



F1 Digest 2009 – Singapore Preview

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We return to the streets of Singapore, where we're hoping for less controversy than last year's race caused.

Vital Statistics

The Singapore Grand Prix takes place around the street circuit on the 27th September 2009. The track is 5.1 kilometres in length, which equates to 61 racing laps. Kimi Raikkonen holds the lap record from last year, with a 1:45.599, whilst pole position in 2008 was Felipe Massa with a 1:44.801. Early weather forecasts suggest thunderstorms, followed by thunderstorms, with some rain and thunderstorms for good measure. That will certainly make night running interesting.

2008 in 30 Seconds

Felipe Massa qualified on pole, with championship rival Lewis Hamilton behind him. Alonso was way back in 15th, and in the race he pitted early. Moments later, Piquet spun and crashed into the wall, causing a safety car. Having already completed his stop, Alonso was catapulted into the lead, which he retained until the end of the race. We now know that the crash was a deliberate action. Ferrari struggled with their pit stops, allowing Massa to run with the fuel hose still attached, ruining his race. Hamilton finished on the podium though, with Rosberg and Alonso ahead of him.

Team by Team

Let's start with Red Bull, and even the boss admits that things aren't looking good for their championship chances anymore. Dietrich Mateschitz watched the race at Monza, and blames the engine, not only for its poor performance, but because of their lack of Free Practice running and the possibility of an engine change. Vettel is hoping to avoid such things though. He says: "Friday running, as we have seen at the last two races, is very restricted for me and for sure we cannot have another failure. If we do, obviously we have to accept the penalty and take an extra engine. That is not what we want, so the plan at the moment is to run a little on Friday in order to avoid the penalty."

Sister team Toro Rosso have been very quiet between races, as have Ferrari – although they appear to be concentrating more on their driver choices than what's happening out on track. All the speculation rests on whether Raikkonen will be with them next year, and Stefano Domenicali is giving nothing away: "The team is very, very happy in the way that he is performing - above all in the second part of the season when I have to say that with the last five races, he was always on the podium and he scored, I think after Barrichello, the highest points, who is fighting for the championship."

Let's move on to Toyota, then, and Trulli is hoping their car might be a little better: "Singapore is a unique race for us as the only night race and it is quite an interesting experience. I hope we can be competitive there, especially as we have some improvements to the car. The team has pushed hard all season to introduce new parts and it's great to have upgrades even as the season is coming to a close." Glock likes that Singapore is a little bit different: "I really enjoy racing at night because it is a great show for the fans and last year was just an unbelievable event. You need to get used to driving under lights but for me the visibility was fine, it's just a very strange thing is to be arriving at the track early in the afternoon and leaving again at 4am."

Over at Brawn, Jenson explains how they'll cope with the timezones: "As last year, we will stay on European timing for the race weekend which means staying awake throughout the night and sleeping most of the day to ensure that



we are alert and the body is ready to react in the right way for the evening timetable.” Whilst Barrichello highlights some of the challenges: "It's very narrow in places and you can feel quite enclosed particularly with the bright floodlights shining down. It's a very slow track so you need a high downforce aerodynamic configuration on the car and with so many corners, you have to maintain your concentration at all times.”

Hamilton is looking forward to this race because there isn't as much pressure on him as in 2008: "I remember my race in Singapore last year was all about damage limitation – I was driving with one eye on the world championship and wasn't going to take too many risks. I was happy to finish on the podium. This year, it's very different – I know I'm out of the title hunt and I want to attack these last four races, pushing for as many victories as I can." Meanwhile Kovalainen is on a bit of a roll: "We really seem to have discovered the sweet-spot of this year's car. I've had points finished in every race since the Nurburgring, and we've got some interesting new upgrades in the system that are planned for the Singapore race.”

Now we turn our attention to Renault and things get very awkward. No one really wants to talk about last year, and even though the company say they want to continue in the sport despite their two year suspended ban, no one really wants to talk about the future either. Alonso says that he likes the track at Singapore but notes that there aren't many overtaking opportunities. Grosjean is learning the circuit for the first time and says: "I've been doing a lot of work with my engineers and I've watched some videos to try and learn the track as much as I can before I arrive there. I already know the layout from studying the map, but it's only when you drive a lap and feel the grip that you start to understand the circuit.”

The BMW drivers are both looking forward to the race this weekend, and Kubica is glad that 2008 allayed a lot of his concerns: "Last year the surface was very bumpy, maybe a little too bumpy at some places. Before the initial night session, there were lots of concerns among us drivers regarding visibility which did not prove right. Actually I was very surprised how well the light situation was managed." Heidfeld adds that qualifying is crucial: "As I found out last year, it's practically impossible to overtake in Singapore. After a penalty I had to start from ninth on the grid rather than sixth and, although I had the speed, sixth at the finish was the best I could hope for. Grid position is equally as critical in Singapore as it is in Monaco.”

Sutil is feeling suitably hyped up after his great finish in Italy: "I was so happy for myself and for the team. We've been in points-scoring positions before but then never actually got them, so to finally get a points' finish, and a good one, felt like we had got a good reward. It was getting a little frustrating for everyone but now we can really start putting that energy into moving forward.” Meanwhile Liuzzi feels like he is getting there: "I don't think I'm yet at the pace where I was two years ago, when I was completely confident about the car. I think there is still a lot to come. It was a big shame for the team that we couldn't score points in Monza, but I feel happy because fortunately I saw that once the car is fast and competitive I can give a good performance and I can fight with the big guys in the World Championship.”

Finally, Williams, and Rosberg looks ahead to some of the challenges: "The toughest thing about Singapore is the heat and the number of corners. There are 23, so there's never an opportunity to relax.” Whilst Nakajima is hoping for better lighting: "Once you get used to the light and you've sorted out your visor, it really feels like normal. There were some corners where it was a little bit too dark last year, but I'm sure they will have sorted that out for this year.”

That's all for this preview edition of F1 Digest. Don't forget you can join us on sidepodcast.com for live commenting throughout all the sessions over the weekend. I'll see you there for Free Practice 1 on Friday.