

# Red carpet, choppers champagne greet Formula One in Texas

By Melanie Warner | Reuters – Sun, Nov 18, 2012

[AUSTIN, Texas](#) (Reuters) - Celebrities and well-heeled Formula One fans from around the world hit art shows, book signings, fashion shows and parties this weekend in the Texas capital that is hosting the first U.S. Grand Prix in five years.

The glittering off-track events to celebrate Sunday's Formula 1 race are a change of pace from the gritty, hip gatherings that typically accompany the city's well-known extravaganzas such as [Austin City Limits Music Festival](#) and the South by Southwest film, music and interactive festivals.

"The response has been extraordinary, surpassing even our most confident expectation," said [Nicholas Frankl](#), who has produced Formula One parties in Monaco, Cannes, Abu Dhabi, Miami and London.

Frankl's bash at the downtown Ballet Austin complex, with ticket prices ranging to more than \$9,000, featured gold-infused Comte de Mazeray bottles of champagne. New and vintage Lamborghinis lined the event's parking lot.

"It becomes like an intercultural exchange," said designer Paulo Moore, an Austin resident originally from Argentina who also has lived in Switzerland and Monaco. "I feel like I'm a citizen of the world and is opening this huge window so we can cater to and accommodate different people."

More than 100,000 spectators were expected to watch the race, according to the Austin American-Statesman, which also quoted a race official as saying some 120,000 tickets had been sold as of Thursday.

Frankl said three-quarters of the attendees were from out-of-town or international.

Circuit Of The Americas, which is hosting the Formula One U.S. Grand Prix, said celebrities expected to attend included filmmakers George Lucas and Ron Howard, actors Kyle Chandler, Luke Wilson, Patrick Dempsey and Matthew LeBlanc, musician Enrique Iglesias and former U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords and her husband, retired astronaut Mark Kelly.

Many VIP attendees were arriving by helicopter to the six helipads at the \$400 million Circuit Of The Americas facility, arranged by Charlie Bravo Charter, whose owner said 500 flights were scheduled for the weekend.

Formula One legend Mario Andretti was one of those who arrived by helicopter. Andretti, 72, said although the track has the best design for spectators that he has seen, he doesn't expect a "big wow" from foreign visitors.

"The Formula One contingent is very used to being in the Taj Mahal," said Andretti, a Circuit Of The Americas ambassador. "Nothing is going to impress them."

(Editing by Corrie MacLaggan, Ellen Wulforst, Doina Chiacu)