

## **Baltimore on the fast track - Our view: Although it may have been a shock to some, much-anticipated Grand Prix race appears to have turned out well for Charm City**

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One can only hope that crow tastes like chicken, because after the success of the Baltimore Grand Prix, there are a number of people dining on it this week.

That may even include, gentle reader, the members of this newspaper's editorial board who, along with many letter writers, publicly pouted about the inconveniences and controversies imposed by the three-day event. "It had better be worth it," was one of our snappier headlines.

So let's take the inventory. The turnout of spectators was greater than promised — as high as 160,000 over Labor Day weekend, though the numbers are a little soft given the inexact accounting of tickets. The big race on Sunday was a TV ratings hit, the best ratings on the Versus cable network that an IndyCar series event has drawn this season.

That translates into a lot of favorable publicity for Baltimore and revenue for the various vendors, hotels and other businesses that depend on tourism dollars. Exactly how much probably won't be known for weeks, but there is reason to be optimistic.

Nobody was seriously hurt because of a crash or other mishap (one of the fears trotted out by naysayers), so there's no lasting image of death and destruction. Nor did crime mar the event. Indeed, the typical coverage seen and heard on local TV and radio stations was nothing short of glowing, as reporters excitedly described the thrill of watching cars run around the harbor at eye-popping speeds.

The downside? Some trees were cut down in the process (although organizers have agreed to finance replacements), and some motorists were greatly inconvenienced by downtown traffic snarls, particularly last week but also when certain streets were repaved and upgraded to accommodate the race.

Make no mistake, hosting the race came with a cost — not just the money spent directly on the event but the indirect expense to businesses that were inconvenienced by the preparations and event itself.

Nevertheless, it's hard to see the Baltimore Grand Prix, on balance, as anything short of a nice coup for the city, not only as an economic development boost but perhaps a psychological one as well. Racing fans saw Charm City as something other than a homicide capital, both fictional and real, and a lot of local residents probably woke up feeling better about Baltimore (call it pride if you will) and themselves than they did just a few days ago.

Some of us may even be a bit embarrassed for having such low expectations of an event that, from the beginning, was only meant to promote Baltimore and create economic opportunities. There may be a certain occupant of City Hall who bore the brunt of the public criticism and now may be feeling a certain vindication for her troubles.

Still, the race was a gamble, and maybe the biggest lesson to be learned from its success is that Baltimore ought to take more such risks. If the city can host big-time racing, then is it really all that far-fetched to promote an expansion of its convention center or arena — to note two high-profile projects that may soon be approaching the starting line?

Of course, wagers don't always pay off. That's why it's called risk taking. In the business community, people understand that's what competition is all about. If the path to prosperity was easy and not a no-holds-barred race from start to finish, everyone would be Warren Buffett and nobody would ever find themselves in bankruptcy court.

Sometimes you cross the finish line first, and sometimes you're stuck in the pit with a busted engine and no hope of contending. But unless one gives it a shot, the only guarantee is that you'll never win anything — no trophy, no success, no jobs or opportunities.

Finally, how perfect that the winning driver was an Australian named Will Power. After a dismal week of Baltimore Gas & Electric Co. crews cleaning up outages after Hurricane Irene, it was nice to see at least one kind of power surging through the city so triumphantly.