



F1 Digest 2009 – Japan Preview

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After the streets of Singapore, we turn our attention to the circuit at Suzuka.

Vital Statistics

The Japanese Grand Prix takes place at Suzuka on the 4th October 2009. The track is 5.8 kilometres which equates to 53 laps. Kimi Raikkonen holds the lap record, securing a 1:31.540 in 2005. The last race at the circuit was in 2006, when the GP switched to Fuji. Back in '06, Massa scored pole position with a 1:29.599. The long range weather forecast show rain and showers building up to the weekend, when it may start to dry up. Sunday is supposed to be cloudy but not wet.

2008 in 30 Seconds

Last year's Japanese race at Fuji saw Lewis Hamilton on pole, alongside Kimi Raikkonen. Lewis overshot the first corner, forcing Kimi wide and he received a penalty for it. On the next lap, Massa and Hamilton collided, and the Ferrari was given a penalty. However, Hamilton came off worse, as he ended up towards the back of the field. Massa also had an incident with Sebastien Bourdais, with a controversial penalty for the Toro Rosso. In the end, it was Alonso who was victorious, joined on the podium by Robert Kubica and Kimi.

Team by Team

We'll start with McLaren, who are on a bit of a roll from Singapore. It is Hamilton's first race at this circuit, and he says: "It feels like I've been waiting my whole life to race at Suzuka - so, as you can imagine, I'll be really excited when practice starts there on Friday morning. Ever since I was a kid, I've raced Suzuka on computer games – and while it kind of gives you an idea of how the circuit goes, nothing can beat the real thing." Kovalainen doesn't think their car will run well at the track, it's not suited to them, but he says it doesn't put them off.

Force India are hoping to put Singapore behind them. Sutil is full of confidence: "It's a brilliant drivers track, quite difficult to learn, but rewarding when you get it right. I think our car will perform well there as well – as we've seen, we are very strong on the low and medium downforce tracks and Suzuka should suit us well." Tonio is still making progress: "Singapore was a circuit where it's difficult to get the feeling back, because the concentration is so high, and you have to try and stay away from the walls. It's not a normal situation. But doing the whole race helped me a lot. I think we are getting close to my optimum speed."

Kubica is looking forward to one particular aspect of the weekend: "The fans there are fantastic. In 2006 a lot of them in the grandstands stayed at the circuit until very late in the night. They are really passionate and enjoy Formula One a lot." And Heidfeld puts Suzuka at the top of his list: "I'm thrilled that my favourite Formula One circuit is back on the calendar. It will be interesting to see what changes it has in store for us. I know the track has been partly resurfaced, and there's always the possibility of the forces of nature intervening - we've already had an earthquake and a close call with a typhoon."

Over at Ferrari, things are quiet for the team on the racing front, although they did finally confirm Alonso would be joining them next year, and Raikkonen would be leaving. It's about time. Alonso himself has some notes about the upcoming circuit: "The Esses section is an important part of the lap as you have to cope with fifteen seconds of continuously changing direction, so it's very demanding physically. You also need to keep your concentration as there is only one line through the corners and any mistakes cost you a lot of time." Grosjean is hoping for a change of fortune: "All the tracks will be new for me so I know that I have a big challenge ahead. I hope that my luck will



change in the races as I have yet to have a normal race without any problems. If I can have some trouble-free races then hopefully I can help the team score some important points..."

For Toro Rosso, Alguersuari has non-F1 related memories of the track: "I have been to Suzuka before, back in 2005 for a karting race, the Asia-Pacific World Cup, although of course we weren't racing on the F1 track! I was leading the race on the final lap, but I crashed with Kazuki Nakajima at the last corner and ended second." Buemi also has memories, although not of this circuit: "I've been to Japan, as I drove the Medical Car last year in Fuji, but I've never been to Suzuka. I've been on the simulator to practice the track, which looks great, so I'm very much looking forward to driving it for real."

Button could wrap up the championship this weekend, but he's not thinking of that at all... not in his preview quotes at least. He is looking forward to seeing the fans, though: "I've always enjoyed great support at Suzuka in the past from the Japanese fans who are so enthusiastic about the sport so we'll be hoping for more of the same this weekend and I can't wait to race there again and put on a great show." Barrichello is concentrating on the track itself: "It's a tough circuit because of the corners and the track layout and you have to be precise, consistent and get the balance of the car absolutely right to have a good weekend." He also says that overtaking can be tricky, boo.

Toyota are heading for their home race, and Trulli says: "I will give my all to get the best result for Toyota and our Japanese supporters. I have a special relationship with the Japanese fans so I really enjoy visiting the country; they are always so supportive and enthusiastic. It is a special atmosphere." Glock is also very upbeat about the race: "Suzuka is a really special circuit. It is very fast and the first sector is just unbelievable in a Formula 1 car; a really enjoyable experience. It is five years since I drove a Formula 1 car at Suzuka but the lay-out hasn't changed and I'm sure the fans will still make it a pleasure to race there."

Our penultimate team is Williams, with Rosberg hoping to move on from his mistake in Singapore and get a good result for the team in Japan. Nakajima has his own home race to look forward to and says: "I kind of grew up around Suzuka. I have been to the circuit many, many times and it's the place where I started karting. I've also watched countless races there, not just Formula One races, but many other forms of Japanese motorsport, so going to Suzuka feels like going home."

Finally we turn to Red Bull, with Vettel another one who enjoys the circuit. He has some experience there too: "I drove the two hours of Friday free practice here at the 2006 Japanese Grand Prix. The first hour was wet, which was pretty scary as I didn't know where the track went." Webber adds: "Fourth is my best result here, for Williams in 2005, the penultimate time we raced at Suzuka. It was a bit of a classic with Raikkonen and Alonso coming through from the back. Kimi took the lead on the last lap and I had a good battle with Fernando in the middle of the race." Let's hope we see some of that this weekend, boys.

That's all for this Digest Preview. Don't forget we'll be around on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting every session, so join us if you can. I'll be back on Friday with F1 Digest covering Free Practice.