



Grand prix: An event for 'bogans'

The Opinion page of the Sunday Age of April 17 featured an article by writer and former ABC broadcaster, Jon Faine, headed 'GP formula for the bogans', (and illustrated by the cartoon at left). He recounted how he once asked a former Victorian premier why the government persisted with the race and he got 'a surprisingly frank answer': "*You have to do something for the bogans*".

Faine explained why he will never go to a grand prix event despite being something of a petrol-head himself. He gave two main reasons, one being Formula 1's connection to the tobacco industry, the other being the 'appalling episode' in 2001 when the death of a race marshal was concealed in order to allow the race to continue. Faine also referred to the billion dollar cumulative cost, the 'voodoo economic modelling' that claims 'squillions of dollars' worth of value in 'name recognition' which is 'actually worth diddly squat', the disruption over months to local residents and to the 25 sports clubs based in the park.

In concluding, Faine wrote: We do not need the race in Albert Park. It should move to Phillip Island and the diehard fans will flock there as they do for the motorbike races'. There, we differ. If we must have the event to keep the bogans happy it should go to a site near Avalon airport, reached by a fast and low emission train.



A beautiful park turned into a race track lined with fences and advertising hoardings.

(Photo: [f1destinations.com/2022/Australian grand prix](https://f1destinations.com/2022/Australian-grand-prix), April 11, 2022)

This photo was apparently taken sometime during 2022 grand prix event, not race day. It shows the section of Lakeside Drive at the north end of the park that was widened, straightened and resurfaced to achieve higher speeds. This work, together with the smoothing of some other corners cost nearly \$20 million, reduced the circuit length by 25 metres and enabled the fastest lap time to be reduced by about 5.3 seconds. Considering the shorter lap length, the actual reduction in lap time was about 5 seconds. The race was broadcast and from this there was little evidence of the promised increase in thrills. A few cars fizzled out but there was little real drama and the race seemed to be mainly the procession that has been past characteristic of the Albert Park circuit.

A high quality film of the race can (or could) be seen at [Youtube.com/watch/ race highlights/2022/Australian Grand Prix](https://Youtube.com/watch/race%20highlights/2022/Australian%20Grand%20Prix).

The papers were full of headlines like this one in *The Age* on April 11. There were numerous accounts of crowds 'flocking' to the Albert Park circuit, with the 4-day attendance reported to be 419,114 which 'eclipsed' the previous record crowd of 401,000 set in 1996.

Bigger than Texas: Crowd a GP record

The Grand Prix Corporation (AGPC) apparently stated that the attendance had been 'estimated' not counted, but declined to reveal how the figure had been obtained. However, the method used by the AGPC in 1996 was described in an economic impact report commissioned by Tourism Victoria. This report stated that the event was attended by 197,686 spectators, some of whom attended on

more than one day, and that the total attendance of 401,000 included event staff, officials, media representatives and racing team members. So it appears that the 401,000 comprised 'attendances', not individual spectators and also included repeat attendances by event staff etc, plus the assumed use of free tickets issued. Evidence indicates that this process has been used by the AGPC over the previous 24 grand prix events. It is reasonable to assume that as the 1996 and 2022 attendance figures are being compared, that they were determined the same way. **Certainly a large crowd attended the 2022 grand prix, but considering the AGPC's history of inflating attendances, the 419,114 figure cannot be believed.**

Extension of the grand prix contract?

On April 13, *The Age* reported that Premier Daniel Andrews had hinted about a new deal with Formula 1 to extend the race contract beyond 2025. Apparently, 'the complexity of the negotiations means that it could be weeks before any deal is formally struck'. Andrews was quoted as saying "I'm pretty happy that we had the biggest grand prix that we've ever had and that anyone's ever had'. So we have a premier who, on the basis of the AGPC's currently unverified attendance figures, and without a proper business case, is prepared to sign a contract that will involve a loss to the state of \$60 million or a lot more, every year. This could represent a combination of deception and irresponsibility.

'Precision or procession'

In his article 'Six key things we learned from the Grand Prix' in *The Age* on April 12, sports writer Michael Lynch described the attempts made to the Albert Park circuit to encourage closer and more competitive racing and to 'improve the show and encourage overtaking', and referred to the \$20 million spent on modifying and resurfacing the track. He continued:

'However, Leclerc (Ferrari driver and race winner) turned the race into a procession and there was precious little of the cut and thrust that casual fans hope to see.'

As mentioned on the previous page, this was the impression gained from the race broadcast. The state government probably spent well over \$150 million to stage this race, possibly close to \$200 million and it was a fizzer as a spectacle, and as Jon Faine commented, the value from global recognition won't be worth much, particularly as the attention turns to the Ferrari home circuit in Imola, Italy, and the 19 races after that.



This photo (from the official program of the 2022 grand prix) shows the recent widening of Aughtie Drive as it leads off pit straight and Turns 1 and 2 of the race track. At the top is the Parks Victoria office, and below it is Oval 21 with scarring from its sole use as the site for the huge 'Chicane Pavilion and a gravel run-off. Areas to the left of Oval 21 are used only as a grand prix worksite. The lake is at the top right corner. Oval 20, at the right lower corner, is occupied for grand prix purposes for around two months.

General boredom in general admission If you wish to experience being a holder of a grand prix general admission ticket, you can get a good idea by watching the amateur video shown on [bing.com/videos/Australian grand prix 2022/race highlights](https://www.bing.com/videos/Australian+grand+prix+2022/race+highlights). The video includes some interesting shots of the Thursday of the event when grandstands were free but unless you are a dedicated F1 fan, watching the races from behind the fences must have been excruciatingly boring and a serious risk to your hearing unless you were wearing ear plugs.

Advertising at the grand prix circuit The fences erected around both sides of the grand prix track were used as advertising hoardings. TV shots of the event mainly showed the following ads:
LENOVA : **Chinese** technology company; CRYPTO.com: **Singaporean** crypto currency exchange; ARAMCO: **Saudi-Arabian** oil company, the world largest; EMIRATES: airline owned by the **United Arab Republics**;
SALESFORCE: **US** software company; HEINEKEN: **Dutch** brewing company; UBS: **Swiss** investment bank;
PIRELLI: **Italian** tyre manufacturer; STORE: Retail store operated by the **US** company, Google.

TV viewers will see these ads time and time again during multiple laps during multiple events. They will also see a few AUSGP signs and an occasional glimpse of Melbourne's unremarkable skyline. It appears likely that the revenue from the display of these ads for foreign companies goes to Formula 1 in the US, not to the Victorian government, which has to meet the cost of erecting the hoardings and staging the race.

Miami grand prix: opposition still strong On May 6-8, Miami will hold its first F1 grand prix. The event will be held within the privately owned 'Hard Rock Stadium' in the Miami Gardens suburb. It was originally proposed to stage the event in the city's foreshore and parkland area but this was opposed by Miami's commissioners. The event is being held under strict conditions designed to protect residents from excessive noise but a lawsuit was launched with claims that the engine noise and pollution would create not just a nuisance but a health hazard. The lawsuit failed with the judge deciding that the resident's claims of potential hearing damage were 'speculative'. We await reports on the event with considerable interest.



Lakeside Drive, with its corners smoothed out and resurfaced to allow racing at up to 330 km/hr. The lush area on the left is the golf course, in stark contrast to the adjacent parkland.

SAP contacts

Media enquiries: Peter Logan, mob. 0412 697 074; email peterandjoanlogan@hotmail.com

Membership/accounts: Greg Byrne, tel. 9645 1301; email greg-byrne@bigpond.com

SAP Newsletter/campaign: Peter Goad 9699 7932; email pwgoad@outlook.com

Post: PO Box 1300, South Melbourne BC 3205

Letters to the papers (including a couple from the other side)

The Age, April 8

No to noise and pollution

I am sure that many Albert Park residents would be very happy to live without "the piercing sound of Formula One cars" (Editorial, 7/4) ringing out in their neighbourhood for four days, not to mention the increased pollution from all the carbon dioxide pouring into the atmosphere. I do not imagine racing drivers will be converting to electric vehicles any time soon. Shame.

Joy Hayman,
Blackburn North

Destroying our park

The Victorian government claims it is aiming for zero emissions, but the Grand Prix is being held in a temporary circuit which has taken three months to erect and will require a further two months to remove and repair the damage to the sports grounds.

This work creates very significant emissions as it requires the transportation of around 40,000 tonnes of race infrastructure from an Altona depot to Albert Park and back again, a total of 6000 heavy truck trips covering 66,000 kilometres.

The state government is well aware that road transport is one of the biggest sources of carbon emissions, but must think that the Grand Prix event couldn't survive in a permanent circuit without the backdrop of Albert Park's beautiful lake and parklands.

Peter Gillespie,
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The Age April 9

Make entry to the grand prix available only to electric-powered vehicles. It would protect the environment and cut back on noise.

Mick O'Mara, Winchelsea

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Where's the proof?

How can the organisers of the grand prix say that 38 per cent of tickets have been sold to women (*The Age*, 8/4)? Do you have to nominate your gender when you buy a ticket to any event? More spin presented as fact

Patricia Norden, Middle Park

Such polluting events

Can someone please explain how the continued existence of the world-wide grands prix is not a selfish and flagrant denial of the needs of a world confronted by climate change?

Elinor Morison, Box Hill South

The killjoys emerge

The arrival of the F1 grand prix always coincides with the annual hatch of pleasure dodgers, killjoys and fun police.

Thankfully they only have a lifespan of about three days.

Greg Hardy, Upper Ferntree Gully

The Age April 11

Furthermore

Let me get this straight: If you don't like a sport that results in significant noise pollution to those living nearby and that puts a public park out of action for several months of the year, you are a pleasure dodger, killjoy or member of the fun police ("The killjoys emerge", *Letters*, 9/4).

James Proctor, Maiden Gully

HeraldSun April 11

Our race may be over

IF you follow F1 closely you would be aware they are trying to reduce their carbon footprint. Australia does not fit in the plan.

It is why races added are in the United States or Europe or Asia. They are trying, as they do in Europe, to remove as many aircraft movements as possible and move the circus with trucks.

John Morrissey, Hawthorn

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It's won me over

Having lived for many years in an apartment overlooking Albert Park, I have long bemoaned the disruption of amenity caused by the months of setting up and dismantling of the infrastructure, the constant beeping of reversing trucks and the closure of roads related to the grand prix.

However, this year the event was truly reborn. With a newly surfaced and challenging track, more viewing stands and fine weather, vast crowds streamed to the event in high spirits.

It seemed like a celebration of Melbourne's dealing with COVID following the abrupt cancellation of the March 2020 event. The city centre was fully alive as well, with restaurants overflowing, theatres and comedy venues abounding in good cheer.

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We don't need this circus

So the Australian Grand Prix contract renewal announcement is imminent ("Andrews hints at grand prix extension deal", *Sport*, 13/4). Here's why that is deeply sad for Melbourne.

The GP in its current form is terribly last century. Wake me up when it is 100 per cent electric and half of the drivers are women.

Albert Park is the wrong place for a car race. Imagine the citizens of London or New York embracing the prospect of a GP in Hyde Park or Central Park.

Sensible alternative venues for the race exist. Have a look at Avalon with the air show.

The sports clubs of Albert Park forgo access to their fields for many weeks each year. And they endure poor-quality grounds for weeks after the event because of the damaged surfaces.

Finally, the regular park users (cyclists, joggers, dog walkers and so many more) lose their publicly owned open space to a construction site for four months of the year. Every year.

Yes, it is my backyard. It's also the garden and breathing space for many thousands of others. Can we please enjoy it without this circus?

David Myer, South Melbourne

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