



Large-scale pop-up

Staging a Formula 1 race on a temporary circuit can be hugely challenging, but good preparation and high levels of teamwork go a long way for Australia's largest pop-up event. **James Ling** reports

THE FORMULA 1 AUSTRALIAN GRAND

Prix in Melbourne is staking its claim to be the largest pop-up event in the country. Every year, a temporary circuit is built in Albert Park and more than 300,000 people descend on the venue over the race weekend to get the season underway.

'We have six weeks to build a circuit and essentially four weeks to dismantle it,' says Craig Moca, manager - engineering, Australian

Grand Prix Corporation. 'We keep the park open all the time except for the week of the race, so essentially we only close the park for seven days. We're working around the park users who are taking their dogs for a walk, the kids who are playing football - it's a very living thing that we work around. When you're trying to bring in 34km of fencing it's quite a big feat.'

During this period 34,000 sq-m of marquees need to be erected,

38,000 seats arrive and, of course, there is the partial installation of the audio and video equipment for the race, two 40-foot semi-trailers worth to be precise. It takes a total of 290,000 man hours to get everything ready, so preparation is key.

'We obviously only have a certain amount of time to setup, so we go right back to the basics,' says Mr Moca. 'We've got a lot of cables that run underground. We've got a couple

of fibre networks that run around the circuit. We've got an RF signal distribution network, we've got a CATV distribution network that runs around the circuit. So we've got a lot of infrastructure that we use each year to make the event happen.

'It does help having all the cables in the ground. Obviously, being a functional park we have to expose them each year and do a fair bit of work to get the systems up and running, but we always get them going and deliver a pretty high standard event,' he explains.

'With technology we have to have the best quality,' continues Mr Moca. 'Our customers come in and they expect to hear the track audio, so

we have nearly 500 speakers dotted around the circuit. We have 28 super-screens, covering 700 sq-m around the place. So we are always making sure that we give our clients the best value for money when it comes to the technology. As technology gets bigger and better, we try to bring in a bit more.'

When it comes to supplying the audio system, the Australian Grand Prix Corporation has turned to The PA People for the last four years. Over this time the company has developed a number of techniques for avoiding technical difficulties with careful engineering in place to protect the installed systems against collisions in a uniquely challenging environment.

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The Bose system in the pit lane

'Every second speaker is on a separate circuit in case of impact,' explains project engineer Paul Barrett. 'That way, we can keep the PA up and running and spread the load over multiple amp channels whilst we fix any issues.'

'We were using installation ties for the cabling, but we found that if a car hit a section, they were too strong and didn't break as easily,' adds Campbell Waller, installation manager - track PA. 'We changed the fixing method and with a couple of big incidents into the wall (since then) this means we haven't had to repair anything.'

The TOA CS304 speakers are powered by Lab.gruppen amplifiers housed in seven locations positioned around the track in custom designed 'huts'. Each hut features Socomec UPS, amplifiers, network audio bridges and FM tuner backup. Signal distribution is via the Australian Grand Prix Corporation's fibre-optic network surrounding the track.

All audio distribution, meanwhile, is via MediaMatrix. From The PA People's main hub - established four weeks prior to race-day - audio is directed to and from MediaMatrix nodes in the seven amplifier huts, and network interfaces mounted in the Yamaha LS9 digital mixers in the F1 Press and National Press centres. Other network pick-up and drop off points include the National Media Tent, camera positions, The Action Zone and the V8 Supercars area.

'It would be challenging to manage an event like the GP without using networked DSP,' notes Mr Barrett. 'We can pre-build all of the audio routing and intelligence into the system. The MediaMatrix rack is then dropped into our operations room in the main compound and it's all up

and running pretty painlessly.'

'Our involvement with the F1 event not only includes the distributed audio system, but we also provide numerous smaller PA systems for the corporate stands, press conferences and localised entertainment activities that occur around the F1 site,' adds Des Williamson, project manager for The PA People. 'We also provide the audio system that supports the anthem singing and presentations in the Pit Lane as well as a 12 screen video-wall system that is installed



A Bose system provided reinforcement for the podium ceremony

within race control; this allows all race officials to monitor the track in real-time during the race. To assist us in our operations we set-up a fully fitted-out compound, complete with office, lunchroom and equipment storage areas and this forms the base of our operations on site.'

The all-important podium is provided with sound reinforcement comprising long-throw Bose LT4402 Series 2 cabinets suspended from the main compound and projecting to the stands. The hangs are supplemented by Bose 9702s plus further enclosures mounted beneath the podium. A Yamaha LS9-32 with an SB168-ES stage-box is used for mixing.

'The Bose speakers are everything that runs in the pit lane and for the podium presentation,' says Mr Moca.

'Those are obviously quite substantial because after the race we all still need to hear what's going on. When you've got over 100,000 people storming through the fences trying to get onto the main straight, we want to make sure they can hear what's happening on the podium.'

Other systems installed and managed during the event included PA horns throughout the pit and garage areas for emergency paging and relays, and 28km of cabling around the barriers described as 'treated more like a permanent installation' to avoid failures. Additionally, the main compound is permanently wired with 100V line speaker cabling to built-in ceiling speakers and constant voltage control lines, all patched directly to The PA People operations room.

The main highlight on the visual side are the super-screens, and this is something Mr Moca believes has seen some serious improvements. 'The super-screens are using better and better technology. Formula One management, has improved the size of the graphics on the screens - you used to see really small graphics, now they're really large and crisp. We actually had some comments from our corporate customers who said that they really enjoyed watching the super-screens because they're just so informative and you can just see everything - that's improved over the years.'

Teamwork is always critical in the success of pop-up events, no matter what the size, and this is something that has been important for the Grand Prix. 'We have a great team of people on site that have been involved with the event since we were awarded the contract,' says Matt Kirby, manager of event

communications with The PA People. 'Having a consistent team, who completely understand the nature of the event, and particularly understand the high expectations of quality that come with the Formula One brand, is key to delivering a successful result each and every year.'

'I think the key thing that's made The PA People so easy to deal with is their staff,' agrees Mr Moca. 'Nothing is too hard - I can always pick up the phone and ask for something outrageous and they deliver.'

'They started off just supplying me with the track PA system, over the years they've won the contract to supply the UPS'; they also supply the race control screens now,' continues Mr Moca. 'I always challenge them and say "what else do I really need?" and they always try to come up with things.'

With Australia's largest pop-up event packed away for another year it's clear that the relationship



The PA People supplied equipment for the press conferences

between the Australian Grand Prix Corporation and The PA People is in good shape. 'It's good to have a contractor that you can rely on and just let them get on with it,' concludes Mr Moca. 'The less I hear from a contractor, the better.'

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