

## ROOKIE WATCH - NIKITA MAZEPIN

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With more than a third of the 23 race season done and dusted, it's time to look at how the newest entrants have fared so far. The rookie season is always the hardest, with mounting pressure to impress, only a select few truly make it. At Project Divebomb we'll be looking at this year's rookies to see if they have what it takes to create a long and successful F1 career.

*Written by Abhishek Banerjee, Edited by Janvi Unni*

Nikita Mazepin raced under the Russian Flag prior to Formula 1, but has been racing under a neutral flag this season after the Court Of Arbitration of Sport upheld the ban on Russia competing at World Championships after it's athletes were found guilty of state sponsored doping. He has been mainly backed by URALCHEM and its subsidiary company URALKALI, where his father is the major shareholder. He did well in his junior career and in the 2019-20 F3 Asian Championship he finished 3rd overall. In the 2020 F2 Championship he finished 5th overall winning 2 races. With enough points for his Super License, he made the jump to Formula One with Haas F1 team.



It was no secret that Haas would not develop their car for the 2021 season, so competing for places would be really difficult and would massively depend on external variables higher up the grid. He has previous experience of being in an F1 car, being the test driver for the Sahara Force India team from 2016-2018 racking up more than 100 laps. In 2019, he was part of the Mercedes Team in the 2019 Barcelona test, where he topped the charts.

He has been partnered with the 2020 Formula F2 Champion and Ferrari Driver Academy member, Mick Schumacher. As competing for places is going to be a rare occurrence, he will directly be compared to his teammate and they funny enough they have gone up against each other in their karting careers.

|                        | Qualified | Finished |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Bahrain</b>         | 19        | -        |
| <b>Italy</b>           | 19        | 17       |
| <b>Portugal</b>        | 20        | 19       |
| <b>Spain</b>           | 20        | -        |
| <b>Monaco</b>          | 19        | 17       |
| <b>Azerbaijan</b>      | 18        | 14       |
| <b>France</b>          | 18        | 20       |
| <b>Austria(Styria)</b> | 20        | 18       |
| <b>Austria</b>         | 20        | 19       |

He spun out in the first lap on turn 3 in his first F1 race. In Italy, he finished 17th after the Mercedes of Valtteri Bottas and the Williams of George Russel crashed and Latifi facing issues in the starting lap. He finished last in Portugal as well after Kimi did not finish. In the Spanish Grand Prix he qualified 0.690 seconds behind his teammate and finished last. In Monaco, Mick was not able to participate in the qualifying session and after a nervous moment where Nikita was overtaken by his teammate he managed to get ahead and finish ahead of his team-mate in the Principality.

In Azerbaijan, he finished P14 and overtook his team-mate in the last lap but fell just short as Mick managed to get away right before the chequered flag, which seems brilliant on paper, but one-fifth off the grid did not finish that race. France was a relatively uneventful race where Mick qualified 3 places in front of Nikita who finished plumb last. In the Styrian GP both the Haas drivers started and finished on the last row. In the Austrian GP, he qualified half a second behind his teammate and subsequently finished behind him in the actual race .

Nikita Mazepin has made it notoriously difficult for others on the grid to get past him on Fridays and Saturdays. Charles Leclerc, Estaban Ocon and Lando Norris are on the casualty list after being blocked by the Haas Driver. He did not heed the blue flags when getting lapped by Sergio Perez in the Italian Grand Prix and was penalized for it. In another incident Mercedes Team Principal, Toto Wolff was heard complaining to the race officials about Mazepin blocking the front runners, but in that instance he hadn't yet caused any problems for the Mercedes of Lewis Hamilton. Even his own teammate was not happy with him in Azerbaijan after he tried to keep his place by jinking to the right and forcing Mick wide, dangerously close to the wall and if Mick didn't stop, it could have been a devastating accident.



Mazepin has always been a controversial figure. He physically assaulted his F3 rival Callum Ilott and was given a race ban as a result. In F2 he had racked up so many penalties that he would have been unable to take part in the last race of the 2019 season. If these weren't enough he had allegedly been pictured in a party he hosted during the funeral of miners contracted to his father's company.

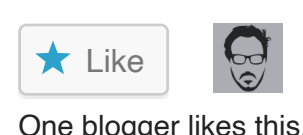
Considering he's had a checkered few years, a seat in a back-marker team was seen to be a good move until a video of him groping a woman was uploaded before the first race had taken place. The team later condemned the "abhorrent" video.

Nikita Mazepin certainly has his haters. To really have a shot at a long F1 career would require him to keep his head down and focus on beating his team-mate. As of now he's started only one race ahead of Mick Schumacher (owing to Mick not partaking in qualifying) and has only beaten him on a Sunday once, both in the Monaco GP. Most fans believe he's not talented enough to remain in F1 and he's taking up a seat which could be given to a different driver. But, clearly one cannot be in the highest level of motorsport without talent. It's going to be very difficult for him to stay if he doesn't mend his ways, and with him having not yet cleared his mandatory military service, it is going to be really hard for him to keep a hold of his seat unless he stops spinning his car and starts beating his team-mate.

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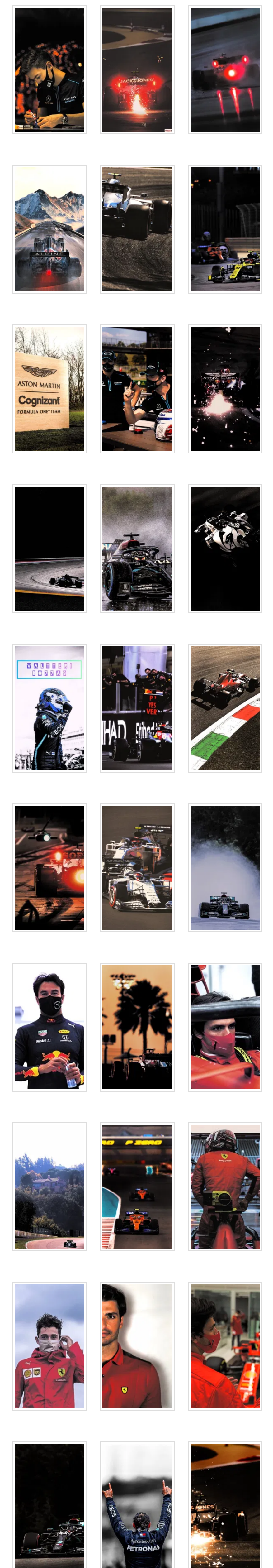


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