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GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL JUSTIN HYNES

THE SURVIVALIST

As Max Verstappen's Red Bull Racing teammate, Sergio Pérez has got one of the toughest jobs in Formula 1. But as he slogs through the end of a bruising campaign, the Mexican insists that he's still enjoying the ride.

Sergio "Checo" Pérez has always greeted adversity with a brave face. During a conversation at the Japanese Grand Prix, he recalls a prank his older siblings Paola and Antonio played on him when he was 6 years old. "They were always playing jokes on me," he says. "And they convinced me that I was adopted."

Young Checo packed his bags and solemnly asked his mother to identify his real parents so he could join them. "My brother and sister got in a lot of trouble for that one," he laughs.

In the years since, Pérez has faced adversity with similar stoicism. He exiled himself to Europe at the age of 14 to make his way in motorsports. He clawed his way to Formula 1 in 2011 and parlayed a middling drive with Sauber into a big money transfer to McLaren, only for that to collapse inside a year as results dried up. A switch to Force India saw him rebuild, but then the team collapsed. Pérez found himself a couple of races away from the F1 exit door. Victory in the penultimate race of 2020 earned him a dream transfer to

title-contending Red Bull Racing and a seemingly rosy future.

But the road forward has remained tough. Paired with a generational talent in Max Verstappen, Pérez has shone and suffered in equal measure. Glorious victories such as his battling Monaco win last year or his domination of this year's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, have been opposed by periods of competitive problems.

After winning two of the opening four races and getting within six points of defending champion Verstappen's lead,

Pérez slumped. In the 12 races that followed he found the podium just five times. By contrast, Verstappen won 11 of them. Even with a year to go on his contract, speculation about Pérez's future in F1 has abounded.

Pérez remains stoic. In Singapore, the Guadalajara native hit a mark only 10 other drivers have reached—250 grand prix starts. His ability to grind is an achievement in itself. "At the end of the day I still do the same job as I've been doing for the last 20 years," he says. "It was really difficult for me to reach Formula 1, so to maintain that,

to keep myself here, it's been quite hard. It's so hard to stay in this sport."

Pérez can recall his emotions as he lined up for his debut, at the 2011 Australian Grand Prix. "I remember feeling that I'd made it, but also that the really difficult part was about to start," he says. "There was excitement, but also fear of failure. I thought that I'd worked so hard for it, and my family had given everything, but that if I didn't succeed in the first five races, I might be gone by number six."

On the bright side, this weekend in Austin is race number 253. Asked to pick a few of his most meaningful races, he unsurprisingly mentions that first race. "After leaving Mexico at a very young age, leaving so many things behind, to finally make it was a massive achievement." Two other highlights he cites: His first podium

with Force India—in Bahrain in 2014—after he was dropped by McLaren, and his 2022 win in Monaco. "That was very special for me," he says. "It was always a dream to do that in Monaco."

The high of that race, and of his bright start to 2023, has given way to tougher times. Last month, opening up about his struggles, he told Dutch newspaper *De Limburger* that after the Miami Grand Prix he was "driving without confidence."

Bad became worse. A crash in qualifying in Monaco and a last-place start defined a dismal weekend at the scene of his greatest triumph. He failed to make it to Q3 at the following three races and instead of his season being defined by big wins, it instead was characterized by dogged fightbacks from lowly grid positions to the fringes of the top three.

But in character, he remained unflappable. "I didn't give up and kept working hard with the engineers to sort things out," he told the Dutch outlet. "My self-confidence came back when I realized that I won races under my own steam earlier this year."

Pérez hired a mental coach to help, at races and at home. "When you are having such a hard time with your work, it is difficult to be cheerful at home with your wife and children," he admits. "So I hired a mental coach, because my family deserves to have that cheerful father at home."

The renewed confidence has allowed him to nudge closer to the runner-up position in the championship, a placing he lost in last year's final race to Ferrari's Charles Leclerc. But he's unsure whether stepping up to second in the Drivers' Championship will feel like progress.

"I'll tell you once I get this second-place trophy, but I don't think it will make any difference," he says. "If there is a difference, it will be in how I achieve that. I want to achieve it with more victories this year, by finishing the season strong, and having great momentum to go into the winter—still believing that I can be champion in the future, which is the ultimate target."

Again, there's that indefatigable belief in his ability to stay the course. Last October, as he crossed the line to win the Singapore Grand Prix and end another midseason drought that sparked speculation over his future, Pérez got on the radio to his team and delivered an emphatic rebuttal. "This is how we do it, man," he said. "We shut our mouths and we work hard. This is the Mexican way."

After qualifying 13th for the 2023 Singapore Grand Prix, Pérez finished the late-September race in eighth place. Understandably, he is hungry for more success than that.



GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

BY THE NUMBERS

LEWIS HAMILTON



5
WINS



AT COTA FOR
**LEWIS
HAMILTON,**
THE MOST OF
ANY DRIVER

CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS

3.43
MILES

THE LENGTH
(IN MILES) OF THE
CIRCUIT OF THE
AMERICAS TRACK



20

NUMBER OF
TURNS ON THE
CIRCUIT OF
THE AMERICAS.
NINE OF THEM
ARE RIGHT
TURNS AND 11
ARE LEFTS.

ZHOU GUANYU



1:36.169

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CIRCUIT GUIDE

Veteran Daniel Ricciardo, who has started more than 230 Formula 1 races, offers his insider perspective on the key turns on the COTA.

TURN 12

"This is a really cool corner," Ricciardo says. "It's very tight, big braking, but it's quite banked on the apex, so it kind of sucks you around the corner." It's another intense braking zone (and overtaking opportunity), with drivers going from 200 mph to 50 mph.

TURN 19

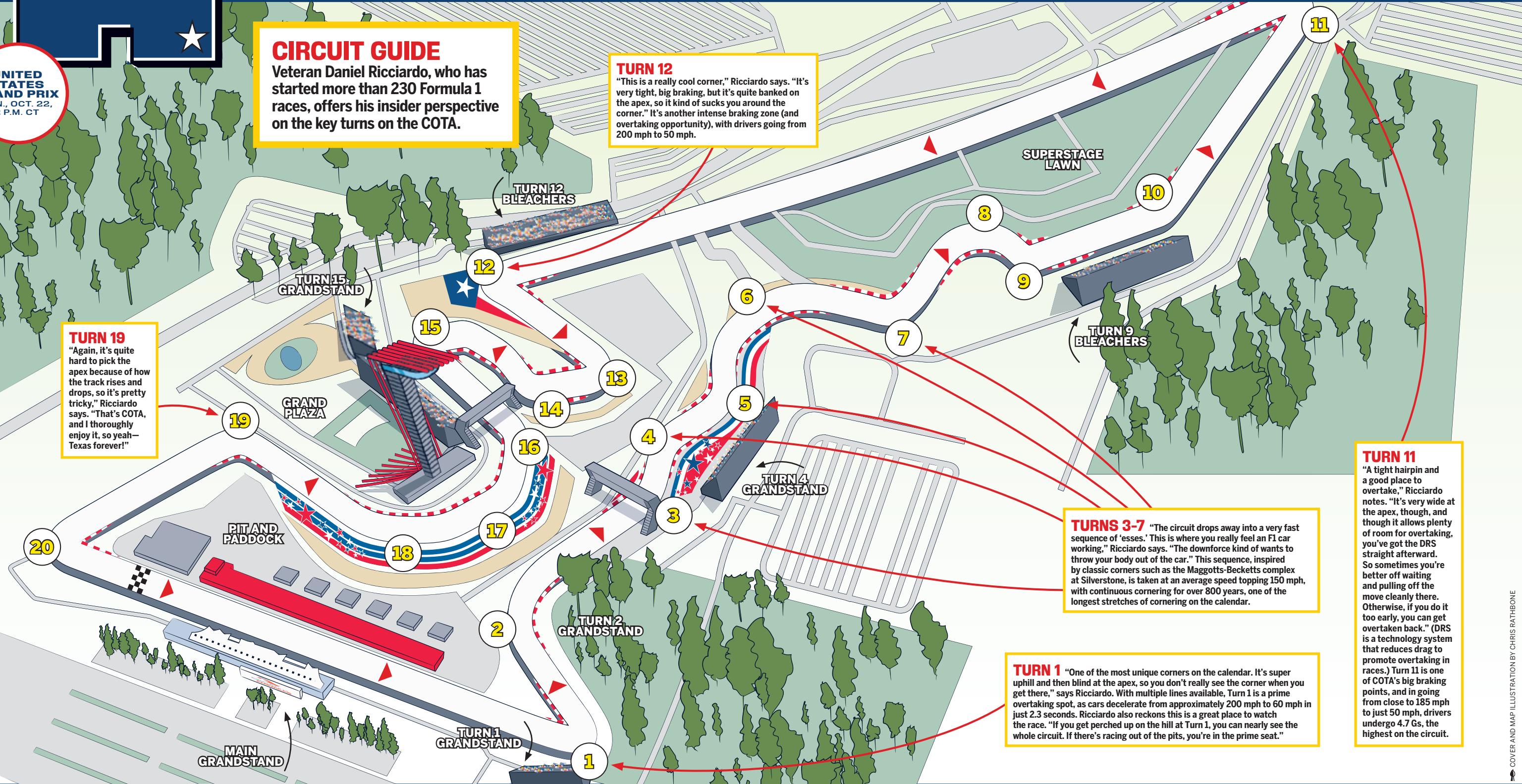
"Again, it's quite hard to pick the apex because of how the track rises and drops, so it's pretty tricky," Ricciardo says. "That's COTA, and I thoroughly enjoy it, so yeah—Texas forever!"

TURN 11

"A tight hairpin and a good place to overtake," Ricciardo notes. "It's very wide at the apex, though, and though it allows plenty of room for overtaking, you've got the DRS straight afterward. So sometimes you're better off waiting and pulling off the move cleanly there. Otherwise, if you do it too early, you can get overtaken back." (DRS is a technology system that reduces drag to promote overtaking in races.) Turn 11 is one of COTA's big braking points, and in going from close to 185 mph to just 50 mph, drivers undergo 4.7 Gs, the highest on the circuit.

URNS 3-7 "The circuit drops away into a very fast sequence of 'esses.' This is where you really feel an F1 car working," Ricciardo says. "The downforce kind of wants to throw your body out of the car." This sequence, inspired by classic corners such as the Maggotts-Becketts complex at Silverstone, is taken at an average speed topping 150 mph, with continuous cornering for over 800 years, one of the longest stretches of cornering on the calendar.

TURN 1 "One of the most unique corners on the calendar. It's super uphill and then blind at the apex, so you don't really see the corner when you get there," says Ricciardo. With multiple lines available, Turn 1 is a prime overtaking spot, as cars decelerate from approximately 200 mph to 60 mph in just 2.3 seconds. Ricciardo also reckons this is a great place to watch the race. "If you get perched up on the hill at Turn 1, you can nearly see the whole circuit. If there's racing out of the pits, you're in the prime seat."



A DRIVERS' GRAND PRIX

The Miami Grand Prix may have its sun-soaked, beach-ready bling, and the all-new race in Las Vegas will have neon-lit glamour for high rollers, but despite a lack of post-Netflix theatrics, underneath F1's current longest-standing and seemingly prosaic grand prix lies a race of rare beauty. The attractiveness of the racing in Austin lies in its authenticity. With more than a decade of service under its belt, and more focus on the track action at the Circuit of the Americas than the celebrity-soaked sideshows, the race in Texas references the old-school traditions of F1's classic European circuits.

The top drivers agree. "[Austin] has its own kind of atmosphere," longtime COTA cheerleader and eight-time grand prix winner Daniel Ricciardo told Stephen Colbert last year. "It's a race I certainly love going to. I'll

probably continue going just as a fan."

For seven-time F1 champion Lewis Hamilton, Austin's circuit sits right alongside the world's most iconic tracks, which he dreamed about racing on as a child. "They don't make tracks like they did in the olden days," he observed while in Austin back in 2018. "Some of the new tracks aren't really that good, but this is one of those that is—it's got great character. And from day one when we arrived here, there was a massive crowd."

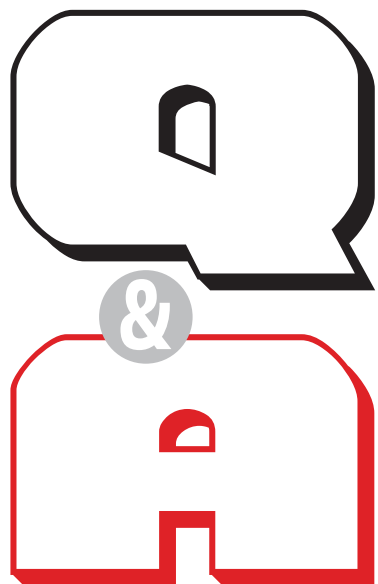
Ricciardo concurs. "It's one of the best circuits we go to on the calendar for racing. You can pass in four different places," he notes. "There are some tracks you struggle to pass on once, so to have four different opportunities, with the shape of the corners and the apexes—everything just creates a really good atmosphere that encourages you to battle."

Away from the track itself, the popular Australian driver is equally enthusiastic about the atmosphere in the city on race weekend. "The extra energy I get from the atmosphere is immeasurable, and I love everything about it," says Ricciardo. "From the crowd to the food and music—the U.S. Grand Prix is like nothing else!"

COVER AND MAP ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS RATHBONE

THIS SPACE LEFT
INTENTIONALLY BLANK

PINCH HITTER



Get to know reserve driver Liam Lawson, who landed an unexpected shot at the big time—and made a quick impression on fans.



GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL JUSTIN HYNES

After AlphaTauri racer Daniel Ricciardo broke his hand in a practice crash at the Dutch Grand Prix, you went from the bench to qualifications for your first grand prix within 24 hours. How crazy was that?

I'd flown in from Japan [where the New Zealand native has been racing this year] on Thursday. I was as prepared as you can be for these things, but you never really expect it to happen—and then it did!

What's your day-to-day role as a reserve driver like?

It's extremely rare that we are needed, but it is important to be ready. So my schedule is similar to a normal driver's. I arrive at and leave the track at a similar time. I sit through all the briefings, going through the sessions, looking at onboards and data, speaking to the engineers. Being a reserve is an amazing opportunity but it's also the most horrible thing. You watch 20 guys live

your dream, and you're right there on the sidelines.

When you were told you'd be driving, who was the first person you called?

I sent my dad a text; I didn't want him to read it online.

Getting straight to work—is that even possible?

When I was first told, there were a lot of emotions and stress. I spent 30 minutes to an hour trying to wrap my head around what was happening, but then I really didn't have time to think about anything else.

You made a big impression and scored your first points in Singapore in only your third race. Did you feel like you had to make a statement fast?

I think so. I felt that I had been ready for a long time. You need to have that confidence in yourself. I got the opportunity and knew I needed to make the most of it. I just wanted to look back and know that I'd done everything I could.

Ricciardo is slated to be back in the car in Austin and is confirmed for next year at AlphaTauri. How do you feel about going back to being a reserve?

To be in this world, it completely immerses you, and it's something that I'm completely in love with. I don't think I can settle for anything less now.



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FLASHBACK

LONE STAR MELTDOWN

Formula 1's long, strange history in the U.S. doesn't get much stranger than the sport's sole visit to Dallas in 1984, where extreme heat, a disintegrating circuit, soap opera stars and fainting fits contributed to a Texas massacre.

Austin has become a fixture of the F1 calendar, but it wasn't the sport's first rodeo in Texas. That honor goes to Dallas, which in 1984 served up an odd spectacle. Larry Hagman, star of prime-time 1980s soap opera *Dallas*, was the race starter. And French driver Jacques Laffite protested the very un-Gallic pre-race warm-up time of 7 a.m. by arriving at the paddock in pajamas.

But what made Dallas truly unforgettable was the weather. Held on a scorching July day, the street layout at Fair Park began to crumble under the force of 25 turbo-boosted F1 cars. The heat was so relentless—Goodyear measured 150°F on the track—that Osella's Piercarlo Ghinzani fainted during a pit stop and had to be revived with a bucket of cold water. Nigel Mansell passed out trying to push his stricken Lotus across the line at the end of the race.

Williams driver Keke Rosberg, though, was unfazed. He'd worn a \$2,500 water-cooled skull cap. Used regularly in NASCAR but new to F1, the gizmo gave the wily Finn a competitive advantage. And he took a cool-headed victory ahead of the more exhausted-looking René Arnoux.

After winning the 1984 Dallas Grand Prix in excruciatingly hot weather conditions, Keke Rosberg celebrates with a cold beverage as he waves to the crowd.



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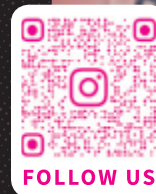
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