

F1 Advent Calendar 2009 – Day One

Hello and welcome to an extended mini-series, our F1 Advent Calendar. Advent is the period of waiting before Christmas, counting down to the Nativity Celebration. We're going to mix that up a bit and add in an F1 flavour, and recap the 2009 season over the next 24 days. We're heading right back to the beginning of the year, so let's get started with Day One - The Brawn Surprise.

Whether you were a Honda fan or not, we all lived through the anxiety and concern of the 2008 off season. The future of the team was completely unknown and all the potential rescue deals seemed to end in failure. It wasn't until the first few days in March that things took a turn for the better, and Ross Brawn announced the management buyout with the team turning into Brawn GP.

Jenson Button and Rubens Barrichello were retained, with their experience counting for a lot - 423 races started between the pair of them. It was Button who had the first taste of the brand new car though - the BGP001. The team took up a portion of Silverstone for a private shakedown, although it really wasn't that private. The first images emerged of the team's new livery, the infamous white, black and day-glo yellow, and Button was particularly vocal about how well the car ran underneath him. It was an important experience for the entire team, as they had fitted brand new Mercedes engines into the chassis.

Button not only got the first taste of the Brawn car behind closed doors, he also got behind the wheel when the team joined the rest of the field at the official Barcelona test later in March.

It would not be exaggerating things to suggest everyone was completely blown away by the Brawn's pace. Button was well over half a second faster than closest placed Trulli by the end of the first morning, and the team completed 30 laps without a single niggle. By the end of the day, Button had slipped down to fourth, but he kept up a consistent pace, and it's fair to say most of the other drivers were surprised by the improvement. From a back marker car, to a team with no future, to a top running driver within the space of a few months.

Ross Brawn wasn't surprised, though. He said: "It's 15 months of work. We said that we were sacrificing last year to concentrate on this car, and what you see is what we said we would do. So it is perfectly rational in my mind."

Raikkonen was fastest on the second day, but on day three, Button was back up there, shaving a couple of seconds off his own and most of the other driver's times. On the fourth and final day of testing, Barrichello was almost an entire second faster than Rosberg behind him.

A test the next week in Jerez continued in a similar fashion, Barrichello fastest on day 1, Alonso just pipping Brawn on day 2, but Button returning to the top of the timesheets on day 3. Brawn's competitors really started to sit up and take notice. Alonso said: "It's not normal that they are so quick in their first tests. The truth is that they have a car that Honda began working on in 2007 to use in 2009. And that's evident in its design, because it's a very elaborate car, with different shapes than the rest."

Those "different shapes" weren't going unnoticed at all, as the Brawn's pace was a key factor in the double diffuser concerns that were to follow.

That concludes the story behind door number one. Join us tomorrow to find out what treats we have in store.