

Cash is king

There's plenty of money in the motorsport industry, even in the junior categories. Gemma Cockrell explores why they are so expensive for young drivers to compete in

Motorsport is one of the UK's major success stories. Just look at the figures; in 2012, the UK motorsport engineering and services industry had a turnover of nine billion pounds.

Fast forward ten years later, and seven of the ten teams that compete in Formula 1 are still based in the UK, a tribute to the high level of technology and engineering that the country can provide them with.

It isn't a new concept that money is the driving force of motorsport, perhaps even more so than talent.

At the start of 2020, Lewis Hamilton stated that "cash is king" in Formula 1, and the sport has been referred to as a playground for sons of billionaires for a while now.

But how did those sons of billionaires reach that stage of their careers? To answer that question, you have to look back at the road that they travelled to get there.

Many of the biggest names in Formula 1 today, including George Russell and Lando Norris, worked their way up the motorsport ladder by competing in British single seater junior racing series.

These include the British F4 Championship and the BRDC Formula 3 Championship; the latter is the most well-

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established and professional single-seater series in the UK and goes by the new name of GB3 as of 2021.

Competing in these series costs around £800,000 per year, once factors such as travel are taken into account, says Tom Wallace, racing mechanic for the Carlin GB3 team.

This money often comes directly from drivers' families. "I find this sad, because sometimes good drivers aren't able to progress through the ranks, all because of how successful their parents are."

Nick Gilkes, a driver who competed in GB3 in 2022, has utilised sponsors to fund his seat in the championship. This has been pivotal to funding his blossoming careers.

"My sponsors have given everything they can to help this year and have been there every step of the way, and I will

forever be grateful. Without them, I couldn't do what I do."

2021 GB3 driver Alex Fores also credits his sponsors as the reason he is able to compete at this level of the sport.

"I'm lucky to have got to where I am with all the financial barriers, but there's no chance that I'd be where I am now without getting a sponsor. This is pretty uncommon though, because in the lower series, the sponsors aren't getting much exposure out of it."

Motorsport journalist and editor of the Feeder Series blog Tom Evans echoes this. "Smaller series offer less exposure, making them less desirable to potential sponsors. The majority of these drivers are racing due to family funds rather than relying on sponsors, so drivers from wealthy backgrounds will always have an advantage over those who aren't."



GB3 is one of the most affordable racing series today
Image Credit: Matthew Cockrell

Without GB3, Nick Gilkes would have had to abandon his dreams of a career in motorsport
Image Credit: Matthew Cockrell



GB4 is a recent addition to the UK motorsport calendar
Image Credit: Matthew Cockrell

route according to McGlade, something that is mirrored by Fores' own personal experience: "They are getting rarer nowadays, and more cutthroat too."

But the reason that the cost of these series cannot be reduced is because the teams themselves barely make a profit. This is particularly the case if they have a poor season in terms of performance.

"It is fairly hard to make a profit in this business," Wallace says. "Making motorsport cheaper is harder than you'd think. The teams are businesses, looking for profit, and they've got staff to pay."

Gilkes doesn't see this changing anytime in the near future. "I think it'll be a while before we see any major changes, unfortunately," he says.

Evans agrees, no matter how streamlined the costs. "While it is extremely unfortunate to see this happening, cars have to be maintained, crashes happen, and staff have to be paid."

But the recent introduction of the GB4 championship, which Evans confirms is the cheapest option at this point in time, marks a step in the right direction for the British motorsport industry.

The series has "gone out of its way to make things as affordable as possible," says McGlade, providing a glimmer of hope for the future of young drivers who are on a lower budget.

GB3 and GB4 "are very well-run, and they do a great job of limiting the cost. They are definitely more affordable than other series across Europe, and they're the best value series to compete in," says Gilkes.

"They allow me to continue to race, because other championships have a minimum budget which I could never afford, so I'm very grateful."

The cost of competing in these championships continues to increase year on year, which Evans believes is due to the design changes that are frequently made to the cars to ensure technology and safety are as advanced as possible.

"Especially the British F4 Championship this season, thanks to the completely new chassis that has been introduced," he says.

GB3 commentator Lewis McGlade agrees that the cost of single seater racing comes from the fact that it is a specialised, ever-changing category.

"Series like the British F4 Championship and GB3 have brand new, bespoke cars, with the latest safety innovations," he says.

"So, even though a lot is done to try and keep the cost down, it is still going to be expensive."

It is very common in the world of motorsport, especially in single seaters, that talented drivers who have an abundance of skill and ability run out of budget and have to abandon their dreams of making it to Formula 1.

Driver academies are an unlikely