



F1 Digest – Prelude to the German Grand Prix

Christine: The Nürburgring is a legendary part of motor racing history, a sprawling track through the depths of the forests in Germany, a scene of triumph and tragedy throughout the years. These days, Formula One races on just a small part of the original 22 kilometre circuit, but the legacy of days gone by seeps through the barriers onto the newer parts of the track. Germany has had exceptional success in F1 in recent history, with seven-times World Champion Michael Schumacher, and the current defending champion Sebastian Vettel in search of a fourth world title. But Vettel hasn't yet won in Germany, so this weekend could be anybody's.

Mr C: This is F1 Digest – Prelude to the German Grand Prix, a Sidepodcast preview of this weekend's racing action at the Nürburgring.

Christine: At this early stage in the build-up to the German Grand Prix, the weather looks very similar to what was experienced in the UK, although the temperatures could be slightly higher. Rain is forecast for Friday, meaning practice could be affected once again. Saturday is due to be cloudy, but should remain dry, whilst the sun is meant to be in full force on race day, with air temperatures around 23 degrees C. As always, with these European tracks, the weather forecasters do their best, but the skies can be very unpredictable and conditions can remain changeable throughout a whole weekend.

The original, extended version of the Nürburgring circuit had well over 100 corners for drivers to do battle with. Our current layout has a much more manageable 15. At just over 5 kilometres long, the race will see 60 laps to get above the 300 kilometre distance. The lap begins with a medium size straight, one of the precious few areas of track that give the drivers a chance to breathe. The rest is made up of winding corners, not quite as fast flowing as the previous outing at Silverstone, and another full of tricky overtaking prospects.

Aerodynamic efficiency is one of the key areas this weekend, so Mark Webber will be looking to keep both endplates on his front wing this time out, third time's a charm! The track is the second-highest above sea-level which means the engines can't give their maximum performance, and the track is relatively easy on the brakes as well. But don't let me fool you into thinking this is a simple circuit.

Tom McCullough, Head of Track Engineering at Sauber, has this to say about it: "The Nürburgring is one of the most technically challenging circuits for the drivers and engineers. There is a good mix of low, medium and high-speed corners... requiring many set-up and driver compromises. There are also some off camber corners, which always make it harder to get the ideal set-up."

There's a 20% chance of the safety car making an appearance, which is relatively low given the challenging nature of the track. Pit lane loss is just under 20 seconds, and last year there were 50 pit stops made in the course of the race. The expected strategy will be similar to Silverstone, two or three stops.

F1's sole tyre supplier Pirelli find themselves under increasing pressure as the 2013 season continues. Having previously been under fire for making the tyres too prone to degradation, and having too much of an influence on racing strategy, they're now dealing with the fallout of the four tyre blowouts that occurred during the British Grand Prix. The reasons and solutions are still to be investigated, and meanwhile there's another race to complete!

This weekend, teams will be supplied with the medium and soft compounds, the white and yellow sidewalls respectively. This is one step down from the selection available for Silverstone, as speeds are slightly lower around the Nurburgring, and the tyres can be slightly softer on the tarmac.



Back to back racing means the teams have departed straight from Silverstone to cross the channel and head into the depths of Germany to prepare for the next race. It's a tight turnaround, but the logistics guys are pros at this sort of thing. There's no time for any major upgrades to the cars this weekend, and most teams will probably be focusing ahead to the three-day Silverstone test in mid-July. The FIA confirmed that it will be open to more than just Young Drivers in an attempt to solve any lingering tyre problems, although there will be observers in place to make sure the teams can't work on upgrades with current racers. That sounds like a hard thing to spot to me, but we shall see.

Germany has a huge motor racing heritage, and several of the big German car manufacturers participate in Formula One, Le Mans and more. There's even the dedicated DTM series for them to play around in. Germany has also been well represented on the grid in recent years, although in 2013 they are down to just four drivers. As well as the defending champion Vettel, patriotic fans can also cheer on Nico Rosberg, Adrian Sutil and the other Nico, Hülkenberg.

It's not often that Sebastian Vettel retires from a Grand Prix, and his DNF at Silverstone has allowed Fernando Alonso – who finished on the podium – to close up the gap to the current championship leader considerably. Previously Vettel held a 36 point lead, but that has been reduced to just 21 points – a single race victory standing between the top two. Kimi Räikkönen, Lewis Hamilton and Mark Webber all managed to increase their points total in Britain, but made no huge impact on their own championship campaign, and they round out the top five in that order.

In the Constructors' Championship, Mercedes were the big winners from Silverstone, taking victory and managing to jump ahead of Ferrari to move into second place behind Red Bull. At first glance, the lead appears hefty, but at 48 points, it is not unassailable yet. Lotus sit in fourth place, with 124 points, the last of the teams to have reached the century so far. Force India round out the top five, with just 59 points.

The quick return to racing is something the McLaren team are looking forward to, particularly Sergio Pérez who found his race at Silverstone cut short by one of the tyre blowouts that marred the Grand Prix. He says: "I've already put the disappointment behind me. In fact, I was more encouraged by the positives: I demonstrated strong pace all weekend, was having a good race and looked set to finish in the points..." He's got better memories of racing in Germany, as that's where his single-seater career started, and he believes the track will suit his style.

Meanwhile, Giedo van der Garde of Caterham is hoping to settle in at the Nürburgring very quickly, as he has driven there before - although this will be his first time in an F1 car. He says: "Germany is going to be a great race, partly because the track is relatively near home for me so there will be a lot of Dutch support there, and because it's a track I've always gone well at. Throughout my career I've won races there in all categories – I know that's not going to happen this year but, as a rookie, when you go to a track you know really well it means you're on it right from the first lap and that helps us maximise the time we have in every session, as long as the weather stays dry..."

The weather will be on everyone's minds as the weekend draws closer, some hoping for rain to offer up some opportunities, some hoping for clear skies to keep things simple. It looks like we're going to have a little bit of both.

Mr C: This episode was brought to you by Sidepodcast, with stats from Williams F1. If you want to stay up to date over the race weekend, visit Sidepodcast.com for live comments and lap by lap coverage for qualifying and the race.