

Lofty expectations or realistic pessimism? Cadillac set for F1 debut in Melbourne.

The 2026 Formula One season is well underway after the first five-day test in Barcelona, with Cadillac preparing to join the sport's first 11-team grid since 2016. After a challenging journey, the American juggernaut was finally accepted as the sport's newest outfit.

The team have prioritised experience in their hires, recruiting numerous senior figures throughout the sport such as Graeme Lowdon (formerly of Marussia) leading the squad as Team Principal. This theme has been maintained in their driver choices, with fan favourites Valtteri Bottas and Sergio Perez amassing 527 Grand Prix starts in their careers.

Perez in particular will bring significant sponsorship opportunities and a loyal Mexican fanbase to an already significant enterprise. With the team expected to face challenges in their debut season in the sport, experience is vital, both for maximising results and developing the car.

Given its position as a powerhouse of American manufacturing, Cadillac will operate partially from the company's headquarters in Indianapolis. However, a European base has been set up at Silverstone, located near the existing Aston Martin facility.

Heading into the season, Cadillac are expected to be towards the bottom of the field, a natural occurrence for new outfits in the frantic, high-pressure world of Formula One. A complicated journey has led them to the grid in 2026, with everyone involved aware of the obstacles to come.

Only two years ago in January 2024, the FIA had previously rejected a joint bid by Cadillac and Michael Andretti to become the 11th team on the grid from 2025, with the governing body deciding the proposal would not provide the necessary sporting value to the current championship.

Following this decision, an apparent rift between Andretti and the Cadillac hierarchy saw the latter submit their own bid to join the sport, which was accepted by the FIA in March 2025.

It was expected that the team would operate with a Renault engine until 2028, at which point a works engine courtesy of General Motors would be installed. However, the American outfit changed plans after its split with Andretti. Instead, they will use Ferrari power units and gearboxes until 2029, before switching to a General Motors engine.

The pre-season shakedown in Barcelona heightened the task ahead, with the drivers only completing 164 laps, the lowest of any team running for three days and comfortably short of Mercedes' test-leading 500.

Bottas led the two drivers on pace, clocking a 1:20.920 as his fastest time, just over a tenth ahead of Perez over the three days. However, Cadillac were the slowest team overall. If the Spanish shakedown is anything to go by, the American outfit could be in for a difficult season.

An 11th team on the grid will offer a fresh twist to Formula One in the season to come, particularly as the sport enters a new period of regulations in 2026. Cadillac are expected to be at the bottom of the pecking order, but can they stun the world and find performance to match their name?