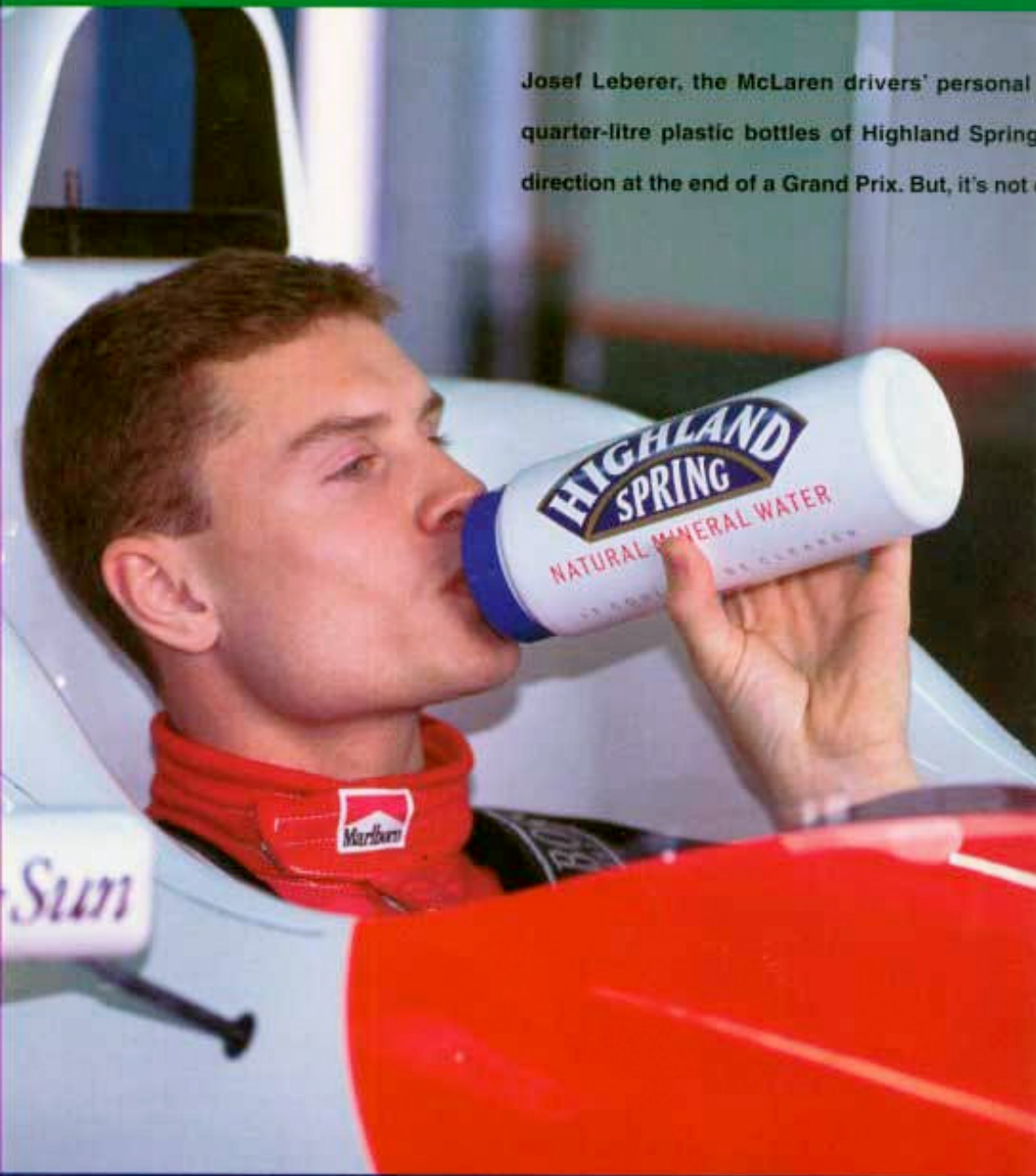


# THE STUFF OF LIFE

Josef Leberer, the McLaren drivers' personal trainer, has a habit of hurling quarter-litre plastic bottles of Highland Spring Natural Mineral Water in their direction at the end of a Grand Prix. But, it's not done out of malice, he explains.



**A** Formula One driver can lose on average, depending on the conditions, a litre of water during a race, and it's important to replace that immediately. But, in the post-race crush, with the press and everyone else around the driver, I often can't get close to him. The quarter-litre Highland Spring bottles are the perfect throwing size, so that's what I do," says Leberer. "He's learnt to catch them."

It's not just throw ability, of course, that has made Highland Spring the water of choice for the McLaren team. For a lay person, water is water. For a purist like Leberer, the liquid his drivers consume has to be as quality controlled as the fuel put into their cars. The parallel is apt, since at this level, a fraction of a percentage drop in performance in either driver or car can mean the difference between winning and losing.

"You could say I'm the mechanic who ensures the drivers are tuned to optimum performance," laughs Leberer. "The loss of liquid during a race can amount to 1 - 2% of body weight, and that's when trouble can set in. A 2% loss will begin to affect performance. Concentration becomes fractionally harder, for example. If it gets up to 5%, you have a substantial loss of performance."

Leberer is also the drivers' dietician and his solution is hyper-hydration; ensuring Mika Hakkinen and team mate David Coulthard fill up with Highland Spring half an hour before the race. This is a less vital for drivers who opt for in-car re-fuelling via an on board plastic bottle with a tube attached for them to take constant sips from. But, drivers divide into sippers and non-sippers and Mika, who finds drinking while driving an understandable distraction, is firmly in the latter camp.



Mika Hakkinen tests the new MP01 at Estoril



Josef, the drivers' personal trainer with David

From his base in Austria, where he had just finished a stamina-boosting cross-country skiing session with David Coulthard, Leberer elaborates on the team's choice of Highland Spring. "The purity impresses me" he says. "The mountains of Scotland remind me of my own mountainous Austria, and the filtering effect as the water passes through those layers of rock is important, as is natural mineral water status - naturally pure, nothing added, nothing taken out."

"Then there's the minerals. I looked into this before recommending it. The combination of minerals is perfect for sportsmen and women. We are talking milligrams, which may seem incidental, but it is vital to keep the body's balance of essential minerals right."

As a dietician, Leberer is of the school that prefers his clients' vitamin intake to be through natural food and drink, rather than tablets. "Highland Spring plays its part here," he says. "I mix it with orange or apple to make natural fruit juices. I feed it to them in clear soup stocks and I'm even trying to wean David Coulthard off his morning tea and onto my herbal tea made with Highland Spring."

"The reason is simple," he continues. "It's vital to get the best from the food the drivers consume, and a high quality water is an essential part of that equation. Every ingredient has to be perfect."

In countries on the global Grand Prix circuit where water supply may not be 100% reliable, team members even find Josef washing up with Highland Spring. "You can't take chances in this work," he comments. "If there's even a slight chance they'll pick up a light bug from a local water supply that will affect their driving, then I won't take that chance."

Leberer is clearly a perfectionist. "I suppose I am," he concedes. "Perfection of preparation comes in paying attention to detail and our choice of Highland Spring is part of that." So, the next time you see the Flying Finn or the Flying Scot reach out to catch a flying bottle in the paddock, you'll know where it came from!