

A1 GP - empty billboards

Despite Malaysia's Astro interrupting coverage of an 18 lap race with three sets of advertisements that resulted in viewers missing more than 1/3 of the inaugural A1 Sprint Race, there is a noticeable lack of advertising on the cars themselves.

Yes it was sunny, and yes it was first class open wheel, single seat racing at Brands Hatch and yes the ticket price at under GBP30 was affordable and, yes, Brands is easy to get to from much of the Continent as well as much of the UK. But no one of these factors could explain why Brands Hatch was full, no FULL for the inaugural race of the A1 GP series.

No, what made the numbers massive both live and on TV was the format. Sheikh Maktoum has done an amazing job. Yes, there are bits that are tacky: the trophies were simply nasty and the handing to the drivers of physically large cheques on the podium is really infra dig, but the racing was for the most part superb.

One thing was especially puzzling the marshalling: was no one watching the start and are there no blue flags in this formula? In the first race, the Italian team were moving long before anyone else. Did they jump the start or had all the other drivers gone for a cup of tea to calm their nerves?

And for a big slice of the last part of the race, first and second shot off to their own private battle whilst behind them Pakistan (3 laps down) unmercilessly hindered Russia's (one lap down) attempts to pass so he could get on with trying to unlap himself. Despite "no weaving rule" Pakistan seemed to make his car wider with each corner.

Behind them, hoping they didn't trip each other up and cause a pile up right in front of them, were the third and fourth places who were unable to pass the two lapped cars and so were unable to give chase to the leading pair.

But there was one other thing that was especially noticeable: the very small amount of advertising on the cars. Racing cars are normally mobile billboards but A1 GP is so new that no one has yet got much advertising.

With near global coverage (more than 80% of the world's population are able to see it, if they have

a TV) it's a promotional tool. It would be good if we could move advertising from the TV to the cars.

Indeed, if all TV stations had the same policy as Astro (which NEVER interrupts a soccer match for advertising), that could be the one thing that has a seriously detrimental effect on viewing figures. There would be uproar if half an hour out of a 90 minute soccer game was to be given over to adverts (and Astro's adverts are mostly trailers for other programmes making it even more galling) but that's what happened for Malaysian viewers yesterday. All enjoyment of the race was lost. Maybe it was a good race: it was impossible to tell due to the interruptions.