

Putin Brings Formula One to Sochi

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ecclestone and Putin, flanked by sponsors Deripaska and Alekperov, toasting Formula One in Sochi on Thursday. **Mikhail Metzel**

Sochi will host a Russian Formula One Grand Prix from 2014-20 under a deal announced by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Thursday, though the first race could be postponed if it affects Winter Olympics preparations.

The agreement is “very important, because we need to make use of everything that we’re creating” for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Putin said. “Construction of the racetrack will give our athletes a training facility and attract the attention of young people.”

“I’m very happy not only to have Formula One in Russia, but now in Sochi I’m delighted to see all the facilities you’ve built for the Olympics,” Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone told Putin at the Black Sea resort on Thursday. “I sincerely hope that Formula One is going to play a big part in what I can see happening in Sochi.”

The opening race could be delayed by a year if necessary, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry

Kozak said.

Russia is the latest confirmed addition to an already expanded Formula One calendar, with a record 20 races scheduled for next year. India is making its debut in 2011 after South Korea's inaugural race next week. A return to the United States, with a grand prix in Austin, Texas, is scheduled for 2012.

Ecclestone has said 20 races is probably the limit for the glamour sport, meaning that some races in the European heartland could be dropped, although he has also joked about adding more.

"We are not dropping anything. [It's] 20 races — getting ready for 25," he said back in April, long before the 2011 calendar was published. In July, Ecclestone said Formula One needed to be in Russia more than any other candidate for a race.

Russia has its first Formula One driver in Renault's Vitaly Petrov, although the rookie's place in the team in 2011 has yet to be confirmed because of his inconsistent performances. Petrov has, however, attracted several Russian sponsors to his team including part Renault-owned carmaker Lada.

In a March 1 meeting with Renault chief executive Carlos Ghosn, Putin said the French carmaker's "symbolic step" in hiring a Russian driver would stimulate its cooperation with Russian companies.

Ecclestone told Kommersant last week that Russia would pay a yearly fee of about \$40 million for the right to hold a Grand Prix race. Building a racetrack may cost Russia as much as \$200 million, the newspaper said.

Sponsors of the Sochi Grand Prix will include LUKoil, Oleg Deripaska's Basic Element, MegaFon and Russian Technologies. Construction of the race circuit will cost about \$100 million, said Alexander Tkachyov, governor of the Krasnodar region that includes Sochi.

The government will save money by incorporating new roads built for the Olympics for about half of the circuit, he said. Tilke, an architectural and engineering firm based in Aachen, Germany, will design the circuit, and a construction tender will be held in April 2011, Tkachyov said.

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