

F1 Digest 2010 Season Preview – The Teams

Hello, welcome, this is F1 Digest and we are counting down to the 2010 season with a four part preview. We've already covered the drivers - all 24 of them - and now we are set to turn our attention to the teams. It's a big shakeup this year, with some well-known names gone, some brought back, completely new cars and liveries... it's going to be a lot of fun. Let's get started then, in reverse entry list order.

The Teams

BMW Sauber

Team Principal: Peter Sauber

Debut: South Africa 1993

Championships: 0

The team formerly known as BMW Sauber have turned into, oh wait, they are still BMW Sauber. I can't really figure out why they still have BMW in the name, as the manufacturer have pulled out of the sport, Peter Sauber has regained full control, and they have Ferrari engines. I can't imagine the Italians are particularly happy about powering a team with their automotive rival in the title, but there must be some contractual obligations still to be sorted out.

When BMW announced they were leaving, it was an instant concern. We spent a lot of last year's off-season wondering what was going to happen to ex-Honda, and we didn't want to go through another winter of wonderment. Former boss Mario Theissen did his best to sort out a future for the team, and for a while it looked as though they were going to be bought out by some less than savoury characters, but thankfully, it was Peter Sauber who took the reigns and reluctantly returns to leading the team after a four year break. Sauber has been involved throughout BMW's tenure, so he knows exactly what he's got to do to keep the team competitive, and perhaps return to their Kubica winning form.

Their new car is the C29, launched with a plain white and grey livery, somewhat lacking in sponsorship. The nose is different to a few of the others on the grid, in that it doesn't dip downwards, but remains smooth to the end. There is an added shark fin towards the back, and the sidepods seem nice and compact to give the car a pretty neat appearance. If BMW were tailing off their development towards the end of their tenure in the sport, then Sauber has brought it right back on track. It remains to be seen whether he's chosen the right direction or not. In early pre-season testing, the car seems relatively stable, but of mid-field pace - that is not counting for any variables in fuel loads or setups, though. The lineup of Pedro de la Rosa and Kamui Kobayashi is a fascinating one - the epitome of youth paired with experience. We know that Kobayashi is fiesty on track, whilst de la Rosa may be more reserved, but has plenty to share when it comes to testing, setup and development. This must be a transitional year for Sauber, but they aren't starting from nothing, so I am hoping to see them pick up some points in 2010.

Virgin Racing

Team Principal: John Booth

Debut: Bahrain 2010

Championships: 0

One of the brand new teams for 2010, Virgin Racing have certainly made an impact on the sport already. From posting some fabulous videos, to issuing challenges to rival Lotus, Virgin are really throwing themselves into this Formula One business. They were the first new team to launch their brand new car - the VR-01 - and more importantly, they have decided to design solely using CFD. No wind tunnels involved at all. This is a surprising move,



and explains why when the car was unveiled, it looked completely different to anything we had seen so far. The black and red livery is nice, a refreshing change from the many white paint jobs on the grid at the moment, and it hides a multitude of fresh ideas. Many people, upon first glance, suggested the VR-01 looked like an Indy car, and the supremely sharp and high nose does make it very conspicuous. The car also boasts really small sidepods, and a curvy front wing. Actually, the front wing didn't get off to a great start in winter testing, as Timo Glock took to the track in Jerez, and the wing promptly fell off. A noticeable lack of spare parts meant the team had to delay some more of their running, and they have been held up by various other niggles through the fortnight of testing we've seen so far.

Their two drivers, di Grassi and Glock, have both managed to get a handful of laps under their belts, but both have spent frustrating hours waiting in the garage. The pair appear to be a great lineup, though. Enthusiastic, young, ready to race, and they get on well. Virgin's rivalry with fellow new team Lotus is going to be fascinating to watch - not least because whichever team boss loses is going to end up wearing an air stewardess outfit. I'm not sure I want to see either of them in such garb, but even without that disturbing image to think about, the two new teams that have cars and are ready to get the season going have really impressed me, and I can't wait to see them compete with each other throughout the season.

US F1 Team

Team Principal: Peter Windsor and Ken Anderson

Debut: Bahrain 2010

Championships: 0

Well, they were meant to debut in Bahrain anyway, but along with Campos, there has been very little of material worth coming out of the US F1 camp, and just recently, things seem to have taken a turn for the worse. It's all rumour and speculation about the end of things as we know it for the American team, but Ken Anderson did recently admit that the team have lost several sponsorship deals, they are struggling at the moment, and they are talking to the FIA to see if they could miss the first four races. That seems highly unlikely, as the FIA already had to issue a clarification that any team missing a race was going against the Concorde Agreement. With no car and no apparent means of getting one at the moment, US F1's only signing Jose Maria Lopez must be starting to wonder if he should look elsewhere for a drive.

Campos Meta 1

Team Principal: Colin Kolles

Debut: Bahrain 2010

Championships: 0

Alongside US F1, the future of Campos was looking increasingly shaky, but a recent deal has seen shareholder José Ramón Carabante take full control of the team, and place Colin Kolles in the team principal role. It's thought the team will ask to be able to change their name now that Adrian Campos is no longer part of the deal. So, if the future is a little more secure, then Campos or whatever they will be called still have their work cut out for them. They at least have a car though. We haven't seen it, but apparently the chassis has passed the FIA crash tests, and they are making progress. Campos have Bruno Senna on board as their first driver, with the second yet to be announced. They are keen to keep the Senna name in the sport, and it no doubt helps with sponsorship deals. It's unlikely they will make testing before the season gets underway, but to be at the first race after such a turbulent winter will be an achievement.

Lotus F1 Racing

Team Principal: Tony Fernandes

Debut: Bahrain 2010



Championships: 0

The Lotus team are a new entity in Formula One, despite the fact they are using the name of a previous entrant who last ran in the early 90s. They have Mike Gascoyne on board, who has previously worked for Toyota, Sauber and Renault. He's not necessarily a well liked figure in the paddock, but he certainly knows what he's doing. The whole team have made great progress, particularly if you compare it to the other new teams. They are on a par with Virgin Racing, and have already been in stiff competition with them during the pre-season tests. Virgin launched their car first but Lotus had a better event. The new car was revealed with the age-old green and yellow livery, which has divided opinion in the Sidepodcast comments at least. On balance, I think it is mostly a positive outcome though. Good to see the old livery back again.

During testing, they seemed to have less reliability problems than the Virgin Racing team but they have had to work through a few niggles of their own. In terms of the car itself - the T127 - the nose is clean and straight, with no major dimples or dips. The front wing has a lot of detail on it, whilst the sidepods look quite boxy and the back of the car looks much less sculpted than the front.

They've signed up Heikki Kovalainen and Jarno Trulli for 2010, and as a partnership, I think they'll do well developing the car and pushing as hard as they can, but I'm not sure if they are a winning formula. Points will be the best Lotus can hope for, for now.

Scuderia Toro Rosso

Team Principal: Franz Tost

Debut: Bahrain 2006

Championships: 0

For 2010, Toro Rosso were tasked with breaking ties with Red Bull and designing their own brand new car. Well, that was what we thought was going to happen, but from the looks of it, they have taken last year's Adrian Newey designed STR4 and tweaked it to become the STR5, in much the same manner as Newey himself has tweaked the RB6. Still, at least the livery is a little bit different. They've added more red to the nose, hopefully in an attempt to make it more distinctive to the Red Bull out on track. That will help me at least. With more staff in the design department, you might have expected a little bit more than a copycat edition of the nose and incredibly complex front wing. The car has the expected rear shark fin engine cover, and similar sidepods to last year.

Their driver lineup remains as Sebastien Buemi and Jaime Alguersuari for a little bit of consistency. Alguersuari was confirmed later than Buemi but the pair both seem quite happy and content in their continued roles. Hopefully the Spaniard will be able to improve on his performance from last year now he has had some testing time under his belt - he shocked us all when he reminded us that he hadn't tested an F1 car yet, despite being in the sport for six months. Buemi can continue to show the promise he displayed last year and build on his experience. So far in pre-season testing, they've performed at a mid-field kind of level - as much as you can tell from testing anyway. Toro Rosso were one of the more vocal teams about the disturbance caused by the weather. The intermittent showers made it tricky to get any significant running in or data collected but they were clocking up the miles anyway, so they should be on good form when we get to Bahrain.

Force India F1 Team

Team Principal: Vijay Mallya

Debut: Australia 2008

Championships: 0



Force India have been pretty quiet over the winter, presumably hunkered down working on the brand new VJM03. The end of the 2009 season saw increased competitiveness for the team, so they will want to harness that and improve upon it. Making the right changes ahead of 2010 is crucial so they don't just take one giant step backwards. The only tricky patch came when Fisichella deserted them for the riches of Ferrari, allowing Tonio Liuzzi to step into the lurch. They are keeping Liuzzi and Sutil on board for 2010, so a little bit of consistency across the drivers will help. When the VJM03 launched, we were all rather underwhelmed by its appearance. They've got no major livery changes, and the car looks very similar to last year's. That would account for them not wanting to take a step in the wrong direction. Compared to some of the newer cars we've seen, the nose is exceptionally wide, and that makes the front wing look rather different as well. The sidepods are quite large, so in keeping as much of 2009 in the bodywork as possible, the team are actually taking a different direction to many of the other cars we'll see on the grid.

With Sutil and Liuzzi on board, Force India have signed up DTM driver Paul di Resta as reserve driver, who will also take the unprecedented step of getting some Friday practice running in during the season. Presumably, this is all part of the Mercedes engine deal, and it's understandable that Force India would do anything to keep those speedy engines on board. Di Resta is a great driver, and it looks as though he's being groomed for a race seat in at least one of the Mercedes teams that now grace the grid.

The team finished ninth in the championship last year, and Chief Operating Officer Otmar Szafnauer has targeted fifth place for 2010. Pre-season testing has so far indicated a general mid-field performance, with no major hassles but no major surprises either. They have more competition this year, though, so it might be harder to rise through the ranks in qualifying - a necessity for Force India to make an impression on the championship.

Renault F1 Team

Team Principal: Eric Boullier

Debut: Britain 1977

Championships: 2

If ever a team was trying to shed its image completely from the previous year, Renault is it. All that remains from 2009 is the name, and even that is covering a change in ownership behind the scenes. Genii Capital took a majority share in Renault, although the actual amount was withheld, and that is why Mr Boullier is now in charge. Wanting to distance themselves from the Singapore scandal as much as possible, the team have lost a couple of their major sponsors, including the title sponsor of ING. Now they are just plain old Renault, and that means a return to the yellow and black livery of old. Well, yellow and black and red. I've made my feelings on this livery quite clear, and whilst I can see how the yellow and black is an okay look, the red spoils it completely. But hey, this is not the time for a rant.

The R30 has moved on from 2009 as well, with a lot of work around the front wing and nose area. It is one of the wider noses that we have seen, but it does sink quite low. The front wing seems quite basic and a lot flatter, particularly if you line it up side by side with the Toro Rosso or Red Bull. The sidepods are a bit smaller than we are used to, and the wing mirrors are red. Red! Hmm. Sorry.

Not only has the car and the livery changed, but it is an all new line up behind the wheel. Robert Kubica made the jump from the ailing BMW team to the, well, ailing Renault team, before both teams were saved. His manager was a little skeptical about the new owners of Renault, had some questions, but presumably he got satisfactory answers, as the Kub seems very happy in his new digs. He's joined by the first Russian to grace the grid, in the form of Vitaly Petrov. I can't see them being a particularly entertaining or charismatic pair, and I can't even begin to predict how well they will do in developing the car or hustling it into the points. Whatever happens though, it can only be an upward trend for Renault now, can't it?



AT&T Williams

Team Principal: Frank Williams/Patrick Head

Debut: Argentina 1978

Championships: 9

Williams knew that this year they would be losing Nico Rosberg. He's stuck by them since his career began, and whilst they've sometimes had pace, there wasn't enough to keep the young German on board. I imagine, then, that he is kicking himself a little bit upon seeing the Williams in pre-season testing. Whilst we know, and I've said about a zillion times already this show, that you can't hold any real stock in the times we've seen from Jerez and Barcelona, the Williams has seemed really quite impressive. The combination of Rubens Barrichello's great experience, and Nico Hulkenberg's new take on things seems to be developing the car in a new direction. We know that Rubens was good at developing towards the latter half of 2009, and that seems to have transferred to Williams as well.

The car itself had no real launch but appeared in testing in Valencia with the familiar blue and white livery. Before we clapped eyes on it, Sam Michael admitted that the entire car was a brand new design, which seemed like an odd decision as they had been improving in form through 2009 and things seemed to be on the up. Still, the FW32 is different, and it features a nose with just a bit of the dip on some of the more sculpted designs, and it's quite wide, although nowhere near as prominent as the Renault. The sidepods look quite bulky to my untrained eye, and the front wing appears quite boxy.

Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro

Team Principal: Stefano Domenicali

Debut: Monaco 1950

Championships: 16

As normal, Ferrari were the first team out of the gate to reveal their new car - the F10. They launched at the factory in Italy, and were due to run out on track at Mugello that same day, but had to delay the shakedown until the official test due to weather issues. That seems to be the story of their pre-season, as whoever is in charge of the official Ferrari Twitter account has been very, very vocal and particularly downbeat, about the bad conditions in Jerez. During one particular day, filled with intermittent showers, there was at least one tweet an hour bemoaning the rain and the lack of running. Nevertheless, they persevered and their driver pairing have completed plenty of laps.

Back to the car, though, and the first noticeable thing about the F10 was how much longer it was compared to the F60. Don't get me started on the numbering system. Presumably the team have had to make quite a large adjustment for the larger fuel tanks - as will have everyone - and word on the street is that Ferrari are struggling with fuel consumption on longer, race simulation runs. There's also talk that their tyre wear is very good, which if you add to that the extra fuel they may have to run, is rather good news. The F10 isn't enormously different to the previous car, although it is edging towards a Red Bull-esque design, with a thinner nose and that trademark dip towards the front. The front wing isn't sculpted a lot, and is now a striking white to make way for the Santander branding. In fact, there is a lot more white on the car and the driver overalls, which I quite like, but I know some people are a little put off by. Less red on the Ferrari.

Talking of the drivers, Felipe Massa appears to be back to full strength, and there's no sign of any recurring problems following his accident last year. Testing has been good and he's got plenty of laps in - when the team have put the car out on track, instead of sulking in the garage, that is. He's joined by Fernando Alonso for 2010 - a move that has been talked about for such a long time that I almost can't believe it finally happened. They are going to be an impressive pairing, and I know everyone is keen to see firstly what Alonso can do in a competitive car again, and secondly, how the two of them will get on. They aren't the only team where a lot of focus is on the drivers this year.



Red Bull Racing

Team Principal: Christian Horner

Debut: Australia 2005

Championships: 0

Red Bull was the one car that everyone was keen to see launched. Adrian Newey did everything right last year, and even managed to factor in a double diffuser that they weren't ready for. The car was hailed as the fastest of 2009, despite missing out on the championship by only a few points here and there. Everyone wanted to see what Newey would come up with for 2010, with such a great base to work from. The team even took an extra week to put last minute improvements on the car, sacrificing the test in Valencia to turn up to Jerez. When they launched at the Spanish track... big disappointment. They didn't seem to have moved much further forward, whilst all the other teams have managed to catch up. They had a fast car but they haven't managed to take a particularly big step. That's not to say they won't still be fast, but only that we were expecting a little bit more. Newey might surprise us all yet. The nose is high and thin, with two lips a little further back to direct the airflow around the tyres. The front wing is detailed and pushed further back, the sidepods also feature some serious work. At the back we have a shark fin cover, and this time the double diffuser is present from the very start.

Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber will continue their campaign to be the first to get a championship for the team, and now that Webber's leg should be fully mended, Vettel might have a real fight on his hands. The important thing for this year, is that the team try and continue the pace they had found last year, keep getting wins and fighting for serious points. To take a step backwards now would put a huge dent in their championship campaigns. Webber and Vettel know the team inside out and how to work with each other, so they've got a good base to start from. It all depends what happens out on track. In the testing we've seen so far, the car has been fast but not supreme.

Mercedes Grand Prix

Team Principal: Ross Brawn

Debut: France 1954

Championships: 2

Although the Mercedes name has been associated with F1 since the 1950s, as a constructor, the team have only competed in 12 races. Back then they won a lot of what they were entered in and picked up two titles. For 2010, they are back, and have evolved from the championship winning Brawn GP. Although Ross Brawn is still in charge, the team could not be any different to its predecessor. Far from being the underdog independent entry, Mercedes are taking over the paddock one step at a time, and they have turned the team into a corporate beast that could quite easily win another championship by storming it's way to the top. Brawn signed up Rosberg from Williams, and tried to retain the services of Jenson Button, but the Brit was keen to look for a new challenge over at McLaren against Lewis Hamilton. Instead, Ross called up his old friend Michael Schumacher, who was already interested in returning following his abandoned comeback in 2009. Rosberg must be wondering what he's signed himself up for.

With the seven times world champion returning, it's fair to say that all eyes are on the drivers of Mercedes, or driver anyway. Who even knows what their car looks like? It launched under some very dodgy lighting, but when we finally got to see the livery, it was painted onto an existing Brawn car. The car was revealed a week later - the MGP-W01 (catchy). The most noticeable thing to me about the new car is the air intake above and behind the driver's head. It's a completely different shape from what we are used to, more of a flat triangle. As with a lot of the cars on the grid, there are elements of the Red Bull brought into what appears to be an evolution of the Brawn car from 2009, creating a mix of two of the fastest cars on last year's grid. So far in pre-season testing, they seem to be quite strong, perhaps lacking a little of the reliability that the Brawn was known for. The speed could be there, but we'll know more in Bahrain. They are known as the Silver Arrows, so it will be interesting to see if they can live up to that title.



Vodafone McLaren Mercedes

Team Principal: Martin Whitmarsh

Debut: Monaco 1966

Championships: 8

So far, we have two teams where the drivers appear to be more important than any of the other developments. It's fair to say that McLaren outweigh them all. The first team in goodness knows how long to pair the two latest champions with each other. Two British drivers, with big personalities, and who, so far, appear to be getting on okay. Already, though, there have been plenty of notes that Lewis Hamilton doesn't seem as happy as he did even last year when he had a terrible car. Jenson is bouncy bouncy, happy with his new challenge. Hamilton seems more reserved, wary of what lies ahead. He has experience of difficult teammates though, so it makes sense that he would be treading carefully to begin with.

Meanwhile, the car itself was launched in spectacular style, well, compared to the other teams anyway. Far from the Technology Centre, and nestled in the surrounds of Vodafone HQ, McLaren invited the press and bloggers to watch the MP4-25 be unveiled. All reports would suggest they were quite impressed with what they saw. The engine cover is reminiscent of the regular shark fin but extends further back to attach itself onto the rear wing, similar to the Red Bull of last year. The nose looks quite similar to the 2009 version, although a little less bulky and quite a lot higher. The McLaren also seems to be longer than it's predecessor, which is a bit of a trend this year. The livery is still very much the same silver and red that we've seen for the past couple of years, and it's plastered with Vodafone stickers.

Pre-season testing has looked slightly worrying for the team, as the car has been sporting plenty of flow vis and measuring dongles, just like last year. In 2009, things started badly but improved very quickly. I hope they can avoid a similar performance in 2010, and that the green paint is just an aid, rather than a desperate measure to find some pace. They'll be hoping for vast improvements over this time last year, and perhaps to continue the momentum from Hamilton's couple of wins towards the end of the season. If he and Jenson are competitive, then we really might see sparks flying.

That is our brief run-through of all the teams. For more detailed coverage of the launches and the testing we have seen so far, please head on over to Sidepodcast.com where there's more information than you can shake a stick at. The racing is creeping ever closer, but we still have two more preview sections coming up. Join me next time for a whirlwind trip around the globe as we look at the 2010 Calendar.