



Valsecchi leads Razia: 10 seasons of GP2 between them

IF YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

...then just keep trying, as Davide Valsecchi proved in 2012. By *SIMON ARRON*

Some thought it a sign of malaise that the top four GP2 drivers had collectively accumulated 14 full seasons at this level by the campaign's end, but it could also be perceived as strength in depth. Either way, Formula 1's recognised ante-chamber was its customarily combustible self in 2012, with a cocktail of wonderful racing and clueless optimism that created queues several miles long outside the stewards' room door.

Some feel that veteran (well, he's 25) **Davide Valsecchi** should have moved on before now, but it's not widely known that he created quite an impression when he tested Astromega F3000 cars as a teenager. At the time, the Belgian team thought he'd shown similar flair to another raw youngster the squad had run in 2000 – a kid by the name of Fernando Alonso.

It's probably now too late for Valsecchi to morph into such a star, but there is more to his success than longevity. It took Pastor Maldonado four attempts to win the GP2 title and everyone now considers him to be mustard (or, at least, well-heeled, erratic

mustard) – and he was always with strong teams, which Valsecchi conspicuously wasn't during his first two seasons.

It would help the sport enormously if there weren't two almost-parallel Renault-powered championships in F1's slipstream. If you pitched the top 12 Formula Renault 3.5

“As a teenager, Valsecchi showed similar flair to a raw youngster by the name of Alonso”

drivers against their counterparts in GP2, you'd instantly create the world's most competitive feeder series and the champion would rightly be lauded.

As it is, Valsecchi had accumulated a reasonable slice of an F1 budget by the end of the season, but didn't know whether or where he'd be able to spend it.

HOW IT WAS WON

Valsecchi began his fifth GP2 campaign with pole position in Malaysia and sealed the title with third place in the Singapore feature race. One day later, his fifth place helped DAMS clinch the championship for teams. Between times, he scored four race victories – three of them in Bahrain, where GP2 Asia experience helped – and was rarely anything other than fast. Even at Silverstone, where he was sent to the back of the feature grid for not having enough fuel in his tank post-qualifying, he came away with strong points finishes. There was a brief mid-season slump, but he was quick when it most mattered.

Luiz Razia won the opening race, added three sprint victories to his tally and led the points table for most of the summer, but his hitherto unerring consistency failed him in the penultimate meeting at Monza – where he crashed out of the first race, the trigger for his only pointless weekend of the year – and Valsecchi seized the initiative.

Lotus GP team-mates **James Calado** and **Esteban Gutierrez** were title outsiders for much of the year. The Englishman's relative inexperience never showed: the GP3 graduate took two feature race poles (the same as Valsecchi and two more than Razia), but his victories were both in sprints. That was down to some outrageous bad luck (a dreadful pit call by the team in Valencia, gearbox failure at Silverstone) and his mostly stellar year petered out fairly quietly, with a poor set-up at Monza and a nasty bout of food poisoning in Singapore.

Calado was a star but desperately unlucky



A second weekend in Bahrain: pointless



STANDOUT PERFORMERS

Calado, on balance, although the top two played their part in a title duel that blended fierce competition with mutual respect. Max Chilton came on in leaps and bounds – and was prepared to make bold tyre calls, sacrificing his chances in Sunday sprints to optimise his prospects in feature races. That worked beautifully in Hungary and Singapore. And Jolyon Palmer proved he was much more than simply the son of a well-known father. He was unlucky early on, when his car kept melting, but was habitually quick – and a feisty overtaker.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

The final few minutes of the Valencia sprint. Razia saved his tyres from the start and went

from fifth to third on the penultimate lap, then third to first a few corners from home, passing Calado and Fabio Leimer as their lead tussle carried them beyond the circuit boundaries. If this was to be the Spanish street circuit's swansong, there could have been no finer farewell.

SOMETHING TO FORGET

The standard of driving at the back of the field – and, sometimes, a little farther up (yes, Rodolfo Gonzalez, this means you) – and the Friday morning Silverstone traffic, which almost caused several GP2 drivers to miss free practice.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The incorporation of GP2 Asia within the main GP2 Series gave the calendar a cosmopolitan, balanced feel – but there's still no excuse for racing in Bahrain twice. The second meeting, the only one of the year not to support a grand prix, attracted about 17 spectators.

WHERE NEXT?

More of the same, but without Coloni: the Italian team is leaving the series following a dispute with the organisers, a matter all parties were reluctant to discuss on the record. ☹

THE CHAMP IN HIS OWN WORDS



DAVIDE VALSECCHI

"It's fantastic to have taken the title and I think the results speak for themselves; I took four wins, 10 podium finishes, six fastest laps and always qualified in the top seven – except at Silverstone, where I ran out of fuel before the weight check, but even there I was seventh before they threw me to the back!

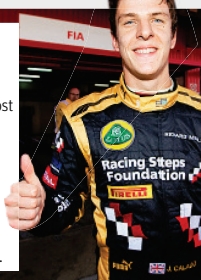
"The statistics prove we did the best job and I have to thank DAMS for giving me such a good car. Without that, you cannot be a hero. There were some difficult moments and Luiz Razia led the points table for quite some time, but when it most mattered, during the final few races, we were consistently strong. I have to compliment Luiz, too, because he has been a fantastic adversary – hard, but fair.

"I was actually quite sorry when the season ended – I'd have been happy to keep going until December. It's such a pleasure knowing you'll be fighting at the front every weekend: it feels like you're always going on holiday."

OUR TOP 10 DRIVER RATINGS

1 JAMES CALADO

Probably the campaign's most consistently impressive driver – and a rookie at that – but also one of the least fortunate.



2 DAVIDE VALSECCHI

Huge experience, but some of that was acquired with new (or else skint) teams. Speed and racecraft beyond question.



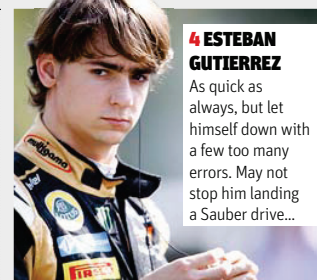
3 LUIZ RAZIA

People are deterred because he's been doing GP2 forever, but still only 23 – and getting better by the season.



4 ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ

As quick as always, but let himself down with a few too many errors. May not stop him landing a Sauber drive...



5 MAX CHILTON

The speed has always been apparent, but this season he blended it with racing maturity.



6 JOLYON PALMER

Impressed iSport from start with committed approach... and improved thereafter.



7 FABIO LEIMER

Almost always at sharp end, but perhaps lacking a little bite: 12 top-six finishes, no wins.



8 MARCUS ERICSSON

Disappointing overall, because more expected, but borderline unbeatable on his day, like Spa.



9 FELIPE NASR

All sorts of problems, but adversity often gave us chance to appreciate his fighting spirit.



10 JOHNNY CECOTTO JR

Edges van der Garde by dint of more adventurous approach, although could get into trouble.

2012 GP2 SERIES

POS	DRIVER (NATIONALITY)	TEAM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	POINTS
1	DAVIDE VALSECCHI (I)	DAMS	**2*/R	**1*/1	1*/3	4/3	4/R	18/10	7/2	13/7	2*/4	3/R	6/1*	4/5	247
2	LUIZ RAZIA (BR)	ARDEN INTERNATIONAL	1/5	2/4	4/2*	8/1*	15/6*	3/1	5/1	7/10	3/3	6/20	R/16	5/4	222
3	ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ (MEX)	LOTUS GP (ART)	7/2	3/2	10/4	10*/7	23/8	*1/R	1*/4	10/5	8/1*	11/13	9/R	2*/6	176
4	MAX CHILTON (GB)	CARLIN	3/7	4/5	5/13	7/5	5/2	7/4	9/19	14/R	**1/11	12/22	**4/6	1/19	169
5	JAMES CALADO (GB)	LOTUS GP (ART)	8/1	5/3	16/12	**2/4	7/R	**8/2	R/20	8/1*	4/6	2/3	12/14	R/10	160
6	GIEDO VAN DER GARDE (NL)	CATERHAM RACING	9/4	R/9*	**3/19	1/6	3/3	11/6	8/21	**5/2	5/10	5*/21	R/10	8/1	160
7	FABIO LEIMER (CH)	RACING ENGINEERING	4/6	7/12	2/8	12/11	18/R	4/3*	**14/9	2/4	9/14	R/5	5*/2	3/3	152
8	MARCUS ERICSSON (S)	ISPORT INTERNATIONAL	13/R	13/16	7/7	13/22	2/4	2/R	21/7*	11/15	18/R	1/4	3/7	7/2	124
9	JOHNNY CECOTTO JR (YV)	ADDAX TEAM	R/22	R/22	9/R	18/13	**1/R	EX/R	2/18	1*/6	R/R	17/R	2/5	R/9	104
10	FELIPE NASR (BR)	DAMS	6/3	R/6	11/5	11/9	17/R	R/14	6/3	4/3	25/8	8/2	R/21	6/7	95

11 Jolyon Palmer (GB), iSport International, 78; 12 Nathanael Berthon (F), Racing Engineering, 60; 13 Stefano Coletti (MC), Scuderia Coloni/Rapax, 50; 14 Rio Haryanto (RI), Carlin, 38; 15 Tom Dillmann (F), Rapax, 29; 16 Luca Filippi (I), Scuderia Coloni, 29; 17 Josef Kral (CZ), Addax Team, 27; 18 Stephane Richelmi (MC), Trident Racing, 25; 19 Nigel Melker (NL), Ocean Racing Technology, 25; 20 Fabio Onidi (I), Scuderia Coloni, 13; 21 Julian Leal (CO), Trident Racing, 9; 22 Rodolfo Gonzalez (YV), Caterham Racing, 6; 23 Simon Trummer (CH), Arden International, 4; 24 Fabrizio Crestani (I), GP Lazarus, 1; 25 Brendon Hartley (NZ), Ocean Racing Technology, 1. TEAMS CHAMPIONSHIP: 1 DAMS, 342; 2 Lotus GP,

336; 3 Arden International, 226; 4 Racing Engineering, 212; 5 Carlin, 207; 6 iSport International, 202; 7 Caterham Racing, 166; 8 Addax Team, 131; 9 Rapax, 44; 10 Trident Racing, 34; 11 Ocean Racing Technology, 26; 12 GP Lazarus, 1. RACES: 1 Sepang, March 24/25; 2 Sakhr, April 21/22; 3 Sakhr, April 27/28; 4 Barcelona, May 12/13; 5 Monte Carlo, May 25/26; 6 Valencia, June 23/24; 7 Silverstone, July 7/8; 8 Hockenheim, July 21/22; 9 Hungaroring, July 28/29; 10 Spa, September 1/2; 11 Monza, September 8/9; 12 Marina Bay, September 22/23. POINTS SYSTEM: On each weekend, first race: 25-18-15-12-10-8-6-4-2-1; second race: 15-12-10-8-6-4-2-1. Pole position: 4 (denoted by **). Fastest lap of top-10 finishers: 2 (denoted by *).