

Ecclestone Praises Mosley's Safety Drive



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Formula One commercial rights holder Bernie Ecclestone has praised the role FIA President Max Mosley has played in increasing driver safety in the sport.

Speaking at the annual Sid Watkins Safety Lecture at the Autosport International Show, Ecclestone said that Formula One has witnessed a huge advancement in safety over the last 10 years thanks to the efforts of Mosley and the FIA.

Ecclestone said: "Max is very much behind safety, he pushes safety. Before that the governing body really didn't take much interest but Max has certainly pushed things along and made sure we have got all these safety measures."

Ecclestone added that many of Formula One's past stars would still be alive today if more had been done for safety in previous decades. He believes fatal accidents suffered by drivers such as Jochen Rindt and Ronnie Peterson could have been avoided.

Ecclestone said: "They should not have been killed in those accidents. It was car construction that was the problem most of the time. In Jochen's case it was two-fold, both the car and after the accident. It would never have happened today. These guys would have been alive."

Ecclestone also praised the work carried out by former F1 medical chief Professor Sid Watkins, after whom the annual lecture on motor sport safety is named. Watkins, who is President of the FIA Institute for Motor Sport Safety, instigated many of the modern safety features compulsory at F1 circuits today.

Before Watkins influence, for instance, none of the circuits had hospitals on site. Ecclestone said: "I remember Sid and I sitting down to design the first hospital. It sort of went from there. Back then there wasn't a hospital. There was an ambulance of sorts which would take them to the local hospital if they could find it. It clearly needed to be improved. When you look at these hospitals now – and Sid was the one that pushed for this – you can run a sensible sized operation without any problems."

Despite criticism that some of the new safety features at circuits have made the circuits less challenging, Ecclestone insisted that Formula One has not gone too far. As he said: "we are not in the business of entertaining the public by having accidents".

And clearly, the drivers are much happier to race today than they have ever been. As Ecclestone put it: "If I was a driver who wanted to feel safe I would be happier today than I would have done when you see some of these cars that were racing 20 years ago. At Sa they had trees on the edge of the track and a concrete block saying so many kilometers to the next village and it was raining. These guys used to have to race in those conditions."

But thanks to the work of safety stalwarts such as Mosley and Watkins drivers are no longer risking their lives every time they go out on track.