

Detroit Grand Prix History



The origin of the Detroit Grand Prix dates back to November of 1980, when the directors of Detroit Renaissance, a non-profit urban development organization, voted to study the feasibility of a world-class motorsport event in downtown Detroit.

The study assessed the logistical and financial impact such an event would have on the City of Detroit and its people. The study sought the interest of international Grand Prix sanctioning bodies and meetings were held with state and local officials to determine what legal hurdles had to be cleared.

A welcome was found in London and Paris, capitals of Formula One World Championship racing. The hurdles in the Michigan State Capitol, however, were more formidable.

Fortunately, the Detroit Grand Prix idea quickly found an advocate in Lansing, David Callanan, special assistant to William Faust, majority leader of the Michigan State Senate.

The legislation was drafted to permit the street race to be held, but not before hard questions of spectator safety and sufficient economic benefit to the city and state were answered.

The safety question was foremost in legislators' minds. Extensive engineering studies, however, demonstrated the Formula One Grand Prix race for Detroit could be accomplished without incident. The Detroit Grand Prix was "on the road."

With the support of Detroit's Mayor Coleman A. Young, no fewer than 11 City departments and offices played important roles in planning the race and construction of the street circuit. The result was a 20-turn, 2.5 mile downtown race course,

which provided spectators with a superb view of the high-tech racing machines at full speed.

At the end of the 1988 race, the City of Detroit, Detroit Renaissance and Formula One organizers agreed in principle to relocate the Detroit event to Belle Isle, due to development projects slated to take place on the downtown course. Detroit Renaissance was also authorized to proceed with contract negotiations, as the current contract had expired with the conclusion of the 1988 event. In the ensuing months, downtown development plans shifted, which allowed the 1989 race to continue on the streets of downtown Detroit. However, facility changes demanded by the Formula One governing bodies for 1989 were not physically possible.

At that point, Detroit Renaissance broke off negotiations with Formula One officials and contacted CART (Championship Auto Racing Teams, Inc.) to discuss the possibility of an Indy Car race in Detroit. In less than a week, the announcement was made: Detroit would host a CART Indy Car race on the downtown course in 1989.

The 1989 Valvoline Detroit Grand Prix will hit the streets of Detroit on June 16, 17 and 18. Friday, June 16 is Free Prix Day.

GRAND PRIX