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FALL CLASSIC

A GUIDE TO THE 2025 U.S. GRAND PRIX



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The three men who stood on the podium at the Italian Grand Prix—Max Verstappen of Oracle Red Bull Racing, and Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri with McLaren—are vying to win the Drivers' championship. Piastri currently leads with six races to go.

IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER

McLaren might have wrapped up the Constructors' title as early as any team has done it, but there's still plenty to fight for over the season's final six races.

WHO WILL WIN THE DRIVERS' TITLE?

For much of this season the title appeared to be a two-horse, papaya-colored race for the top driver, with Oscar Piastri looking decidedly more surefooted than his McLaren teammate, Lando Norris. However, the final chapters of the 2025 campaign are throwing up all sorts of plot twists. Normally calm and collected, Piastri has crashed once (in Baku) and been bullied backwards (in Singapore), which means his stablemate is now just 22 points

behind. And coming up on the rails fast is Max Verstappen with Oracle Red Bull Racing. The four-time defending champion has turned a corner since the sport's summer break—with two wins and two second-place finishes in the last four races—vaulting the Dutchman back into contention, sort of. Presently, he's 63 points behind Piastri, but there are six races and three Sprint weekends to go. That means a full 174 points are available. It's a long shot, but it's Max, so anything can happen.

THE REST OF THE CONSTRUCTORS' PODIUM

While a fifth Drivers' title might be a long shot for Verstappen, helping his team to the runners-up spot behind McLaren in the Constructors' championship isn't. Since the summer break, Verstappen has scored 86 points, 34 more than Piastri and 47 more than Norris. The Dutchman's results have helped Red Bull Racing to a four-race total of 96 points and an overall haul of 290. That's 58 more than

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the third-place Ferrari team over the same period, leaving the Italian squad just eight points clear of Red Bull.

But while Ferrari are very much in Verstappen's sights, Mercedes is a tougher target. The Silver Arrows have also profited from the downturn in results for McLaren and Ferrari and over the past four races have banked 89 points, leaving them 35 ahead of Red Bull. Mercedes is also spreading the load, with 65 points coming from George Russell and 24 from an improving Kimi Antonelli. By contrast, Verstappen's teammate Yuki Tsunoda has scored just 10 points for Red Bull in the last four races. Verstappen and his team are on a roll, but one lackluster result for the Dutchman could derail the team's late charge.

MIDPACK CHAOS

The top four teams are well clear of the chasing pack, led by Williams with 102 points, 188 behind Red Bull Racing. Still, there's little doubt that Williams, 30 points ahead of the Racing Bulls, will top the midfield with a fifth-place finish overall. The battle behind them is tight, though. Visa Cash App Racing Bulls have 72 points, four ahead of Aston Martin, who are 13 clear of Kick Sauber. In that group, Racing Bulls are the most consistent scorers, with 13

points finishes (including one podium), and both Isack Hadjar and Liam Lawson are in good form now. Aston Martin and Sauber have been more competitive since midseason, with Aston scoring 54 of their 68 points since Race 9 in Spain, while Sauber have taken 49 of their 55 points over the same period. Haas's scoring is spread more evenly but they have scored just 20 points since Barcelona. It's tight, but it feels like the Racing Bulls' momentum might just carry them. For Alpine, with only 20 points to date, the bottom of the team rankings beckons.

DRIVE TO SURVIVE

For a handful of drivers, the final six races of the season aren't just about finishing with a flourish—they're about convincing team bosses that they're good enough to hang on to a seat in 2026.

There's been plenty of speculation about what happens at Mercedes, with both drivers unsigned for 2026, but while the contracts haven't been inked, team boss Toto Wolff has verbally confirmed both drivers for next year, telling reporters in Singapore that, in Russell's case, "good things take time" and that Antonelli will "stay here in 2026, 100 percent."

The same is hardly true on Red Bull's two teams. Dr. Helmut Marko, an F1 legend and

adviser to the teams, recently told Austrian newspaper *Kleine Zeitung*: "The only thing that is certain is that [Max] Verstappen and [Isack] Hadjar have a contract. But where and in which position is still open." Hadjar has been linked with a step up to Red Bull Racing alongside Verstappen, which would leave Yuki Tsunoda out in the cold or headed back to Racing Bulls. Liam Lawson's Racing Bulls seat is also under review. The New Zealander endured a tough first half of the season but has bounced back recently, and with four points finishes from his last eight races (including his best F1 finish of fifth place in Azerbaijan), he's making a strong case for retention.

Should Red Bull promote Hadjar and dispense with both Tsunoda and Lawson, there are two contenders for the Racing Bulls spots—both racing now in F2. Current Red Bull junior Arvid Lindblad has made a strong case for an F1 drive by finishing fourth in his rookie F3 season in 2024 and was at times contending for overall glory in his maiden F2 season. The other driver in the frame is Irish racer Alex Dunne. A McLaren junior since 2024 (he recently parted ways with the team), Dunne impressed on his first outing in an F1 car at this year's Austrian Grand Prix. He's also been in title contention in F2.



Many F1 drivers, shown here racing at the Singapore Grand Prix, are still fighting for valuable final individual and team placings—or even a job next year—with five races left on the calendar after the U.S. Grand Prix in Austin.



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TURN 19
Drivers say that it's tricky to find the apex of this off-camber turn because of the undulations in the track and the increasing radius of the turn, which allows drivers to take an earlier and faster line.

TURN 12
This tight, banked left-hand turn is another intense braking zone (and overtaking opportunity), with drivers going from 200 mph to 50 mph.

DRS ZONE 1
DRS is a technology system that reduces drag to promote overtaking in races. COTA's 0.62-mile back straight is a likely overtaking spot on the circuit.

TURN 11
This tight hairpin 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 This sequence, inspired by classic corners such as the Maggotts-Becketts complex at Silverstone Circuit (where the British Grand Prix has been held since 1948), is taken at an average speed topping 150 mph, with one of the longest stretches of continuous cornering on the calendar.

FASTEST RACE LAP 1:36.169 (Charles Leclerc, 2019)

FASTEST QUALIFYING LAP 1:32.029 (Valtteri Bottas, 2019)

TOP SPEED 214.4 mph (Kevin Magnussen, 2016)

MOST WINS (IN AUSTIN) Lewis Hamilton, 5

COTA BY THE NUMBERS

TRACK LENGTH 3.426 miles

LAPS 56

RACE LENGTH 191.634 miles

CIRCUIT GUIDE

WITH THE BIG RACE WEEKEND LOOMING, HERE'S A RUNDOWN OF THE KEY TURNS, PASSING ZONES AND STATS TO ENJOY THE ACTION AT THE COTA.

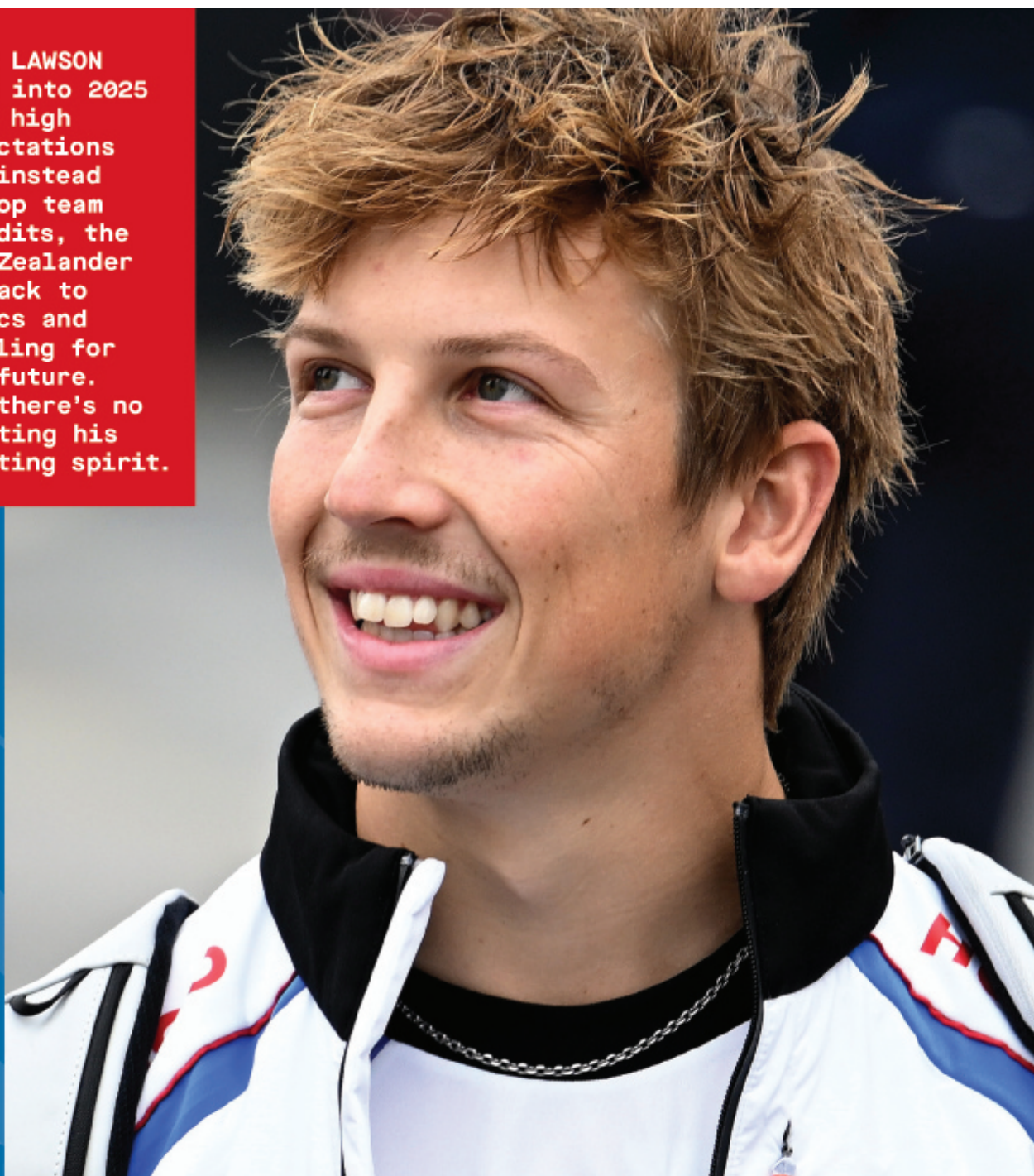
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CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS

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REDEMPTION SONG

WORDS BY JUSTIN HYNES

LIAM LAWSON came into 2025 with high expectations but instead of top team plaudits, the New Zealander is back to basics and battling for his future. But there's no doubting his fighting spirit.



Back at the start of April, Liam Lawson took an uncomfortable seat in the cramped press conference room of Japan's Suzuka circuit to explain why, just two weeks and two races into his time as a driver for Red Bull Racing, he was being sent back to the junior Visa Cash App Racing Bulls team from which he'd been elevated—and how he would bounce back from the rejection.

Under a literal and metaphorical spotlight, Lawson performed admirably, speaking about being grateful to still be in F1, before sliding

into team-player mode and describing the switch as “an opportunity” rather than a setback.

Reminiscing six months after that press conference, the New Zealander admits that the moment, coming just seven days after the announcement of his “demotion,” was even tougher than it looked. “It was probably the hardest thing I’d done in a long time,” he says. “There were a lot of questions, a lot of eyes and a lot of focus that weekend on the switch. It really wasn’t easy to go through.”

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After a slow start this year, Lawson, 23, shown here racing at the Singapore Grand Prix two weeks ago, has scored points in five of his last 11 races and sits 14th in the driver standings.



That weekend in Japan could have been the moment Lawson's career fully unraveled. Ascension to a front-running team and being handed the keys to a car capable of putting a driver on the top step of the podium is the holy grail for an F1 driver, the platform from which world champions spring. To be propelled into that fast lane only to be summarily shunted out of it is the sort of body blow that can be hard to come back from.

Lawson insists, however, that while the pain was hot and raw in Japan, he at least had the analgesic of a race to run. "Honestly, I had so much to think about with the car, going into a race, the preparation," he says. "I hadn't done the start of the season with the car, so I was kind of playing catch-up on where the car was at—and that was tough. There was a lot of work to be done, but that allowed me to just focus and not worry too much about the media."

He also leaned on his family and the tight-knit group of supporters who had taken him all the way from his early days in F4 to the

F1 paddock. "Having good people in your life, it's really important for any athlete, especially when you're trying to reach the highest level," he says. "Having people that you can talk to and trust is a really important part of that and something I'm very grateful to have."

Lawson's return to the Racing Bulls was not without its own difficulties, however. Finishing in 17th place in Japan was followed by a couple of avoidable collisions and a pair of penalty points in Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia he was again penalized, for a bruising encounter with the similarly embattled Jack Doohan, and then in Miami he again tangled with Doohan (who has since been demoted) at the race start, damage from which eventually forced him to retire. Whatever pressure Lawson had faced before the switch was suddenly amplified by what appeared to be a crushing desire to prove the doubters wrong.

But Lawson says that was not the case. "At the end of the day, we are always pushing the limits. And I would say there was no mental

side of me that was just going out there to prove a point," he says. "That wasn't really my approach to it. I let everybody say what they wanted to say and I just focused on driving."

The tactic worked. Despite increasingly negative speculation, his efforts began to bear fruit. In Monaco, in what was his first attempt at the track in an F1 car, he surprisingly made it through to Q3 and then took his VCARB 02 to eighth place in the race.

That was merely a prelude to Lawson's outing at the Austrian Grand Prix a month later. There, he qualified and finished in sixth place, his best result in F1 to that point. It was, he says, a testament not just to his growing comfort with the car but also work behind the scenes by the team. "To get some points on the board was really important, so yeah, it was a breakthrough," he says. "We definitely found some things midway through the season to make me comfortable in the car, and I think Austria was the turning point in terms of results."

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According to Racing Bulls team boss Alan Permane, the turnaround came through the development of new parts specifically designed to give the New Zealander more confidence in the car. “We had a new front suspension, which we developed through the simulator, and he really liked it,” he explains. “[Liam] was really enthusiastic about it, and it worked. Monaco was a decent race for him, but in Austria, he really had a spring back in his step.”

The bounce reached its apogee at September’s Azerbaijan Grand Prix. In a chaotic qualifying session disrupted by a record six red flags, Lawson kept his cool—and demonstrated his pace—by qualifying a remarkable third. And in the race 24 hours later, he held off a clutch of much quicker cars, including his Red Bull replacement Yuki Tsunoda, McLaren title contender Lando Norris and seven-time champion Ferrari driver Lewis Hamilton, en route to taking a career-best fifth place.

If life resembled a neatly circular screenplay, Lawson’s drive in Baku would have completed his redemptive arc, delivering him back to the rising star status he held before his fever-dream start to 2025. But Formula 1 is rarely as tidily forgiving as that. Within days of the race in Baku, speculation was rife that Red Bull was considering ejecting both Tsunoda and Lawson. Lawson’s teammate, Isack Hadjar, seems likely to partner Max Verstappen at Red Bull Racing, while the Racing Bulls seats are being linked with an all-new lineup, featuring Red Bull junior and F2 racer Arvid Lindblad and former McLaren junior and highly rated F2 star Alex Dunne.

Lawson is sanguine about the speculation and the dogfight he’s now in to remain in F1. “We’re in a program that’s very high pressure,” he says. “It’s always been like that, and we’ll continue to have that pressure through the year until a decision comes. The message to us is to perform—and the better we perform, the better chance we have at staying in the sport.”

And that, he says, is the only goal he can now focus on. The visions of victory at Red Bull he recently branded “naïve” are distant, hazy spots in the rearview mirror now. The road ahead is all about doing enough to keep the dream alive. “Formula 1 is such a fast-paced sport. It moves so fast,” he reflects. “You have an expectation—what you imagine things are going to be like—but quite often, it’s not the way you think it’s going to be. And that’s especially true this year. I came in with a plan of how this season was going to be and nothing turned out like I expected.”

“I’M ON AN AMAZING TEAM. I THINK THE BIGGEST LESSON WAS TO LEARN TO ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES.”

But Lawson insists that he’s in a great place now. “I’m on an amazing team with the support I need,” he says. “I think the biggest lesson was to learn to roll with the punches. You just get used to dealing with these things and having to reset your mind after each race—whether it’s good or bad—and you have to make sure that you go into each weekend with the best possible mindset, ready to perform.”

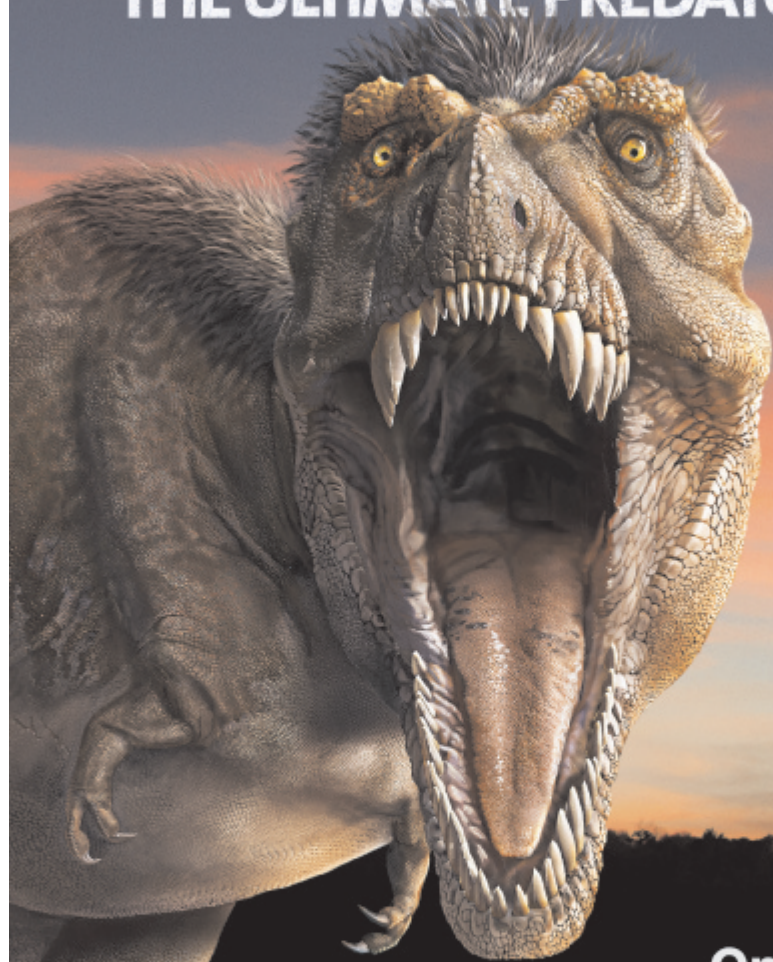
That’s about as near to a neat and tidy closing statement as Lawson gets. But while there’s no easy reward in his analysis, it is reflective of his newfound understanding of F1—as a never-ending fight for validation and acceptance. It’s energizing, relentless and at times a little ugly, and given all he’s been through over the past six months, that fighting spirit might just make Liam Lawson the perfect man for the job.



Lawson, shown here before the Dutch Grand Prix, seems increasingly comfortable with the perpetual ups and downs that nearly all young F1 drivers experience—and insists he’s ready for the battle ahead.

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Illustration by Zhao Chuang; courtesy of PNSD

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