



F1 Digest – Prelude to the British Grand Prix

Christine: The Silverstone Circuit has been the location of the British Grand Prix for the past 26 years, and was, of course, the track that hosted the very first Formula One Championship race in 1950. An old airfield in the depths of the English countryside, the Silverstone circuit began life as some crumbling tarmac lined with hay bales. It's evolved a lot since then, now a state of the art motorsport complex, with a track of the highest standards - constantly being evaluated to keep up with the needs of safety and entertainment in Formula One. The most recent changes were ready in time for the race in 2011 but no matter what twists and tweaks occur, the track is recognisable and infamous - Hangar Straight, Maggotts & Becketts, Stowe and Club - it's fast-flowing, it's tough on the tyres and it's always under threat from the weather.

Mr C: Welcome to F1 Digest - Prelude to the British Grand Prix, an F1 race preview from Sidepodcast. Here's your host, Christine Blachford.

Christine: Keeping your eyes on the skies is a crucial part of the Silverstone experience. Last year, the race weekend was overshadowed by travel problems as the mud levels rocketed, car parks were closed, and some fans were urged not to make the journey where possible. For 2013, the weather in the UK hasn't been all that much better, but organisers at the track are confident they've learnt their lessons.

The long-range weather forecasts for this year's race, held on the 30th June show lower temperatures, no rain on the cards as yet, but little in the way of sunshine as well. The race should then favour those drivers and teams that can get heat into their tyres in the lower ambient temperatures. After two street tracks, we're finally returning to a dedicated fast-flowing circuit, so performance should be more like that which we saw in Spain, rather than the last two events in Canada and Monaco. Mercedes will likely be back on pole position, whilst Lotus expect their performance to improve after disappointments over the last two races.

It's worth briefly noting that Mark Webber won last year's race in Britain, halting a charge from pole position by Ferrari's Fernando Alonso. The Spaniard won the previous season, 2011, after Webber lost his pole to Red Bull teammate Sebastian Vettel. Pit stop problems allowed Alonso to snatch victory.

Although the nature of the circuit is less demanding of the driver than some on the calendar, there are still plenty of potential incidents, and there's a 50% chance of the Safety Car making an appearance at some point during the race. There are 52 laps completed in a clockwise direction, making a total race distance of around 306 kilometres.

Normal race strategy would favour 1 or 2 stops, but of course this depends on the weather and how the new Pirelli compounds react to the track surface. Pit lane loss at Silverstone is about 16 seconds so it wouldn't take long for a driver, for instance Sebastian Vettel, to dash off in the distance and give himself enough space for a complete pitstop.

This weekend, the compounds available are the medium and hard tyres, the white and orange sidewalls respectively. These tyres should be able to deal with the high speeds and changeable conditions, whilst there is also a new manufacturing process that should lessen the impact of tyre delaminations that we've seen on several occasions already this season.

Eight of the eleven current Formula One teams have their bases in the UK, regardless of the nationality of the outfits themselves. That makes the British Grand Prix a home race for almost three quarters of the F1 paddock. Expect



teams to invite employees from the factory to watch the race, as a morale boost for those that don't normally get to travel to races, and as an extra incentive for the drivers to push that little bit harder.

After a brief flyaway race in Canada, the teams can break out their motorhomes again, as they make the most of their local event. There are no issues bringing new parts to the car, as for many of the teams, it is just a trip down the motorway from factory to track. For Force India, it is just a jaunt across the road.

Unlike some of the more recent additions to the F1 calendar, Formula One is embraced in the UK - a country with a rich motorsport history, passionate fans, and racing tradition. There are junior series, driver academies and plenty of educational courses to help anyone and everyone get involved and get interested in sports involving four wheels. And Silverstone styles itself as the "Home of British Motor Racing."

Organisers of this weekend's race have complained that ticket sales are down, as the four Brits competing are unlikely to put together a winning weekend. They place the blame squarely at Sebastian Vettel's door, and the German is starting to run away with things again. He won comprehensively in Canada, extending his lead at the top of the driver's championship standings, he now has 132 points to second place Fernando Alonso's 96. The gap to the front is a tough one to overcome, but the fight for second and below is ongoing. Alonso moved up to second over Kimi Räikkönen after the Montreal weekend, with Lewis Hamilton and Mark Webber rounding out the top five.

There's always less movement in the team standings, and Red Bull have a magnificent lead over there too. Mercedes moved up to third place after a good showing in Canada, they're now sitting on 134 points to second place Ferrari's 145. Red Bull are racing ahead, having broken through the 200 points barrier. Three teams remain on zero points, with Williams, Marussia and Caterham all chasing that elusive first top ten finish in 2013 - or ever!

For Williams, it is a significant weekend, as they reach a milestone as a team. Finnish driver Valtteri Bottas explains: "This is going to be a very special weekend for Williams, celebrating 600 races in front of our home fans at a track which has a lot of history for the team and is great fun to drive."

Meanwhile, the Lotus squad have had a run of bad luck of late, and team principal Eric Boullier hopes this will be the race where they can turn things around. He says: "We're certainly not going to let two weekends of poor results stop us in our efforts. We have a very reasonable package to fit to the E21 for Silverstone - with a number of elements which should help with our performance... We head to Silverstone with a determined strategy to be back fighting for podiums."

Finally, Max Chilton is making his home race debut in F1, and the Marussia driver is looking forward to it: "We're racing in our own backyard with fantastic support from our fans, our team and our partners right here on our doorstep. It doesn't get much better than that, apart from bringing home a good result of course... I know from having raced at Silverstone previously that the atmosphere is electric, with a sea of Union Jack flags and some big noise coming from the grandstands. I'm sure it will be better than ever this year with four British drivers in the mix."

Those four, along with their 18 colleagues, will take to the track at 1pm local time, GMT+1, for the 2013 British Grand Prix. Place your bets now as to who will leave the Silverstone circuit with a trophy in their hand, and a healthy dose of points in their pocket.

Mr C: This episode was brought to you by Sidepodcast, with thanks to Williams F1 and Pirelli Tyre S.p.A. If you want to find out more about the British Grand Prix, visit Sidepodcast.com for live comments and lap by lap coverage, as well as post-race results and analysis.