

BMMC South Midlands Region invited Peter Roberts to join us in a Virtual Noggin & Natter on 14th July 2022. Peter spoke about his work as an International Race Director for Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup, illustrating his talk with video footage from races. After a short break the evening concluded with a short Q&A session hosted by Chris Whitlock (BMMC South Midlands Regional Chair). Below is a summary of the evening.

Chris Whitlock introduced Peter as a former Chair of BMMC (1998 - 2004) and a current International Race Director, best known for the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup. Peter explained the rest of his roles, which include consultant to the FIA Circuits Commission, presenter at the annual FIA Race Director's Seminar, SRO Steward, Motorsport UK Steward and Clerk of the Course.

The Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup has been supporting the FIA Formula 1 World Championship since 1993, and is widely recognised as the international pinnacle of the 20+ Porsche one-make series around the world.

<https://assets.porsche.com/motorsport/international/en/-/media/Project/Motorsport-Hub/motorsport-shared/2022/04/22/PMSC2022-SeasonGuide-UHD-3840x2160px-RZ-M.pdf?rev=-1>

The 8 rounds in 2022 include Imola, Monaco, Silverstone, Spielberg, Le Castellet, Spa-Francochamp, Zandvoort and Monza. The series has a permanent grid of 28, and up to 4 "guest drivers" where track licenses allow. As Race Director Peter has overriding authority in a number of areas regarding practice and racing, including stopping activities due to safety concerns. From experience this role includes interacting with Stewards, Clerks of the Course, Promotors, Technical and Medical Departments, Marshals and Media, and carrying out both the Track Inspections and the briefings for Team Managers and Drivers, as well as the Critical Incident Management. All this work starts many weeks before the season starts and continues on a race-by race basis throughout the year. Some of the events can produce their own challenges, such as at Monaco where the Paddock is 1.5 miles from the circuit and team trolleys and competition cars drive from their Paddock to the Pit Lane (and back again) on public roads with a full Police escort! The Race Director is also responsible for publishing the many documents associated with the event, including Team Manager and Drivers' Briefing notes, procedural notes for each venue, team timetables and, post-race, a detailed report. For anyone interested in the documents issued during a Formula 1 Grand Prix, these are openly published on www.fia.com in the drop-downs under Sport and Championships.

In the run-up to an event there will be a series of Minute-by-Minute timetables published, which details who is doing what, where and when. The main overall event timetable needs to be broken out into the individual racing series, vital co-ordination for the International events where management of teams in/out of the Pit Lane and through specific gates is critical.

One of the aspects of a venue that people sometimes don't appreciate are the differences in the location and layout in a Race Control. The FIA have a prescribed minimum format for the equipment in Race Control, such as desks and screens etc, however the FIA always take their own control desk to all their events, including a radio console and a screen linking directly to the startline controls. The Race Control building itself may not be either permanent or purpose-built. The entire Race Control building at Monaco is a 3-storey pre-fabricated building which is constructed specifically for the races and put into storage afterwards. The Race Control at Laguna Seca used to be an old wooden building, with antiquated air conditioning, that swayed in the wind, but has now been demolished and Race Control has moved to a room at the end of the pit lane. The St. Petersburg (a street circuit in Florida) Race Control is in the associated airfield control tower, and not only is it created especially for the event but it is actually on the outside of the circuit with only a minimal view of one corner of the circuit from its windows!

One of the key points of contact with the drivers is at a drivers' briefing. These will detail the key aspects of the circuit such as the pit entry and exit, where the driver can safely leave the circuit if needed, and track-specific aspects such as re-joining from behind a gravel trap, and so on. It will also include a discussion on track limits, where the Judges of Fact will be situated, and the penalties that

will be applied for infringements. For events operating under the FIA International Sporting Code (the ISC) a car is deemed to have left the circuit if no part of the car remains in contact with the track (which includes the white line), unlike for UK under Motorsport UK regulations where a car is “off-circuit” if one wheel is beyond the white line. Hence it may mean that an Observer may be in a good position for track limits under MSUK regulations but may not be sighted well for FIA events and vice-versa.

Peter concluded his talk by discussing what happens when incidents take place that must be reviewed and referred to the Stewards. This includes what decisions need to be made in Race Control, and how decisions are reached in any Stewards discussions. He illustrated this section using camera footage from a series of incidents from Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup races from recent years. One of the very interesting take-outs from this section was explaining in detail what happened during an incident and how the Stewards decisions were reached (which unfortunately do not translate well into this summary!).

Peter explained the decision-making process which is used internationally. When the Race Director sees an incident and refers it to the Stewards – the incident is “Noted” and any review and subsequent penalty then rests with the Stewards. Within the FIA ISC, the Race Director does not issue any penalties, however if the specific Championship or Series Regulations specifically describe it, then the RD may issue penalties of a limited nature, the remainder being issued by the Stewards.



One aspect that Peter explained in detail is the role of the Driver Advisor, an experienced racing driver whose role is to assist the Race Director and the Stewards in reviewing incidents and driving behaviour during sessions, assist in post session reviews and provide an experienced point of view and advice to the drivers. Peter illustrated their contribution by dissecting in detail an incident where three closely-following cars going in to a corner resulted in the middle one being spun out. Whilst at first sight it looked like a clear “assist” from the third car making contact with the rear of the second, the Driver Advisor had a different view. He took the incident back to the entrance to the corner where all three cars hit the kerb and bounced in the air, and took it through frame-by-frame. The second car was seen to be bounced higher into the air than the other two, and the driver applying opposite lock when he returned to the tarmac – a sign that the car was carrying less speed than those ahead and behind him. The following car then had no opportunity to avoid the now slower car, and contact was inevitable. In this case the conclusion was that “the driver behind was not found to be wholly or predominantly responsible”, which is the FIA preferred terminology for “Racing Incident”, and would have had the outcome “No Further Action”.

Peter started his motor racing career in marshalling. At one event, after struggling to understand a decision from the Clerk, he discussed it with him and was invited to join the training programme and see what it was like, first hand. He progressed through the MSA ranks, becoming a National ‘B’ and then a National ‘A’ Clerk. It was during a meeting with the MSA to consider the applications from marshals for the Grand Prix in the late 1990’s that Peter was invited to become Deputy Chief

Observer, then Deputy Clerk of the Course, for the GP. This brought him into contact with Porsche, who selected him in 2011 as the Race Director for Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup. In 2016 he also became the Race Director for an American series called Pirelli World Challenge, which he continued until 2019. As SRO acquired the rights to PWC in 2018 he was invited to join their team of officials, which he continues to do. He was asked to speak at the FIA Race Directors Seminars in 1999 on track limits, as Charlie Whiting knew that he had plenty of relevant experience through Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup! This also led to him being invited to join the FIA working committee on track limits.

Questions were put to Peter from the meeting:

You talk to the drivers on circuit? Yes, in Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup I can talk directly to drivers by radio on circuit either collectively or individually. General messages might be “yellow flags at turn 4, car in gravel trap”, or “safety car in this lap”, or I can issue a final warning to a specific driver about track limit violations “final warning turns 4 and 8”.

What language do you use? English, which is generally accepted as the international language most commonly used. I use a limited vocabulary of standard messages and make a point of speaking clearly, without accent, so that my messages can be understood, particularly if English is not the native tongue of the drivers.

What is your view on Track Limits – is it cheating? Whether it is done intentionally or not, if a driver intentionally exceeds the limits then that is potentially an unfair advantage and should not be allowed. At the moment, it is primarily monitored by Judges of Fact who report into Race Control and appropriate action is then taken.

Several companies are trialling automatic in-car systems which will send messages to Race Control when a car exceeds the track limits, and we hope it will link through to the timing system as well. Whatever we do needs to be fair and consistent for all drivers. Different championships have different criteria, but all have an escalation process in their regulations such that a first offence is noted and further offences incur an increasing level of penalties. We also look for one-off incidents such as cutting a chicane and gaining an advantage, which would have action taken immediately.

Do you agree that there should be a standard set of Drivers’ Briefing Notes for F1? Drivers are complaining that there are two different sets depending on the Race Director. There are guidelines from FIA on what should be included in any briefing. What might vary is the briefing style and length, I keep mine to no more than 15 minutes as that is the typical attention span in my opinion.

With your “circuit consultation” hat on what do you think of the first corner incident at Silverstone GP? The halo system did a fantastic job. As with all incidents of this type there will be a thorough investigation by the FIA and the results will be published in due course. If there are recommendations to make, then those will be issued as well.

Do you think F1 should continue to go to the older circuits, as happened during Covid? The drivers loved the old circuits as it gave them fresh challenges, but there are two issues here. One is needing to bring the older circuits up to the same standards as the existing ones, and I don’t mean in terms of safety but rather the facilities, paddocks, access routes, etc. Second is the multi-year contracts that the existing circuits have with Liberty Media. But the media tells us that there are some other circuits under consideration and maybe we will see different circuits in the coming years.

What is your view on light panels? Light panels provide an extra level of safety. At F1 events, the panels are located to give the best view to the drivers and as much warning as possible, so they may be located in advance of flag positions. The light panel operators are located in safe positions where they can see the part of the circuit that they are observing.

What was your first taste of motor racing? I was taken to Oulton Park aged 11 and saw Denny Hulme win the RAC Tourist Trophy in a Lola-Chevrolet T70 Mk.3 GT and I was hooked! I went whenever I could and then started at a race school but ran out of money before getting my first race. I took up marshalling initially at Oulton Park, then went round other UK and international circuits.

What do you think of racing then and now? I still love classic cars, and I will be one of the Clerks at Snetterton in September for an event with a number of classic races. The modern cars can be equally thrilling, for example, in Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup at Spielberg recently, the top 20 cars all qualified within 1 second of each other.. That is young drivers taking their machinery to the absolute limit!

What memories do you have of marshalling on Isle of Man 3 Hills Challenge in 1990s when BRMRC took marshals across to help marshal the events? I have very fond memories of marshalling with many great friends! I went there for a number of years, working the radio control and in some ways that was my first introduction to clerking.

What was your biggest change when you went from marshalling to Race Control? Needing to understand the regulations. On the bank we react to what we see and report accordingly, but in Race Control we need to know the regulations to be able to make correct decisions quickly. For example, different series have different regulations regarding what happens if a driver stalls on the grid at the start of the Formation Lap but gets going before being passed by the last car. In one of W-Series races at Silverstone recently, a driver received a penalty from the Stewards because, after she was delayed leaving the grid on the Formation Lap, she did not regain her grid position within the distance specified in the regulations. The Race Director needed to know the regulations to report the driver to the Stewards, who then issued a penalty as soon as possible.

Chris thanked Peter for his excellent presentation, and for answering all our questions. Peter wished all marshals well and noted that BMMC was in good hands with Nadine promoting marshalling interests, and how impressed he was that she had been asked to present one of the trophies at the Silverstone F1 to represent the marshalling community.

Marion Quarrington
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