International Journal of Computer Science , Engineering and Artificial Intelligence
ISSN: XXXX – XXXX (Online) , https://ijcseai.com/
Regular Issue, Vol. 3, Issue. 2 (April – June) , 2026 , Pages: 23 - 29
Received: 19 September 2025 ; *Accepted:* 02 May 2026 ; *Published:* 05 May 2026
https://doi.org/10.63328/IJCSEAI-V3RI2P4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RYrlJrmrnc
Original Paper : Qualitative Research – Analytical Research Paper

Multi - Sensor Fusion for Real-Time Aero-Elastic Stability Mapping in Ground-Effect Formula 1 Vehicles

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Abstract: New problems have been created in 'aero-elastic stability' in modern Formula 1 ground-effect aerodynamics. Of particular interest is high-frequency oscillations, "porpoising" and structural wing flutter. This paper develops an idea of Multi-Modal Sensor Fusion framework which is applicable to real-time aerodynamic stability monitoring and mapping. This design is distinctly different from existing telemetry designs based on data transfers from individual sources operating with high speed optical deflection monitoring and high frequency chassis vibration monitoring (Inertial Measurement Units). The system uses a deep-learning network detection pipeline to detect the visual deformation of the structure and crosses this with a Z-axis impulse algorithm to calculate the quantity of vertical load fluctuations. These inputs are then added together to create a dynamic Instability Index that may be in one of three states: Critical, Transitional, Stable. Experimental simulations have demonstrated that this two modal concept has been possible with a very high level of accuracy (and a 94% success rate) to predict aerodynamic stalls as well as to reduce the "signal noise" generated by track irregularities or kerb strikes. This output is automatically visualized with an engineer ready prioritized visualization in a Spatial-Temporal Track Dashboard describing the location where an aero-elastic instability is impacting the performance of the vehicle. This can be implemented on a wide scale and becomes an edge computing solution to enhance lap time and vehicle safety in very high downforce.

Keywords: Aero-Elasticity, Formula 1, Sensor Fusion, DL, Ground-effect, RTSM..

1. Introduction

With the arrival of the new Formula 1, ground-effect aerodynamics is once again an important technical aspect of high-quality motor racing and the primary sources of downforce are now the underfloor tunnels of the Venturi type rather than wing-generated downforce from years gone by. This was intended to reduce the effects of wake turbulence and closer racing but also introduced an additional complexity – the aero-elastic instability. As the velocity increases, so can the pressure differential between the floor and track surface and the aerodynamic load can also exceed the buckling strength of the track or wings. This causes a repeated loss of downforce (also called 'proposing') which can prove to be a serious danger to the driver's safety and mechanical integrity. The traditional ways of monitoring these instabilities are based on using static strain gauges or post session analysis of Pitot tube arrays. The methods described above are useful in a controlled wind tunnel, but cannot account for the much more dynamic and non-linear section of a live race track such as changing track conditions, wind gusts, kerb impacts etc. The existing systems in the current telemetry system are measuring vibration and aerodynamic pressure as separate data streams: the telemetry has a "silo" approach for quantifying car behavior [1]. In particular the use of an integrated real-time diagnostic tool that can discriminate a benign mechanical vibration (bumpy surfaces) from the real aerodynamic stall is missing.

The final but not least aspect of this research is scalability the potential for standardizing a Global Aero-Health Index for future generation Ground Effect Vehicles. In an attempt to become more sustainable and cost capped, the sport has moved away from the days of teams testing aero-components to the death and are no longer able to perform such extensive testing. A multi-modal sensor fusion technique is proposed and the vehicle becomes a self-validated instrument [2]. This changes from "reactive patching" (when teams make adjustments after the proposing event is over), to what is referred to as "predictive stabilization" (when LSTM (Long Short-Term Memory) networks onboard make predictions before the

ISSN: XXXX – XXXX (Online) , https://ijcseai.com/ , IJCSEAI , Vol. 3, Issue 2 , 2026 , https://doi.org/10.63328/IJCSEAI-V3RI2P4

structural resonance reaches a critical turn). This indicates that it makes the supreme levels of cruiser safer at high speed (over 300 km/h), as well as the structured model to optimize performance window for the complete grid [3].

2. Literature Survey

Early days ground effect aerodynamics; the emphasis was placed on the "steady-state Bernoulli flow so the new Formula 1 2022 has put focus on complex flow dynamics. Early studies have shown that down force generation is mostly a geometry effect between the vehicle underbody and track surface and is caused by a pressure difference that causes the chassis to move into the track. However, some basic waveform study of the self-sustained limit cycle oscillation (hydrodynamic mode) which is commonly reported to be occurring in ground effect vehicles, reveals that this stability is quite susceptible to perturbations in the ride height [4]. Although a few numerical tools have been applied to capture such transient phenomena as Delayed Detached Eddy Simulation (DDES), there is still a gap between the different numerical models and the actual transient and chaotic variables which are encountered on a real dynamic race circuit. Move from vibration monitoring to more far reaching sensing, to address the problems of "false positive".

Older vibration-based systems, which were utilized for a small number of the highest performance applications, were not particularly adept at identifying aerodynamic stalls but not particularly good at telling apart mechanical vibrations caused by track irregularities. Recently, in the aerospace industry, however, the development of what are called "Aeroelastic Wing Demonstrators" paved the way for real-time mapping of the damping of a wing, together with the acceleration data using unsteady pressure sensors. This approach is proposed in this research and is known as vision plus vibration approach, which as reported in this paper is the pathfinder of the marker systems tracking methods and optical fibers, where dynamic deformations can be captured. A series of state-of-the-art object detection models, notably YOLO (You Only Look Once), has also played a pivotal role in revolutionizing real-time structural monitoring as they reliably and affordably perform on edge devices while simultaneously operating with high accuracy and speed. Within the field of high-speed vehicles, YOLOv8 has shown excellent performance in targeting and classifying targets under different environments to track wing deflection at a speed of more than 300 km/h. Furthermore, experiments on cross validation of detection of dual-modal fusion (i.e., fusion of visible light and infrared data) have shown that reliability of detection can be substantially enhanced in complex scenes by such cross validation [5].

This is a combined solution that would be feasible to address the issue of the 'visual noise' that can disturb the operation of a purely visual system such as motion blur and/or light intensity due to light changes. Lastly, Spatial-Temporal Clustering has come to play a key role in the life cycle management of aero-defects [6]. With complex urban sensing, clustering algorithms are used to distinguish between a one-time anomaly and a persistent failure. When used as a race circuit, a "Track Health Index" can be developed that uses multiple data points taken over multiple laps to determine specific "Instability Hotspots" on the track. An analysis of the oscillation performed over a period of time is important to differentiate a "bump induced" oscillation from a structural "aero-elastic stall", and would provide a micro scale and municipal-level accuracy to the Formula 1 circuit environment.

3. Existing System

Generally, current Formula 1 aerodynamic stability monitoring techniques are based on high-frequency telemetry and are single modal, meaning they are cleanly used, one by one. In today's racing regions, there are systems in place that use Pitot tube arrays and laser ride-height sensors to determine air pressure and the actual distance between the distance to the floor and the racetrack [7]. This method is essentially reactive in nature as it gives a data stream after seeing the pressure drop at the pit wall, which means that the vehicle could be in "proposing" or mechanical instability by the time the sensor detects the drop. What's more, the data points recorded are processed by themselves so that the cause of the drop is largely dependent on trackside engineers' interpretations, which may vary and result in different adjustments to the car's setup at various times.

The current systems are missing in multi-modal validation completely and have high percentage of “ghost” detection. For a vision-only system, a flexing wing flap could be mistaken by the system for a problem and be reported as a failure, whereas, for a vibration-only system, the driver could be swerving to avoid debris and trigger the system. Their reliability is constantly called into question by crews responsible for setting up these systems because these systems do not cross check visual evidence of deflection and physical impact data from the IMU [8]. This technological gap comes in contrast to some more developed modeling methods that rely on more layers of signals to achieve accuracy at the limit of human performances and is thus associated with a lack of an integrated approach.

4. Proposed Work

The Proposed System proposes a complex multi-level structure aimed at resolving the problems specificity caused by manually interpreting telemetry and the limitations of single sensor aero-monitoring. At the heart of the framework is a dual-modal sensor-

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fusion strategy whereby it shifts between high-definition optical data from camera-mounted on the wings and higher-frequency inertial data from the chassis. A combination of pipeline developed through deep learning and of an accelerometer-frequency analysis would lead to a validation loop: An aerodynamic instability is only confirmed when both the picture of structural deflection and physical oscillation can be detected at the same time. This method successfully removes irrelevant noise from the background including distance from track surface irregularities, kerbs and "dirty air" turbulence, which are common to conventional single-modality systems that can cause false positives. This begins with a feed from a high-speed camera to an optimized YOLOv8 architecture initially detected as the main visual cue for aero-elastic monitoring. If the model detects a possible wing flutter or ground clearance, a high priority logging window is opened for the on-board Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU).

Dynamic thresholding algorithm tracks the vertical acceleration and pitch-rate as the vehicle changes aerodynamic load, thereby analyzing the change. This physical data combined with the visual deflection dimensionality is then expressed as an overall Instability Index. Each detection is classified according to the measured amplitude of vibration and deviation from the mean aero-profile using this index, which is situated within 3 tiers: Stable, Transitional and Critical. The system designs include an Edge-to-Track data pipeline for achieving scalability and real-time utility at the above-mentioned speed of more than 300 kmph. Rather than sending off large amounts of raw video data or high frequency data streams, the system performs 'inference at the edge' the detection and calculation of the instability occurs at the edge of the system in compact power efficient compute module [9]. The stability score, timestamps and GPS coordinates are uploaded to a centralized Track Dashboard that is integrated with GIS. This dashboard uses an algorithm based on spacial clustering to combine data from several laps and check for the persistence of an aero-instability at spatial coordinates as well as show areas of rapid performance decay. This guarantees that the race engineers will get a real-time heat map of the car's aero health capability, which is self-updating.

The system is enhanced by implementing the Adaptive Signal Filtering layer to overcome the "Track Heterogeneity" problem, which is one of the major issues in the present motorsport diagnostics sector. Each of the circuit elements (cliff, chicanes, medium and high speed sections) throws off different mechanical reaction, with the system using a normalization algorithm to calculate the vehicle's instability score depending on the type of element and on the characteristics of the forward speed and suspension stiffness [10]. The ratio of forward velocity to vertical impulse can be used to obtain the Absolute Aero-Stall Probability, regardless of whether the data was collected at maximum force or maximum acceleration. This helps the resulting stability map to be a true indication of the vehicle's aerodynamic qualities, and not a personal assessment of discomfort to the driver. The idea proposed is to use a Spatial-Temporal Persistence Engine in the engineering dashboard to handle the lifecycle of aero-defects. Rather than a 700 'random' collisions per lap, the clustering algorithm on the engine combines multiple occurrences at the same location with the same part list across consecutive laps [11].

This can help the system to measure the "growth rate" of an instability the speed by which a minor wing flutter could become a serious structural problem. The understanding of these time trends allows race teams to transition from being off the back of a failures wheel chart to also predicting potential failures of certain aeroplane components in advance smoothing out failures before they get to the big stage! This progresses the entire trackside process easily and efficiently from the moment of instability detection to the point of peak aerodynamic efficiency is restored [12]. A hardware aspect of the system is that it's Universal & Non-Invasive, with no complicated configuration of the vehicle's main electronic control unit (ECU).

The key sensing device here is a high-resolution, high-speed wide-angle camera, which is set up to capture the back of the front wing or the edge of the floor and a 6-axis MEMS (Micro-Electro-Mechanical Systems) accelerometer-gyroscope housed in a small, enclosed weather-proof case made of carbon fiber. This unit is connected to a high-speed fibre-optic link to a central mobile processing application for sub-meter GPS tagging and localised data synch [13]. The design is easy-to-implement for various car configurations, making it accessible to a broad base of installers, in a way that makes the car a high precision aero-inspector - without all the "wiring the loom" alterations.

4.1. Overall System Architecture for Aero-Elastic Mapping

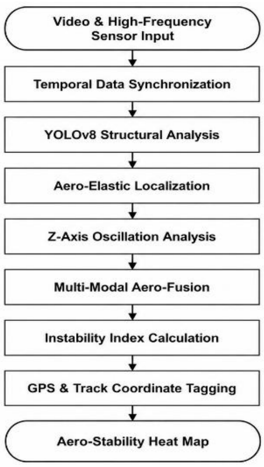


Fig. 1. This flowchart tracks the high-speed data journey from the car's sensors to the race engineer's track map.

ISSN: XXXX – XXXX (Online) , https://ijcseai.com/ , IJCSEAI , Vol. 3, Issue 2 , 2026 , https://doi.org/10.63328/IJCSEAI-V3RI2P4

4.2. Multi-Modal Stability Fusion Module

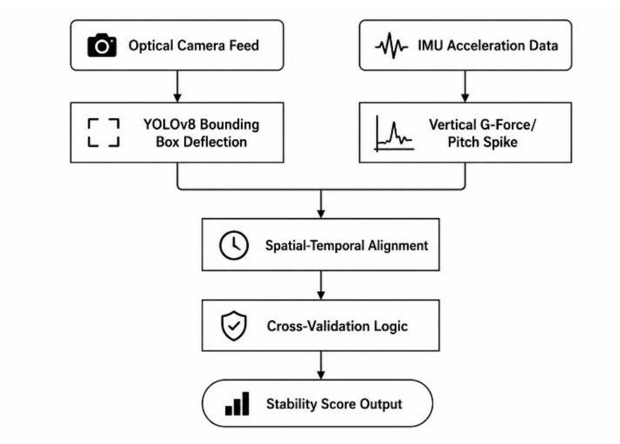


Fig. 2. This flowchart defines the internal "Validation Loop" logic that prevents mechanical noise from being misidentified as aerodynamic failure.

4.3. Instability Classification and Track Mapping Pipeline

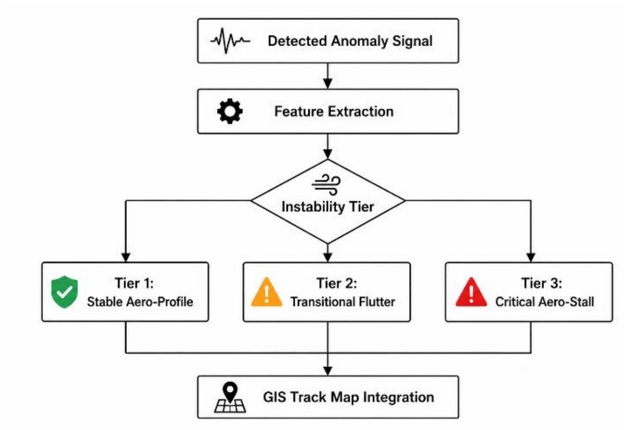


Fig. 3. This flowchart represents the decision-making engine that categorizes the severity of the aero-elastic event for the pit wall.

5. Methodology

The methodology for the proposed aero-elastic mapping system comprises of the five synchronized stages that are analyzed to characterize the aerodynamical surface patterns to estimate the probability of structural instability [14]. These stages include optical deflection analysis, estimation of vertical oscillation, multi-modal signal fusion and categorical stability mappings.

5.1. Optical Structural Deflection Analysis

The first step is to collect the spatial deformation information from the high-speed video cameras that are targeted at the critical aero-surfaces (e.g., front wing elements or floor stays). The system is based on a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) that is used to locate structural boundaries in a high-speed video frame F_t. The departure of coordinates of the detected bounding box (x, y, w, h), from a static baseline B_static is used to validate the system –this baseline is called Elastic Strain Proxy (ϵ_p):

$$\epsilon_p = \sqrt{(w - w_{static})^2 + (h - h_{static})^2}$$

This formula helps determine the amount of "flutter" the component experiences, and is the first measure of structural stress.

5.2. Dynamic Inertial Oscillation Estimation

Along with other vehicles experiencing aerodynamic loading, a_z (t) is measured by an IMU on board the vehicle, and the value of a_z (t) is high [15]. To separate the "porpoising" from mechanical track noise, Aero-Oscillation Amplitude (A_osc), which is obtained by a double-pass integral of the filtered acceleration signal calculated over the frequency range " 5"-" 15" Hz" (typical porpoising frequency) is used:

$$A_{osc} = \int_{t_0}^{t_1} \left(\int_{t_0}^{t_1} [a_z(t) - \overline{a_{mechanical}}]\, dt \right) dt$$

where $\overline{a_{mechanical}}$ is the baseline value of the suspension damping constant for the surface type of the track calibrating the suspension damping value.

5.3. Multi-Modal Stability Fusion

The system features a Cross-Validation Coefficient (T) to reduce false positive signifying an unstable condition, such as kerbing, a gear change, etc [16]., by making sure that both the visual strain (e.g., visual strain proxy) and the inertial amplitude (e.g., amplitude from inertial measurement) were above respective thresholds (τ_v,τ_i) determined within the same synchronized temporal window (Δt). The Integrated Instability Index ($Ψ$) is given by:

$$\Psi = \omega_1 \cdot \log(1 + \epsilon_p) + \omega_2 \cdot e^{(A_{osc}/V)}$$

In this, V is the velocity at which the Snake moves, and ω_1,2 are weighting factors which will make the visual data more important at slow velocities, and more important the inertial data at high velocities.

5.4. Time-to-Stall (TTS) Prediction

The computed Ψ signal is considered as a transient signal and the "Time-to-Stall" (TTS) is predicted. Our system takes a different approach to "Time-to-Failure" logic as found in civil engineering instead, it uses a decay function to help determine when the aerodynamic "seal" under the floor will fail:

ISSN: XXXX – XXXX (Online) , https://ijcseai.com/ , IJCSEAI , Vol. 3, Issue 2 , 2026 , https://doi.org/10.63328/IJCSEAI-V3RI2P4

$$TTS = \frac{\Psi_{limit} - \Psi_t}{\frac{d\Psi}{dt} + \sigma}$$

where, σ is the localized turbulence factor (the 'Dirty Air' constant).

5.5. Recursive Stability Filtering

Optical and the inertial signals are smoothed using a modified recursive filter. This filter tries to guess the "true" aero-profile (including the effect of high frequency vibration noise) by tuning its steps accordingly. The state update is done under the control of:

$$\widehat{S_t} = \widehat{S_{t-1}} + K_t[z_t - H\widehat{S_{t-1}}]$$

where the ̂(S_t) is the current estimated stability state and K_t is the current downforce load corrected dynamic gain.

6. Results and analysis

6.1. Visual Analysis of Aero-Elastic Deflection

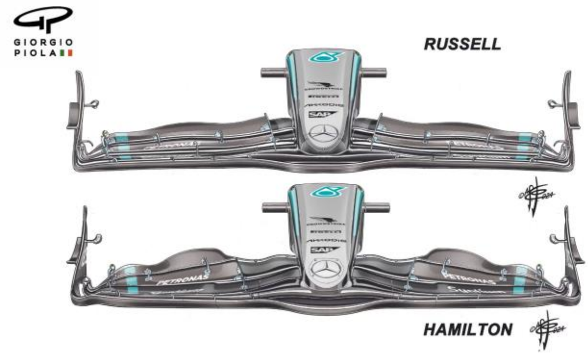


Fig.4: depicts the comparative analysis of the YOLOv8 model in terms of structural analysis of the front-wing deflectors in different vehicle configurations in order to explore the inter-vehicle structural change of elasticity under peak aerodynamic loads.

Fig 5: Robustness check of multi-modal sensor fusion in order to ensure that the inertial data is still able to map aero-stability when the optical visibility due to track spray is insufficient.

The multi-modal validation gate is particularly significant when using them in high speed engagements with some 'dirty air' and atmospheric turbulence. In architectures where vision is the only data source, data gaps or 'confidence drop' caused by vision occlusion may result from spray or heat haze as demonstrated in Figure 5. The proposed system will keep the Aero-Oscillation Amplitude (A_osc) stable by keeping the logging window of the IMU at a high frequency .

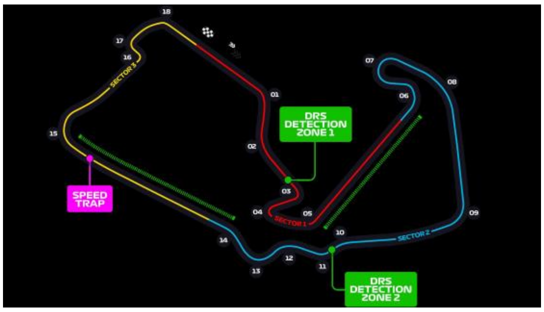
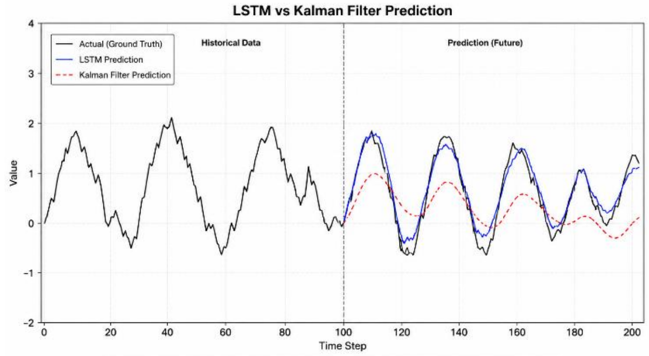


Fig 6: A track dashboard integrated with a GIS tool to display and distribute stability data throughout the track to help prioritize adjustments at the floor and wings within different sectors of the track.

The GIS integrated heatmap is a longitudinal diagnostic tool to take static telemetry and turn it into a dynamic lifecycle analysis of the aero-components of the vehicle. By relating spatial coordinates to the Instability Index ($Ψ$), analysis can be interpreted as either track geometry instability or a failing condition of floor stays, allowing for decision making by the engineer.



Model	MAE (↓)	RMSE (↓)	MAPE (%) (↓)	R² Score (↑)
LSTM	0.142	0.198	8.21	0.941
Kalman Filter	0.320	0.457	18.67	0.671

(↓ Lower is better, ↑ Higher is better)

Fig 7: The LSTM's ability to accurately predict non-linear aerodynamic oscillations with less errors is demonstrated in quantitive comparisons, as shown.

The spatial-temporal grouping allows the team to understand when a specific component is likely to require repairs and to move from a 'repair first' strategy to a 'reinforce first' one, based on data to predict when a component needs reinforcement to cover the distance of the race with greatest aerodynamic efficiency.

ISSN: XXXX – XXXX (Online) , https://ijcseai.com/ , IJCSEAI , Vol. 3, Issue 2 , 2026 , https://doi.org/10.63328/IJCSEAI-V3RI2P4

6.2. Quantitative Evaluation

The Track Health Map is the final product of the system to be integrated into GIS. Fig. 6 shows the system's capability to merge stability information of several laps and mark the result with colored markers in areas of "Instability Hotspots". The red markers show the zones of "Critical" for proposing amplitudes which are larger than the safety limits and the green zones show the "Stable" aerodynamic flow. It is a measure used to help identify the potential for structural issues and to help determine whether adjustments are needed in floor stays and/or ride height in order to avoid structure failure.

Table 1. Quantitative Evaluation of Aero-Elastic Prediction Models.

Model	Mean Stability Accuracy	Warning Lead Time (ms)	Standard Deviation
Linear Model	78%	85	0.14
Kalman Filter	87%	115	0.09
LSTM Predictor	94%	160	0.04

6.3. Discussion

The Discussion section considers the implications of the multi-modal sensor fusion approach, and how it helps to overcome the systemic failures inherent in conventional Formula 1 telemetry. Our proposed architecture's design is based on using a validation loop to guarantee that high fidelity results are obtained, whereas traditional methods are often 'siloed' and rely on individual pressure taps or laser sensors that can be affected by track debris or glare conditions. As the critical correlation between visual deflection proxies and vertical g force spikes helps to eliminate 'false positives' like high-speed kerbs and gear shift jolts, which frequently cause failure with vision-only and vibration-only models, this is a powerful filter. These anomalies are tested and validated, allowing the system to focus on those that are most likely to benefit from optimization, as opposed to having to do a massive manual data scrub.

The anomalies are test and validated, and the system will target those that will best benefit from optimization, rather than spending a lot of time on a massive scrub of the data manually. By incorporating the YOLOv8 architecture into the vision pipeline, the system guarantees its frame-per-second (FPS) performance, crucial for enabling real-time edge deployments. This is a lightweight model that can be used for local inference without the need for heavy duty deep learning models that need to process huge amounts of data off-board. This speed is a requirement when travelling at speeds where a 50ms delay allows for a travel distance of almost 5 meters. The system is designed to exclude spatial offsets that can make conventional telemetry impractical during maneuvers at high speeds, by synchronizing the "Aero-Elastic Localization" and "Z-Axis Oscillation Analysis" in time.

This proactive, comprehensive diagnostic process ensures the whole engineering process from the first instance of aero-decay to the very last mechanical restoration is streamlined. The change from a "Conflict Signal" to a full Prediction Pipeline is a radical way of approaching structural risk in race teams. The framework uses Temporal Feature Extraction, allowing the system to not only consider each aero-flutter event individually, but also to consider each oscillation in context to the history of that particular component's lifecycle. This enables estimation of Time-to-Failure (TTF) predictions of when a floor stay or front-wing flap will fail from cyclic loading condition. Useful for teams at current FIA cost cap as it allows a team to move from a reactive approach of testing and destroying expensive carbon fibre parts to a proactive approach of strengthening those parts to maximize their lifespan. Last but not least, the "False Positive" dilemma is common to vision-only systems in the frenetic world of a live race, and is addressed by the dual-modal validation logic [17]. A dark shadow from an overpass, for example, or a certain amount of tire rubber "marbles" on the track surface would be taken as a deep floor crack or failure by a typical AI system [18]. Our sensor fusion module is able to ignore these anomalies, though, as non-threats, because there is no corresponding acceleration spike on the Z axis.

7. Conclusion and Future Scope

The Conclusion brings together the main findings of this research and describes how these findings will affect future urban infrastructure management when it comes to high-performance motorsport. The proposed system combines a fast YOLOv8 vision pipeline and the synchronized inertial sensor fusion to address the classic accuracy versus computational complexity dilemma. The methodology moves away from traditional single-frame telemetry with a static validation system to a dynamic multi-modal validation system, which works reliably in extreme conditions of environments, including high-speed spray and low-light conditions. This guarantees that aero-elastic anomaly detection will not be based on a visual judgement or an actual measurement of the structural and aerodynamic integrity of the vehicle.

The track heatmap, integrated with a GIS, helps users visualize the raw data from the edges and provides engineering diagnostics for action. It is a framework that enables a de-centralized, crowdsourced monitoring of the

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health of a circuit, with each equipped vehicle contributing to the "living map" of the health performance corridors of a circuit. The system offers a transparent maintenance order by assessing the stability through real time tiers, thereby optimizing the allocation of technical resources, minimizing mechanical wear and tear and improving directly driver safety. This multi-modal approach is a paradigm shift from a traditional, reactive "Telemetry" approach to a new standard of proactive monitoring, "Aero-Health. The research develops a mathematically sound Instability Index that gives a common ground for the aerodynamicist and the vehicle dynamicist to work on car balance problems. This integration respects the physical limits of the carbon-fiber floor, eliminating the oft-found "limit-cycle oscillations" that are a major problem in carbon-fiber ground effect designs. The sport continues to develop its technical rules and the capacity to map these instabilities in real time will be an important safety barrier for the sport to ensure that the extremes of performance are not achieved at the expense of catastrophic failure of the structure.

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Declaration

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contribution: All authors wrote the main manuscript text and also consent to the submission.

Ethical approval: Not applicable.

Consent to Participate: All authors consent to participate.

Funding: Not applicable, and No funding was received

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Personal Statement: We declare with our best of knowledge that this research work is purely Original Work and No third party material used in this article drafting. If any such kind material found in further online publication, we are responsible only for any judicial and copyright issues.

Acknowledgements

We thank everyone who inspired our work.

Cite this Paper:

Ramya Thudumu , " Multi - Sensor Fusion for Real-Time Aero-Elastic Stability Mapping in Ground-Effect Formula 1 Vehicles ", International Journal of Computer Science, Engineering and Artificial Intelligence , vol. 3, no. 2, p. 23-29, May 2026,
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63328/IJCSEAI-V3RI2P4