



F1 Digest 2009 – Abu Dhabi Preview

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Abu Dhabi Preview.

The final race of the season holds no championship weight, but it is a brand new one.

Vital Statistics

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix takes place on the 1st November 2009 at the Yas Marina Circuit, which is 5.5 kilometres long. That means we'll see 55 laps, and of course as there has been no racing there yet, we have little in the way of lap time knowledge or history. The long range weather forecasts suggest sun throughout the weekend, with top temperatures about 34 degrees C. The race starts at 5pm local time, though, so it may be a bit cooler when the cars actually get going.

With no race last year, we'll move straight on to the team's thoughts.

Team by Team

Let's start with Williams, and both drivers seem to have quite a good idea of what to expect, despite not having been to the circuit before. Nakajima says: "As we haven't driven the circuit yet, it's difficult to give an accurate breakdown of the track but our simulator has provided us with some really invaluable data. It looks like set-up will veer towards a medium to high downforce configuration to cope with the long straight (which will require good top speeds) and tight corners which we expect to see on a street circuit." Rosberg adds: "It's definitely a big advantage having a sim like ours as I will be able to drive out of the pits on Friday and know the track pretty much straightaway. The one consideration I'll be interested to see play out is the fact that we will start the race in daylight and then move into the night time."

At BMW, the drivers are preparing for their last race with the team. Heidfeld says: "This will be a very special race for all of us in the team. So far I haven't really had that feeling of saying goodbye. But that will change in Abu Dhabi for sure, and will probably be quite intense. I very much hope that the team is given a place on the grid for 2010 soon." Kubica also hopes for the same thing, but is mostly concentrating on the weekend ahead: "Fortunately I consider myself a driver who does not need a lot of track time to be on a good pace straight away. I guess that a lot of cars will be out on the track on Friday in order to understand the track and to learn as much as possible. I am really looking forward to going there."

Hamilton is feeling super confident ahead of the final race of the year: "We've had a fantastic second half of the season, and it would be perfect to end the year with a win - it would send us into the winter fully motivated and pumped up for the 2010 season. All the signs point to Abu Dhabi being another strong track for us – there are plenty of slow corners leading onto long straights, where KERS will be very advantageous." Kovalainen is keeping his aims more modest: "I had a very strong race in Brazil and I'm determined to rack up a points finish in Abu Dhabi to make sure we hold on to third position in the Constructors' Championship."

Talking of the Championship, there aren't any Brawn preview quotes at the time of recording, but that may be because they are busy working on contracts for next year. Barrichello's future is still very much in the air, whilst Button is now asking for more money and Brawn are keen to keep him on board. They are either talking about contracts, or they are celebrating.

There isn't much word from Toro Rosso either, but presumably they don't have much to celebrate at the moment, so they are probably just preparing for the race as per usual.

For Force India, Sutil does not have great expectations of the new circuit: "Yas Marina looks like it will be a great facility - very luxurious and a great working environment for the team. However I don't think the track will be massively challenging. It has a long straight, but there are a lot of second gear corners as well, which might hurt us a little bit. The good thing is everyone is starting from the same platform, so it will be a little bit of a surprise when we arrive." Meanwhile, Liuzzi says that their aim for the weekend is points, points and more points.

Over at Renault, Grosjean has similar plans: "As it's a new track for all the drivers, things should be easier for me as we all have to learn the circuit. My aim is to try and match Fernando, qualify well and hopefully fight for points in the race." Alonso is feeling nostalgic ahead of his last race for the team: "It will be an emotional race because I have enjoyed so many special memories with this team and I am leaving behind a lot of friends. Renault is one of the great teams in Formula One and I look forward to fighting with them on the track in the years ahead."

Raikkonen is also on the last weekend for his team, and says: "The race in Abu Dhabi will be my last Grand Prix with Ferrari and as usual I will give it everything to gain the best possible result. We'll try to conclude this difficult year with a good result, hoping that it will be enough to gain the third place in the Constructors' Championship, McLaren took over in Brazil." He does note that it will be a different style of race, now the championship pressure is off the drivers.

Red Bull have to settle for second in the constructor's, and possibly the driver's championship as well, and after the race, Vettel wasn't impressed with that: "Second is the first loser. I'll just try to do my best in Abu Dhabi. Obviously the target is to win, as we have a winning car. I don't really care about second or third." Webber also thinks victory is possible: "We've been pretty strong since Singapore, so there's no reason to suggest that we can't be fighting towards the sharp end again. As usual, qualifying will be very important and then we'll see how the race goes from there. We're looking to finish off on a high for the team."

Toyota have confirmed that Glock will be missing out on Abu Dhabi as well due to conflicting medical reports on his back. They don't want to risk further injury. That means Kobayashi gets another chance, and he's hoping to improve: "I am more familiar with the car now, as well as other procedures during a race weekend like pit stops and the two tyre compounds, so I expect to be more competitive in Abu Dhabi. I am sure the car will be strong and I will do everything I can to try to score my first points in Formula 1." Trulli adds: "It's been an up-and-down season for us with such a strong start followed by some disappointing races in Europe then a really competitive end to the year. As Abu Dhabi is a new track it's impossible to predict how we will perform but after the speed we showed in the last three races I am confident of finishing the year on a high."

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest, and I suppose the last preview of the year! Plenty more still to come though, as I'll be back over the weekend to cover all the action from Abu Dhabi. Hopefully, I'll see you in the comments on Sidepodcast.com.