

THE AUSTIN RACE WEEKEND GUIDE

# FORMULA 1 UNITED STATES GRAND PRIX 2026

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A title within reach.

A circuit that tests everything.

OCTOBER 23-25 | AUSTIN, TEXAS

Schedule, circuit guide and original race projections

Updated October 15, 2026

## YOUR AUSTIN READING GUIDE

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The confirmed weekend programme, the championship stakes and the decisions that could shape Sunday. Race projections are editorial estimates.

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Standard weekend: three practice sessions, qualifying and the Grand Prix.  
Austin local time is CDT (UTC-5); Eastern Time is EDT (UTC-4).

OCTOBER 23-25, 2026

# The confirmed F1 timetable

Austin hosts a standard race weekend with three practice sessions and no Sprint. The five F1 session times match the official Formula 1 and COTA listings. The columns below keep track time and the U.S. Eastern viewing time separate. [2, 3, 12]

| DATE        | SESSION           | AUSTIN - CDT   | EASTERN - EDT  |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| FRI, OCT 23 | <b>Practice 1</b> | 12:30-1:30 PM  | 1:30-2:30 PM   |
| FRI, OCT 23 | <b>Practice 2</b> | 4:00-5:00 PM   | 5:00-6:00 PM   |
| SAT, OCT 24 | <b>Practice 3</b> | 12:30-1:30 PM  | 1:30-2:30 PM   |
| SAT, OCT 24 | <b>Qualifying</b> | 4:00-5:00 PM   | 5:00-6:00 PM   |
| SUN, OCT 25 | <b>GRAND PRIX</b> | <b>3:00 PM</b> | <b>4:00 PM</b> |

## RACE START

**Sunday, October 25 | 3:00 PM CDT / 4:00 PM EDT**

COTA's wider event programme begins Thursday, October 22. The competitive F1 sessions begin Friday. Support-race and fan-activity times should be checked with the latest organiser programme. Session times remain subject to change.

## CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS

# COTA: a complete-car test

**5.513 KM**

CIRCUIT LENGTH

**56 LAPS**

SCHEDULED DISTANCE

**308.405 KM**

GRAND PRIX DISTANCE

**THE START AND THE FIRST COMMITMENT**

The steep uphill approach to Turn 1 changes the visual reference at the start. A wide entry can invite an attack, but the exit still determines the run that follows. Watch which driver leaves the corner with a stable car rather than judging the entire start at the first braking point. [1]

**FAST DIRECTION CHANGES, SLOW EXITS**

The opening esses put a premium on precision and balance. The later slower sequence rewards control at a different speed. Our analysis is that a car which excels only at one type of corner may struggle to repeat a complete lap when its tyres become less responsive.

**THE OVERTAKING SETUP**

The exit before the long straight toward Turn 12 matters to the attack that follows. A driver who spends too much grip preparing one corner can reach the next opportunity with fewer options. Read exit quality, electrical deployment and braking as one connected sequence.

CHECKED OCTOBER 15, 2026

# The title picture before Austin

The drivers table below is the official post-Singapore snapshot. Antonelli leads Russell by 102 points and Hamilton by 111. Six Grands Prix remain, including Austin, with a maximum of 150 race points still available to a driver. [4, 10]

| POS | DRIVER                 | TEAM            | POINTS     | GAP |
|-----|------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----|
| 1   | <b>Kimi Antonelli</b>  | Mercedes        | <b>340</b> | -   |
| 2   | <b>George Russell</b>  | Mercedes        | <b>238</b> | 102 |
| 3   | <b>Lewis Hamilton</b>  | Ferrari         | <b>229</b> | 111 |
| 4   | <b>Max Verstappen</b>  | Red Bull Racing | <b>221</b> | 119 |
| 5   | <b>Charles Leclerc</b> | Ferrari         | <b>215</b> | 125 |
| 6   | <b>Lando Norris</b>    | McLaren         | <b>201</b> | 139 |
| 7   | <b>Oscar Piastri</b>   | McLaren         | <b>138</b> | 202 |
| 8   | <b>Isack Hadjar</b>    | Red Bull Racing | <b>97</b>  | 243 |
| 9   | <b>Liam Lawson</b>     | Racing Bulls    | <b>75</b>  | 265 |
| 10  | <b>Pierre Gasly</b>    | Alpine          | <b>41</b>  | 299 |

## THE AUSTIN STORY

**A first chance to settle the drivers title - not a certainty.**

See page 18 for the title conditions. Our projected podium on page 17 keeps the championship open: a race victory and a title clincher are separate outcomes.

**RECENT FORM**

# From Singapore to Austin

## THE LATEST FORM REFERENCE

Max Verstappen won in Singapore ahead of Charles Leclerc and Kimi Antonelli. That is the most recent Grand Prix result, while the Mercedes driver still holds the championship advantage. Austin asks a different question: can the same car deliver through fast direction changes, heavy braking and a long acceleration zone? [6]

## WHY THE TRANSFER IS NOT AUTOMATIC

A strong street-circuit performance does not prove the same ranking at a purpose-built venue. An excellent qualifying car can lose its advantage over a longer stint if the tyres stop responding. The revealing comparison in Texas is sustained pace under similar conditions, with traffic and tyre age taken into account.

## THE FIRST COMPARISON TO MAKE

Watch whether a driver can repeat a clean line through the fast corners without surrendering the slow-corner exit. A car that looks settled at the start of a run but needs increasing steering correction later may force a strategic compromise. Friday will give the first useful Austin evidence; the opening order remains an editorial view.

## THE CENTRAL QUESTION

**Can recent form survive a different circuit test?**

## TEAM FOCUS

A Mercedes-AMG F1 W11 EQ Performance race car is shown from a low-angle, front-three-quarter perspective, driving on a racetrack. The car is silver with black and blue accents. The background shows a blurred racetrack, grandstands filled with spectators, and a tall red and white tower under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

# Mercedes: control and opportunity

## THE STRONGEST SEASON BASELINE

Mercedes leads the teams standings with 578 points, and its two drivers occupy the first two championship places. Those are compelling season credentials. The Austin challenge is to turn that position into a car balance that works for both a qualifying lap and an extended race stint. [4, 5]

## THE DECISION THAT MATTERS

The setup links corner grip with straight-line speed. An unstable rear on a slow-corner exit can cost acceleration all the way down the next straight. A setup that lets the driver commit early can be worth more than an impressive isolated speed-trap number. Look for repeatable exits, not one perfect sector.

## HOW THE TWO CARS CAN HELP

Two competitive cars create options at the first pit-stop decision. One can respond to a rival while the other protects track position, provided the gaps and available tyre sets allow it. Antonelli has the larger championship cushion; Russell still has every reason to pursue a strong individual weekend. This is a strategic possibility, not a claim about team orders.

## EDITORIAL VIEW

**The season record makes Mercedes the benchmark to challenge.**

## TEAM FOCUS

# Red Bull: the momentum test

## A SERIOUS CHALLENGER

Verstappen arrives after winning the latest Grand Prix. The case for a strong Austin result is therefore more than historical reputation, but recent success still has to be translated into this circuit. The key question is whether the car can maintain a predictable balance as the tyre condition changes. [6]

## WHERE THE LAP CAN BE WON

A driver who can place the car precisely through the fast direction changes may start the following section with a useful margin. That advantage can disappear if the rear tyres slide excessively out of the slower corners. Watch the sequence of compromises across a complete lap instead of treating every straight as an independent contest.

## THE ROUTE TO THE FRONT

A front-row start would simplify the race by reducing exposure to midfield traffic. If that is unavailable, the timing of the first stop becomes more important: extra pace has limited value when the car returns behind a slower train. Our projected podium includes Verstappen, with Friday degradation and Saturday grid position capable of changing that preference.

## EDITORIAL VIEW

**A podium contender whose recent momentum deserves attention.**

## TEAM FOCUS



# Ferrari: convert the opportunity

## TWO DIFFERENT SOURCES OF PRESSURE

Hamilton and Leclerc are both among the leading championship contenders, and Ferrari holds second in the teams table. The immediate objective in Texas is a complete weekend rather than a single eye-catching session. A car that can produce a strong lap still needs a clean strategy and manageable tyre wear on Sunday. [4, 5]

## THE QUALIFYING ADVANTAGE

Starting near the front gives the team more choice over when to react to an opponent. The useful sign is a driver reaching the slow sequence with the front tyres still responsive, without paying for it with rear instability under acceleration. Compare the car on both entry and exit, not just its most dramatic braking moment.

## THE RACE-DAY TEST

Ferrari must judge whether fresh-tyre speed is sufficient to justify giving away position. Splitting strategies can create an opportunity, but only if each car has a viable route through traffic. In the main editorial order both drivers finish inside the top five; that is an advance scenario which qualifying can strengthen or overturn.

## EDITORIAL VIEW

**Strong qualifying must become sustained Sunday execution.**

## TEAM FOCUS



# McLaren: keep the whole weekend

## THE CONSTRUCTORS BATTLE IS CLOSE

McLaren has 339 points to Red Bull Racing's 332, leaving only seven between them in the official teams table. That contest gives both cars a clear reason to maximize a clean finish. A recovery from a compromised grid position can be valuable, but preventing the compromise is the better starting point. [5]

## THE AUSTIN OPPORTUNITY

The fast changes of direction reward a driver who can commit without repeatedly correcting the steering. The viewing question is whether that confidence remains as the run progresses. If a car is quick only with a new set of tyres, the early pace can flatter a race plan that becomes difficult to sustain.

## MAKE THE SECOND CAR COUNT

Having both cars available near the leading group can protect against an opponent's early stop or open an alternative stint length. That flexibility disappears when one car loses time in traffic or an avoidable incident. The projected order gives Norris and Piastri points, while a stronger qualifying performance would justify moving them closer to the podium.

## EDITORIAL VIEW

**A clean two-car result can matter as much as peak lap time.**

## OFFICIAL TEAMS STANDINGS

# The fight beyond the podium

| POS | TEAM            | POINTS |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 1   | Mercedes        | 578    |
| 2   | Ferrari         | 444    |
| 3   | McLaren         | 339    |
| 4   | Red Bull Racing | 332    |
| 5   | Racing Bulls    | 100    |
| 6   | Alpine          | 68     |
| 7   | Haas F1 Team    | 30     |
| 8   | Audi            | 23     |
| 9   | Williams        | 12     |
| 10  | Aston Martin    | 7      |
| 11  | Cadillac        | 0      |

## WHERE A FEW POINTS MATTER

McLaren and Red Bull are seven points apart in the official table; the same gap separates Haas and Audi. Those margins make a lower points finish meaningful even when the television focus is on the leaders. A clean qualifying lap can reduce the need for a risky recovery through the field. [5]

## THE EDITORIAL WILDCARD

Bearman is a points challenger outside the main projected top ten. A well-timed stop or a stronger-than-expected qualifying performance could bring him in. Austin practice will show whether that case is stronger than the advance ranking.

## TECHNICAL VIEW

# The 2026 racing systems

## ACTIVE AERO CHANGES THE VISUAL STORY

The FIA's 2026 framework replaces the old DRS concept with movable front and rear wing elements. Straight Mode reduces drag at permitted sections, while Corner Mode restores the higher-downforce configuration for cornering. A visible wing change should therefore not automatically be described as the old one-second DRS advantage. [8]

## OVERTAKE MODE IS A SEPARATE TOOL

Additional electrical deployment can help an eligible following car attack. The useful viewing distinction is between changing the aerodynamic state and spending electrical energy to improve a passing opportunity. The Austin event instructions identify the usable activation points. Those published zones determine which passing options a driver can use. [8]

## WHY IT MATTERS AT COTA

An attack is prepared before the final braking zone. Exit speed, deployment and the condition of the tyres all influence whether a driver reaches the next corner close enough to challenge. Watch whether the following car gains early on the straight and whether it has enough grip left to complete the move without running wide.

## WHAT TO WATCH

**Follow the full attack: exit, deployment, braking and control.**

**PRACTICE GUIDE**

# Friday: find the race picture

## TWO SESSIONS, TWO JOBS

FP1 begins at 12:30 PM in Austin; FP2 follows at 4:00 PM. Both last one hour. The first session offers an initial view of balance and preparation, while the later session provides another chance to compare tyre behavior. There is no Friday Sprint Qualifying session at this event. [2]

## READ A RUN, NOT JUST A LAP

A quick time can reflect a new tyre, a lighter car or a favorable gap in traffic. A more useful race clue is the direction of a sequence: are lap times stable, and is the driver keeping a similar line? Compare equivalent tyre ages and acknowledge that fuel levels are not publicly transparent.

## THE SIGN THAT SHOULD CHANGE A PICK

Repeated sliding from slow corners or progressively larger corrections in the fast sequence can weaken a favorable advance view. Conversely, a driver with a modest headline time may be building a convincing longer run. The winner projection should move when the quality of the Austin evidence changes, rather than remain fixed to the championship order.

## SESSION WINDOW

**FRIDAY | 12:30 PM & 4:00 PM CDT**

A Formula 1 car, likely a Mercedes, is shown from a front-three-quarter view, driving on a track. The scene is set at sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light illuminating the car and the track. In the background, another car is visible, and the track's surroundings, including a tall structure, are silhouetted against the bright sky.**QUALIFYING GUIDE**

# Saturday: build the front row

## THE LAST PRACTICE WINDOW

FP3 is scheduled for 12:30-1:30 PM local time, with qualifying at 4:00-5:00 PM. Teams have time to compare what Friday revealed, but the final setup still has to serve the race. A sharper qualifying car is less useful if its balance becomes difficult to manage over a full stint. [2]

## HOW THE 22-CAR FORMAT WORKS

The 2026 format uses 18 minutes in Q1, with six cars eliminated, then 15 minutes in Q2 with another six eliminated. Ten cars reach the 13-minute Q3 session. On a busy track, preparing the tyres and finding clear space can matter as much as the nominal performance of the car. [9]

## THE EDITORIAL POLE LEAN

Antonelli is the advance pole selection, with Russell and Verstappen clear threats. It is a modest preference based on the broader competitive picture, not a predicted lap time. A car that requires a very narrow tyre window, a traffic interruption or an event-specific penalty can change the front row quickly.

## EDITORIAL POLE PICK

**Kimi Antonelli - revise after the Austin practice evidence.**

A Formula 1 car is shown in a pit lane, surrounded by several crew members in black racing suits and helmets. They are working on the car, which is a dark-colored open-wheel race car. The background shows a blurred racetrack and grandstands under a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is dynamic and focused on the technical aspects of a race.**RACE STRATEGY**

# Race strategy: pace meets traffic

## THE FIRST STOP IS A TRADE

An early stop can buy fresh-tyre pace, but the gain must cover the time spent entering, stopping and leaving the pits. It can fail if the driver returns behind slower cars. The key comparison is net race time after traffic, not simply the fastest lap produced on a fresh set.

## ONE STOP OR AN EXTRA ATTACK?

Medium-to-Hard is a plausible one-stop framework if the tyres remain competitive. Medium-Hard-Medium is a two-stop alternative when the pace recovered on fresher tyres can repay another visit to the pits, assuming suitable sets are available. These are scenarios to test against practice, not a declared optimum or a promised pit window.

## WHAT A NEUTRALIZATION CHANGES

A Safety Car or other interruption can alter the relative cost of a stop and bunch the field. The best response depends on tyre age, available sets, track position and how much racing remains. A nominally faster strategy can still lose if it gives up a position the driver cannot regain.

## THE DECIDING QUESTION

**Will the fresh-tyre gain repay the stop and the traffic?**

## TYRE GUIDE

# Tyres and changing conditions

## THE CONFIRMED AUSTIN RANGE

Pirelli has selected C2 as the Hard, C3 as the Medium and C4 as the Soft. White, yellow and red identify those event roles. The useful question is how each option behaves at this track in 2026, rather than assuming an identical stint length from a previous season. [7]

## READ THE TRADE-OFF

A softer option can make an early attack more effective but may require earlier management. The harder option needs to produce usable grip, not merely survive many laps. Watch whether a driver can still put power down cleanly after the opening burst of pace; that influences both overtaking and the next stop decision.

## WEATHER IS A SCENARIO, NOT A CLAIM

This edition does not assign a rain probability or exact race-day temperature ten days ahead. In a hot, dry scenario, managing sliding and surface temperature becomes central. Cooler or wet conditions change warm-up and grip demands. Use the race-week forecast and official session information to refresh the scenario; no wet race is assumed in the projected order.

## OFFICIAL NOMINATION

**C2 HARD | C3 MEDIUM | C4 SOFT**

ORIGINAL EDITORIAL ESTIMATES

# The projected Sunday order

Main lean: Antonelli converts a strong weekend, Verstappen remains the closest race challenger, and Russell completes the podium. The order is an original editorial estimate, to be revisited after practice and qualifying.

| FINISH | DRIVER                 | RACE POINTS |
|--------|------------------------|-------------|
| P1     | <b>Kimi Antonelli</b>  | 25          |
| P2     | <b>Max Verstappen</b>  | 18          |
| P3     | <b>George Russell</b>  | 15          |
| P4     | <b>Charles Leclerc</b> | 12          |
| P5     | <b>Lewis Hamilton</b>  | 10          |
| P6     | <b>Lando Norris</b>    | 8           |
| P7     | <b>Oscar Piastri</b>   | 6           |
| P8     | <b>Isack Hadjar</b>    | 4           |
| P9     | <b>Liam Lawson</b>     | 2           |
| P10    | <b>Pierre Gasly</b>    | 1           |

POLE LEAN / PODIUM

**Antonelli / Antonelli - Verstappen - Russell**

Refresh this order after representative long runs, the final grid and the actual weather. A penalty, a reliability problem or an interruption can change several places. The listed points assume a full-points Grand Prix classification.

**VERIFIED CHAMPIONSHIP PERMUTATIONS**

# Could the title be settled here?

Formula 1 confirms that Antonelli can become champion in Austin. Its published scenario requires him to win, Russell to finish ninth or lower, and Hamilton fifth or lower. Verstappen's finishing position does not prevent the title in that combination. [10]

**ANTONELLI****WINS THE GRAND PRIX****RUSSELL****P9 OR LOWER****HAMILTON****P5 OR LOWER**

## WHY A POINTS TIE CAN STILL BE ENOUGH

Five Grands Prix remain after Austin, worth at most 125 points to a driver. Formula 1's clinching calculation includes the championship countback, which is why a ninth-place finish for Russell is sufficient in the published winning scenario. The published condition already accounts for the tie-break on race wins. [10]

## WHAT OUR MAIN RACE ORDER WOULD MEAN

Our projected Antonelli win and Russell third place would put them on 365 and 253 points: a 112-point gap, with 125 still available. In that specific editorial scenario, the championship would continue beyond Austin. This arithmetic explains the forecast; it does not report an event that has happened.



WATCH THE WEEKEND UNFOLD

# Your U.S. viewing plan

Apple TV is the official U.S. home for all Formula 1 race-weekend sessions in 2026, including practice, qualifying and the Grand Prix. Open the event's live listing in advance and confirm the programme start; the times below are session starts. [11]

FRIDAY, OCT 23

**1:30 PM ET / 12:30 PM CDT**

FP1: balance, preparation and first tyre clues.

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FRIDAY, OCT 23

**5:00 PM ET / 4:00 PM CDT**

FP2: compare the longer runs and changing balance.

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SATURDAY, OCT 24

**1:30 PM ET / 12:30 PM CDT**

FP3: the final practice opportunity.

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SATURDAY, OCT 24

**5:00 PM ET / 4:00 PM CDT**

Qualifying: clear track, tyre preparation and the front row.

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SUNDAY, OCT 25

**4:00 PM ET / 3:00 PM CDT**

Grand Prix: start, first stops, late tyre condition and title maths.

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At the start, watch the exit from Turn 1. During the first stint, follow the gaps that determine a viable pit window. In the closing phase, compare the actual results with the title conditions on page 18.

## EDITORIAL NOTES

# Disclaimer & Sources

## PUBLICATION SNAPSHOT

Checked October 15, 2026. Timetable, circuit facts, standings, tyre nominations and championship conditions come from the linked primary sources. All main F1 sessions are future events at publication. Austin times are CDT; Eastern times are EDT. Schedules and event instructions can change.

## EDITORIAL PROJECTIONS

The pole pick, podium, top ten and strategy scenarios are original Digital World Pulse opinions. They are not results, live odds or calibrated probabilities. The race order assumes a normal full-points classification and should be refreshed after practice, qualifying, the official grid and the race-week forecast.

## VISUALS AND INDEPENDENCE

Images are AI-generated editorial illustrations with generic cars and people; they do not document verified scenes, exact 2026 team machinery or a future result. Digital World Pulse is independent and is not affiliated with or endorsed by Formula 1, the FIA, teams or broadcasters.

## CHECKED PRIMARY SOURCES - CLICK TO OPEN

- [1] [Official F1 event and circuit facts](#)
- [2] [Official F1 local-time timetable](#)
- [3] [COTA event programme](#)
- [4] [F1 drivers standings](#)
- [5] [F1 teams standings](#)
- [6] [F1 Singapore race report](#)
- [7] [Pirelli: confirmed Austin compounds](#)
- [8] [FIA: 2026 cars and racing systems](#)
- [9] [F1: 2026 qualifying format](#)
- [10] [F1: Austin title permutations](#)
- [11] [Apple: official U.S. F1 coverage](#)
- [12] [FIA: 2026 Sprint calendar](#)