



F1 Digest 2010 Season Preview – The Calendar

Hello and welcome to F1 Digest, this is your four part Season Preview special, and we are on to part three - the calendar. We've already covered the teams and their drivers, so now we'll take a quick trip round the globe to see the places they will be visiting. The calendar is 19 races long this time round, starting in Bahrain and ending in Abu Dhabi. We're running from mid-March to mid-November, quite a lot later than last year, but you've got to fit those extra couple of races in somewhere. Let's get started.

The Calendar

Bahrain

Date: March 14th
Circuit: Bahrain International
Laps: 49
2009 Winner: Jenson Button

Bahrain has stolen the season opener slot from Australia, and it's not really a popular decision. The hot and dusty track doesn't usually provide stunning racing, although it is not the worst track on the calendar by far. The runoff areas are enormous, in an attempt to keep the track clear of surrounding dust. It doesn't really work and means driver mistakes are often forgiven. High winds overnight will often blow sand onto the track, so each day starts with green conditions. The gritty surface can often mean high tyre wear as well. Previous years have been dominated by Ferrari and Renault, although it was all about Jenson Button last year. For 2010, the track has been revised and extended so that it now runs for 49 laps rather than the 57 of previous years. The added corners include a sequence of five turns and a tight hairpin that brings the cars back onto the original track.

Australia

Date: March 28th
Circuit: Albert Park
Laps: 58
2009 Winner: Jenson Button

There's a fabulous statistic for the Australian GP, in that the last four winners of the season opening race in Melbourne have gone on to become the World Champion for that year. It's an impressive number, considering how chaotic the race usually is. Although Australia has been bumped to the number two spot this year, and drivers will have had a chance to get used to their new machinery, the stop-start nature of the track will always mix things up. The weather is likely to be good, and the atmosphere electric, there are always good crowds in Melbourne. The track is set in the delicious Albert Park, surrounded by trees and good sunshine. In past years, Ferrari, Renault and McLaren have done well, but there's always the chance of a surprise win, particularly if it's a race of high attrition.

Malaysia

Date: April 4th
Circuit: Sepang International
Laps: 56
2009 Winner: Jenson Button

The F1 calendar always starts out in the hotter climates, and Malaysia is a real challenge. The heat and humidity turn F1 into a real endurance race, for everyone involved. The drivers and mechanics need to stay hydrated, and the cars can suffer under the temperatures. Cooling is always an issue, but having said that, despite the heat, there's always



the possibility of rain. Consider 2009. Bernie messed about with the start time of the race, and that led to a torrential downpour halting the race halfway through. Half points were awarded, and generally, the event was a big let down. Bernie doesn't seem keen to take responsibility for this though, and has scheduled this year's race to start at 4pm once again. Renault have gone well in the past, particularly Alonso, but it's worth noting that overtaking is more prevalent in Malaysia. The track is exceptionally wide, but the pitlane is long so strategy has been key in the past. The lack of refuelling, and the likelihood of rain, might change all that.

China

Date: April 18th

Circuit: Shanghai International

Laps: 56

2009 Winner: Sebastian Vettel

The problem with the Chinese Grand Prix is the lack of atmosphere both in the paddock and out. All the grandstands are empty, and despite the great facilities, the whole event has been a bit lacklustre of late. The circuit is packed with long straights and fast corners, and the wide run-off area - typical of newer tracks - lets drivers get away with mistakes and encourages overtaking. It's a challenging circuit, so despite the lack of visitors, it's a popular track in the paddock. In 2009, Sebastian Vettel managed to break the Brawn dominance to scrape a win, making the most of China's move from the end of the calendar towards the front. It remains towards the beginning of the season, meaning it can also have less than ideal weather conditions. In the six years the event has been held at Shanghai, we've had six different winners, three of whom have been for Ferrari.

Spain

Date: May 9th

Circuit: Circuit de Catalunya

Laps: 66

2009 Winner: Jenson Button

Barcelona plays host to the final pre-season test of the winter. That being the case, the teams and drivers have plenty of experience of the circuit, they know it like the back of their hands. Mistakes are often minimal and overtaking is unlikely, but the weather can be temperamental, and that is where the challenges occur. Wind is always an issue, particularly as the track is fast and sweeping. Conditions can change incredibly quickly, and that makes setup and handling one of the key parts of racing in Barcelona. This year, Spain will host three home drivers in the form of Alonso, Alguersuari and de la Rosa, and the Spanish fans are passionate for at least one of those.

Monaco

Date: May 16th

Circuit: Monaco Street Circuit

Laps: 78

2009 Winner: Jenson Button

Monaco needs no introduction, clearly. The principality plays host to one of the more popular street circuits, although not necessarily for the racing. The narrow streets and twisting corners make overtaking mostly impossible, and you might use the word procession. Having said that, the proximity of barriers and buildings means precision driving and there is always the chance of a mistake or two, particularly when you throw in the possibility of rain. Qualifying is super important at Monaco, and with the lowest average speed of any circuit on the calendar, setup is also crucial. Traditionally McLaren do well at the circuit. Hamilton was certainly happy when he won his first victory at the principality. Last year, Button had great fun jogging around the track to claim his trophy. I'd keep an eye on



both of them for 2010. Anything can happen in Monaco, retirements occur often, and predictions are almost impossible.

Turkey

Date: May 30th

Circuit: Istanbul Park

Laps: 58

2009 Winner: Jenson Button

Turkey is one of the better tracks to have been added to the calendar recently, but even so the racing isn't always excellent. There's the complex Turn 8 which has four apexes, plus the fact the racing runs anti-clockwise, adding an extra strain on the drivers necks. Watch out for the first signs of Schumacher struggling here. Four of the five previous Turkish GPs have been won from pole position, but last year that trend was bucked. Vettel was on pole, but he tripped up halfway round the first lap allowing Jenson Button to add yet another win to his tally. The track has some slow corners meaning tyres and grip are going to be really important.

Canada

Date: June 13th

Circuit: Circuit Gilles Villeneuve

Laps: 57

After one year off the calendar, Canada has returned to much fanfare. The event is one of the more popular events, not just because the track creates great racing but also because Canada has a great atmosphere and they always put on a good show. The highlight of the track is, of course, the Wall of Champions - a barrier that clearly has a magnet attached. We've previously made fun of Button being a victim of that wall when he wasn't a champion. He certainly showed us. Watch out for future champions crashing there this year! The track has previously been dominated by McLaren and Ferrari, but Kubica pulled off his debut win in 2008 - after a terrifying crash the year before. Hamilton also secured his debut win in Canada as well, it seems like a nice track to pull off your first win.

Europe

Date: June 27th

Circuit: Valencia Street Circuit

Laps: 57

2009 Winner: Rubens Barrichello

In 2009, the European Grand Prix was held after the summer break in August, so to be bumped up to late June is quite a change. The circuit around the docklands of Valencia is about as grey as you can imagine, and there is usually massive field spread around the many corners to make overtaking and good racing impossible. It's fast, though, and the bridge adds a little bit of interest around the port. Last year, Barrichello took the victory which was a welcome win for the Brawn driver, who hadn't been on the top step of the podium since 2004. It also saw the debut of new drivers as Massa was injured and Piquet was... well, sacked. What a place to make your debut!

Britain

Date: July 11th

Circuit: Silverstone

Laps: 60

2009 Winner: Sebastian Vettel



The future of the British Grand Prix was in doubt towards the end of last year, as Donington Park had the contract but not the means to provide a race. Silverstone have stepped in and saved the event for now, but Bernie never seems satisfied with racing in the UK. Despite the fact that there is almost guaranteed to be some rain over the weekend, there'll likely be mud and wind. The fans remain enthusiastic and the racing is a challenge. The track has been modified slightly for 2010, to enable MotoGP racing. Change is often difficult, but Silverstone has been criticised for a lack of overtaking in the past, and the new area of the track could encourage passing. Tyre wear will be crucial, depending on the weather, as the surface is rough and the speeds high.

Germany

Date: July 25th

Circuit: Hockenheimring

Laps: 67

Last year, Webber won the German Grand Prix at the Nurburgring, but this year it is the turn of Hockenheim to host the race again. We have six German drivers on the grid, and Mercedes have managed to turn themselves into a complete German team so the fans will have plenty to cheer about when F1 rolls into town. The circuit itself features very little in the way of elevation changes, and a lot of downforce is required to get round the medium-speed corners. Top speed is also important, though, and the track can be rough on braking and traction. Hockenheim have the oh-so-familiar funding troubles but Bernie has agreed to support the event - an unexpected move but a welcome one.

Hungary

Date: August 1st

Circuit: Hungaroring

Laps: 70

2009 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

For the longest time, Hungary was considered the boring track on the grid. For the past couple of years, various incidents have raised interest levels, whilst worse tracks have come onto the calendar to make it seem almost decent. Last year it suffered from Felipe Massa's major incident, the rest of the weekend was overshadowed by concern for the Brazilian. The year before, Kovalainen took his debut win after Massa's engine blew out three laps from the end. Poor Felipe doesn't have much luck there. The track seems to favour McLaren, and Hamilton has won twice in his three years of F1. The weather is usually stable and warm, so don't expect rain to spice things up. Car set-up is key, and keep an eye on the tyres as the track can be dusty, and the rear rubber takes more load than normal.

Belgium

Date: August 29th

Circuit: Spa-Francorchamps

Laps: 44

2009 Winner: Kimi Raikkonen

The highlight of the calendar, everyone's favourite racetrack is Spa. There is always a good chance of rain in the heart of Belgium, and when you throw in the added challenge of Eau Rouge - one of the best corners in F1 - the race is always highly anticipated. For the last three years, Ferrari have dominated, and it's been Raikkonen for four of the last five events held at Spa. With the Finn out of the picture now, it'll be interesting to see who will make it work. 2009 saw a first lap crash that knocked out four drivers, so expect the two McLaren drivers to be more determined this year, and all the rookies to be concentrating a little harder. Temperatures in Spa are generally quite low, and you



can usually expect some rain - the teams always come prepared for inclement weather. Spa is the longest track on the calendar, thus having the least number of laps, but every lap is a good one.

Italy

Date: September 12th

Circuit: Monza

Laps: 53

2009 Winner: Rubens Barrichello

The Italian Grand Prix has always appeared to favour Ferrari, and of course the Tifosi would prefer it stays that way. However, the last five races have been won by different people, and only one Ferrari, which was Schumacher in 2006. Last year, Barrichello took another win for Brawn GP, and he has plenty of experience having won twice before at Monza as well. The track itself features a lot of straight line work, but the corners that are there are somewhat tricky. The circuit is high-speed, and the set-up needs to take into account some aggressive kerb action, required for a fast lap time. You can never count on the weather to stay dry, and last year the safety car came out on the final lap causing quite a bit of confusion.

Singapore

Date: September 26th

Circuit: Singapore Street Circuit

Laps: 61

2009 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

Sadly for Singapore, the novelty of the first ever night race has worn off, and their 2009 offering was overshadowed by the scandal surrounding Piquet, Renault and some less than accidental spinning. The race itself remains interesting, but not exceptional. The marshalling still leaves a lot to be desired, but Singapore has as yet escaped any serious accidents. Hamilton won the race last year, whilst there were pitlane mistakes galore. There's something about working at night that makes errors more likely - perhaps because everyone involved is tired from trying to stay on European time. Certain areas of hotels are blocked off as quiet zones, so that people can sleep until mid-day, and breakfast is served at 1pm. I couldn't cope, I have no idea how they do. Back on track, the cars run anti-clockwise, and the circuit has 23 corners, keeping drivers on their toes. Concentration is key, and we've seen special visors introduced to help with visibility.

Japan

Date: October 10th

Circuit: Suzuka

Laps: 53

2009 Winner: Sebastian Vettel

In 2009, Sebastian Vettel desperately needed some points to keep his championship challenge alive, and he managed to do just that. The race is held at Suzuka full time now, after Fuji pulled out of their race-share arrangement. Suzuka has previously favoured Ferrari, while Alonso won two of the last four Japanese GPs for Renault - so he may be one to watch this year. There is always a very high possibility of rain in Japan, and that adds to the probability of seeing a Safety Car as well. Suzuka is a challenging circuit, popular amongst drivers, thanks to its high-speed corners, tempered by a tighter hairpin and chicanes. Getting a decent lap time around the track is a fine art, and it is easy to lose time by falling even slightly off the racing line. Balance is really important around Suzuka.

Korea

Date: October 24th



Circuit: Korean International Circuit
Laps: 55

Not an enormous amount is known about the Korean International Circuit, because the last time I checked, it was still being built. The deal with the FIA is for the racing to happen in Korea for seven years and potentially five years beyond that. We know it's not going to be a night race, but aside from that, the track isn't even due to be finished until July. The circuit diagram indicates a long first sector with a couple of straights, whilst the third sector is more twisty. Apparently everything is on schedule but organisers are worried about having enough room to accommodate the fans and even the F1 employees. Everyone involved seems confident construction will be completed on time, though, so we'll have to wait and see.

Brazil

Date: November 7th
Circuit: Autodromo Carlos Pace
Laps: 71
2009 Winner: Mark Webber

Along with Spa and Canada, Brazil is one of the more popular races on the grid, and it retains its popularity, despite the fact that Abu Dhabi has stolen the season finale from Sao Paulo. In 2009, the championship decider was hosted in Brazil anyway, and with changeable weather, plenty of overtaking, and down to the wire racing, the action can be intense. The atmosphere is always electric, and no matter who is winning, the fans just love the racing. As one of the few anti-clockwise tracks, Brazil adds an extra element of challenge for drivers, whilst the high altitude and thin air adds challenge for the engines. For this year, they've got four drivers to support in the form of Massa, Barrichello, Senna and di Grassi, but Massa and Ferrari have won two of the last four events.

Abu Dhabi

Date: November 14th
Circuit: Yas Marina Circuit
Laps: 55
2009 Winner: Sebastian Vettel

Oh, what to say about Abu Dhabi? It was a beautiful, shiny event, with bright lights and clean lines. Unfortunately, it was also completely dull. The racing was processional, and even the drivers struggled to find anything positive to say about it. The track itself is wide with enormous run off areas, the corners are relatively slow and there are a couple of long straights to try and mix things up. The pitlane runs under a bridge to and from the hotel complex, but far from adding glamour to the racing, it caused safety concerns for us watching at home. For a moment, we had hopes that Brazil was going to be put back in its rightful place at the end of the season - in 2009 all the championship excitement was done and dusted by the time we left Sao Paulo anyway. Abu Dhabi was more like an afterthought, and their desire to remain at the end of the calendar means the same will probably happen again this year. It would be wrong to finish up on a sour note, though, so... the hotel is pretty.

That's all for this episode. It's going to be a great year, if a little long, but I am looking forward to it, particularly the return of Canada, and seeing what kind of circuit Korea will turn out to be. We have just one more season preview episode to come, so please stay tuned and I'll see you then.