



CATALONIA & MOTORSPORT MATCHING HISTORY & PASSION

Jules Goux is not a name that you hear about a great deal. He is the French racer whose superb performances in the 1908 and 1909 Catalan Cup races in Spain, laid the foundations for the motor racing fanatics the Catalonian region is famous for.

These were the first motor races ever held in Catalonia, at the town of Stiges, near Barcelona. This is where it all started for Goux. He went on to become the first ever Frenchman (and the first European) to win the Indianapolis 500 in 1913. Goux was also successful at Le Mans, winning the Sarthe Cup in 1912.

Europe's involvement in the first World War interrupted his career and after he completed his military service, the French racer returned to the track in 1921. He won the inaugural Italian Grand Prix held in Brescia that year, but his next visit to the top step of the podium didn't come until a long five years later, when he won both the 1926 French and Spanish Grands Prix.

It is surprising that despite not being a Spaniard, Goux' early and later career successes in Spain and particularly in Catalonia, had set in motion the establishment and success of one of the world's longest running Grands Prix, the Spanish Grand Prix, which celebrated its centenary in 2013.

The Spanish Grand Prix started out as a Touring Car race which was run on a road circuit located in Guadarrama back in 1913. There would be several changes and interruptions due to economic difficulties and the Spanish Civil War, but it would be the region of Catalonia that would herald the return of Grand Prix racing to Spain in 1946, when the Pedralbes street circuit, near Barcelona, played host.

In 1951, legendary Argentinian racer, Juan Manuel Fangio, won his first of five world championships at the 1951 Spanish Grand Prix in an Alfa Romeo at the Pedrables street circuit. In 1954, British Ferrari racer Mike Hawthorn took

the victory at the same Barcelona street track.

The 1955 Le Mans 24 Hour tragedy – that took the lives of more than 80 people – resulted in new spectator safety regulations and the scheduled Spanish Grand Prix was cancelled that year. It was clear that the pedestrian-lined street track at Pedralbes, like so many others used in that era around the world, would never be used again.

In a bid for Spain to return to the world of international motor racing, the Royal Automobile Club of Spain commissioned a new permanent racing circuit north of Madrid at Jarama, while



Catalonia refurbished their Montjuïc street circuit, once again in Barcelona. One of the greatest drivers of the era, Lotus F1 driver Jim Clark, won the non-championship Grand Prix at Jarama in 1967.

The Spanish Grand Prix then alternated between the tight, slow and twisty Jarama and the fast, wide and sweeping Catalonian Montjuïc street circuit, which gained its first Formula One race in 1969, with flying Scot Jackie Stewart the winner. Jarama would host the Spanish Grand Prix in even-numbered years and Montjuïc alternated with it. The 1970 Spanish Grand Prix saw Belgian Jacky Ickx and Briton Jackie Oliver get involved in a fiery accident, both drivers escaping with burns. The race was won by Stewart and he completed a hat-trick of Spanish Grand Prix wins in 1971. Austrian superstar Niki Lauda won his first of 25 races at Jarama in 1974.

The 1975 Spanish Grand Prix at the Montjuïc street circuit was marred by



tragedy when the rear wing of Rolf Stommelen's car broke off after a crash, killing four spectators. The race was stopped, Jochen Mass was declared the winner and half points awarded. This clearly defined the end of the Montjuïc street circuit as a Spanish Grand Prix venue, leaving Jarama as the sole Grand Prix venue in Spain.

As depicted brilliantly in the Ron Howard directed 2013 feature movie "Rush", The 1976 Spanish Grand Prix saw Briton James Hunt take advantage of Lauda's broken ribs (suffered in a tractor accident) to win, but he was disqualified following the race after his car was found to be 1.8 inches too wide. Hunt's McLaren team successfully appealed the





decision. This would prove to be pivotal in helping Hunt gain the world championship that year.

The Spanish Grands Prix of 1977 and 1978 saw Mario Andretti dominate in his ground-effects equipped Lotus 78. The 1980 race was of particular note for

Australian racing fans. On the Friday morning of race weekend, temperamental and controversial FISA president Jean-Marie Balestre announced that the Spanish Grand Prix would not be counted as a championship race, so none of the factory teams (Ferrari, Renault and Alfa Romeo) bothered to compete. Only the independent constructors took part. The race was won by reigning world champion Alan Jones in his Williams, but this victory was not added to his career tally due to Balestre's last minute decision.

Spectacular racer, Gilles Villeneuve, won the Spanish Grand Prix in 1981, hustling his ill-handling Ferrari to keep four much better-handling cars at bay, to take victory on the twisty and confined circuit. It was one of the Canadian's most memorable drives. Despite the excitement of that event, the Spanish Grand Prix at Jarama was dropped from the world championship, returning five years later in 1986.

In 1985, the Jerez circuit in southern Spain was commissioned for construction to promote tourism in the region and was completed in time to become a part of the 1986 world championship. The inaugural Spanish Grand Prix at Jerez was memorable for staging one of the closest finishes in Formula One history, with the furious battle between Ayrton Senna and Nigel Mansell culminating in a side by side finish, the Brazilian legend taking the win by just a single hundredth of a second. The Brit won the race the following year with Senna winning in 1989 and Prost in 1990 with Ferrari. The 1990 event was the last Spanish Grand Prix held at Jerez, although the circuit returned to the Formula One world championship in 1994 and 1997 as the European Grand Prix.

The Catalonian government and its people's passion for motor racing never waned during the Jarama and Jerez years and construction of the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, located close to the



city, was well underway by the late '80s.

In 1991, the Spanish Grand Prix returned to its most cherished home, Catalonia. The undulating and challenging 4.6 kilometre circuit has since hosted 24 consecutive Grands Prix, to date.

The 1992 event co-incided with Barcelona's hosting of the 1992 Olympics, so the race was known as the Grand Prix of the Olympic Games. The Williams team dominated the racing in Catalonia at every event until 1994. Michael Schumacher won the race six times, including his first win for Ferrari in the rain drenched 1996 Spanish Grand Prix. Finnish champion Mika Hakkinen won the race three times and almost made it four when his car failed on the final lap in 2001.

Fernando Alonso's meteoric rise in the sport gave the Spanish Grand Prix an added boost since 2003 with hundreds

of thousands of fanatical local fans visiting the event. It would be his third appearance at his home Grand Prix and his pole position and victory was received by a rapturous track invasion from his adoring fans in 2006. It would be seven long seasons until he won his home race again, in 2013, but the Spaniard gained second place four times in 2003, 2005, 2010 and 2012.

The 2012 race saw more history created in Catalonia, with the first ever Grand Prix victory for a Venezuelan driver, Pastor Maldonado, who in the process gave the Williams team its first Grand Prix win since 2004.

From 2013, Spain was hosting two Grands Prix, the Spanish Grand Prix at the Circuit de Barcelona and the European Grand Prix at Valencia, located to the south of Barcelona on the Iberian Coast. Valencia hosted five Grands Prix from 2008 to 2012 before

financial difficulties ended its tenure. This made Catalonia, and its historical city of Barcelona, the sole custodian of the country's century long Grand Prix heritage yet again. **NSL**

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It is steeped in history and full of beauty. It is also as modern as it is classic. It is a metropolis of seven million people that is surrounded by the majestic Pyrenees Mountains and flanked by hundreds of kilometres of magnificent Iberian coastline. This is Catalonia and its incredible capital city, Barcelona, home of the Spanish Grand Prix for the 24th occasion in 2014.

Catalonia is one of the most individual locations in Europe. Catalonia's distinction is expressed through its language and its political tradition, being an autonomously governed community within Spain. Like all Spanish people, they are very passionate about their sport, helped in no small way by the incredible success of the country's double World Champion, Fernando Alonso, who is from Oviedo in Northern Spain. www.catalunya.com

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