

# Inside the Driver's Mind

Renowned mind performance coach, **Simon Fitchett**, explains the psychological challenges facing his former charge, **Sergio Perez**, of being a McLaren driver.



Every Formula One team has its own way of doing things. Each has its own tried and tested protocols and share the same desired outcome: to win races. But there are realistically only three or four teams who will win on a regular basis over the course of a season; McLaren, traditionally, being one of them.

The mentality of the McLaren team will be significantly different to what Sergio has previously been used to. Sergio came from a Sauber team full of highly-motivated, professional and very intelligent people, and the McLaren team he has moved to will be no different in that regard. The fundamental difference lies with the team's mentality and expectations.

The team at Sauber invests countless hours of commitment, desire and dedication just to win a race (and were very close last season) and are always over the moon when one of its drivers achieves a podium finish. Finishing third or below at McLaren will be considered unacceptable. If both drivers are not on the front row after qualifying and finish first and second in the race, the team will still not be happy and the pressure on everyone in the team will increase. This will be an amount of pressure and a level of expectation that Sergio has not yet experienced.

Despite coming exceptionally close at last season's Malaysian Grand Prix, Sergio has yet to win a race, and this will be expected of him pretty

quickly at McLaren. Therefore, he will have to accept this responsibility, apply himself in the right way and focus on the right things.

Another difficult adjustment will be that he no longer has the support of the people he has been closest to in Formula One over the last two years, meaning that he will have to form new relationships of trust with others around him. However, recent history has shown that McLaren is accustomed to either bringing in or nurturing young talent and turning them into world-beaters. Lewis Hamilton is proof of that.

It is a team of great people and great experience so I would be both surprised and sad if this became a problem for Sergio. After working with Sergio last year, I have seen enough to know that he has what it takes to exceed the team's expectations. For his age, he has incredible mental strength. An example of this was his performance in Monaco last year, considering what had happened to him there a year earlier. Coming out of that tunnel flat out for the first time approaching the chicane would be a test for anyone who had experienced a crash like he did in 2011. Sergio now has the perfect platform from which to build and show what he can do. If he focuses and believes in himself and his obvious ability, and can consistently perform at his optimum level, then he will surprise a lot of people. It is in his hands.

**Will Lewis feel better racing against his mate?**

*"I honestly don't think it will make a difference to him. Of course, he and Nico know each other well and respect each other, so they won't need the usual time to become familiar. I am certain Lewis would not be concerned in the slightest at who his teammate was. He will simply focus on what he is doing and do his best to be quicker than his teammate and win races again. Whoever is alongside him in the team, it would not make a difference to him."*

**Will Jenson perform better against a lesser rival?**

*"Knowing Jenson, he will not consider Sergio a 'lesser rival' at all. He will be as focused on what he is doing as he always has been and he will approach the season no differently to if Lewis were still alongside him. He will respect Sergio just like Sergio will respect him, and they will both be fully focused on doing the best job they can individually and for the team."*