



Days that Shook the F1 World (Part 1) – US Grand Prix 2005

Welcome to Sidepodcast. This is the first part in our latest mini series – Days that Shook the F1 World. The idea is to pick out some specific dates in Formula 1 history that made drivers, teams, fans and the media sit up and take notice. Days that quite literally shook the F1 World. Our first date is June 19 2005.

The 2005 Formula 1 season proved to be a refreshing break from the Ferrari dominance of previous years. Fernando Alonso took his R-25 Renault and made it work out on track, and Michael Schumacher was left struggling in the distance. Only Kimi Raikkonen could match Alonso's pace, but the McLaren suffered from reliability problems.

In June, Formula 1 descended upon the USA, and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The Speedway features some of the only high banking in the Formula 1 calendar, as the cars leave the infield section and rejoin the Speedway oval. The critical corner is Turn 13. During Friday Practice, Ralf Schumacher suffered a left rear tyre failure at the turn and crashed heavily. After close inspection by Michelin of both the tyres in use, and spare tyres flown in from Spain, they advised their customer teams – seven out of the ten teams competing – that they couldn't guarantee safety through the banking for a full race distance. On Saturday, Michelin informed the FIA that they didn't know what the problem with the tyres was, but that it could be solved by slowing the cars down at Turn 13. The teams proposed several options: new spec tyres to be flown in, or a temporary chicane to be built, but Race Director Charlie Whiting would not allow either of these amendments. According to him, Bridgestone would be unfairly put out by a chicane, and essentially it was Michelin's problem if they couldn't bring the correct tyres to a race.

The teams met up, discussed the options, and all except Ferrari, who weren't there, agreed that a chicane really was the best way to go, despite the FIA's concerns that any changes to the track layout would render the race outside of the championship. Bernie Ecclestone offered to ask Jean Todt for Ferrari's position on the proposal but returned with bad news. Todt believed the problem was between the FIA and Michelin and didn't want to get involved.

Discussions continued, and the proposals went back and forth, with the teams beginning to come round to the idea of running a non-championship event, if only for the fan's entertainment. The FIA and Ferrari continued to disagree to all the options presented to them.

With only moments to go, and confusion reigning supreme, the teams decided that they had no options left and would be forced to complete only a formation lap and then retire from the race. Ferrari were going to race, and Jordan decided to race also. Minardi team principal, Paul Stoddart, who was running on Bridgestones decided he needed to race, to keep the fight up with Jordan, but announced he would retire his cars if the Jordan's were out of the race.

And so, twenty cars took to the grid, twenty cars completed the installation lap, then fourteen cars peeled off into the pit lane. Six cars took their places at the start line.

The crowd boomed.

Obviously Ferrari won the race, and it helped them considerably in both driver and constructors championship. But any benefits the team had were outweighed by the many, many complaints. Anyone attending the race was absolutely furious, the race was rubbished and the future of F1 in the United States looked very shaky.



The fans blamed the FIA. The FIA blamed Michelin.

It was a very dark day in the entire history of Formula 1, and still provokes reactions today. Although the FIA eventually decided Michelin was not solely to blame, it was too late for the company, and the sport is now supplied by a single tyre manufacturer. Although the US Grand Prix battled through the bad feeling in both 2006 and 2007, it is off the calendar for 2008. Michelin eventually gave refunds to anyone who had attended the race.

That's our first topic covered, a day that really did unsettle F1 to its very foundations. Join me again tomorrow for part two, featuring another day that shook the F1 World.

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