



› Visit autoweekracing.com to see the full letters from Ecclestone and Straus, and to listen to our podcast interview with McMichael.

F1 Headed to New York?

■ FORMULA ONE'S NEXT home in the United States could be at an unlikely venue.

According to a letter written to Monticello Motor Club (MMC) members by Ari Straus—president of the facility in upstate New York—and leaked to *AutoWeek*, the country-club-style racing venue that today serves as a playground for wealthy car enthusiasts is talking to F1 boss Bernie Ecclestone about bringing the Grand Prix circus to the Catskill Mountains.

According to the letter, Straus and MMC chairman Bill McMichael met with Ecclestone a few months ago to talk about hosting a Grand Prix, with an eye toward a long-term, 10-year deal. Hermann Tilke, the architect of F1's modern venues, visited MMC and reported that the facility is capable of hosting F1, although expansion and modifications are necessary.

McMichael told *AutoWeek* that he understands skepticism about the plan, but he

pointed out that New York City is 90 minutes away from MMC—under normal traffic conditions, that is—and a natural fit for F1 and that the track could draw from 50 million people living within a 200-mile radius.

Asked whether the two-lane roads leading to the circuit are fit to accommodate a Grand Prix, he said, "If you look at some other major circuits around the world, a lot of them have two-lane roads going in and out. . . . But, like

any major event, we'd have a traffic plan in place. . . . When you have 125,000 or 150,000 people show up for anything, it's gonna be busy. Certainly, our highway system, we think, can handle it."

McMichael said that early estimates point to a required investment of \$100 million to \$150 million to prepare MMC to host F1 and that the money would come from a combination of public and private financing—which he said he believes is worth it, based on a potential economic impact on the region of more than \$100 million each year of the deal. He declined to specify exactly what such a financing package might entail.

McMichael said that MMC could host its first Grand Prix as early as 2012, but plans must fall into place within "the next several months" for that to happen.

As Straus wrote in his letter, "securing F1 is like winning the Olympics; competition is fierce, and this is not a done deal."

Speaking of letters, *AW* also obtained a copy of one written to MMC by Ecclestone and dated March 24, 2010. It reads in part: "The superior quality of your existing four-mile race-track, combined with your proximity to New York City, makes MMC an excellent candidate to host the FIA Formula One World Championship.

While we discussed the basic terms between F1 and MMC, we understand that the next critical stage is your local and state government's support to this endeavor.

"New York is our preferred venue for a USA round of the FIA Formula One World Championship. We hope that you are able to quickly secure the commitments required so that we can have our inaugural MMC F1 event by 2012. . . . I look forward to visiting with you soon." —MAC MORRISON