

Ancillary F1 – Météo-France

Welcome to the Sidepodcast Mini Series Ancillary F1. Already this series we've had a look at Bridgestone, Mercedes and Tilke Engineering, and today it's the turn of another company who help the world of Formula 1 without ever taking home a trophy.

Météo-France is the official national meteorological service in France, and is the weather data supplier for Formula 1 teams. The organisation has been in existence since 1993, with headquarters in Paris, and funds most of its 300 million Euro budget with state grants, royalties, and commercial services.

One of those commercial services began in alliance with Toyota. In 1997, the team manager of Toyota was Ange Pasquali, and he brought Météo-France on board to provide weather information for Le Mans. The company soon progressed onto Formula 1.

Eight of the teams currently contribute towards the cost of the weather service, although when the FIA discussed a potential increase in the cost of Formula 1 entry fees recently, it was suggested that teams pay for the system in its entirety and estimated its annual cost at 485,000EUR per year.

Météo-France supply data to the FIA from a small unit within the circuit and measure the weather to internationally accepted standards. The information gathered isn't supposed to be used in regulatory matters, as that is the job of FOM supplied weather data, which can be found on page 3 of the pitlane timing screens. However, controversially both the Williams and BMW teams relied on the supplied information for their "cool-fuel" defense following the 2007 Brazilian Grand Prix.

The main problem for Météo-France is that the FOM supplied information and their own quite often disagree. Race Control can provide us with the standard "No rain expected in the next thirty minutes" messages, but, the service has a reputation for being a bit unreliable.

Some people within the paddock aren't happy with either system mind you. In 2006, Pat Symonds wasn't shy about mincing his words. When asked how useful the information was, he said: "Rubbish. Absolute rubbish. There is just nothing here. We don't subscribe to the Météo-France system, because we normally bring our own weathermen." But then talking of the FOM supplied system, in October of 2007, Pat said "The equipment that is used to display the temperature on page 3 of the timing screens is very, very old. It's not cared for, it's not been calibrated for years."

In addition to turning up to races, the French weather provider is also on hand at the Paul Ricard High Tech Test Track. The nearby airport has been using the services for some time and in the summer of 2007 the HTTT's Intranet system was upgraded to supply teams with essential weather information.

This gives us a good example of what Météo-France can do when they get it right. Paul Ricard gets a four-day forecast which is updated every few hours, and is constantly rolling forward. There's also a seven day forecast covering a much wider area. If the weather looks like it's getting serious, Météo-France can issue the circuit with various warnings and red alerts. The intranet side of things also boasts some radar images, to allow officials at the circuit to make their own mind up about conditions.

In real life, no one ever believes what the weather man says, but when it comes to Formula 1, getting accurate information is vital to race strategy and ultimately results. Whilst we might complain about Météo-France, FOM and their weather systems, the question is, could anyone do it better?



That's it for this show. I'd love to hear your feedback about the weather information supplied during races, leave your thoughts on 0121 28 87225 or at Sidepodcast.com. See you tomorrow for another ancillary company.

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