



What does the outbreak mean for the 2020 motorsport season?

What will be the long-term impact on the industry as a whole?

What can motorsport fans do to scratch the racing itch while stuck at home during lockdown?

Covid-19 and motorsport

This year's racing season may not even get a chance to start, as health risks and logistics issues plague the industry. The list of cancelled or postponed events includes the 24 Hours of Le Mans, which has now – rather optimistically – been rescheduled to late September, and the entire Formula 1 season which will probably consist of less than half its scheduled races.

As with every other industry, the bigger fish in the pond are less likely to be negatively affected to the point of collapsing; the top-level categories of motorsport have already started to draw up plans to stay afloat and keep running into 2021. According to McLaren team principal Andreas Seidl there is no threat to the existence of F1 itself, but there is the potential

to lose some of the smaller teams. This issue is partly being addressed by the introduction of a \$150m budget cap as part of the 2021 regulations, which will provide welcome relief to teams that normally lag behind on the funding front and end up struggling on track.

The entire motorsport industry relies on sponsorship deals and funding from external companies in order to keep teams and competitions running, and as businesses of all sizes are hit by the financial impact of the crisis, less critically essential expenses like sponsoring a motor racing team will be the first thing to go. The same logic applies to car manufacturers themselves, whose instinct will be to save as much as possible and shut down all their motorsport-related activities in order to focus on recovering

consumer car sales.

One risk is that, while top-tier motorsport will manage to survive, smaller events and championships will find it impossible to get over the financial and logistical challenges, after months under lockdown. If this happens, the motorsport landscape of the UK and the world will be impoverished, and there will be even fewer opportunities for newcomers to get involved, threatening the long-term survival of the sport itself at a time when a new generation of enthusiasts is very much needed.

With fans and drivers still stuck at home for the foreseeable future, motorsport bodies are trying to come up with ways to keep their fan base engaged as much as possible. This has proven to be a golden opportunity for

the ever-expanding world of esports. Free from the constraints of team politics, safety concerns and pressure to win points and championships, drivers have embraced virtual racing, competing in live-streamed esports events that can attract thousands of viewers. The fans themselves, of course, can get involved and challenge each other through online sim-racing platforms.

Motor racing is unique because it translates very well into the virtual domain; today's sim-racing set-ups are technologically advanced enough to replicate almost all aspects of driving a real car minus the G-forces (and even that is on the way, if very expensive). The future of motorsport might be uncertain, but at least the fans won't run the risk of getting bored.



Where to get your motorsport fix without leaving your sofa

F1

F1's official YouTube channel uploads footage from past GPs and this year's virtual GP.

Indycar

The Indycar iRacing Challenge (May 2) is one not to be missed; check Indycar's Facebook page for links.

Nascar

The eNASCAR website covers the sport's virtual version. NASCAR social media has live eSports content.

WRC

The World Rally Championship has its own streaming platform, WRC+, with video content – though there's a subscription charge to view it. There's an official WRC video game which is available on game consoles and Nintendo Switch.

eSports

iRacing is probably the best-known sim-racing platform, but if you don't want to race against others many alternative games are available on consoles and PC.