



F1 Advent Calendar 2009 – Day Fourteen

Welcome to another episode of our extended mini series, the F1 Advent Calendar 2009. Each day, we're running through a key moment from the 2009 season, as found behind the door of our F1 advent calendar. Today, we're on to Day Fourteen - Not Quite Banned.

The fallout from the Hungarian Grand Prix continued for a long time afterwards. The qualifying timing incident was cleared up pretty quickly, and attention focused on Massa's condition. He began to improve, much quicker than anticipated, although it seemed as though it would still be quite a long road to recovery. With all that going on, what we really needed was a little bit more controversy.

Yesterday, we ran through what happened on Sunday in Hungary itself, and touched upon the loose wheel that flew off Fernando Alonso's Renault, after not being secured properly during a pit stop. It could have been a pretty dangerous incident, there were spectators, marshals and other cars around at the time, but thankfully, the errant wheel avoided contact with anything other than the barrier.

Alonso finished his lap on three wheels, pitted for a new one, but retired later with an unrelated problem. Afterwards, the team were called to the stewards. Now, things flying around the track was a very sensitive subject at the time, with Massa's welfare praying heavily on people's minds, and the tragic death of Henry Surtees just a week earlier being caused by a stray wheel. It was not a surprise then, when the stewards gave Renault a one-race ban - they would not be allowed to participate in the European Grand Prix.

The reasoning behind the ban was that the car was released from the pitlane without a wheel-nut retaining device, so the team must have known it wasn't safe. They didn't make the driver aware, try and stop him, or recall him, and allowed Alonso to continue in a dangerous car.

With the European Grand Prix at Valencia, one of Alonso's home races, the timing of the ban couldn't have been more harmful for the team. Renault immediately appealed the penalty, and even the organisers of the Valencia race got involved, arguing: "It would be a shame if he missed the race and we are confident that he will be able to race, although we know it will be hard especially considering the other accidents that took place over the weekend. What happened is serious, but we hope it doesn't hurt the European Grand Prix or the fans."

Thankfully for them, the traditional Formula 1 summer break came next, which meant the FIA could schedule an appeal hearing before the race itself. This came on the 17th August, where Renault's lawyer, Ali Malek, defended the team: "Was there a conscious wrongdoing from Renault? There was none what-so-ever. The only persons who knew were the two mechanics. Nobody on the pitwall knew there was a problem and the driver did not know either. "There was a series of unfortunate events but no conscious wrongdoing."

The FIA examined all the arguments, and decided that the best course of action was to overturn the penalty, meaning Renault could race in Valencia after all. Instead, they were given a \$50,000 fine, with the FIA stating there was not enough proof that the team released Alonso knowingly, and they had also received four letters of support from rival teams - with two of them admitting they were changing their own pit stop procedures in the wake of what had happened.

For a short while, at least, Renault had the support of their fellow racers.



That is all for this episode of our advent calendar. I think we may be moving on from Hungary in tomorrow's show, but you'll have to join me then to find out, as we open the advent door for Day Fifteen.

sidepodcast.com
YOUR WEEKLY F1 FIX