

The Village People

Mayfield Media Strategies' Steve Monnington visits the A1 GP Global Village an exhibition and sporting event rolled into one.

The first thing that hits you when you stand in the hospitality area overlooking the pit lane at Brands Hatch, one of the UK's premier motor racing tracks, is the noise, 22 cars idle on the grid. Then, with an ear-splitting scream, the cars rev up and race for the first corner, jostling for position. There's a loud crackling noise as the cars brake and then the scream starts again as they accelerate up the hill. Welcome to the A1 GP World Cup of Motorsport.

The A1 GP is like Formula One but with overtaking. The 22 competing nations take part in a series of 11 races around the globe in identical cars, meaning that it's driving skill rather than investment in technology that makes the difference between winning and losing. It's also about the country rather than the driver which engenders a healthy partisan attitude from the crowds.

You're probably asking what relevance a motor race has to the exhibitions and events sector but this final race in Season three of the A1 GP is notable for the launch of a new concept alongside motorsports events. This is the first A1 GP Global Village - an exhibition with interactive feature areas designed to entertain the crowds between the races. The Global Village concept will be rolled out for next season in Holland, China, New Zealand and South Africa, and the ultimate aim is to have a Global Village alongside every A1 GP.

The Global Village is the brainchild of Martin Anslow, an exhibition entrepreneur who created the Adventure Travel Show and the Spa Show before selling them last year. Like the World Photo Awards covered in last month's column, Anslow also featured as one of my "Unsung Heroes" in 2006. It's great to see another innovative high profile event coming out of this stable of creative event producers.

I asked Anslow why he had created the Global Village. "Firstly the Global Village is being used as an overall marketing tool for the A1GP event, through using its content in pre-event promotional activities," Anslow explains, "but the main function is to engage and entertain, adding value to the overall visitor experience of the race weekend. There are over 75,000 people here this weekend and they are all looking for something to do between the main race."

As well as exhibitors from the motoring, fashion, financial, property and aviation sectors, there were a number of features to engage the crowds including: a pit lounge with a live track feed from the team radios with TV coverage and



Motorsport's new Global Village A1GP Event

live timings, the A1 GP car tyre change challenge with the winners having access to the grid just before the race, and a showcase of classic and modern Ferraris.

I asked Anslow what we could expect to see next year. "Now that we have seen how well the crowds react to the features we will extend them for next year. We have plans for interactive gaming and virtual racing features and our show piece will be a Centre Stage with Live music and showcases for the 22 nations".

A1 GP have entered into a six year sponsorship deal with Ferrari which means that every team will be racing a brand new car next season. This should increase interest in the race series and the additional crowds will further increase exposure for the Global Village sponsors and exhibitors.

The Global Village has been licensed to a number of event organisers around the world and the first event next season will be in October at Zandvoort in Holland. The organisers are a specially created joint venture between In2 Live Communication, a company set up by former staff from VNU, and Punta Linea, a brand marketing agency. Anslow is clear about the benefits that the licencees receive. "The prime attraction for our partners is that we deliver a captive audience without any need for them to spend money on visitor promotion," Anslow explains, "and because they are an integral part of the overall race meeting, there is no venue cost. This makes it an extremely cost efficient business model".

The A1 GP Global Village is an interesting model for an exhibition held alongside a sporting event but it also gives further evidence that experiential events can be rolled out across an international network of partners to create a brand in its own right.