

# Drive to Survive documentary helping bring in new generation of US F1 fans

[Giles Richards](#)

Formula One will revel in its newfound success in the US at this weekend's Miami Grand Prix. The sport is resurgent in the country F1 has long wanted to break and a key factor has been the popularity of the Netflix documentary series Drive to Survive. Little wonder then that the streaming service chose Miami as the backdrop to announce the series has been recommissioned for a further two seasons.

F1 is holding two races in the US for the first time since 1984, with Miami and the US GP in Austin. Next year [it will add Las Vegas](#) to the mix. The sport's owners, Liberty Media who took over F1 in 2017, have made no secret of their ambition to build F1's profile in the US and Drive to Survive has been vital.

Team principals have acknowledged the part the TV show has played in bringing their sport to a wider audience, even while some drivers such as Max Verstappen have criticised that it is played for dramatic effect to sell a narrative.

Verstappen has a point but the format unquestionably

chimes with viewers. In Miami, the American former world champion Mario Andretti emphasised the part the series had played in revitalising interest in his home country. "It was always said that F1 was the Olympics of motor racing and it was well received, always respected in every way but it's picked up a new fervour now," he said. "Especially the way it was exposed in Drive to Survive. That's rekindled something but also brought on some new interest which is good, it's fabulous for the sport."

The series was launched in 2018 and season four, which premiered this year, attracted its biggest audience, achieving the Netflix top 10 status in 56 different countries. The audience growth watching the sport in the US has been steady since then and crucially is hitting the younger demographic F1 wants to attract.

**We used to joke in the early days that it was Game of Thrones in fast cars**

*Paul Martin, Drive to Survive producer*

Drive to Survive is made by the Box to Box production company and Paul Martin is its founder and producer of the series.

"When we went to the Austin GP it really hit home," he said. "Attendance had gone up and tickets sold out in record time and people in hotels and at the track just kept referencing the show. When a woman from Texas came up and told me her favourite driver was Esteban Ocon and I thought: 'Wow, this show has really broken through'."

Martin paid tribute to the sport itself and Netflix as being

fundamental in driving the surge. "It has young, good-looking guys, driving fast cars in amazing locations," he said. "Behind it all you have powerful people and brands fighting it out. We used to joke in the early days that it was Game of Thrones in fast cars.

"It was the sport, our story telling and Netflix played a huge role as well. They put it in front of households that probably never would have found it on a traditional broadcaster."



Netflix series producer Paul Martin says part of the appeal is 'young, good-looking guys, driving fast cars in amazing locations'. Photograph: Peter Fox/Getty Images

On the opening weekend of this season the Bahrain GP was held on the same day as Nascar Cup and IndyCar races. Adam Stern of the Sports Business Journal kept track of the viewing figures. Nascar picked up just over 4m viewers, F1 1.3m and Indycar 954,000.

The sport is broadcast by ESPN in the US and this was F1's second-highest audience figures on cable TV after the 1995 Brazilian GP. It was up by almost 400,000 on the 2021 season opener.

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ESPN has enjoyed increasing ratings since it took over broadcasting F1 in 2018 moving from an average of 554,000 that year to 927,000 in 2021, yearly rises tallying with the growth in popularity of each subsequent series of Drive to Survive.

Filming is already under way for season five of Drive to Survive and will continue this weekend. "It's amazing to see the buzz around F1 at the moment," said Martin. "I think Miami is going to be the pinnacle of that."