



F1 Advent Calendar 2009 – Day Eleven

Welcome to our end of year extended mini-series - the F1 Advent Calendar 2009 - where we are opening a door each day to find a key story of the 2009 season. It's our version of the traditional season review, and I'm keen to find out what's behind today's door - Day Eleven - Accidents Happen.

The Hungarian Grand Prix has a bit of a reputation for being boring, although the last few years have seen races that are a lot worse - this means you Valencia. In 2009, qualifying has taken on more importance, both in terms of racing results, and in terms of interest in the weekend. Unfortunately for Hungary, Felipe Massa's accident overshadowed everything, anyway.

In the first part of qualifying, Alguersuari suffered an hydraulic failure that ended his session early. Rosberg topped the times, and Felipe Massa easily got through to the second session. He was also easily through to the third session, but in the last few minutes of Q2, the World Feed cut to an image of the Ferrari crashed into the tyre wall at turn four. It took a while to piece the story together, but after replays it became clear that a piece of debris had fallen off the Brawn car he was following, and struck him on the helmet.

He was knocked unconscious almost immediately, and thus took no action to avoid the barriers. It took a while, but he was extracted from the car and airlifted to the nearest hospital in Budapest.

The accident was all the more eerie coming just a week after the tragic death of Henry Surtees, who was involved in a fatal accident in the F2 series at Brands Hatch, when a wheel struck his helmet after coming loose from another car. In Massa's incident, it turns out the debris was a heavy duty spring from Barrichello's car. Brawn confirmed this to be the case, and submitted to an FIA investigation during the third session of qualifying, to ensure Button's car was safe. In doing so, he only had one run and attempt at pole position. He qualified eighth. Massa actually qualified tenth, but obviously could take no part in the rest of proceedings. He was also missing from the race as well.

At the hospital, he underwent emergency surgery, as the spring had made contact with the helmet around his left eye. There were many stories later that if it had been just a tiny bit lower, things could have been a lot different. His pregnant wife, Rafaela flew out from Brazil to be at his side.

Thankfully, despite his injuries being classified as life-threatening when he first arrived at hospital, he began to recover very quickly. After just a week, he returned home to Brazil, for further recuperation. His condition continued to improve, and whilst he would have been okay without further surgery if he was just going to live a normal life, Massa was determined to return to racing. Talking about missing being behind the wheel, Felipe said: "It's not easy. I want to be in the car, driving, especially here in Brazil, it would have been fantastic to come back for this race, but unfortunately we need to wait a bit more. It's not easy to be outside just looking, not doing anything, just discussing what is happening in the test." It must have been made harder by the offer for him to wave the chequered flag at the Brazilian GP, which he did as Webber took the win.

Massa was operated on again to put a plate above the eye, but it wasn't long before he was back training. Just recently, he returned to karting, he's had a go in the F2007 with GP2 tyres on, and he came third and first in his charity karting event - beating Michael Schumacher. He has also become a father, with wife Rafaela bringing Felipe Jr safely into the world.

That's all for this episode of the F1 Advent Calendar 2009. Thank you for listening as we make our way through the 2009 season. Join me tomorrow when we open the door for Day Twelve.