

**Ipsos ASI**

The Advertising Research Specialists



# Sensational **F1** Continues

Sponsorship Perspectives

September 2009

## Simon Lincoln, sponsorship expert at Ipsos MORI, talks about the impact and the trends in brand associations with Formula One.

*Formula One is never far away from the headlines these days: so it seems appropriate to share Ipsos ASI's thoughts and data at this difficult time for the sport.*

### Sensational F1!

Brawn GP and Jenson Button sensationally dominated the first seven Grand Prix of 2009, winning six. McLaren had a disastrous start the season with an uncompetitive car and some poor management decision-making at the first Grand Prix in Australia. Red Bull appeared to have the fastest car but repeatedly failed to make it count when it mattered. Oh, and there were a few off-circuit disputes about the future of the sport and Renault's admission that three of their former employees conspired to influence the outcome a race.

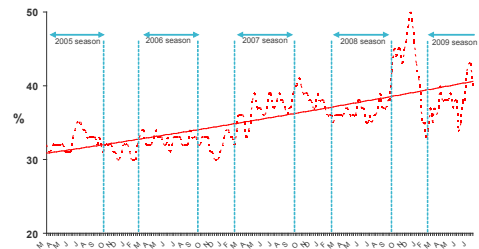


### What is the impact of this?

Interest in the sport reached an all-time high in October / November 2008 as Lewis Hamilton became the sport's youngest World Champion and as Honda sensationally pulled out the sport. At the time, this level of interest compared favourably with the nation's obsession – football. Whilst interest in the sport fell back during the close season, the “Brawn GP factor” kicked in and interest quickly rose – peaking during the British Grand Prix in late June. With the current on-and-off-the-track headlines, I see no reason why interest should not reach similar levels in future months.

Ipsos ASI's *interest in Formula One* measure asks people how they follow the sport (watching on TV, reading in the news / online, listening on the radio etc.). As a result, it is very sensitive to how people

### Any Interest in Formula One



Base: GB adults aged 16-64 (4 week rolling data)

Source: Ipsos MORI GB Sponsortest

interact with the sport, which is important for the sponsors of Formula One and how they plan their activation.

## So what is the trend in brand associations with F1?

A mixed bag depending on whom you support. Marlboro has seen its association with the sport decline consistently since 2005. This is hardly surprising given that bans on tobacco advertising have forced them to replace their name and logo with subliminal 'barcode' branding on the Ferrari car. Despite this gradual fall, Marlboro does demonstrate the impact longevity with a sport can have – the brand's spontaneous association remains above more visible sponsors.

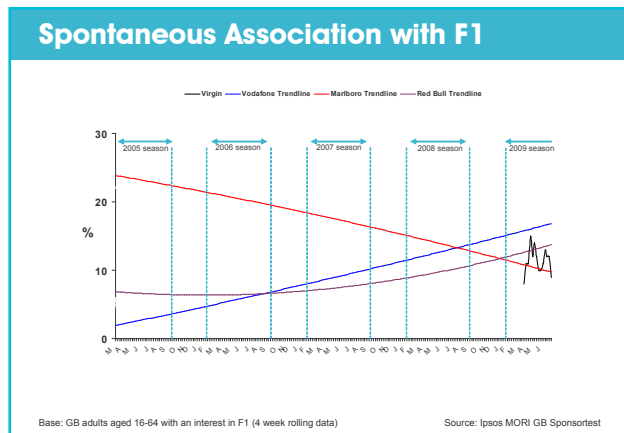
Hamilton's rise to prominence and the subsequent success of the McLaren team have resulted in great gains for Vodafone in recent years. With the stepchange in interest coinciding with Hamilton's first season in F1, we can assume these gains are, at least in part, a function of his success.

Red Bull, for so long the nearly men of Formula One, is finally fulfilling its potential. On track success has

resulted in greater cut-through among the clutter of brands vying for our attention. However, it continues to be its own worst enemy as according to popular belief, Webber and Vettel have the fastest car, but as yet still haven't produced the goods consistently on the track. If they can, the team are one of the few the British public will probably warm to, with Red Bull reaping the benefit of the association.

And, what of Virgin and Brawn GP? "Sensational" is a term I would use for the entrance of both brands into the Formula One arena. Jenson's early season success has seen Virgin cut-through the clutter well making a grand early entrance. However, the investment required to maintain a sponsorship that generates the cut-through achieved to date is arguably more than the brand is willing to pay – highlighted by the switch to Manor Motorsport for the 2010 season.

Despite the off-track politics of Formula One, which keeps it on the front as well as back pages, the sport is unpredictable, entertaining and, from a domestic perspective, offers recent and continuing British success. This can only be good news for sponsors who are willing to leverage their association with the viewing public. Whilst a few sponsors have / are leaving the sport at present, the entertainment value of Formula One and the sport's global reach mean it remains an attractive proposition for global brands. As a fan of the sport, I'm looking forward to the season finale in Abu Dhabi.





## About Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI is one of the largest and best known research companies in the UK and a key part of the Ipsos Group, a leading global research company. With a direct presence in 60 countries, our clients benefit from specialist knowledge drawn from our five global practices: public affairs research, advertising testing and tracking, media evaluation, marketing research and consultancy, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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