



# ***THE OFF-TRACK BATTLE THAT WILL DEFINE F1'S TITLE FIGHT***

FORM: CREATIVE ARTICLE  
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Hamilton vs Vettel for a fifth title is this year's headline contest. But the Mercedes vs Ferrari vs Red Bull superteam slugfest will be just as ferocious. BEN ANDERSON takes a peek beneath the leading contenders' intricately sculpted forms

Formula 1 is a gladiatorial contest between drivers; a political dogfight between team bosses. But the true nature of the beast is tireless pursuit of engineering excellence. Mostly, therefore, F1 is a battle of brains: the ingenious ideas of the brightest minds forged in carbon fibre, pitted against those of their rivals. A skirmish of pens, drawing boards and CAD machines. Think to victory: design or die.

The cars are as intricate as Swiss clockwork; the engines a complex mix of fuel-starved, turbo-charged, gas-recycling, electro-powered, hybrid wizardry - capable of producing close to 1,000bhp.

The undoubted master of this sorcery in the V6 era is Mercedes, but the new aerodynamic rules and wider tyres introduced for 2017 have, to some degree, scrambled the picture. Ferrari came close to denying Mercedes last season, such was its leap forward with the SF70H - arguably its best car in a decade.

Snapping at Ferrari's heels came Red Bull, charging into contention as the season wore on, too late to affect the outcome, but potent enough to upset the other big beasts. Red Bull - F1's V8-era master - has been dethroned in the V6 age, but can never be discounted, thanks to its biggest weapon: Adrian Newey, the greatest F1 designer of the past 25 years.

Can his maverick genius outwit the methodical diligence of Mercedes and the passionate fever of Ferrari? This is the battle that will define the 2018 title race, fought out on the drawing boards and CAD screens of F1's top three teams.

