THE No. 1 *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER



UPDATED WITH GUENTHER'S REVIEW OF 2023

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The Times

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Chris Evans

SURVIVING TO DRIVE

A YEAR INSIDE FORMULA 1



GUENTHER STEINER

FOREWORD BY **STEFANO DOMENICALI**

Guenther Steiner is an Italian motorsport engineer and team manager. From 2014 to 2024 he was team principal of the Haas F1 Team, having previously been managing director of Jaguar Racing and technical operations director of its subsequent incarnation, Red Bull Racing. In 2014, Guenther persuaded Gene Haas, owner of Haas Automation and NASCAR championship-winning team Stewart-Haas Racing, to enter Formula 1.

With their entry in the 2016 season, Haas became the first American constructor to compete in F1 in thirty years. The team took eight points at the 2016 Australian Grand Prix with a sixth-place finish, becoming the first American entry, and the first constructor overall since Toyota Racing in 2002, to score in their debut race. Steiner is also a prominent figure in the cast of the successful Netflix series *Drive to Survive*.

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SURVIVING TO DRIVE

A Year Inside Formula 1

GUENTHER STEINER



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whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

Penguin Random House UK, One Embassy Gardens,
8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

penguin.co.uk

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in Great Britain in 2023 by Bantam
an imprint of Transworld Publishers
Penguin paperback edition published 2024

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Typeset by Six Red Marbles UK, Thetford, Norfolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House
Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9781529177480

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‘A lot of people criticize Formula 1 as an unnecessary risk.
But what would life be like if we only did what is necessary?’

– Niki Lauda

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FOREWORD BY STEFANO DOMENICALI

Guenther Steiner is without any doubt one of the most unique human beings I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Not just in motorsport, but in all walks of life. Searingly honest, dangerously forthright, infuriatingly stubborn sometimes, unusually reliable, occasionally inspirational, constantly amusing and, unless there are children in the room, mainly unfiltered! Even the way that Guenther talks is unique. After all, do you know anybody else who sounds like Guenther Steiner? I don't.

I first met Guenther twenty-two years ago while he was working for Niki Lauda at the Jaguar Formula 1 team. I remember thinking to myself after meeting him, *Wow, where on earth has this guy come from?* When I learned that Guenther had been born and brought up in the Italian city of Merano on the Italian–Austrian border, and that he had been working in rally for several years prior to joining Niki, everything made sense. People who work in rally rarely mince their words, nor do people who originate from that part of Italy. He was and still is very much a product of both his people and his surroundings.

It was only when Guenther approached me at Ferrari many years later that I began to get to know him. He had a dream of creating an American Formula 1 team and wanted my help. Guenther will tell

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you the story himself, but what I want to say here is that his passion for the project and his knowledge of Formula 1 and of motorsport were as integral to me wanting to support his dream as the concept itself. That concept, of course, became the Haas F1 team and although I am obviously partisan in my position as CEO of the Formula 1 Group, I am proud of the part I played in bringing the team to life.

After a business relationship was formed, Guenther and I were able to develop a friendship – a friendship that has evolved over the years and which I think we both value enormously.

A question I am sometimes asked is whether or not I had any idea that *Drive to Survive* would catapult my friend from being a generally anonymous but well-respected team principal into a superstar. The truth is that, as much as I value Guenther as a friend, I never considered for a moment what effect his personality and character might have on the general public. Or on the sport, for that matter. Had I known, I might have warned everyone what to expect! The fact is, though, that the show has created a monster. A monster who appears to have charmed half the world and who I believe is a genuine force for good in our sport.

Once it became apparent that Guenther had caught the audience's imagination I gave him one piece of advice, which was to be sure that you stay as you are. 'Never change, Guenther,' I said. 'Always be you.' Fortunately, I think he always will.

I hope you enjoy the book.

Stefano Domenicali

London, January 2023

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OFF SEASON

Monday, 13 December 2021 – Yas Marina Circuit, Yas Island, Abu Dhabi

It probably won't surprise many people that I am starting my book with a swear word but all I can say is, thank fok that season is over! It's been a nightmare from start to finish. I don't drink very much but this year I've been tempted to take it up professionally. Whisky on a foking drip. That's what I needed sometimes!

It hasn't just been this year, though. The shit goes back even further than that. Being kicked out of Melbourne at the start of 2020 was probably where it all began. We thought we'd be racing again in a couple of weeks' time but what was actually ahead of us all was months and months of uncertainty. Will we survive? Will we even race again? Nobody knew, you know. It's no secret that there were probably four teams that could easily have gone under during that time, including us. Pete Crolla, our team manager, had meetings with the FIA and Formula 1 two or three times a week, and while he fed everything back to Gene Haas and me, we tried to keep everything afloat. Even the sport itself was under threat for a time because we didn't know how long the pandemic would last. Would it be three months? Would it be three years? Would it be three generations?

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In the end Formula 1 basically shut down for about ninety days. That's incredible, when you think about it. Especially for a sport that is famous for progression. The only time this sport ever comes close to shutting down is during the summer break and over Christmas. But even then there is a lot ticking along in the background. Me, for instance. You think that I shut down in the summer and over Christmas? Don't be ridiculous. I have things to do. That ninety days, though, was a pretty shit time.

The thing that Formula 1 as a whole did right during those ninety days was to carry on as if things would eventually get better, at least as much as it was possible. This meant that when we could come up for air and start racing again we'd be ready to go. A lot of people worked hard to make that happen and it was a big risk. I mean, how long can you keep an engine ticking over before it finally runs out of gas or goes wrong? It was a nervous time.

We as a team had to do a lot of restructuring in order to keep us ticking over, so it wasn't just a case of carrying on and hoping for the best. For sure, nobody was able to do that. One element of the 'return to racing' programme that was devised by the FIA and Formula 1 was the continuation of the existing regulations so, rather than produce a brand new car concept for the following season, we had to develop the existing cars. Unfortunately, for reasons I'll very soon explain, our 2020 car wasn't a great one so instead of trying to develop that for the rest of 2020 and throughout 2021, which would have been like trying to polish a turd, to be honest with you, we made the decision to use it again as it was, give or take, and put everything into developing a new car concept using the new regulations that were coming into place.

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I have to pay tribute to Gene here because he could easily have

taken a different viewpoint and said, *Fok this for a game of soldiers*. A lot of people would have, I think. Especially with all the uncertainty that was still surrounding the sport. Even when we started racing again nobody knew how long it would last. Every day we were reading about new strains of Covid and so we were always looking over our shoulders.

In all my years in motorsport, the decision to write off the 2021 season is the hardest I have ever been involved in. We're all competitive people and so actually choosing to be shit for an entire season goes against everything we believe in and are striving every day to achieve. Every single race weekend put the team on a downward spiral. On arriving at the track they'd all try and be upbeat but then over the course of the weekend they'd start to sink. 'What are we even doing here?' they'd say. 'This is shit!' My main job during the whole of that season was to tell the team as many times as I needed to exactly why we were doing what we were doing and remind them that there was light at the end of the tunnel. Or should I say, the wind tunnel. You see, I'm also a foking comedian!

'Look, guys, better times are ahead,' I kept saying to them. 'You have to believe that.' Fortunately, they did and they stuck with it. We've got a really, really good bunch of people in the team at the moment. Sixty per cent of our staff have been with us for four or five years or more, which is pretty foking cool. We might not be able to retain form very well sometimes, but we're great at retaining staff.

Writing off the 2021 season was the correct thing to do, though. I'm sure of it. Gene is, too. In 2020, which was a normal season for us in terms of spending and development (but turned out to be shit for all kinds of different reasons), our entire budget was roughly

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$173 million, whereas Ferrari's was $463 million and Mercedes' even more than that. Almost half a billion. That's a big gap, you know. Even if we'd spent half of our allocated wind tunnel time on the 2021 car we'd still have finished last. Why would we do that? I've been in motorsport for thirty-six years and sometimes you have to just surrender to the circumstances and improve things when you can.

In 2021, as part of the new rules which were designed to make the sport more competitive, the share of the budget that's performance-critical – design and development, component manufacture and testing – was limited to $145 million per team, and in order to take full advantage of that we decided to run the 2020 car in 2021 and put as much money as we could into developing the car for 2022. The top three salaries at each team aren't included in this so it means that the guys at Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull can still gain an advantage by hiring the best people. Or at least three of them. I'm OK with that. It's better than it was.

We're all competitive people and every person who works for every team on the grid obviously wants their team to do well. OK, so we're not likely to win many races anytime soon. In 2018, though, Haas, who were, and still are, the smallest team on the grid, scored ninety-three points and finished fifth in the Constructors' Championship. That's not bad for a team that was also only three years old at the time. We're not stupid.

The only thing that really kept the team going last season was that in the background we'd been developing a car that will hopefully make us competitive again in 2023. So far in our history we've had two promising seasons in 2016 and 2017, a foking brilliant season in 2018, a pretty difficult season in 2019, a shit season in 2020

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and a dead season in 2021. That's three on each side. There's a hell of a lot riding on what we're trying to achieve right now. Not to mention what happens next.

Anyway, I'm flying to Italy in a few hours so have to go. Ciao!

Saturday, 18 December 2021 – Castello Steiner, Northern Italy

If I had a dollar from every person who has asked for my opinion on what happened between Lewis and Max in Abu Dhabi over the past six days, I'd be able to poach Adrian Newey! Not that I would. He's far too exciting for me. After the race I had a few days visiting my mother and every person I saw in the town wanted to know what I thought. 'Why are you asking me?' I said. 'I was too busy concentrating on a Russian who didn't finish the race and a German who was in fourteenth position.'

What do I think, then? Well, it was certainly very confusing. I remember sitting on the pit wall listening to the orders from the race director and thinking, *What the hell is happening here?* At the time it didn't stack up to me, but at the same time I didn't know all the facts. It was very entertaining, though. Poor Toto almost had a foking heart attack!

Look, at the end of the day both teams have won a world championship and good for them. Red Bull won the Drivers' and Mercedes the Constructors'. I'd take either of those. Mercedes didn't protest, so off we go. We move on.

The last few days have done me the world of good. I'm a glass-is-half-full kind of idiot so as soon as the immediate aftermath of the

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season lifted I started getting excited about the new one. Most people assume that after a season has finished all you want to do is relax. Bullshit! The only time I relax is when my car and drivers are performing well, which means I haven't been able to do it for over three years!

All I can think about now is the new car and all the early signs have left me being cautiously optimistic. I obviously don't know what the other teams are doing yet, which makes me nervous, but I was down in Maranello yesterday to get a feel of how things are going, and things are looking good. It's not been easy for those guys either, being stuck in an office in Italy while their team are doing shit. Because of all the Covid restrictions I haven't been able to go there as much as I usually would. Then again, if I'm there talking in their ears and making jokes, they're not working and I don't want to be a distraction. Especially not now. Fortunately, our teams in Maranello and Banbury in the UK have managed to keep their heads up and are as focused and committed as I am on making us competitive again.

I'm going to be spending Christmas at our home in Italy, which means no travelling for three weeks. That doesn't happen very often. I'll certainly be working, though, at least until the 23rd. The week between Christmas and New Year is one of the only ones of the year where hardly anything happens work-wise, so during that week I'll be forced to chill out. I have tried starting new projects during that week in the past but it's useless. Everybody's like, 'Yeah, I'll get back to you tomorrow,' but they never do.

One of the other big differences between last season and next season, which should be an advantage, is that next season we'll have two drivers who are no longer rookies. We've had to be quite

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careful not to be too hard on them, especially with the car we've had. Next year should be their big opportunity, though, and so we'll see what they can do. In 2021, apart from a couple of exceptions, all they've really been able to fight for is nineteenth or twentieth position. Next year I think it will be different, which will increase the team's demands on them significantly. At the end of the day, though, they are well-paid employees who need to deliver. No mercy!

Monday, 20 December 2021 – Castello Steiner, Northern Italy

Why the fok would somebody ask for an interview about Formula 1 five days before Christmas? Do these people have nothing better to do? Don't they have lives? 'You better not be asking questions about the season that's just finished.' Fortunately he wanted to talk about how Haas was created. It's actually quite a good story so I may as well tell it to you now.

You remember that period in F1 when the big manufacturers like BMW, Honda and Toyota started leaving the sport? That created a fear that there might not be enough teams so a discussion opened up about customer cars and third cars. That all came to nothing, which is when they started opening up the licences. One of the applications came from a team called USF1, which was based close to where Haas is now in North Carolina. The application was submitted in June 2009 and they were due to start competing the following year.

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The team was set up by the engineer Ken Anderson and the

journalist and team manager Peter Windsor. At some point after their application had been accepted, Peter contacted me about some work that he wanted my composites company to do on behalf of the team. That's how I got to know them. Soon after that I got a call from Bernie Ecclestone. He was concerned that USF1 wouldn't be ready in time for the 2010 season and wanted to know what I thought. At first I couldn't really tell him much but after a few months it became clear that the team wouldn't be ready to start testing in January.

'No chance, Bernie,' I said. 'They haven't got a foking clue!'

Bernie went public with his concerns in December 2009 and in February 2010 Charlie Whiting visited the team's headquarters for an inspection. A few days later he confirmed that, in his opinion, they wouldn't be capable of competing and so that was that.

Anyway, one of the main investors in the team, the YouTube founder Chad Hurley, called me up after the team collapsed and asked me if I thought there was any way of getting an American team on the grid for 2011. My initial reaction was to run a mile as USF1 had been such a fiasco. Then I had an idea. Although nowhere near ready, the doomed HRT team had a car at a pretty advanced stage so I called Chad up and suggested he get in touch with the company who were building it and try and buy it.

'But I don't know them,' said Chad.

'I know,' I said. 'But I do.'

You see? Totally indispensable. How the world managed without me before I was born I have no foking idea.

'Let me have a word with the owner,' I said. 'He's a good friend of mine.'

Chad ended up flying me out to Europe to visit the company in

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person and see if it was doable. The meetings went OK but before I reported back to him I wanted to get the opinion of somebody who was inside the sport. The best person for that job was my old friend and fellow Italian Stefano Domenicali, who was then in charge of the Ferrari F1 Team. He invited me down to Maranello for lunch and gave me his opinion.

'You won't get it through, Guenther,' he said. 'The entire project is a complete mess. You have a good reputation in the sport so don't ruin it. Just leave it alone.'

I did have a couple of meetings with Bernie after that about resurrecting the project but the following week I called Chad up and told him to call it a day.

'It's too foking messy,' I said. 'It's up to you, Chad, but if I were you I'd walk away.'

And that was that.

A few weeks passed and, although the original project was dead in the water, the idea of an American F1 team was still a good one. Not just for whoever managed to do it successfully, but for the sport in general. It was time to call Stefano again.

'Would Ferrari consider making a customer car for a new team?' I said. 'And, if they would, would they sell it to me if I could find an investor?'

'No problem, Guenther,' said Stefano. 'You bring me the right people and I will sell you the car.'

I then had to put a business plan together. There were no lawyers and no fancy tricks, though. Just a simple PowerPoint presentation and a tall, ugly Italian with a big foking mouth.

'OK,' I said to my wife one day. 'Now all I need is a billionaire.'

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A couple of weeks later I bumped into Joe Custer, who I knew from my Nascar days. He ran the Stewart-Haas Racing team and because we hadn't seen each other for a few years we chatted for over an hour. When I got home that evening I realized that I'd missed an opportunity. The owner of his team, Gene Haas, was just the kind of person I wanted to meet, so I called Joe immediately and asked what he thought.

'Do you think Mr Haas might be interested?' I said, after telling him the idea.

'Let's meet for a coffee,' said Joe. 'You can do the presentation to me and if I think Gene might be interested I'll pass it on to him.'

A couple of days later me and Joe met at a Starbucks in Mooresville, which is where a lot of Nascar teams are based, and I did the presentation.

'That's pretty interesting,' said Joe. 'OK, let me pass it to Gene. I'll get back to you when he's seen it.'

This wasn't a full-time project for me, you know. This was just a hobby. What made the presentation credible, though, was that I had Ferrari behind me. Not a bad starting point.

Exactly a month later, Joe Custer called me up and told me that Gene Haas was in town for the Nascar race in Charlotte.

'Gene wants to meet you,' said Joe. 'Let's all go out for dinner.'

This is where the project started to come alive, as Gene's interest turned it from an idea into something that could actually happen. *What if he actually says yes*, I remember thinking to myself. *Jeezoz Christ!*

At the time of it taking place I had no idea how the dinner went. Gene hardly said a word, which I now know to be normal, and I said about a million words, which has always been normal. It's the

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only thing I've ever been good at and during the whole damn night I don't think I came up for air once. Gene didn't fall asleep or get up and walk out, though, which was a good sign.

A few weeks passed and I didn't hear a word. *I must have messed it up*, I thought. *Oh well, back to the drawing board*. Then, completely out of the blue about two weeks later, Gene called me one day and asked for some more information. He still didn't say whether or not he was interested, though, and gave me no feedback on the presentation. It was a couple of questions and was over and done within five minutes.

Over the next few months, Gene started calling more and more, and later on we started meeting up at his office whenever he was in town. This went on for over a year, and although he never gave much away (Gene Haas would make a great poker player!) the fact that he was asking so many questions led me to believe that he was at least interested in the project. After another six months the point had arrived where Gene and I had to either take a shit or get off the pot. Stefano's offer wouldn't be on the table for ever so we had to act.

'OK,' said Gene, eventually and very quietly. 'Let's do it.'

'By the way,' he said. 'How are you going to get a licence, Guenther?'

Good question!

'Don't you worry about that,' I said. 'I'll get you a foking licence, Gene.'

Did I know for sure that I could get one? Of course I didn't. I was flying by the seat of my Italian shorts, as usual.

I might have been on good terms with people like Bernie and Charlie Whiting, but that meant nothing when it came to getting a licence.

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'Get yourself a lawyer,' they said. 'You're going to need one when it comes to the licence application.'

'Why the hell would I want a lawyer?' I replied. 'I have a Guenther.'

In hindsight I should maybe have taken their advice, but I thought to myself, *No, fok the lawyers!* I didn't want to start asking Gene for money just yet and I was confident that I could do it without one. Me, a control freak? Of course I am! I'm the best there is.

In all seriousness, what I had in my favour when this all started were a lot of contacts in Formula 1 (I'll tell you how I got into F1 later). Also, unlike these days, some people liked me and I had quite a good reputation. The first person I called was my old boss, Niki Lauda. If anybody could persuade Bernie and the FIA to grant us a licence, he could. Niki was also big on the idea of there being an American F1 team, which kind of helped.

A few days after speaking to Niki, I went to Europe on business and one night while I was fast asleep in my hotel room my phone started ringing. 'Who the fok is that?' I said, looking at the screen. I didn't recognize the number but answered it anyway.

'Yes, who is it?'

'Guenther, it's Niki. I'm in India with Bernie. He's here with me now and you're on loudspeaker. He's got some questions about your licence application.'

'Really?' I said, trying to get out of bed and almost falling on my ass in the process. 'OK, yes, Bernie. Fire away.'

I had to explain at two o'clock in the morning what our business plan was to Bernie Ecclestone. Talk about a foking wake-up call! It must have lasted about an hour and a half. Thanks to this, though, Bernie warmed to the idea, which was the best possible start. After

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that I had a similar conversation with Charlie Whiting, who was a good friend of mine, and then after that Jean Todt, who, at the time, was the president of the FIA. I didn't know Jean very well, but with the help of people like Stefano, who put in a good word for me, he too warmed to the idea.

So, what about the business plan? Well, the original plan had been to start off with parts from Ferrari that were a year old.

'But how can we be competitive?' asked Gene. 'One-year-old gearboxes, one-year-old engines, one-year-old suspension. That's no good. It needs to be like for like.'

In the end we went to see Stefano and Mattia Binotto, who was then head of the engine department at Ferrari, and we asked them, straight out, if we could have like for like.

'Well, there's nothing in the rules that says you can't,' said Stefano. 'Sure, why not?'

For them it was less of a headache as Ferrari wouldn't have to manufacture so many parts. It made perfect sense. That, then, became our business plan. In fact, I think it was Stefano who really fleshed out the concept, which eventually became known as a satellite team.

These days you couldn't get away with it, but at the time the number of parts a customer team could buy from a manufacturing team wasn't defined in the FIA rules, and for the simple reason that nobody had ever thought about it. At the time everything was still open for discussion and in order for us not to become another Caterham or HRT we had to think differently. Either a team runs out of money, as they both did, or an investor runs out of enthusiasm. Gene and I wanted to be competitive and with the money we had at our disposal, which was obviously Gene's money and was

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probably on a similar scale to the teams I've just mentioned, the satellite team concept was the only solution. Everybody benefited, though: Formula 1 got a new team with a less risky future than the ones that had gone to shit, we got a competitive car and support from a manufacturer (and a pretty good one at that), and Ferrari got a new customer that, unlike some, could pay their foking bills on time. What's not to like? A lot of people in the sport complained later on, but who cares? You can't please everyone all of the time. All we did, with the help of Stefano and Ferrari, was come up with a good idea that nobody else had thought of before.

Despite all the initial positivity, Gene and I getting a licence was not a forgone conclusion. Hell, no. As I said, a lot of teams had dropped out of the sport recently so we had to prove to the FIA that Gene and I were serious and that we would not just fall by the wayside after a few months. The USF1 debacle had made them nervous and we could understand why.

What I had to do first was submit to the FIA what's called a call for interest. I don't know if you still have to do this, but it's basically just a rundown of who is behind your application and allows you to go to the next step, which is to submit the application itself. The fee you had to pay to submit the application was €150,000. It was also non-refundable, so if your application wasn't successful, tough shit. This obviously took out the bullshitters. But if your application was successful, it gave you the right to present your ideas to the panel of the FIA.

I must admit that my ass did squeak a bit while we waited for confirmation that the application had been successful. It was all good in the end, though, and so me, Gene and Joe Custer were invited over to Geneva to do a full presentation to the FIA. This is

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where a lawyer should probably have been consulted but it was too late by then. The presentation lasted over two hours and was basically just a set of bullet points that I talked through one by one. And there was no script. I knew the subject inside out so I freestyled. A lot of people thought I was crazy but remembering a pre-prepared script would have demanded too much of my concentration. I'm a world-champion talker, remember, plain and simple. So let me foking talk!

After the presentation had finished and the panel had all disappeared, Gene asked me how I thought we'd done. 'Do you still think we'll get the licence?' he said. 'I honestly don't know, Gene,' I replied. 'That's up to the panel. We've done everything we possibly can, though.'

Just then I received a text message from a member of the FIA panel. I'd rather not say who sent it but the message read, 'Foking hell, Guenther. Nobody can spout shit like you can! If you can't get a licence after that performance, nobody can!'

'Actually, Gene,' I said, 'let's just say that I'm quietly confident.'

Thursday, 30 December 2021 – Castello Steiner, Northern Italy

Happy Christmas!

Apparently you can buy a T-shirt online with my face on it and the words 'We look like a bunch of wankers' printed underneath. Stuart Morrison, who is our director of communications, says it's something I said on the Netflix show *Drive to Survive*.

'Don't you remember, Guenther?' he asked me.

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'I can't even remember what I had for breakfast, Stuart, let alone what I said on a TV show I've never seen before. Anyway, why am I not getting any money for these T-shirts?'

Actually, that's a good question.

I've never watched a single episode of *Drive to Survive* and I probably never will. It's not because I'm against it or anything. If I was, I wouldn't appear on it. I think it's done an incredible job for Formula 1, and especially in America. My fear is that if I watch the show I won't like certain aspects of how I behave and will try and change how I do things. I know I'm not everyone's cup of tea but I'm actually OK with who I am. If you don't like it, tough shit.

Some people still believe that *Drive to Survive* is staged – or that some of it is staged – and let me assure you it isn't. You can't rehearse the shit I come out with. It's impossible! I know it's an overused saying, but what you see is what you get on there. At least with me. Some people seem to like it, which is great (they'll probably need therapy one day), and some people don't, which is fine. Seriously, I do not give a shit either way. I just go to work as normal and then sometimes a camera crew appears and occasionally they ask me questions and get in the foking way. I always try and answer those questions as honestly as possible and then I go away and carry on working. It's a simple format for me.

The question I get asked the most by the people who watch *Drive to Survive* is do I swear as much in real life. Believe it or not, I do have a filter, so if I'm in a room with some children or something, I'll try and calm it down. You know, just a couple of shits here and there. Nothing serious. In my work environment, though, it's different. I learned to speak English in a rally team and in rally

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it's foking obligatory to use bad language. You don't choose to do it.

Some of you might be aware of this but in 2019, I think it was, an F1 fan called Ana Colina bought me a swear box. We were in Baku and she just turned up with it one day. I forget how much I put in there in 2019 and 2020 but in 2021 it got hardly anything. I only swear when I'm excited about something, and because we weren't competitive that year I didn't have many reasons to get excited. If she'd bought me a swear box at the start of the 2018 season I'd have been able to take the whole team on a foking cruise at the end of it.

Christmas has been very quiet. Happily quiet as far as my family are concerned. Me, not so much. I don't mind a bit of peace and quiet occasionally but this is crazy. I call it 'the ceasefire' and it happens at the same time every year in F1. I'm used to getting between a hundred and a hundred and fifty emails a day and this week it's gone down to about fifteen. Somebody let me know they're alive, at least!

The only big news from Haas over the Christmas period is that our new car, the VF-22, passed one of its crash tests on 23 December. If you fail a crash test it's actually nothing too dramatic. The problem is psychological, as the people who are responsible, which in our case is our technical director, Simone Resta, and his team, are all trying to progress and look forward. If the car fails a crash test, or any test for that matter, it forces them to look back. Apart from getting the job done, there is nothing good coming out of having to do something a second time. The only things you're left with are less money and less time.

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Simone joined us from Ferrari last January, where he'd been

head of chassis engineering. He's the first technical director Haas have ever had and the VF-22 project started almost in parallel with his arrival.

The test wasn't on the complete monocoque, by the way, or even half of it. It was actually just the sides. Testing it determines where the monocoque needs to be strengthened and reinforced before the final crash test takes place. Because of the nature of Romain Grosjean's accident in Bahrain in 2020, the tests have become more stringent and the FIA have increased the impact forces that the monocoques need to withstand from 20 kilonewtons (newtons are the units of force) to 30 kilonewtons. That's quite a big step.

There are literally thousands of boxes that need ticking during the process of building a new F1 car and this one gave the entire team a nice little pre-Christmas confidence boost. But especially the technical team. All they have to do now is build the foking thing!

The only other piece of news from Haas over Christmas was confirmation that Mick Schumacher will become a Ferrari reserve driver for 2022. I think it's for eleven races, with Antonio Giovinazzi covering the rest. This obviously wasn't a surprise for us. It's always on the cards when you hire a development driver, and Mattia and I had talked about it a few weeks ago. A similar arrangement was put into practice last season when Mercedes brought in George to replace Lewis, when Lewis had Covid. This shows that Ferrari value Mick, which is good. Since joining us we've been feeding them information about his progress and they're happy with how things are going. And if Mick is ever called up to replace Charles or Carlos, we have Pietro Fittipaldi to take his place. We confirmed

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Pietro just before Abu Dhabi and for him this is great news as it gives him more chance of a drive. It's all good.

I'm still not sure what we're going to do for New Year yet. Whatever it is, though, it won't be too raucous. I'm too old to be getting drunk and losing a day at New Year. At my age you might not have many left! On New Year's Day we'll probably go for a walk in the mountains, but apart from that I'm going to be resting in preparation for next year. And, more importantly, next season.

OK, I'll see you on the other side.

Thursday, 13 January 2022 – Steiner Ranch, North Carolina, USA

2 p.m.

Howdy! Welcome to the Wild West.

We flew back from Italy to North Carolina on 4 January and, apart from a day trip to Los Angeles, which I'll come on to in a second, I won't be going anywhere now until the beginning of next month. It's my wife and daughter who I feel sorry for. Actually, most people who know me feel sorry for my wife and daughter! Luckily for them, our headquarters are just down the road in a town called Kannapolis. I have to be careful, though. With Covid going through the roof, it's best that I work from home as much as possible.

On Monday of this week I left the house at 5 a.m. and flew from Charlotte to Los Angeles for some meetings with Gene. I then flew back to Charlotte at 11.45 p.m. That's a 5,000-mile round trip.

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