

Sports

Schumacher's Ferrari fetches record \$15 million at auction

World record price for a modern-era Formula One

GENEVA: The Ferrari in which Formula One legend Michael Schumacher won the 2003 World Championship title sold for nearly \$15 million at auction in Geneva on Wednesday. "This remarkable car has achieved a world record price for a modern-era Formula One," the Sotheby's auctioneer said after the F2003-GA, Chassis 229 car went under the hammer for 13 million Swiss francs (\$13.2 million). When taxes and fees were added on, the final price stood at 14.6 million francs (\$14.9 million), the auction house said later. The previous record was held by another Schumacher-driven Ferrari, an F2001 model sold by Sotheby's in New York in 2017 for \$7.5 million.

The final price, offered by an unidentified telephone bidder from Europe after a bidding war of more than 40 minutes, far outstripped expectations, with the auction house estimating before the sale that the car would fetch up to 9.5 million Swiss francs. It is "one of the most significant Formula One cars of all time", the auctioneers said. Schumacher, who has not been seen in public since suffering serious injuries in a skiing accident in 2013, raced nine times in the car.

'Very important car'

He won five Grands Prix with it in the 2003 season and drove it when he clinched the title in Japan. "It's one of the Ferraris with the most victories in the constructor's history, so it's a very important car in the history of motor racing," Vincent Luzuy, from the Sotheby's branch dealing with luxury car sales, told AFP. Designed by Rory Byrne and Ross Brawn, the F2003-GA featured a longer wheelbase to improve



GENEVA: Photograph shows F1 World Champion Michael Schumacher's Formula One Ferrari F2003 GA with chassis number 229 during Sotheby's auction house preview in Geneva. — AFP

aerodynamics, he explained. The model was brought in at the Spanish Grand Prix, the fifth race of the 2003 season. Chassis 229 is by far the most successful of the six F2003-GAs that were built.

Schumacher drove it to victory in Spain and also won the Austrian, Canadian, Italian and US Grands Prix in the car. He also claimed pole position in Spain, Austria and Italy in the vehicle, and the fastest laps in Austria, Italy and the United States. The car powered Schumacher to his sixth F1 title—a total that saw the

German overtake the five won by Argentina's Juan Manuel Fangio in the 1950s. It also helped Ferrari win a 13th constructor's championship—the Italian team's fifth in a row.

Luxury week

Schumacher's Ferrari was sold during Sotheby's Luxury Week, which began last Friday and where a range of sparkling jewels, pricy watches and designer handbags are going under the hammer. But a spectac-

ular blue diamond, expected to provide the grand finale to the jewelry sale and estimated to fetch up to 15 million Swiss francs, went unsold later on Wednesday. That 5.53-carat "fancy vivid blue" cushion-shaped diamond is part of the De Beers Exceptional Blue Collection—a group of eight rare fancy blue diamonds with a total value of more than \$70 million being sold in Geneva, New York and Hong Kong.

Sotheby's told AFP the gem was "an exceptional stone in every sense" and "attracted significant interest" before the sale. "While we didn't get to see it sell in the room tonight, we are confident it will find a new home very soon," it added. Another piece expected to draw attention, and bids, was an emerald and diamond bracelet made in the 1850s, which once belonged to French empress Eugenie, the wife of emperor Napoleon III.

It has been estimated at between 60,000 and 80,000 francs. Sotheby's is already on a roll, having sold the 11.15-carat Williamson Pink Star pink diamond in Hong Kong last Friday for HK\$453.2 million (\$57.7 million), setting a record for price per carat paid at auction for any diamond or gemstone, the auction house said. Pink diamonds are only found in a few places and fewer than 10 percent weigh more than one fifth of a carat, and the big ones are some of the most in-demand on the global market. The 18.18-carat Fortune Pink—the largest pear-shaped "fancy vivid pink" diamond ever to go under the hammer—was meanwhile snapped up at a Christie's auction in Geneva on Tuesday for \$28.5 million.— AFP



Jil Teichmann of Switzerland

Swiss crush Italy in Billie Jean King Cup Finals

GLASGOW: Switzerland powered to a clean sweep against Italy as last year's Billie Jean King Cup Finals runners-up started their campaign with a 3-0 victory in Glasgow on Wednesday. Jil Teichmann put Switzerland ahead by saving a match point in a 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5) win over Elisabetta Cocciaretto before Belinda Bencic beat Jasmine Paolini 7-5, 6-3.

Bencic and Teichmann combined to see off Paolini and Martina Trevisan 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 in the doubles. Switzerland sit top of Group A as they bid to go one step further than 12 months ago when they lost the final against Russia. "I'm super happy, super relieved that I got this important point for our team. I knew coming in it would be a fight," Teichmann said. Belgium, without Elise Mertens or Alison Van Uytvanck for the singles, lost their first Group B match 2-1 against Slovakia.

Mertens arrived late to Scotland following her doubles triumph at the WTA Finals in Texas, while Van

Uytvanck has played just three matches since Wimbledon. And Slovakia, bruised by their 2-1 defeat to Australia the day before, pounced on the opportunity. Viktoria Kuzmova won 6-2, 7-6 (9/7) against Ysaline Bonaventure before Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, who registered just three games against Ajla Tomljanovic on Tuesday, defeated Maryna Zanevska 5-7, 6-2, 6-3.

Belgium salvaged a crucial point when Mertens combined with Kirsten Flipkens to beat Kuzmova and Tereza Mihalikova 6-0, 6-3 in the doubles. "It was our only chance to stay alive. We had to make it 2-1 after the two lost singles. We still have everything to play," Belgium captain Johan Van Herck said. Slovakia's hopes of progressing from Group B are over regardless of the outcome of Australia against Belgium on Thursday.

Spain's Paula Badosa defeated Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina to give her country an unassailable 2-0 lead over Kazakhstan. World number 12 Badosa won 6-2, 3-6, 6-4, leaving Anabel Medina Garrigues' side in control of their own destiny going into their final Group C clash against hosts Great Britain on Thursday. Badosa's impressive success came after team-mate Nuria Parrizas Diaz beat Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (7/5), with the win sealed on her sixth match point. Victory against Britain would send Spain through to the semi-finals for the first time since 2008.— AFP

Football contributes two thirds of them but the most eye-catching rise is in basketball. Mace says there are various reasons for basketball creeping up the league table of suspicious matches - 183 this year compared to 63 in 2021. "With the continued growth of betting markets, basketball has always been one of the most popular," he said. "It is lower down the level, it is not just the top divisions, and new countries getting involved. "You start to get that perfect sweet spot of betting coverage and the economic status of players involved."

'Cat and mouse'

Mace - who says "often the players on the pitch are the actors and executors and not getting rich (from the matchfixing)" - admits battling the matchfixers is a constant challenge. "Yes, it is exciting as much as it is disappointing and frustrating working with manipulat-

Woods to return to golf at Hero World Challenge

WASHINGTON: Tiger Woods said Wednesday he would be returning to action at the Hero World Challenge in what will be the golf great's first tournament since the British Open in July. The 15-time major champion posted a Twitter message confirming his involvement in the 20-man tournament, where he is the host, at the Albany course in the Bahamas, from December 1-4.

Woods, a five-time winner of the event, is joined by American compatriot Kevin Kisner and England's Tommy Fleetwood in completing the field. "I am excited to announce that I will be in the field for this year's #HeroWorldChallenge," Woods said. "A big welcome to @K_Kisner and @TommyFleetwood! for joining us as well. See you soon at Albany!"

This week has seen Woods caddying for son Charlie this week and he recently said he intended to take part in 'The Match', a 12-hole exhibition, with Rory McIlroy, Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas on December 10 in what could be a busy finish to a restricted 2022 schedule following his recovery from a career-threatening car crash. The exhibition is set for the weekend before the PNC Championship in Orlando where Woods has previously played alongside Charlie. Woods missed the cut at this year's British Open at St Andrews, having twice won the sport's oldest major at the Scottish course in 2000 and 2005.

The 46-year-old has appeared in just three professional tournaments this year, all of them majors. Woods, who needed screws and metal rods to hold together his shattered right leg, made his return to competition 14 months after the accident at this year's Masters. He finished 47th at Augusta but achieved a victory of sorts simply by walking 72 holes over the difficult layout. He then withdrew from the PGA Championship after 54 holes, struggling with stamina issues after making the cut.— AFP

ed sports on a daily basis," he said. "This is what is driving our team from betting analysts to our investigators and intelligence operatives.

"What greater motivation to do our part to bring action against these groups?" Mace says their prey are watching him and his organization just as he and his team are trying to keep tabs on them. "They are professional organizations, they are not amateurs. They don't work by chance," he said. "They are very careful and sophisticated, they know what we are doing and they know how our system is able to monitor them. "It is a constant game of cat and mouse for them to evade being caught." Mace said the weaponry his organization can deploy in detecting matchfixing is becoming more effective. "The capabilities of betting monitoring are increasing all the time with access to 600 bookmakers odds' and 300 bookmakers' account-level data and intelligence," he said.—AFP



LONDON: Sportradar Integrity Services' Director of Global Operations Tom Mace (right), speaks with an analyst responding to alerts on the company's detecting system while analyzing betting patterns, at their headquarters in London.— AFP

Matchfixing sleuths driven by cheating on the rise

LONDON: Sports matches arousing suspicions of being fixed globally are on course to break the thousand mark this year but if the matchfixers believe they are in for an easy ride they should think again. "It is why we come to work every day, doing serious work helping our partners to tackle serious crime groups," Tom Mace, director of global operations for Sportradar Integrity Services, told AFP at their London office. Sportradar Integrity Services is a global supplier of sport integrity solutions and partner to over 150 sports federations and leagues with clients ranging from FIFA to NASCAR. Analysts working 24/7 and operating from their main base in London to hubs in Montevideo, Melbourne, Singapore, Las Vegas and Minneapolis pore over screens of live sporting fixtures and betting odds.

They watch how bookmakers' odds move over the course of both pre-match and in-play trading of a contest, aided by their bet monitoring software. In instances where strong, irregular and unexplainable betting activity is identified, the match is flagged up as suspicious. Mace, who is armed with various divisions at his disposal including an Intelligence unit, acknowledges the figures are pretty stark.

"Already this year is worse than last year," he said. "In 2021 we had a record number of 904 suspicious matches and already midway through October we have surpassed that with 978 suspicious matches. "With two months to go we are definitely on track to break one thousand for the first time ever, which is quite shocking." Mace, who joined Sportradar 12 years ago after a career in the bookmaking industry, says the matches cover 12 sports in 70 countries.

Hamilton seeking superb home win

SAO PAULO: Lewis Hamilton returns to the scene of one of his greatest triumphs this weekend hoping to celebrate again by giving Brazil a 'home' winner at the Sao Paulo Grand Prix, the penultimate race this season. The seven-time world champion was confirmed as an honorary Brazilian citizen this week and promptly declared that he felt "like now I am one of you" - a claim that Mercedes may hope helps power him and them to a first win of the season in Sunday's race. To do that and extend his record of claiming at least one win in every season of his career since his debut in 2007, the 37-year-old Briton will need to beat the relentless runaway world champions Max Verstappen and Red Bull.

He did it last year with a spectacular demonstration of speed and courage to secure his third win at the fast and exciting Interlagos circuit, where the spectators generate a carnival atmosphere, and where he won his maiden title in 2008 as Felipe Massa scored Brazil's last home win in a Ferrari. But despite two consecutive second place finishes behind newly-acclaimed two-time world champion Verstappen and a mounting sense of momentum, Hamilton and the 'silver arrows' know



SAO PAULO: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton speaks during a Petronas press conference before the Formula One Brazil Grand Prix in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on November 9, 2022.— AFP

they face a formidable challenge. "Interlagos is an iconic track and the scene of so many special F1 moments, including Lewis's spectacular performance last year in the 'sprint' and the race," said team boss Toto Wolff. "And we're proud to be coming back to Brazil with Lewis having been made an honorary citizen - and having such good memories. "On paper, it shouldn't be quite as strong a circuit for us as Mexico, but regardless, we want to keep up our momentum from recent races. So, we will keep working hard to hopefully be in the mix once again."

Last year, Hamilton kept his title challenge alive in sensational fashion by charging through the field from 10th to take a stunning victory and then pulled aloft a Brazilian flag to signal his feelings and revive memories of his childhood hero Ayrton Senna. On Sunday, he will be a surrogate Brazilian and seek to win both the sprint on Saturday and the Grand Prix on Sunday. In last year's sprint he started last on the grid and finished fifth before receiving a five-place grid penalty for Sunday's contest.

'Political storm'

This time, there will be no titles on offer as Mercedes battle to overhaul Ferrari for second place in the constructors' championship ahead of a scrap between Alpine and McLaren for fourth. A similar close contest is in prospect between Alfa Romeo and Aston Martin for sixth as the F1 circus heads towards the seasonal finale in Abu Dhabi.

After the political storms in Mexico, where Red Bull were told of their punishment for breaking last season's \$145 million cost cap and then announced they were snubbing Sky TV, for alleged bias reporting, Verstappen is expected to enjoy a calmer weekend as he seeks a record-extending 15th win in a single season.—AFP