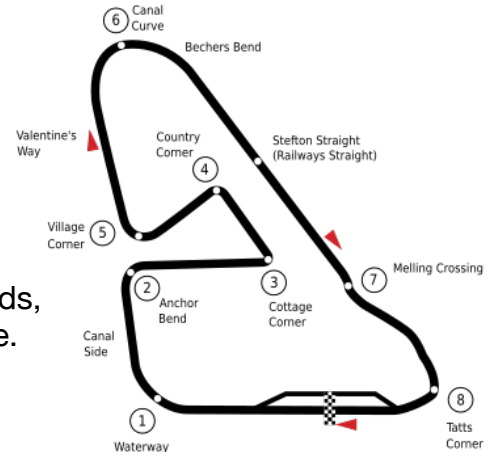


Aintree Motor Racing Circuit And a Detour to Italy, France and Germany

by Bob Vitrikas

Having worked our way through Silverstone and Brands Hatch, we now turn our attention to the third racing circuit to host the British Grand Prix, Aintree. If you are a steeplechase fan, you've no doubt heard of the Grand National horserace held at Aintree Racecourse since 1839. The steeplechase course is about 4 miles long, including over 30 fences, and the horses race for two laps. At over 1 million pounds, it boasts the richest purse of any steeplechase in Europe. I wasn't able to discover how much the horses are paid but it seems only fair they should get something for running 8 miles and jumping over 60 fences. Don't you agree? Well enough horsing around...



Thanks to Wikipedia for the map.

The motor racing circuit is 3 miles long and includes eight turns as you can see in the circuit map above.

Organized by the British Automobile Racing Club, the Formula One British Grand Prix was held on this course in 1955, 1957, 1959, 1961 and 1962. In 1955 famous British race driver Stirling Moss, driving a Mercedes, won his first Formula One British Grand Prix at Aintree, narrowly beating his team mate and two time World Driving Champion, Juan Fangio by 0.2 seconds. Moss's win was also the first win for a British driver at the British GP. Many believe that Fangio, ever the kind hearted gentleman, allowed Moss to win at his home GP. Fangio denied he let Moss win and Moss said he really didn't know. Take your choice! Mercedes cleaned house crossing the finish line 1-2-3-4! Australian driver Jack Brabham made his Formula One debut at the same



Moss noses out Fangio at the finish line of the 1955 British GP!
Thanks to Goodwood Road & Racing for the photo.

race. In 1957 Moss, co-driving with fellow Briton Tony Brooks, were the first British drivers to win a Formula One race driving a British car, the Vanwall, before 150,000 wildly cheering British fans. More, many more would follow!

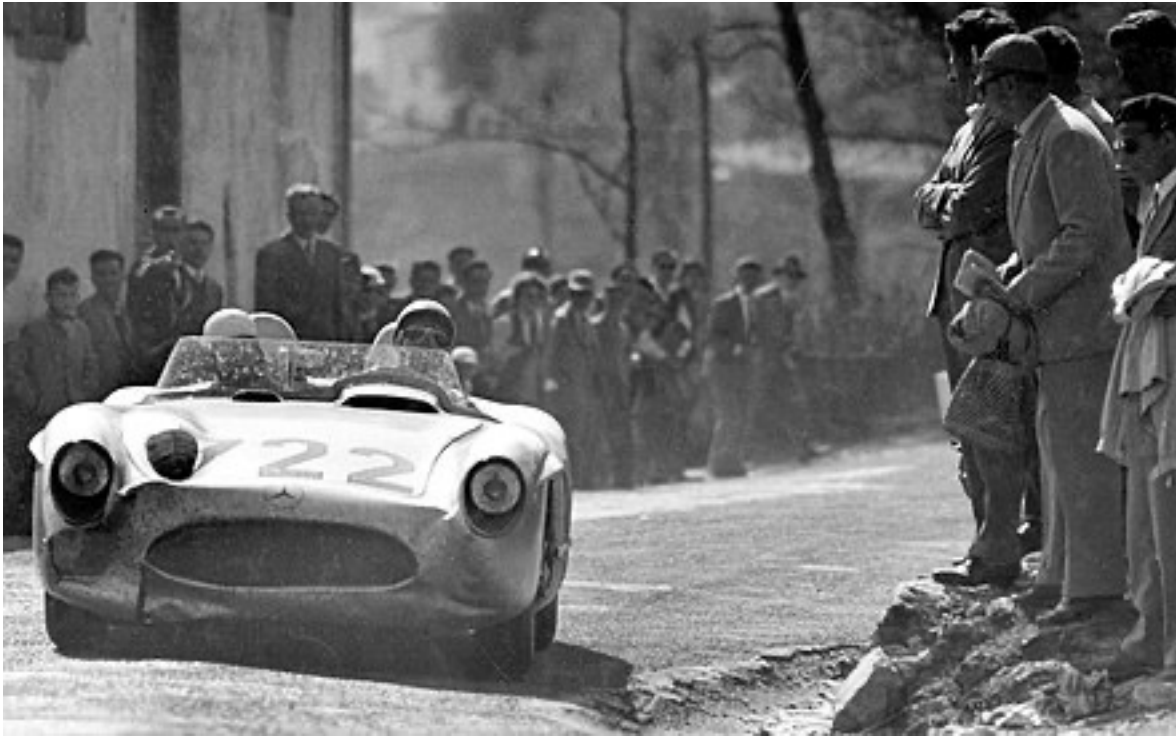


Tony Brooks and Stirling Moss, somewhat the worse for wear after winning the 1957 British GP!
Thanks to Getty Images for the photo.

You may be surprised to learn that since the early 2000s nearly all of the Formula One race cars have been built in the UK! The only exceptions are Ferrari, Sauber (Switzerland) and the American team Haas which is built in Kannapolis, North Carolina, smack in the middle of NASCAR country. Who knew?

In addition to the five Formula One championship races, 11 non-championship Formula One races, known as the Aintree 200, were held between 1954 and 1964. Stirling Moss won the first Aintree 200 race in 1954 and Australian driver Jack Brabham won the last Aintree 200 in April 1964.

In addition to winning his first British Grand Prix in 1955, Moss famously won the Italian Mille Miglia driving an open cockpit Mercedes 300 SLR. Moss averaged 99 mph over the treacherous 992 mile course run in 10 hours, 7 minutes, 48 seconds over Italian two lane public roads which snaked down and back over the Italian peninsula, including the 2,963 ft Futa Pass and the 3,176 ft Raticosa mountain passes. Amazing!



Moss and British journalist Denis Jenkinson in the winning Mercedes 300 SLR in the 1955 Mille Miglia. A total of 534 cars started the race! Once again Moss beat his Mercedes team mate Fangio who finished second. Notice the rough and narrow road and lack of crowd control! Two drivers and one spectator were killed in this race. Thanks to Wikipedia for the photo by an unknown photographer.

Also in 1955 Moss and co-driver Juan Fangio were leading the 1955 24 Hours of Le Mans and were expected to win when the most tragic accident in racing history claimed the lives of over 80 spectators and fellow Mercedes driver Pierre Levegh. Out of respect, the Mercedes team was withdrawn from the race robbing Moss of a near certain 24 Hours of Le Mans win. Despite Moss' illustrious racing career, he would never win the 24 Hours of Le Mans nor would he be crowned the Formula One World Drivers' Champion.

On a more positive note, the most expensive car to sell at a public auction was another 1955 Mercedes 300 SLR, one of two "Uhlenhaut" coupes, that sold on May 5, 2022 at a secret auction held at the Mercedes museum in Germany for \$142,769,250!

Let's see where were we? Oh yes, Aintree in merry old England. A shorter 1.5 mile course with just 4 turns is used today for various events. The Liverpool Motor Club (Aintree is located near Liverpool) holds sprint races in May, June and September. These are held on an even shorter sprint course of just 1.48 miles. The highest speed recorded was 172 mph. Yowie! To fill in the blanks on the race schedule, track days are held in April and August. Starting in 1982 the Aintree Motor Cycle Racing Club has held six motorcycle races a year. As you can see, Aintree has had a long and varied history of four legged, four wheeled and two wheeled racing!