

# A perfect thriller!

The 2008 championship went down to the wire, ultimately being settled in the last few yards of the final Grand Prix of the season. On the Interlagos circuit, Felipe Massa virtually led from start to finish. Once he crossed the line, he thought he had become World champion in front of his crowd and on his home circuit (which would have been the first time since the very beginnings in 1950 when Farina won the title in Monza) but thirty seconds behind the winning Ferrari, the race for the championship tilted decisively in favour of Lewis Hamilton as, in extremis, he clawed his way back to the 5th place! This decisive Grand Prix had a story worthy of Alfred Hitchcock with two bursts of rain interrupting the race's smooth running, first at the start and then when the chequered flag was almost in sight. Lewis Hamilton's success was rightly celebrated. The British driver didn't steal this title at the end of his second season in F1 aged just 23, making him the youngest ever champion. No, in the finale to a season which he had dominated so skilfully, Hamilton managed to resist the pressure which had harmed him a year earlier, when he lost the championship to Kimi Räikkönen by a single point on the very same circuit. Massa's victory at least guaranteed the constructors' championship for the Scuderia Ferrari which is now run by a new generation of managers and engineers who are just as worthy as their illustrious predecessors. Lewis Hamilton's triumph means McLaren-Mercedes secured another drivers' championship title after Mika Häkkinen won them the same honour nine years ago... And Ron Dennis secured his revenge for having been dragged through the mud due to the spying affair that poisoned the paddock for so many months in 2007. This season, the FIA hardly made McLaren's job any easier by penalising Hamilton any time they got the chance (such as in Spa where the Englishman still went on to beat his Brazilian rival) or sometimes favouring Massa and the Scuderia for no reason (by imposing a penalty on Bourdais in Japan when he seemed to be more the victim than the guilty party) and the stewards will not have gone up in people's estimations in a year which, behind the scenes, has been rocked by the scandal surrounding Max Mosley's private life. But just when you thought he had been weakened by the press's sensational revelations, the president of the FIA dug in his heels and restarted the debate on far-reaching reforms – of both a technical and economic nature – to Formula 1 with the teams which have now come together under the FOTA (Formula One Teams Association) banner. A new era in the history of Grand Prix could be about to begin. Narration by **Pierre van Vliet**.

*Well done Lewis! The first Grand Prix of the season is dominated by Lewis Hamilton who drives an impressive race at Albert Park in Melbourne. A start to the 2008 championship to cheer the hearts of the McLaren team after a 2007 season blotted by the spying affair and the well-publicised heavy fine they had to pay. By taking the lead in the championship right from the off, the young Englishman puts himself in a good position in the race for the title.*

