



F1 Digest 2009 – Belgium Preview

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Belgium Preview.

After the bland concrete surroundings of Valencia, F1 returns to its popular roots at Spa.

Vital Statistics

The Belgian Grand Prix takes place at Spa-Francorchamps on the 30th August 2009. A 7 kilometre circuit makes Spa one of the longest tracks featuring only 44 laps. In 2004, Kimi Raikkonen set the lap record with a 1:45.108. Last year, the fastest race lap was also set by Raikkonen, this time a 1:47.930. Pole position went to Lewis Hamilton with a 1:47.338. The long range weather forecasts show some light showers on Friday and Saturday, with things brightening up for the race. It being Spa, though, expect the unexpected.

2008 in 30 Seconds

Last year's race at Spa was nothing short of controversial. Hamilton took pole with championship rival Massa alongside him. The McLaren spun in the early stages and allowed Raikkonen into the lead. The race progressed as normal, until just three laps from the end, when it started pouring. Hamilton and Raikkonen both struggled to keep to the track, the lead changed hands several times, until eventually Kimi crashed and Lewis took the chequered flag. He was joined on the podium by Massa and Heidfeld, but later penalised, for cutting the chicane and gaining an advantage. The victory was handed to Massa.

Team by Team

Rosberg is feeling hopeful after another good performance last weekend, he says: "It's been consistent on every single track so far so I'm pleased with the way the team is working. In relation to other teams, we've done well on the development front as well." Nakajima looks ahead to Spa: "It's very different to Valencia with its medium and high speed corners. We struggled a bit there in 2008 but this year's car is competitive everywhere so it should be fine. The weather made it a difficult race last year so hopefully it will be more stable this year."

Hamilton gets a little nostalgic, thinking about Spa, he says: "Like Monaco, Silverstone and Monza, it's one of the historic circuits that I grew up watching on television when I was younger - which makes it just that bit more special for me, because it's so easy to imagine the heroes of the past racing here." Heikki agrees that everyone in F1 looks forward to Spa, and he thinks it's the best track on the calendar.

Kubica is another driver concentrating on the weather: "The circuit is very long with a lot of challenging high-speed corners. Finding the right balance is one crucial factor in Spa, which is quite difficult. The weather is always unpredictable and mostly changeable. It might be dry on some parts of the track and it might rain heavily on others." Heidfeld is hoping to repeat his success of last year: "Spa is a sensational race track. The 2008 race was one of my best ever. I was running in the points and decided shortly before the end of the race to switch onto wet-weather tyres. It turned out to be a spot-on decision and put me eventually into second."

Alonso is hoping for good things, especially after improvements in Valencia. He says: "We were happier with the performance of the car in the race and to come away with three points was not a bad result considering that we started eighth. I would have loved to reward my Spanish fans with a better result, but being totally honest I think we got the maximum that we could from the race." Grosjean is eager to experience this circuit in his new car: "It's one of my favourites and I know it very well as I won the GP2 feature race there last year. Spa is one of the classic circuits of the world and I can't wait to experience corners like Eau Rouge in my F1 car." Also in the preview quotes, I discovered that Romain works part time in a bank in Geneva to keep in touch with reality. The things you learn!



Toyota are trying to remain positive, and Trulli says driving around Spa is amazing. It should help to combat the disappointment of last weekend. Glock is also hoping for a change of fortune: “Even though I really enjoy the circuit, I have some frustrating memories of the place; being taken out by another driver on the warm-up lap in 2007 and being penalised last year when I did one of the best final laps of my career to get into the points. That was all down to bad luck so I am due a change!”

Over at Force India, Sutil is setting his sights high: “Our new aero package gave a very good step forward and we’ve been quick at lower downforce tracks so far this year so I’m very confident of getting another good result. I hope top 10 or even better.” Fisichella has similar aims – to qualify well so he can start further up the grid and try and pick up some points.

Red Bull and Toro Rosso are keeping quiet, as they usually do ahead of a race, except Red Bull are considering running KERS soon. There was talk they might implement it for Spa, but they have ruled that out, instead thinking it might suit the track at Monza.

Barrichello is no doubt hoping for a repeat of last weekend, he says: “I always knew that we had both the car and the pace to deliver a win this season and stayed positive. I’ve had a few days to relax and reflect now but I can’t wait to get back in the car again in Spa.” Button adds: “It’s been a tough few races for me recently but the car felt very good in Valencia and the pace was right up there when I was able to run in clear air during the race. So we’re feeling positive and very much looking forward to the weekend.”

Whilst Ferrari are busy worrying about their second seat, Raikkonen is looking at the championship and thinks it will be hard to maintain their third position. He says: “With the points we gained, we are still ahead of McLaren in the constructors’ championship. This is our goal as a team, but it’s very difficult to reach, considering that we stopped developing this car, concentrating on the one for the upcoming season.” He doesn’t say ‘considering who we have in the other car.’ For his part, Badoer thinks things won’t be as bad: “I just tell you that this weekend I improved a lot, and in Spa I think it will be much better. I don’t know how much better. We will see there, but I will have a better feeling with the car, with the team, with the track and with everything. It will be much better, I promise.” We will hold you to that, Luca.

That’s all for now. Free Practice gets underway on Friday, so if you have a moment or two, pop in to Sidepodcast.com where we’ll be live commenting both sessions. Otherwise, I’ll see you afterwards with a full roundup of all the action.