

F1 in Italy... All options must be considered

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FEATURE BY MAURIZIO QUARTA

These are tough times for Monza. For while the negotiations with Bernie Ecclestone for renewal of the Grand Prix license beyond 2016 continue, another front has suddenly opened a few hundred kilometers away.

Making good use of the long delay as Monza finds itself not yet in a position to close a deal with FOM, Imola has stepped in to the spotlight. In recent days the Mayor of Imola, Daniele Manca, met with Ecclestone in London in order to express the willingness to take the Italian GP back to Imola and "to play an active role in keeping a GP in Italy, even in a perspective of rotating the event between circuits".



According to Imola sources, Ecclestone has been positively impressed by the initial talks and further meetings are planned. Whilst he is giving little away, other than admitting that a return to Imola is possible, he is mindful of the fact that it was Enzo Ferrari who first asked him to organize a GP at the circuit.

To this observer, it is difficult to say if this is merely a tactical move aimed at pushing Monza to find the financial resources needed to close the contract. Fact is, it didn't take too long to get the 'political answer from Angelo Sticchi Damiani, president of Automobile Club d'Italia (ACI Italy), who, at the recent opening of the Museo della Velocità (Speed Museum) at the Autodromo declared that; "for ACI the Italian GP is Monza".

We subsequently asked Ivan Capelli, President of ACI Milan, which controls the Monza track through SIAS, for his opinion. "Our goal is to keep the Italian GP at Monza," he said, "and we can't help considering that in 2022 we will celebrate the centennial of the track.

"As of today we haven't had any official communication from Imola about such plans; nevertheless, the rotation (alternation) to which they make reference has always been a bad strategy: therefore, what will be needed is a totally new approach in implementing this strategy, that frankly I can't see today.

"We are sportsmen," he concluded, "and the interest of sport comes first in our minds. Should rotation be the last possible resort, at that point we should at least consider it."

This is definitely a realistic and pragmatic approach.

Experience shows that rotation - alternating a race between venues - is always critical; nevertheless, if this is the way to go, we fully support Capelli's opinion that new approaches are needed.

With this in mind, as a lifelong F1 fan, an Italian and interim management opinion leader, I have tried to make a creativity exercise to suggest some possible new ways of dealing with the problem:

First, make the Italian GP a national issue not to be left to local Automobile Clubs. As was the case with Expo 2015 in Milan, why not to have a unique "Italian GP Special Commissioner", nominated by the National Automobile Club, whose remit is finding the necessary resources and optimizing their use, in order to keep the Italian GP on the calendar, no matter the venue.

Second, making a temporary association between Monza and Imola, again under the management of a Special Commissioner?

Third, why not involve directly Ferrari, either in the controlling structure of Monza (at equity level or

at financial investor level) or the previously mentioned temporary association between Monza and Imola. Company chairman Sergio Marchionne has recently stressed the importance of having Monza on the F1 calendar and expressed a willingness to intervene, if needed. Maybe this option is not exactly what Marchionne had in mind, but it is worth considering.

Also, as editor Chris Balfe has suggested, in respect of a team such as Ferrari receiving an extra slice of the prize pot for its long involvement in the sport, why can't 'historic' circuits - which have been in F1 just as long - be entitled to some sort of discount in terms of race fees?

After all, as F1 fans and sportsmen, we wouldn't want to see Monza merely hosting the Historic GP, which took place at the legendary venue last weekend (pictured). It's a nice show, but the Italian Grand Prix is another thing entirely.

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