

Abu Dhabi Week sits down with Richard Cregan, Yas Marina Circuit's CEO and man responsible for turning the track into one of the best in the world



How has Yas Marina Circuit and the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix developed since the inaugural race in 2009?

I think there's two different aspects – the race itself and the organisation that our team put into it. This has evolved in a positive way because people have got familiar with the event. We know what customers are expecting, we also know what's required from the FIA and FOM so that's worked very well for us. In terms of the venue itself, I think it has evolved and is looking more mature, as is Yas Island, so as a destination it's becoming an even nicer place to visit.

What we can expect to see at this year's Grand Prix in terms of activation and events around the track?

Well, once again Yasalam has been a massive activation for the Grand Prix and that's been going really well since kicking off on the Corniche. In terms of the event on Yas, we obviously have the Porsche races, the GP2 and of course the main event itself. One of the main things we've been looking at over the past two years is understanding exactly what the customer wants in terms of entertainment at the Oasis areas and the F1 village, and I think we've been able to tailor the needs of the customer and deliver according to that. So we've upgraded our

food and beverage supply, we have a different range of entertainment, more chill out areas and we've got a lot more stuff for children and families.

The Brazilian Grand Prix will be the last race this year. Are you disappointed not to be hosting the season finale?

What's important for us is the time of year. It's just at the right time to fit in with Ramadan, Eid and Christmas and, of course, the climate at the moment is absolutely perfect. People can sit outside and they can actually enjoy the event. So, it's not really an issue for us. The most important thing is that everyone who buys a ticket feels they are getting a fantastic weekend, great value for money and good entertainment – as long as we can do that, we're happy.

Sebastian Vettel has already got the Drivers' Championship tied up. Do you think this will affect the quality of the race?

Not at all – there's still a lot to play for in terms of team's positions in the championship and also for the drivers a little bit further down. If you look at how Sebastian has tried to make every race his own this year, I don't think it will be any different in Abu Dhabi. He's very focused on statistics and with the championship already sewn up I think he's going to really go for it just to improve his own record book. Of course, we've got two DRS zones [sections of the track, usually on the straights, where the driver can use his drag reduction system] as well, which is going to make it a very exciting, overtaking race this time round.

What do you think makes the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix stand out from other events on the F1 calendar?

I still believe we've got one of the best Formula One circuits in the championship and the venue itself is stunning – a lot of thought and planning went into it and the delivery from Aldar and Cebarco was second to none. All of the unique features incorporated into the design of the track itself add great value to the F1 event and really make us stand out.

There were plans earlier in the year to change certain sections of the track. Why were these plans shelved?

We had three areas in mind to change, based on previous years' experience of overtaking and so on. But with the technical changes this season like the DRS, the KERS system and Pirelli coming in as the tyre supplier, we decided to wait and see, rather than spend a lot of money and potentially destroy what is already a great track. Looking back at how the season has gone so far, we're very happy that we did hold off because these changes have given us a really exciting racing.

Do you have a favourite part of the track?

I just love the whole track really. I mean, turns one, two and three are pretty special – I just think that the elevation change there is pretty spectacular and then when it goes down into the North Grandstand, that whole section is just beautiful. But then if you go down turn 11, 12 and 13 into the South Grandstand, you've got the backdrop of the marina and the hotel, which provide some particularly stunning views – I think it's a bit of a hidden treasure in some ways in terms of vantage points.

Can we expect to see any new motoring events coming to Yas in the future, like the

MotoGP for example?

This year has been a big one for us in terms of commercialisation of the venue so we've decided to wait and make sure that MotoGP would fit into our calendar in regards to customer satisfaction and also, equally important, payback and profitability. We're still in discussions with MotoGP and we're keeping an open mind about it but it certainly won't happen for a couple years.

The circuit has also been reaching out to local residents by hosting a number of community events on and around the track. How successful has this been and will it continue?

Definitely! We open up the track on Tuesday nights for everybody – we've got an average of about 500-600 people turning up every week. It's fantastic to be able to open up the circuit to the community and provide a safe place for them to walk, run or cycle. We've also got the Tri Yas, which was a great success, and we're actually looking at doing a series of triathlons. Then there's the ADNIC Yas Run, which is happening after the F1. Community outreach is just as important as anything else we do and we're going to continue looking for opportunities to basically make Yas Marina Circuit a meeting place for the whole city.

How do you think YMC has helped to raise the profile of Abu Dhabi as a city?

Well, I definitely think it's ticked all the boxes. The original idea behind bringing F1 here was to create an awareness of Abu Dhabi and it's certainly achieved that and will continue to do so. Equally important, it's brought the community together in terms of delivering world-class events – the cooperation that we get from all the different authorities is amazing and I think that this is what has made it such a success so far.

Jon Muller