



## F1 Digest – Prelude to the Singapore Grand Prix

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Christine: From the depths of the European countryside, Formula One is back on the busy streets of the city, with the return of the Singapore night race. Singapore joined the F1 calendar in 2008, a beautiful and glittering spectacle with a unique night-time selling point. The first few races at the Marina Bay circuit held controversy, but the event moved past that to work towards its aim of rivalling the status that Monaco holds in motorsport circles. It may not have the history of Monaco, but Singapore has the looks, the rock stars, and the next spot on the 2013 calendar.

Mr C: Welcome to F1 Digest - a prelude to the Singapore Grand Prix brought to you by Sidepodcast. This race preview covers all you need to know for this weekend's night-race action. Here's your host, Christine Blachford.

Christine: From this distance, it's always hard to know what the weather is going to do but at Singapore, it is slightly easier to forecast. From now until the Monday after the race, the weather predictions show rain and scattered storms for all but Thursday - just time to squeeze in a nice track walk.

Of course, as a night race, there's no need to worry about whether the sun is out or not, but rain under the floodlights always causes a little bit of concern over visibility. Whether it's raining or not, expect high levels of humidity and reasonably warm temperatures as well - the complete opposite to what teams have been experiencing in the European circuits for the last few race weekends.

The actual length of the Marina Bay circuit is your regulation 5 kilometres, but boy does a lap of that track feel a lot longer. In complete contrast to the high speeds at Monza, the Singapore circuit doesn't have much in the way of straight lines, keeping the top speeds below 300 kilometres per hour. There are more than 20 corners, as high as 23 depending on how you count them, and the slower speeds around each mean that the races can often linger on towards the two hour mark.

It's a race run anti-clockwise, and with the humidity, the bumpy track and the sheer length of the race, it becomes much more of an endurance event than a simple F1 jaunt. It's not just difficult on the drivers, but the cars as well - cooling can be a significant issue, particularly around the slower sections of track.

There's been a small change to the layout for 2013, with the chicane at turn ten - about the halfway point of the circuit - being removed. It's replaced with a faster flowing corner, with the FIA simulations estimating an increase of speed of 40km/h as the cars pass through and on towards the Anderson bridge. There's also going to be some resurfacing work done at certain parts of the track, but my money is on the lap still being bumpy, and even with the faster turn ten, the race still pushing the two hour limit.

For the 2013 weekend in Singapore, Pirelli are bringing the supersoft and the medium compounds, that's red and white sidewalls respectively. This is slightly different to their choices last season, when it was the two softest compounds on offer. This year, the medium replaces the soft, with Pirelli explaining it's because the compounds are softer overall, and the track is pretty bumpy with manholes and white lines that compromise grip.

With a good chance of rain across the weekend, we might see the intermediate or full wet tyres in action, giving us a splash of green or blue paint. Assuming it's a dry race, the usual strategy is a two or three stop, despite the longer time spent in the pit lane. All three drivers on the podium last year got there with a two stop strategy, and there were two safety car periods in the mix as well.



Singapore is the first of the final leg of flyaway races, sending the F1 teams all the way back to Asia for the night race around the city streets. With the unusual schedule demanding drivers are at their peak condition later in the day, most of the teams tend to stick to European timezones. This has been well-documented as meaning personnel have to sleep with blackout blinds, have their breakfast at three in the afternoon, and stay up until the early hours. Tiredness and general confusion can often play their part in making the weekend harder than normal.

There can be some issues during practice as the day turns into night and visibility can be difficult. Once the lights come on, the track is brighter than day, with just a few darker sections. Drivers will often opt for a lighter visor, giving fans a little bit of an extra insight as you can see the concentration in their eyes around a full and long lap.

With just five Singapore races complete, it's easy to see who has been strong of late. Fernando Alonso has won the event twice, with two different teams, although one of those wins has a pretty big asterisk beside it. Lewis Hamilton has one victory around the street circuit, whilst Sebastian Vettel has won the last two races.

It's not a surprise to see Sebastian Vettel extending his lead at the top of the driver's championship after a supreme performance at Monza. Second place Alonso also got a good points haul but the gap continues to increase. Hamilton and Räikkönen had less successful weekends in Italy, leading to Lewis initially writing off his title chances. He said: "That's it for the championship," but then after thinking things through, he said: "I've been back with my engineers and I'm not going to give up. I basically need to win every race, which is the tallest order ever, but I can do nothing but try."

Good to see a bit of positivity in the driver's fight. For the teams, things are slightly different. Red Bull are practically untouchable with over 100 points lead on second place Ferrari. The scrap for that second place is absolutely fascinating, however. Ferrari moved ahead after the Italian race, with Mercedes dropping back to third, but there are still only three points between them, and the balance of power is shifting at each individual circuit. Although the title looks to be decided already, there's still a good few battles to keep an eye on.

There's been a lot of attention on Kimi Räikkönen with his planned move to Ferrari next year, and the less-than-talkative Finn hopes he won't be asked as many questions for the rest of the season. Somehow, I don't see that happening. But on the other side of the garage, Romain Grosjean is keeping his head down and trying to get some results. He points out some of the challenges with the Singapore circuit: "It's a fun layout to drive, with the last section being my favourite part of the track. It's certainly a physical race, with lots of kerbs, some bumps on the track and frequent use of the brakes. It's certainly not a circuit with a long straight where you can take a rest!"

Team Principal at Marussia, John Booth, has been dealing with a double rookie strategy all year, but it's even more of a prominent issue here, as he explains: "We always feel a little sad putting Europe behind us, along with some of the classic motor racing venues. Having said that, we're never sorry to be heading to Singapore, for one of the Team's favourite races. The atmosphere and spectacle are quite unique and this year it will be nice to share our experience with two drivers who are very excited to be competing in their first night race."

And as McLaren continue to look back at their own history in Formula One, Jenson Button has been thinking about the short but impressive history of Singapore's unique race setup. He says: "It seemed incredible to think that we could hold a Formula 1 race at night. I must say, the thrill and novelty of racing through spotlit streets is just as intense for me today as it was when we first raced there - it's a unique spectacle, and one that I think is brilliant for F1."

Mr C: This episode of F1 Digest was brought to you by Sidepodcast with facts and information from Pirelli s.P.a. and Williams F1. Stay tuned to Sidepodcast.com for live comments, session results and minute by minute coverage of qualifying and the race.