



F1 Digest 2010 Season Preview – The Rules

Hello and welcome to the final episode of our four part 2010 season preview. We've travelled the globe in our look at the calendar, and examined the grid in its entirety - teams and drivers. Now it's time for a brief look at the changes to the rulebook - because let's face it, there is always something!

Technical Regulations

The first major change for 2010 has been discussed for a long time and finally we're going to see it in action. Refuelling has been banned. There's no more need for the hefty fuel rigs in the garages, as cars will start the race on full tanks of fuel that will, or at least should, last them until the finish line. Tyre wear, and well timed tyre changes, are going to be the key to a successful race. Pit stops will now be a simple dash to change tyres, and any unexpected elements such as rain and safety car periods will have a greater effect on fuel strategy. Drivers no longer have to qualify with the fuel load they will start the race on, which means we will be seeing low-fuel runs for pole position, however, there are some tyre regulations to put a spanner in the works. More on that later.

With bigger fuel tanks required, the cars are a little longer than they were in 2009, however, the low front wing and the high rear wing of last year continue - much to my distress.

The official FIA regulations still make provision for KERS devices, but the teams have agreed not to use the technology. We can notch that one up as a failure, as everyone spent a fortune on research and development, it lasted one year in which it made very little difference, and now it has gone. Something that does continue from last year is the flappy front wing. Put in place to give the driver a chance to adjust the front wing a tiny amount and aid his chance of overtaking, we only saw it a couple of times last year, and Alonso even came out and admitted that it was mostly pointless. Perhaps they will make more of it in 2010.

The FIA have also specified more homologated parts. The survival cell, roll structures, wheels and side impact structures must not be replaced unless teams have a very good reason. If they're damaged or considered unsafe, the FIA can approve a replacement, but otherwise, we'll be looking at essentially the same cars all year.

The tyres used to be of equal width at the front and the back, but now the regulations have changed so that those at the front are slightly narrower than those at the back. The two compounds remain, hards and softs, and for this year, Bridgestone will keep the double step between each that is brought to the races. There will be some exceptions where it is considered a safety requirement, particularly at Monaco. For the first race in Bahrain, Bridgestone will be bringing the super soft and medium compounds.

The FIA tried to ban tyre blankets for this year, but they changed their minds and instead tweaked the regulations so that the blankets can only heat the rubber and not the rest of the wheel. It's supposed to be a compromise to make a driver's ability to get heat into his tyres a benefit, but not making it dangerous to head out on cold tyres. On a related note, the big wheel fairings that obscured the side of the wheel for aerodynamic efficiency, have been banned. We've already seen some smaller tweaks by Ferrari trying to innovate their way around the ban, so once again, what happens in the tyre area may be key to how the season progresses.

Sporting Regulations

Bernie Ecclestone has long been complaining that the existing points system wasn't putting enough pressure on drivers to try and fight for a win. The previous 10-8-6 system meant that you could settle for second without losing too much in your championship battle. Last year he tried to put a medals system in place, and thank god he didn't succeed. For 2010, though, the points system has changed. Now, for a win there are 25 points available, 18 for



second and 15 for third. Then 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2 and one point for tenth place. Yup, that's tenth place. The number of scoring positions has been expanded from eight to ten to take into account the larger grid.

Another element of a weekend that has been adjusted to allow for more teams is qualifying. Now, the regulations stated the first session would see the last eight drivers dropping out, and the same for the second session, leaving the required ten drivers to fight it out for pole position. US F1's departure may have made this obsolete already, but it should only be a small adjustment.

We discussed tyres earlier, but they also affect the sporting regulations as well. Previously, drivers were allowed to use 14 sets of tyres which has now been reduced. They will get six sets of the harder compound, five of the softer, with three of those sets reserved specifically for Fridays. Various sets of tyres have to be given back to the FIA after each session, which basically means drivers will end up with less choice when it comes to qualifying and the race.

Additionally there is a new regulation that means a driver who qualifies inside the top 10 has to start the race on the same tyres that he qualifies with. This regulation can only have been introduced as a direct result of the refuelling ban. Instead of a straightforward qualifying shoot out for pole, with everyone on the same fuel load and the fastest car getting the glory, the FIA have introduced an extra variable into the mix. If you qualify on soft tyres, you are more likely to do well in qualifying but you could struggle on heavier fuel in the opening part of the race. Conversely, a harder tyre might make qualifying tougher, but that opening heavy stint will be much easier to handle.

The FIA won't be publishing the fuel weights of cars anymore. In 2009 we saw the weights revealed a couple of hours after qualifying, taking some of the mystery out of who was running which strategy. Now, there is less strategy involved, but publishing the weights would have given us a chance to see which team had the most fuel efficient car. Sadly, we won't be able to do that, but perhaps there will be other ways to tell.

If there is a Safety Car period during a race, the procedure has been altered yet again. This time, all drivers have to adhere to the minimum time specified by the FIA. Previously, it was only drivers racing back to get to the pits that had to abide by this, but now all the cars will get a calculated time on their dash and they have to stay above it. Also, we are losing the element where backmarkers can unlap themselves before the racing gets underway again. When the Safety Car does pull in, we'll see a mixture of cars that are lapped and those that are not. I don't know about anyone else, but I can see myself getting very confused.

A new rule has been imposed stating that if a driver is slow away on the formation lap and loses places, unless he gets back into his original start position by the first safety car line, he will have to start from the pitlane.

The eight engine rule from 2009 continues, but after a potential loophole appeared last year, the FIA have tightened up on it. Now, if a driver goes over his eight engine limit, the ninth and new engine will result in a ten place grid penalty. If a driver uses two new engines in that same weekend - as we thought Vettel might do last year, in order to take all his penalties in one hit - they'll get a ten place grid drop for the race and a ten place grid drop for the next event as well.

The testing ban is still in force, but the FIA have opened their eyes after so many new drivers entered the sport last year without a clue how to drive an F1 car around a corner. If there is to be a substitution during the season, teams are allowed to get that driver in a car under certain conditions. He can't have been in F1 for two seasons, the test must take place on a circuit that doesn't host a championship race, and must happen within 14 days before and 14 days after the substitution. Why he would need to test afterwards, I don't know. Putting this into perspective for last year, Fisichella would not have been able to have a one-day test in the Ferrari, but Badoer would have. I'm not sure it would have helped him much.



So, that sums up how things have changed for 2010. After the complete upheaval last year, it seems as though the regulations are taking a backseat for the new season, with the focus more on new teams and new drivers. Having said that, though, there's plenty for teams to trip up on, and the lack of refuelling will change the format of races completely. It's going to be a fascinating year.

We have completed our season preview now, if you've missed the previous shows, you've got a few days to catch up on teams, drivers and the calendar, before F1 Digest returns for the season proper. I will be back with the Bahrain Preview, and I hope you'll join me then.

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