

WHEELSPIN

At Park Opening in '09, It's All Ferrari, All the Time

By NOAH JOSEPH

THE Ferrari mystique exerts a powerful draw, reaching well beyond those fortunate drivers who have experienced the sublime sports cars made in Maranello, Italy, and extending beyond the devoted fans of its Formula One racing team.

Six decades after its founding, the company has an image so strong that its followers eagerly scoop up clothing, wristwatches and laptop computers decorated with its prancing horse logo. In coming weeks, Ferrari loyalists will gather to celebrate the 60th anniversary with festivities in Maranello that include a concours, a parade of racecars and the arrival of a relay tour that began Jan. 28 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and will have traveled through 50 countries over 148 days.

Plans to spread the Ferrari influence further yet are heading in a new, and perhaps unexpected, direction — a Ferrari theme park that is scheduled to open on an island in the Persian Gulf in 2009. The entertainment it will offer is intended to appeal to a range of car enthusiasts, from the Six Flags day-trippers to those whose dream is to someday own a vintage Testa Rossa or Daytona.

The construction of the theme park is a logical extension of existing marketing efforts intended to build on the loyalty of Ferrari followers. At the Bahrain Grand Prix in April, the chief executives of Ferrari and of Aldar Properties, an Abu Dhabi real estate development company, signed a contract to begin construction of the entertainment complex. Among Aldar's principal shareholders is the Mubadala Development Company, a wholly owned arm of the emirate of Abu Dhabi that owns 5 percent of Ferrari.

The park is to be built on Yas Island, a resort of nearly 10 square miles in the Persian Gulf about a 30-minute drive from Abu Dhabi. The island project is an effort to increase tourism to Abu Dhabi and provide an alternative to the emirate's economic reliance on oil revenues.

The park's plans call for two dozen attractions, including a Formula One-themed roller coaster on which two sets of cars will race against each other on separate tracks. Other features will include virtual reality racing simulators, a pit-lane team experience, go-karts, dune buggies and a high-tech interactive museum.

One ride will incorporate a 200-foot g-force tower that simulates the cornering forces felt by racecar drivers. There will also be a Ferrari driving school, the only one outside of Maranello. Each aspect of the park, says Ferrari, will highlight the company's heritage and competitive prowess.

In addition, the overall \$40 billion Yas Island project will include beaches, nightclubs, restaurants, upscale stores, luxury hotels, condominiums, marinas, golf courses, polo fields and equestrian facilities.



DRIVE TIME A Ferrari theme park in the United Arab Emirates will include a Formula One racetrack and a driving school.



DESERT ATTRACTION The park is being built on Yas Island, near Abu Dhabi.

The emirate's government is investing billions in transportation improvements to roads and the international airport to ensure the smooth arrival and departure of tourists.

Also in the plans for Yas Island is a grand-prix-caliber racetrack; the Formula One governing body has granted a date for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix beginning in 2009, joining Bahrain to become the second grand prix in the region. Scuderia Ferrari, the factory racing team, will, of course, be among

the teams competing, as will the Spyker Formula One team, whose cars are powered by Ferrari engines. Mubadala also owns 17 percent of Spyker.

The Yas Island racing circuit was designed by Hermann Tilke, a track architect known for his work on tracks in Bahrain, Shanghai and Sepang, Malaysia. It is being modeled after a temporary circuit used for the Monaco Grand Prix in Monte Carlo, and sections will be used as part of the theme park.

Ferrari also plans to use the track for extreme-temperature testing of vehicle prototypes, giving the company another facility to complement its Fiorano (at the factory), Imola and Mugello circuits in Italy. But even with these developments in the gulf region, Ferrari remains adamant that Maranello will remain the company's epicenter.

Why would a sports car manufacturer with a legendary racing team agree to put its name on a theme park? The answer lies in Ferrari's desire to continue building the marketing empire it has nurtured over the decades. It has gone from a small racing outfit to a brand name recognized around the world, in spite of its products being out of reach for most consumers.

While rival automakers seek to broaden their product range with sport utilities and crossovers — even Porsche will be making a four-door sedan in coming years — Ferrari produces only two-door sports cars, at prices that climb with each successive model. Reinforcing the brand's position, company executives insist that the company is not developing an entry-level model.

To a large degree, Ferrari's marketing efforts focus on a global branding strategy that capitalizes on the marque's history and

reputation for high performance. Licensing partnerships have placed the Ferrari name on all manner of products, ranging from sportswear to fitness equipment, audio systems to perfumes, and even teddy bears; the theme park is not an unreasonable extension.

Ferrari's merchandising and branding activities have grown to such proportions that the company recently inaugurated a third division to operate alongside its race-car manufacturing and racing divisions. The new department will have worldwide responsibility for developing the Ferrari brand.

To run the new division, Ferrari recruited Dany Bahar, a top motorsport marketing expert who, during his tenure at the energy-drink company Red Bull, transformed the company from a straightforward sponsor into a direct owner of several racing teams.

In November 2004, Red Bull acquired its own Formula One team from Ford's Jaguar subsidiary, and then entered into joint ownership of a second team operating out of Italy under the name Scuderia Toro Rosso. The Red Bull cars ran with Ferrari power in the 2006 season; the engine contract went to the Toro Rosso team for 2007.

During the engine supply negotiations with Ferrari, Mr. Bahar evidently made a lasting impression on his Italian counterparts; in his new role at Ferrari, he will report to Jean Todt, chief executive of Ferrari.

The Ferrari theme park project is already set to face its first major challenge. As on the race track, Ferrari's rivals are close by, and in this instance the competition comes from within the United Arab Emirates. A Dubai real estate developer, Union Properties, signed an exclusive

Winner's Trophy Gets a Redesign

AUTO racing promoters are going high-design for the trophies they present to winners, commissioning Dror Benshetrit to create a series of trophies for the Champ Car World Series, Champ Car Atlantic and Historic Grand Prix. The trendy young designer is known for the products he has done for Puma, Swarovski and the fashion house of Marithé and François Girbaud, and for shop interiors like the Yigal Azrouël boutique in the meatpacking district of Manhattan.

Often listed among the emerging generation of future design stars, about to join luminaries like Yves Béhar and Karim Rashid, Mr. Benshetrit was hired by the owners of the Vegas Grand Prix and Grand Prix Arizona races in the Champ Car Series to give some flash to the winner's circle. The result is a high concept ring in place of the traditional loving cup trophy.

The owners of the races, Bradley Yonover and Dale Jensen, said they wanted to convey a sense of racing as very modern and progressive with the new trophy. They have been seeking younger, hipper audiences. Mr. Benshetrit is creating 25 trophies for races, which are held in Las Vegas and Phoenix.



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agreement with Formula One Management in 2006 to build a series of theme parks, with the first scheduled to open around the same time as Ferrari's in 2009.

Rather than fearing the competition, however, Ferrari projects that "having complementary sports facilities can only make the area more interesting and more attractive" to potential visitors.

The budget for the Dubai theme park is \$360 million; Union Properties has plans for additional locations in Europe and the Far East. Although Ferrari is not ruling out the possibility of opening additional locations, the company currently has no such plans, preferring to focus on one location before entertaining others.

Unlike its most successful team, Formula One has not fully realized its marketing potential, especially outside Europe; it could stand to take a page out of the Nascar playbook. The contract to construct the F1 theme parks may prove to be a good first step.

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