

## Book Review of Motorsport and Fascism. Living Dangerously. By Paul Baxa. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 313 pages.

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*Motorsport and Fascism. Living Dangerously.* By Paul Baxa. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 313 pages.

Published in 2022, a year marked by the centenary of the inauguration of Monza Autodrome and the rise of Fascism, Baxa's monograph offers a unique and in-depth exploration of the complex relationship between the Fascist ideology and motorsport. Beyond being a captivating read, the book is a groundbreaking contribution to motorsport academic research as the first English-language monograph on this subject. Across the book's seven chapters, Baxa argues the synergy between motorsport and Fascism, demonstrating how the former not only mirrored the modernity and technology celebrated by the regime but also served as a potent instrument for promoting Fascist mythology.

This argument is borne out in chapter 2, where the author explores how motor racing boosted Fascist ideology and resolved many of its contradictions. Particularly, Baxa spotlights how motorsport reconciled Marinetti's Futurism and D'Annunzio's Decadence. Although the former celebrated the future and the latter looked at the past as a balm against the decadence of his contemporaries, both shared a love for technology and cars: Marinetti was thrilled by the machine and its speed, while D'Annunzio celebrated the drivers. Eventually, both exalted race car drivers, who were seen as the New Fascist Man, depicted as both the Futurist modern technician and the Dannunzian hero.

The construction of Fascist mythology also hinged on the autodromes, soon considered mythical landscapes. This aspect is explored in chapters 3 and 4, where Baxa respectively focuses on the openings of Monza and Melhalla Autodromes and the attempt to transform Rome into a motorsport capital. Although the regime could not take credit for Monza's project, soon the autodrome became the first Italian "landscape of speed" where Fascist rituals could be celebrated, and the death of many drivers ended up favoring the creation of modern Fascist heroes depicted as martyrs, disposed to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the fatherland. Meanwhile, the project in the colonial

modernist style of Melhalla Autodrome in Tripoli (Libya) further emphasized Fascist fascination for modernity and the attempt to obtain international recognition through the grandeur of the Italian empire.

Unlike Monza and Melhalla, the circuits in Rome never had the same success. Yet, their story further reveals the profound nexus between Fascism and motorsport as they synthesized the cult of past and modernity and Mussolini's effort to restore Rome's grandeur. Furthermore, the different venues used for the race mirror the evolution of Fascist ideology. While the first venues embodied the vision of the Liberal upper classes, by the 1930s, the creation of the Tre Fontane circuit suggested the Fascist policy of "going toward the people," promoting the ideal of the New Fascist Man instead of the aristocratic racer. Despite its failure, the Rome Grand Prix squarely represents that motorsport is more than a sport since it is used to remake the spirit of Rome.

Notably, Baxa dedicates chapters 5 and 6 to the Mille Miglia, a race that epitomized the convergence of Fascist ideology and motorsport. Organized by the Automobile Club of Brescia, the race immediately received the support of the Fascist Party, becoming a symbol of Fascist ideology. The race not only showcased the rise of Italian industry and the efficiency of Italy's road network but also resolved the tension between the project of "going toward the masses" and celebrating a new elite of celebrities. The Mille Miglia affirmed the legendary rivalry between Nuvolari and Varzi, embodying the New Men who brought themselves to the masses. Throughout the chapters, though, it becomes evident that Mille Miglia's most significant legacy is the creation of a new sense of place. The course layout highlighted landmarks that exalted Italy and the Fascist Revolution, transforming the landscape into a mythology that mirrored the regime's ideology.

Baxa's work clearly highlights the unique role of motorsports in shaping the Fascist national identity. While soccer and Giro d'Italia also contributed to the definition of national identity, motor races indeed expressed Fascist values on a grand scale. The inherent violence and danger of this sport were intricately woven into the Fascist ideology of the New Man. In this symbiotic relationship,

motorsport and Fascism revitalized the sport and provided the regime with a unique platform to propagate its ideals. Eventually, Baxa has the merit to focus on a well-studied topic from a new, thrilling vantage point. As readers, we can hit our journey across the book and feel the adrenaline of the new Italian landscape of speed.