Melbourne, but would be disappointed if he does not better his PB of ninth given the AMR23 being the second fastest car only behind Red Bull.

CHARLES LECLERC - 8TH

16

AGE: 25
DEBUT: Aus 2018
STARTS: 104
BEST QUAL: 1st (x18)
PODIUMS: 24
BEST RESULT: 1st (x5)
BEST AUS GP: 1st 2022

LAST YEAR'S Australian Grand Prix iwas dominated by Charles Leclerc, but the chances of the Tifosi celebrating back-to-back wins are slim. Leclerc sits eighth in the championship and is simply searching for a trouble-free weekend. Car #16 looked on course to score a solid podium

FERRARI

at Bahrain until the power unit expired with 18 laps left. A 10-place grid penalty followed at Jeddah where the Monegasque battled hard to salvage P7. Despite the fighting drive, few believe the SF-23 has enough performance to get the Sir Jack Brabham Trophy back into Leclerc's hands.

4TH - CARLOS SAINZ JR

55

AGE: 28
DEBUT: Aus 2015
STARTS: 164
BEST QUAL: 1st (x3)
PODIUMS: 15
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 8th 2018

AS POWER unit issues have held Leclerc back, Carlos Sainz has been waving the flag for Ferrari. If Sainz retains his current championship position of fourth, he will score a new career best, but he is not arriving in Australia with a big smile. The Spaniard has

recorded P4 and P6 finishes, but better results could have been possible if better race pace is extracted at the back end of stints. Sainz hopes for a better Australian race in red than last year when he spun out at Turn 10 as his teammate drove to victory.

ESTEBAN OCON - 10TH

31

AGE: 26
DEBUT: Bel 2016
STARTS: 113
BEST QUAL: 3rd (x2)
PODIUMS: 2
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 7th 2017

ESTEBAN OCON has had an up and down start to 2023 and currently sits 10th in the championship, looking to make progress in Australia. Ocon opened his season in nightmare fashion, retiring in Bahrain after a night littered with penalties for offences such as not lining

ALPINE

up in the grid box and speeding in pit lane. The Frenchman was able to score his first points in Saudi Arabia with a P8, which was the "maximum" Alpine could have achieved. If Ocon can better his Melbourne performance of P7 last year, he would leave Australia satisfied.
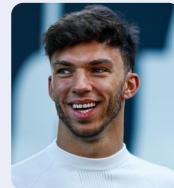
11TH - PIERRE GASLY

10

AGE: 27
DEBUT: Mel 2017
STARTS: 110
BEST QUAL: 2nd (x1)
PODIUMS: 3
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 9th 2022

FOR THE first time in his career Pierre Gasly will race a non Red Bull backed car in Australia and he will stand out in the all-pink Alpine. Gasly has started life at the French outfit consistently recording a pair of P9's to leave him level on points with Ocon. After

first lap contact car #10 endured a "lonely" Saudi Arabian GP and Gasly believes Alpine in "no man's land" with work to do to catch the likes of Mercedes and Ferrari. The Frenchman has only scored points once from three Australian Grands Prix.

VALTTERI BOTTAS - 9TH

77

AGE: 33
DEBUT: Aus 2013
STARTS: 202
BEST QUAL: 1 (x20)
PODIUMS: 67
BEST RESULT: 1st (x10)
BEST AUS GP 1st 2019

VALTTERI BOTTAS sits ninth in the championship, but enters Australia on the back foot after a forgetful race in Jeddah. Bottas experienced a "lack of grip" on his way to a disappointing 18th being the only car not finishing on the lead lap. The Finn believed debris was the cause of the dramas. It was a surprise after Bottas started the year with an eighth at Bahrain. He hopes a return to the scene of his memorable 2019 win can bring purchase points a decade after his Melbourne debut for Williams.

ALFA ROMEO SAUBER

17TH - ZHOU GUANYU

24

AGE: 23
DEBUT: Bah 2022
STARTS: 24
BEST QUAL: 9th (x2)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 8th (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 11th 2022

A MAIDEN points appearance of 2023 is on the radar of Zhou Guanyu as he heads down under for the second time. The Chinese youngster is yet to crack the top 10 in the race or qualifying this year. Zhou believed points were possible after finishing 13th at Saudi Arabia and was encouraged by his first stint before losing ground in the pits. Despite the disappointment it was a step forward from Bahrain where car #24 came home 17th. Zhou fell two seconds short of points at Albert Park last year and is determined to go one better in 2023.

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN - 12TH

21

AGE: 30
DEBUT: Aus 2014
STARTS: 143
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 1
BEST RESULT: 2nd (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 2nd 2014

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN'S career-best result and sole podium remains the sensational second he scored on debut for McLaren back in 2014. Now at Haas, Magnussen is coming to Australia in a positive frame of mind after collecting the American team's first points finish of the year at Saudi Arabia. The P10 did not come easy with the Dane winning a tense wheel-to-wheel scrap with Yuki Tsunoda at the death. Magnussen has shown solid improvement in each race rising from 17th to 13th in Bahrain. After a tough 2022 Australian Grand Prix, another points finish is the priority.
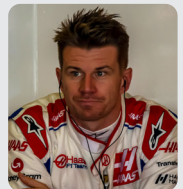
HAAS

15TH - NICO HULKENBERG

27

AGE: 35
DEBUT: Bah 2010
STARTS: 183
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 4th (x3)
BEST AUS GP: 6th 2014

NICO HULKENBERG'S return to Formula 1 is yet to net a points result and he is determined to make it happen in Australia. Hulkenberg was "frustrated" after chewing through he tyres en route to P15 at Bahrian. However, he was much happier following his P12 in Saudi Arabia where the German believed Haas' race pace was more encouraging than its rivals. Hulkenberg's 2023 strength has been qualifying having reached Q3 on both occasions. He has been a consistent force at Albert Park with four of his last five starts all in the points, but has not raced there since 2019.

ALEX ALBON - 13TH

23

AGE: 26
DEBUT: Aus 2019
STARTS: 61
BEST QUAL: 4th (x4)
PODIUMS: 3
BEST RESULT: 3rd (x2)
BEST AUS GP: 10th 2022

WILLIAMS HAS taken a step forward in 2023 with Alex Albon leading the charge. Albon gave Williams its best start to a season in six years by scoring an impressive P10 at Bahrain. The Thai driver started down in 15th, but a strong start and tenacious defensive work to keep Yuki Tsunoda behind gave the struggling team a huge boost. Saudi Arabia was a disappointment with brake issues forcing car #23 to retire from 13th. Albon returns to the scene of his standout 2022 drive where he made a mammoth 57-lap stint on the Hards work to collect 10th.

WILLIAMS

16TH - LOGAN SARGEANT

2

AGE: 22
DEBUT: Bah 2023
STARTS: 2
BEST QUAL: 16th (x1)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 12th (x1)
BEST AUS GP: N/A

LOGAN SARGEANT was the least hyped of the three 2023 rookies, but has done his reputation no harm in his first two appearances behind the wheel. Sargeant finished Bahrain as easily the best placed rookie in 12th, 20s up the road tham the next best Nyck de Vries. The American took a step backwards at Saudi Arabia, spinning in qualifying and not setting a flying lap in Q1. Despite rising from last to 16th, he "struggled to get comfortable" in the #2 Williams during the race. Sargeant will have to work hard to remain the top placed rookie after Melbourne.

YUKI TSUNODA - 14TH

10

AGE: 22
DEBUT: Bah 2021
STARTS: 44
BEST QUAL: 7th (x2)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 4th (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 15th 2022

THE 2023 Formula 1 season is a big one for Yuki Tsunoda and he has started it in positive, yet unspectacular fashion. It has been a tale of what could have been for Tsunoda so far after falling heartbreakingly short of points in both races. At Bahrain he came within a second of catching Albon, while he held 10th at Saudi Arabia, only to lose it to Kevin Magnussen with four laps left. The pleasing thing for the Japanese youngster is the fact he has been able to beat team-mate Nyck de Vries in every session so far.
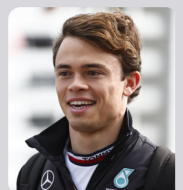
ALPHATAURI

18TH - NYCK DE VRIES

21

AGE: 28
DEBUT: Ita 2022
STARTS: 3
BEST QUAL: 8th (x1)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 9th (x1)
BEST AUS GP: N/A

THE OLDER but lesser experienced Dutch F1 driver Nyck de Vries has finally commenced a long-awaited first full-time Formula 1 season. Despite the promotion, de Vries has struggled to match his under-pressure teammate Tsunoda as he continues to come to grips with his new environment. The 2019 F2 champion is yet to beat Tsunoda and has battled at times with a spin in qualifying at Jeddah, but has a pair of P14 finishes under his belt. De Vries is looking for a strong performance in Australia to stamp his authority and get his debut season rolling.

LANDO NORRIS - 20TH

4

AGE: 23
DEBUT: Aus 2019
STARTS: 84
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 6
BEST RESULT: 2nd (x1)
BEST AUS GP: 5th 2022

LANDO NORRIS arrives in Australia down on confidence and last in the championship after a tough start to 2023. With a pair of P17 finishes, this is the first time Norris has started a season with two pointless races. Although there was hope in Bahrain starting 11th, he was forced to pit six times, while Saudi Arabia was a low point. Contact with the wall restricted him to P19 in qualifying before he was outdriven by his much younger teammate. With the stands to be stacked with Piastri fans, Norris hopes to remind everyone why he is McLaren's leader.
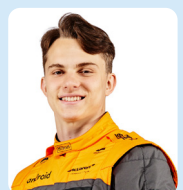
MCLAREN

19TH - OSCAR PIASTRI

81

AGE: 21
DEBUT: Bah 2023
STARTS: 2
BEST QUAL: 8th (x1)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 15th (x1)
BEST AUS GP: N/A

OSCAR PIASTRI is primed for the biggest day of his life, fulfilling his dream in front of thousands of adoring fans at his birthplace. Despite driving a poorly performing MCL60, Piastri has shown glimpses of his immense talent. After his Bahrain debut lasted just 13 laps due an electrical issue, the Aussie wowed in Saudi Arabia, putting car #81 into Q3 while his highly-fancied teammate only managed 19th. Despite an unlucky Lap 1 incident ending the points dream, Piastri outdrove Norris in a straight fight for P15. The drive gives the developing Piastri confidence ahead of his home race.