

FIA STAFF PROFILE

Alexandra Schieren, Formula One Press Delegate (aschieren@fiacommunications.com)

THE GLOBAL GATEKEEPER

As the FIA's Formula One Press Delegate, Alexandra Schieren has to deal with a multitude of media from around the world on a daily basis.



Alexandra Schieren on the grid at the 2008 Chinese Grand Prix

With her fear of flying, Alexandra Schieren might have avoided a career that demands travel to 17 countries worldwide every year. But as the FIA's Formula One Press Delegate, she is used to facing challenges head on.

Schieren's role is a demanding one that involves dealing with a multitude of cultures and customs on a daily basis. She is in charge of accreditation for journalists at all races in the FIA Formula One World Championship and oversees the smooth-running of the media centre at each event.

Schieren is often one of the first people to arrive at a Grand Prix circuit, usually on a Tuesday for an overseas race or Wednesday for a race in Europe. This gives her time to prepare the groundwork for the 450 journalists and photographers who attend every Grand Prix.

The rest of the weekend is spent overseeing operations in the media centre and dealing with the many enquiries related to Formula One and the FIA.

Schieren says: "From Thursday to Sunday, I make sure that the press conferences run on time, that everything is prepared, that guests arrive, staff are in place and technical checks have been carried out. I am responsible for making sure that all information released during a weekend, such as press conference transcripts, stewards' notes and technical reports, are distributed to the media."

It is an important task as the journalists, who together represent the world's press, rely heavily on this information. Then she has to deal with

any questions the media may have and ensure that interview requests are coordinated and carried out as appropriate.

She admits that working with media from all over the world can be challenging but also rewarding. As she says: "To work with different nationalities and different people every two weeks can be a lot of fun, very interesting, sometimes amusing and sometimes outright exasperating."

Schieren is also the link for the F1 team press officers, dealing with questions they might have and coordinating the drivers for press conferences and parades.

The F1 drivers' parade is a challenge in itself. It usually involves all drivers gathering on a platform on the back of a truck which is driven slowly around the circuit to bring them closer to the fans. Unfortunately for Schieren, it is her responsibility to make sure that all 20 of them make it to the truck on time.

Of course, it helps that fines are dished out for any latecomers. As Schieren says: "It is rather challenging to get all 20 of them together at the same time. I remember at one race this year I kept telling them to start going out towards the truck but nobody made a move. So I said 'come on guys, I don't want to write 20 reports to the stewards', which made them move rather quickly."

Schieren has become an essential cog in the Formula One machine. But it could have turned out very differently. Growing up in Cologne, Germany, she was never particularly interested in

motor sport and certainly never envisaged a career in Formula One.

She says: "I got into motor sport completely by accident. In 1993, I answered a job ad from Toyota, which ran a World Rally team at the time, for an assistant in their press department. Somehow I got the job and had to learn rather quickly the difference between a rally and an F1 car."

Schieren stayed with Toyota for three years until 1996, when the team received a 12-month ban from the championship for running illegally modified turbo restrictors at the Catalunya Rally. It was a challenging situation for Schieren, who was in the press department in Catalunya at the time.

But the ban remained and as Schieren puts it, "a rally team that does not do rallies has not a lot to do". So she looked around and found a job with KHP Consulting, a motor sport PR agency based in London. Within two months, she had packed up her life in Germany and headed to England.

At KHP, Schieren worked for different clients in various motor sport categories, including GT, World Rally and F1. In 1998, she moved to Paris and continued working for KHP as a freelance agent. And from 2001, she ran KHP's newly opened French office.

During this time she worked with a number of race circuits and helped set up the media centres at new Grand Prix venues such as Bahrain and Shanghai. It is a project she is still proud of today. As she puts it: "Even the reception in the media centre in Bahrain is my design."

In 2004, she was offered a job with the FIA, first as cover for maternity leave and then as the full-time F1 press delegate. She did not realise it at the time but admits now that she owes a lot to Richard Woods, the FIA's Director of Communications, for convincing her to take the role.

She says: "He convinced me to take this job that I did not want at all in the beginning. I had seen this job from the outside when I was working in the media centres of different grands prix with KHP and it seemed so stressful and time consuming. But once I started and made a few changes, it all improved."

Three years on and she is revelling in the role. Even her fear of flying cannot dampen her spirits. She says: "You would think the fear gets less with all the travelling I do, but somehow it does not. Yet I consider myself lucky to have a job that I do like most of the time, which is challenging and never boring. I get to go to places you would not normally see, meet many different people and learn to deal with different cultures and environments. I have to be happy with that."

