



F1 Digest 2010 – Australia Preview

Hi there! Welcome back to F1 Digest - we are revving up for the Australian GP. It's fair to say that the season opener in Bahrain wasn't everything that we'd hoped for, but that's no matter. Melbourne is next on our tour of the globe, and it's bound to be better, even if it's not still perfect. Let us get on with our first Digest of the weekend.

Vital Statistics

The Australian Grand Prix takes place on the 28th March 2010, and is held on the street circuit in Albert Park. The track is 5.3 kilometres, which equates to 58 laps. The record stands with Michael Schumacher who posted a 1:24.125 in 2004, whilst the fastest lap of the 2009 race was posted by Nico Rosberg with a 1:27.706. The long range weather forecast shows light rain on all three days, Friday through Saturday. The maximum temperature hovers around 20 degrees C, but the wind speed creeps up to 19 mph on Sunday.

What You Guys Think

Mostly, we have positive thoughts about Australia, with KerbRider saying: "Brilliant city, so so track. Twilight was great for spectators, bad for drivers." Steven isn't fully convinced: "Don't like street circuits but Melbourne is OK." Pat thinks there might be a surprise: "It always seems to have an unexpected result." And finally, Gavin sums up what we're all thinking: "The start of the season, even if it isn't the first race!"

You can send me your thoughts on the upcoming tracks by emailing christine at sidepodcast dot com.

2009 in 30 seconds

It's time for a quick recap of what happened during the 2009 Australia GP, which was the start of the season:

All eyes were on the Brawn team last year, as we knew they were going to spring a surprise but we weren't sure just what a shock it would be. To qualify 1-2 with Button ahead of Barrichello was pretty impressive. There were first lap incidents aplenty, whilst Hamilton started way down in 18th. He made his way through the field, though. Kubica and Vettel came together just a couple of laps from the end. After the race finished under safety car conditions, Button took his first of many wins, whilst Lewis found himself third. An incident between himself and Trulli was later investigated, but that is a whole other story.

Team Quotes

Let's start with Sauber and a very enthusiastic Pedro de la Rosa, who is keen to put the season opener behind him. "I'm very much looking forward to this grand prix. I really want our performance in Bahrain to be forgotten. Also it is one of my favourite grands prix because of the great atmosphere there. My last race there was in 2002." Kobayashi has less experience, saying: "I only know the track from the Toyota simulator which I have been in after the race in Bahrain... I have been there twice as a reserve driver." I am curious that he was using the Toyota simulator, did he have much interaction with Stefan GP who were also involved with Toyota's assets?

After a potential win in Bahrain was dashed by reliability problems, Vettel is philosophical about what they learnt from the event: "For me there is nothing I could have done better. Sounds maybe a bit harsh, but at any time I think we had a good position and we were controlling everything. There is a lot of positive. I think we have made a huge step forward in the tyre management side." Meanwhile, Webber is confident that the team will keep the pace up: "it is going to be very interesting to see how this weekend goes and to see what this track throws at us - but I am expecting the car to be strong here as well. There is absolutely no reason it shouldn't be - but whether it is enough to have a really, really successful weekend you just never know."



A new team, now and Hispania can only do better than they did in Bahrain. Chandhok says: "I am really looking forward to my second F1 race this weekend. I have never driven in Melbourne, but I am a very quick learner. I was able to work on a team's simulator before the grand prix so that will help my familiarisation a little bit!" Ooh, more simulator mysteries! What team was that? Senna seems to have forgotten what happened at the last race: "We need to continue building on what we achieved in Bahrain. We put two cars together and ran successfully in Bahrain. Now we must continue to work as a team."

Michael Schumacher said he was pretty happy with his sixth place at the season opener, and he's certainly putting the effort in to try and improve: "As in previous times, I arrived on the continent quite early and have spent some nice days training, adapting and relaxing in order to be fit and rested for the race weekend." Rosberg is wary of the upcoming problems though: "It's quite a challenging track as the public roads are always dirty to begin with and there are a lot of bumps to negotiate. With the change in the time of the race last year, the low sun was one of the most difficult things due to the late afternoon start."

For a team that got a 1-2 victory, Ferrari are still being quietly cautious. Stefano Domenicali says: "Of course the result in the end was very, very good - it was excellent, a first and second place in the first race. It was really an outstanding achievement, but we have seen the list of problems was quite high and we need to address them all and make sure that these are solved before the start of the next race in Australia."

Over at McLaren, Hamilton appreciates all the good things about Melbourne: "I've always enjoyed Albert Park. I had a great race here on my Formula 1 debut in 2007, won the race a year later and made full use of KERS... last year. But for me, the best things about the Australian Grand Prix are the people and the atmosphere." Button also has happy memories: "As with most drivers on the grid, Albert Park was my first introduction to Formula 1, and I really enjoyed my debut... I was on pole in 2006 although I had another non-finish. Of course, last year was a fairytale race for me." I wonder if this year will be.

For Renault, Kubica has some thoughts about non-refuelling: "Especially at the beginning, it felt like the race was happening in slow motion compared to last year because we had so much fuel onboard and the lap times were so much slower. It was interesting to see how the different teams reacted to the challenge." Petrov had a good opening race and wasn't ruffled: "I prefer to take everything calmly. I've been racing a long time and, although F1 is tougher than any other series, it's still about doing the best job you can in the car. I was not worried before the race, but I felt much better after doing my first start, making up places on the opening lap and really fighting with the cars around me."

Sutil says that Australia is one of his favourite circuits: "It's quite a nice street circuit with a few run off areas through a park so it's very beautiful. But it's also very challenging with a lot of quick corners and a few slow speed corners so altogether it's a great circuit to race on." On the other side of the garage, Liuzzi is thinking more about the twilight start again: "It wasn't a real problem last year - there was just one corner where the sun was very low and it was maybe a bit harder to see but everywhere else it was OK. The real challenge is that it can be critical with the temperature as the sun goes down..."

Williams have a mixture of a driver who has raced plenty of times in Melbourne, and one who doesn't know Albert Park at all. Hulkenberg says: "I spent a few days in the factory last week going through practice runs on the simulator and running through data with my engineers which was really helpful but nothing beats having time on the track itself." Barrichello adds that Albert Park doesn't really feel like a street circuit at all and it has some interesting corners, so he's looking forward to a competitive race.



Now, at the time of recording, neither Toro Rosso, Lotus nor Virgin Racing had any preview press releases available, but it's fair to say the two new teams could not be more polar opposites. Richard Branson has been talking up the chances of them fighting with Red Bull in 3-5 years, whilst Lotus are simply hoping to build on their double-race finish in Bahrain. Perhaps if Virgin concentrated on the finishing part, they might be off to a better start!

Predictions

Last week, I rather cleverly forgot to revisit my predictions on the GP Digest show. I was wrong, anyway.

For this race, I don't think Ferrari are going to be so lucky, and the Red Bull might be able to sustain their reliability for an entire race. However, Australia always throws up oddities, so if not a Red Bull win, it might be a McLaren. I'd put my money on Jenson Button, in an attempt to recreate his winning ways of last year.

Outtro

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest. I hope you're looking forward to the race as much as I am. We'll be back after qualifying with a rundown of the action, and a chance for me to revise my terrible predictions.

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