

REDEFINING PRE-RACE ENTERTAINMENT

Set against the backdrop of the Las Vegas Strip, the FORMULA 1 HEINEKEN SILVER LAS VEGAS GRAND PRIX artists the expertise of creative and technical experts to create a benchmark opening ceremony.



Words: Jacob Waite
Photos: Getty Images, Las Vegas Grand Prix Inc. and PyrotechnicoFX





The FORMULA 1 HEINEKEN SILVER LAS VEGAS GRAND PRIX Opening Ceremony presented by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCA) marked the first pre-race spectacle of its kind, with a level of creative technical sophistication never seen before in the rapidly developing world of motorsports. TPi tracked down the creative and technical production team responsible for the undertaking to discuss how they made it happen and reflect on the trials and tribulations associated with staging an event of this calibre in the 'entertainment capital of the world.'

In the grand tradition of Las Vegas spectacles, the opening ceremony kicked off the Grand Prix weekend with performances by Andra Day, Bishop Briggs, J Balvin, Journey, Keith Urban, Steve Aoki, Thirty Seconds to Mars, will.i.am, among others, and garnered an in-person crowd of nearly 30,000 attendees – who enjoyed the performances from the Wynn Grid Club, Paddock Club, Skybox, or Heineken Silver Main Grandstands.

The vendors roster featured Brian Burke Creative (show direction and executive production), DX7 Design (lighting design), Drone Stories (drones), ER Productions (lasers), Nappytabs (co-executive producer), PRG (lighting, sound, and video), PixMob (crowd visuals), PyrotechnicoFX (fireworks), STUFISH Entertainment Architects (production design), Silent Partners Studio (video content and scenic), and eightentwentysix (event production services).

The starting grid was transformed into a visual marvel with dancers and chart-topping artists performing atop seven high-tech mobile LED stages. To create the show, the creative team drew inspiration from Las Vegas' rich entertainment history and the clever use of stagecraft, technology, and scale the city provides, raising the bar to help redefine the landscape of F1 entertainment.

"We wanted to demonstrate the best that Las Vegas has to offer," Brian Burke explained. "It was an honour to lead the team for the city and the thousands of entertainers who come here and provided spectacles for the community – however, trying to encompass that in a 30-minute window was a challenge."

To this end, the team involved as many local vendors, businesses, companies, performers, technicians, designers, and artists as possible. "Our venue of choice was a construction site until a week before the ceremony, so the challenge of doing something we had never done, on a construction site, was a difficult but equally exciting opportunity," Burke noted. The design involved the entire community. Harry Reid International Airport was temporarily closed for laser, lights, and drone testing, while local fire and police departments examined pyrotechnics and drone displays.

"After flying over Caesar's Palace in 2022 for the Formula 1 Launch party, we were counting down the days to return to Vegas for the Grand Prix Opening Ceremony. It was fantastic to be included in such a star-studded line-up for the world's most notorious racing

championship," said Lucas van Oostrum, Drone Stories Founder and CEO. "Drone light shows are the future of entertainment, and it's amazing to see partners like F1 LVGP embracing them to add another dimension to spectacular events such as the opening."

Drone Stories flew the first on-track drone performance for AMG and IWC in the Nevada desert, with 1,000 drones flying alongside Mercedes AMG team drivers Lewis Hamilton and George Russell. "Perfect after running several tests, syncing it to 42 seconds per lap, and flying from only two meters off-ground, our drones formed stunning visuals along the track interacting with the drivers," van Oostrum commented. "We are proud of producing performances that set industry standards for blending artistry with technology."

'A FEAT OF LOGISTICS'

ER Productions installed lasers along the paddock side of the track spanning two levels. At 1000ft long, the special effects and laser specialist utilised its new 18-way power and data racks with built-in fibre to link four locations with 300m links to create a network across the site. Pre-production programming ensured ER could deliver the laser package in sync with the rest of the teams onsite, and a programmer at ER's programming suite.

Further atmospheric were provided by 20 Viper Deluxe units spread across each side of the 1000ft paddock and grandstands. "We were thrilled to be working with the creative and technical teams to bring their vision to



reality with 32 AT30 lasers and 24 Beam-ER fixtures. Thanks to Brian Burke, Tom Sutherland, eightentwentsix and all other teams onsite for being part of a huge event for Las Vegas and the F1," said ER Productions Lawrence Wright.

eightentwentsix, was equally thrilled to be the production producers of the event. In collaboration with an extraordinary ensemble of creative, broadcast, fabrication, and Formula 1 Las Vegas teams, the firm proudly orchestrated a cultural moment of unprecedented scale and excitement. "The event was a feat of logistics and encountered unique technical challenges specific to the race. The Opening Ceremony taking place on the track, in front of the Grandstands and Pit Building, was an important part of showcasing the tremendous infrastructure that Formula 1 invested in Las Vegas," said eightentwentsix COO, Brian Alexander commented.

In cooperation with the industry's top vendors, eightentwentsix was able to execute a large variety of elements including mobile scenic units, lighting, pyrotechnics, cryogenic, lasers, content, LED flags, crowd wristbands, drones, broadcast, The Sphere, multiple artists, and the F1 driver showcase all within a 30-minute runtime. "This ceremony not only set a new benchmark in blending entertainment with sport but also reimagined the very essence of F1 pre-race events," Alexander remarked.

PyrotecnicoFX launched fireworks from seven casino rooftops. For the opening ceremonies, the firm executed CO2 jets on

the Paddock roof for Tiesto and provided special effects support for the Major Lazer and J Balvin concerts throughout race week. "Managing multiple locations, casino teams, Clark County, F1, and the FAA added complexity, but our united team navigated challenges, demonstrating dedication to careful planning and seamless execution. Handling each casino's unique specifications and security protocols, our dedicated crew of 60 worked full-time on this production," said Rocco Vitale, Executive Vice President of SFX at PyrotecnicoFX. "We believe in the artistry of fireworks, participating in the F1 event is a proud achievement. The Grand Prix's awe-inspiring spectacle created a next-level fan experience that upcoming races will try to top each year."

'SETTING THE STANDARD'

With the racetrack not equipped to deal with a live production, the team had to go back to the drawing board to design and create infrastructure which would transform the paddock building into a fully functioning entertainment space for one night. "The level of coordination and communication required to pull this off, from 11 major headliners, drivers, moving custom staging on and off the track in time, while they were loading in this global event, with two nights of rehearsal was mind-blowing," Burke recalled. To pull off the state-of-the-art production, Burke enlisted the expertise of Stufish Entertainment Architects to create and design the staging for the opening ceremony

at the brand-new Las Vegas Grand Prix Pit Building. No strangers to the Las Vegas Strip, Stufish have been responsible for creating some of the biggest residencies in the city, namely *Weekends with Adele* [see TPI #276] and *U2:UV Achtung Baby Live at Sphere* [TPI #279]. "The opening ceremony was a spectacular show that blended the incredible entertainment value that Las Vegas has to offer with the speed and thrill of F1. Drawing from Las Vegas' rich history of entertainment, the creative team under the leadership of Brian Burke set the bar very high for this type of show," stated Ray Winkler, STUFISH Entertainment Architects CEO. "The Las Vegas strip gave us so much inspiration to create something unique for this event and there has never been a show like the Las Vegas Grand Prix Opening Ceremony that has this level of creative and technical sophistication. With a field play equivalent to three American football fields long, the opening ceremony was the biggest of its kind and has redefined the landscape of F1 entertainment."

Over 1,200 lighting fixtures and 100 lasers were used throughout the show, making this opening ceremony one of the most technical track shows ever produced. "Lighting a 1000ft long stretch of racetrack was a challenging but equally exciting prospect," Sutherland remarked.

The DX7 Design team used Vectorworks to draft plots and drawings, and Synchronorm Dependence to pre-visualise the project, collaborating with the choreographers,

PRODUCTION PROFILE

directors, and technical vendors in the lead-up to show time.

The automated elements of the rig included Claypaky Mythos 2; Vari-Lite VL2600 Profile and VL3600 Profile IP; GLP Impression X4 Bar and ACME Lighting Geist Beam lighting solutions. Effects came in the shape of GLP JDC1 Strobe and TMB Solaris Flare Q+ units. The LED portion of the rig comprised Astera Titan Tubes and ETC Source Four LED 36° spotlights with PRG GroundControl Best Boy HPs as followspots. MDG theONE and Look Solutions Viper Deluxe hazers, along with a Martin Professional AF1 Fan, ensured adequate atmospheric effects for lighting and video was in abundance.

Associate Lighting Designers and Lighting Directors, Jasmine Lesane; James Coldicott, Hunter Selby; Lighting Directors, Harry Forster, and Nate Files; Lighting Programmers and Lighting Directors, Brian Jenkins, Bobby Grey, and Ryan Tanker; Gaffers Alen Sisul and Chris Roseli made up the lighting team.

According to Sutherland, PRG provided “fantastic” on-site technical support, with the LD praising Randy Hudson and Travis Snyder from the firm’s Las Vegas office, who led the charge and tapped into their vast pool





of resources to knit the show together. "It was such a collaborative effort with power runs, James Coldicott and Alan Sisul from my side worked for 10 months along with the building architects and engineers to figure out how we would cable and power everything, which was a challenge within itself." With the dazzling skyline of Las Vegas as the predefined backdrop to the ceremony, Sutherland required a rig that could, with the lights emitting from the Las Vegas strip, stand out from a helicopter and be its own icon within the city. "I knew that we would have bright strobe fixtures in super high quantities, which is where the GLP JDC1s came into play as one of our 'workhorse' fixtures, they lined two floors of the building and our main key light/gobo effects fixture was the Vari Lite VL3600, which we used as key light and add gobos onto the track, while our beam fixture was the Claypaky Mythos 2 which PRG had in vast quantities," he said, referencing the balancing act of "IP-rated fixtures versus budget". The show design team had the idea of lighting up zones of fans in the grandstands. To achieve this, PixMob pre-programmed each section into zones and triggered them one by one to create racing stripes, chase effects, and other multi-layered visuals for the show. "It was amazing to work for and with both technical and creative integration teams on this landmark project," commented Hila Aviran, PixMob Director of Tours and Entertainment.

"We tried to tell a story throughout the show. We started out with some big, towering beam looks for 30 Seconds to Mars' set, which

towered out from the top of the MSUs and video trucks. As we moved into the DJ and dance-pop section for Kylie Minogue, Steve Aoki and Tiesto, the entire lighting rig came to life, which was a real standout moment. Towards the end of the show, moving up to the roof, we created a lux tower all over the city, which could be seen all around, which was a great transition."

Lighting fixtures were integrated into the video surfaces, which we used as storytelling elements, synchronising lighting, and video. "It was a tricky one to balance for camera because you need to make sure everything looks good and is exposed for the audience by eye, and everything is exposed and in line with the city backdrop, so we had to begin with a wide shot, and making sure the city was looking great, our video elements and MSUs were bright enough and then pull the lighting in from there and balance cameras from that point of view."

Programming was done by the team in the grandstands, however, when it came to show time, given the popularity of the event and seat allocation – audio, lighting and video playback was achieved underneath the grandstands via monitors and multi viewers without a clear line of sight for the show.

"When we first tracked down to the site, we had nowhere to hang lights. It was just a building in which we wanted to create a show comparable to the Super Bowl, so we had to work with the building architects and construction experts to reengineer the building to add lighting rails. From a key light point of

view, the only angle we could come in from was the racetrack truss which we had the racetrack floods on, at a specified height from the FAA, the governing body of racing. We couldn't shoot around that at all, so we had to figure out how to light this ceremony the length of the track without infringing the parameters set by officials."

The wider team featured Executive Producer, Kelley Parker; Broadcast Director, Mark Stepp; Screens Producer, Loren Barton; Screens Programmer, Joe Bay; PixMob Programmer, Stefan Zubovic; Laser Programmer, Lawrence Wright; Technical Producer, Michael Anderson; Supervising Producer, Kathleen Smyth; Producer, Louanne Madorma; Music Director, Kris Pooley.

"I'm proud of the entire spectacle, and the collective determination and expertise of the wider production team and the city of Las Vegas who believed in this vision," Burke concluded. "We have set a new standard for F1 ceremonies for years to come."

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