

# THE MOTORMOUTHS OF MOTORSPORT



MURRAY WALKER (RIGHT) WITH REGULAR MACAU GRAND PRIX COMMENTATOR ALAN HYDE

Few will remember that the most famous motorsport commentator of all time, the late Murray Walker, once made the annual pilgrimage to Macao to commentate on the Grand Prix. Walker spent almost a quarter of a century commentating on Formula 1 during his distinguished career.

Inevitably, over the course of thousands of F1 Grand Prix laps, Walker would occasionally trip over his tongue, on one occasion declaring “there’s nothing wrong with the car except it’s on fire”, and “with half the race gone there is half the race to go” on another. It is somewhat unfair, though, that Walker became as celebrated for his ‘Murrayisms’, as his slip-ups were dubbed, as his astonishing

knowledge of the sport, quick eye and lightning reactions in the commentary box.

It is common for armchair enthusiasts to criticize a race commentator, but keeping one eye on dozens of racing cars hurtling around a track and the other on the minutiae of the timing screen data, while at the same time verbally recounting what is going on – often with the voice of a director in your ear – is far from easy.

Macao’s Guia Circuit is famous for providing drivers with a unique set of challenges, but these also apply to the commentators, who have to keep an eagle-eye on every inch of the 6.2km track and its 26 turns. For English-language Macau Grand Prix commentary box regulars Alan Hyde and David Addison, however, it is a challenge they embrace, and the rewards are both personal as well as professional.

Says Alan: “Working at Macao is a privilege, and I have never lost sight of that since the first day I commentated there in 2012. Not only was that a wonderful experience, it was also quite a challenge – there was only me! So it meant a lot of talking and a lot of learning all at the same time, but I was richly rewarded with a wonderful personal moment. Rob Huff is a master of Macao, and I was there to witness his genius in the flesh – enough to secure his FIA WTCC title. I have known Rob since he competed in junior championships in the UK, and I know his



DAVID ADDISON (LEFT) IN THE COMMENTARY BOX WITH TWO-TIME MACAU GUIA RACE WINNER EMANUELE PIRRO

family well. Wonderful people, and I knew his mum would be at home watching, as she wasn't too keen on flying. I was the soundtrack to a mum watching her son conquer the world in Macao."

But before a word is spoken into the microphone each year, hours of work go into the preparation starting long before either Alan or David set foot in Macao. With typically six or more races on the Macao Grand Prix schedule, the commentators must learn about hundreds of competitors and – particularly for the English-language commentators – try to master and memorize the phonetic pronunciation of Chinese names.

With the focus of broadcasts or live streams on the race track, viewers rarely get to see the commentators at work. The commentary booth is a crowded, busy, high-stress working environment, particularly during live broadcasts, packed with screens and equipment for multi-way communication.

Learning to listen to a director, keep an eagle eye on multiple screens and speak at the same time is a skill which can only come with experience. Says David: "You do get used to it. Like pressing the clutch and changing gear in a car, you learn to do it. After a

while you don't notice it happening, but you need to set the volume of the director just right so that when he speaks it doesn't come as a shock and you stop speaking in surprise."

So, what's the most difficult part of this already-challenging area of motorsport? "The boring bits!" admits David. "Exciting races are easy, but it is the 'padding' that is a challenge, when you are waiting for something to happen. A race stoppage and a delay after a big crash makes the job come alive because it isn't just describing the action, it is about shaping a conversation, working out what to talk about next, listening to instructions, cueing advert breaks or interviews..."

But challenges aside, the rewards are memorable, particularly at Macao. Recalls Alan: "I've known quite a few drivers on their route to stardom, and that always adds an extra special element to Macao. Watching António Félix da Costa win his second Grand Prix at Macao in 2016 was also a special moment. Having already won once, he returned as a very successful works BMW driver, just to see if he could win two. And of course, he could. An incredibly nice guy who I had got to know, and talking about his second win was an emotional joy.

"Dan Ticktum's dramatic final lap to win his first Macao Grand Prix was a commentator's dream, and nightmare. Nightmare because as the drama unfolds in front of your eyes and your vocal cords, you still have to remember to breathe – which was difficult. The wonderful lead battle between Ferdinand Habsburg and Sérgio Sette Câmara ended with neither in the lead after Fisherman's Bend, and Dan swept through to take his maiden win. There are too many memories – every year has its drama, but I never forget, talking about it is a privilege!"

While life as a motorsport commentator can put you in the firing line from fans, who today have any number of platforms from which to voice their displeasure at the smallest slip up, it is nevertheless an immensely rewarding career. Pitfalls aside, being the voice of some of the sport's most memorable moments creates a unique connection with fans. While the fallibility of the commentator might sometimes be the object of mirth, it can also bring the relationship closer. This was something Murray Walker himself was acutely aware of, even using a line from one of his most oft-quoted 'Murrayisms' for the title of his autobiography: "Unless I'm very much mistaken... I am very much mistaken!" ❧



AS WELL AS TV / LIVE STREAM COMMENTARY, A SEPARATE CIRCUIT COMMENTARY IS PROVIDED FOR SPECTATORS AT MACAO, WITH THE TEAM SWITCHING BETWEEN CHINESE, PORTUGUESE AND ENGLISH