

New kids on the block

The honeymoon period is over for Formula 1 owners Liberty Media, writes **Tom Pountney**. Now expectations are high for their sophomore year, with 'grid girls' gone and a high demand for less predictable action

While the Formula 1 off-season headlines were dominated by its famous 'grid girls', focus will fall firmly upon Liberty Media now the lights have turned green.

Bernie Ecclestone may still linger around the paddock in his new role as chairman emeritus and board advisor, but the responsibility to evolve Formula 1 lays with new CEO Chase Carey.

"At the end of the day there's a lot of stuff we want to build around [the sport], but it's all built on having great racing at the track," he told ESPN in an interview ahead of 2018.

"Everybody we've talked to on the motorsport side I think would agree our racing should be more competitive, with more action, and probably less predictable."

Carey's brave move to switch from Ecclestone's preferred 'grid girls' to 'grid kids' signals, if nothing else, a line in the sand to end the supremo's reign and herald the beginning of a new era.

In January 2017, Liberty Media Corporation (LMC) bought Formula 1's parent company Delta Topco from a consortium led by the private equity firm CVC, in a \$4.6 billion acquisition. And now Chase Carey is promising

Below: Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? At 33 years of age, Hamilton is one of the elder statesman and chasing a fifth world title – but he says he is feeling faster than ever despite the new halo

more Live events and more paddock filming, with more competitive, less predictable action on the track.

Created to bring Formula 1 closer than ever to its fans, F1 Live's debut saw 100,000 people flock to London's Trafalgar Square as teams and drivers gathered for a spectacular exhibition just

days before the British Grand Prix at Silverstone.

The event also focused upon engaging the next generation, with local schools engaging in a variety of activities under the banner of F1 in Schools – a not-for-profit company established in 2000 to give an opportunity for students to learn all about STEM-related subjects, with the aim of helping them into a career in engineering and motor sport.

Shanghai, Miami, Berlin, Marseille and Milan are all set to host Live events this year, with Live Marseille and Berlin expected to raise the curtain on a return to the calendar for France and Germany.

The Paul Ricard Circuit, in France's Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, makes an appearance on the roster for the first time since 1990 – with France last hosting a Grand Prix ten years ago at Circuit de Nevers Magny-Cours – some 250 kilometres from Paris.

Hosting the biennial German Grand Prix is the similarly flat Hockenheimring, where reigning World Champion, ▶



Above: Hamilton and Kimi Raikkonen share thoughts at Sepang, Malaysia last year

Below: Max Verstappen testing the new RB14 in Barcelona in March Right: Sebastian Vettel – who is also chasing a fifth title – cuts a relaxed figure in Spain

Lewis Hamilton, and former World Champion Fernando Alonso, have both won three times.

While Hamilton is in the hunt for a fifth title, to equal Juan Manuel Fangio's five championships (two behind Michael Schumacher), double

World Champion Alonso is expected to be competitive once more.

Fernando's MCL33 is the first product of McLaren's new partnership with Renault, after a disastrous three years with Honda. The 36-year-old Spaniard, who won his 2005 and 2006 titles with Renault, will have to roll back the years to break Mercedes' four-year stranglehold on the Constructor's Championship.

Elsewhere on the grid, Alfa Romeo returns as a technical partner to Sauber-Ferrari after a 33-year absence and Aston

Martin are Red Bull's new title sponsor, with Daniel Ricciardo and Max Verstappen expected to be very competitive.

Despite rumblings from Ferrari, Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen are in the prancing

horse hot seats for 2018. Rule changes feature a revised grid penalty system as well as tweaks to technical regulations and driver safety, with the introduction of a protective 'halo' screen in front of the cockpit. ■



DATE	VENUE	GP			
08/04	Sakhir	Bahrain	29/07	Budapest	Hungary
15/04	Shanghai	China	26/08	Spa	Belgium
29/04	Baku	Azerbaijan	02/09	Monza	Italy
13/05	Barcelona	Spain	16/09	Singapore	Singapore
27/05	Monaco	Monaco	30/09	Sochi	Russia
10/06	Montreal	Canada	07/10	Suzuka	Japan
24/06	Le Castellet	France	21/10	Austin	USA
01/07	Spielberg	Austria	28/10	Mexico City	Mexico
08/07	Silverstone	GB	11/11	Sao Paulo	Brazil
22/07	Hockenheim	Germany	25/11	Yas Marina	Abu Dhabi

