



F1 Digest – Prelude to the Korean Grand Prix

Christine: South Korea finds itself hosting a bit of an awkward race. At this point in the season, the championship is either drawing towards an incredible, tense and exciting conclusion, or it's like this year. With Red Bull storming away with both titles at the moment, it would take a huge upset for anyone to stand in their path. Korea also doesn't have one of the most captivating or memorable tracks, which makes it a tough weekend to get truly excited about. But, there's always something to look forward to, isn't there? This show is where you'll find out what.

Mr C: Welcome to F1 Digest – Prelude to the Korean Grand Prix. This is your race preview for all the action in South Korea, brought to you by Sidepodcast. Now, here is your host, Christine Blachford.

Christine: The long-range weather forecasts for the weekend in Korea show sunny skies for all three days. The temperature is set to hover around the 25 degrees C mark, increasing gradually as the weekend wears on. There's little chance of rain, in fact the early predictions put the possible percentage of rain at 0. But the wind could have an impact at certain sections of the track, and the humidity is greater than 60% on occasion, so these are extra things the drivers will have to deal with.

As I said, a lap of the Korean International Circuit isn't too memorable, except for two things. It's another track that sends the drivers round anti-clockwise, so neck strain is supposed to be something to watch out for, although these guys are tip top athletes and never seem to have a problem with it. The pit lane has also caused its fair share of controversy.

The pit entrance is on the racing line, meaning drivers are slowing to make a stop exactly where a faster car following wants to be. The pit exit is not on the racing line, but it feeds out on to the outside of turn one, where plenty of drivers have locked up and missed the apex. All it takes is the unfortunate timing for a driver to be exiting the pit lane at the same time another is messing up the corner, and a crash is almost inevitable.

Assuming drivers can get through the first corner correctly, they find themselves out on a long, long straight, over 1 kilometre, and then braking hard into a tight right hander. There's just the benefit of another short straight, before the track becomes twisting and weaves its way back round through some difficult corner complexes. Zig-zagging back and forth, there's a good mix of high speed and slower corners but overtaking can be very difficult, and DRS hasn't proven to enhance the action too much so far.

The fast straights and slow corners mean everything about the setup and running of the cars is a compromise. Cooling and downforce requirements are both medium, whilst drivers have their foot to the floor for about 61% of the lap. There's also a 67% chance of a safety car making an appearance, and the ideal strategy is your standard two-stopper.

Pirelli have opted to bring the medium and supersoft compounds to the Korean track, just like they did at the last race in Singapore. The medium compound should be able to cope with the mix of fast and slow corners, whilst the supersoft is in place to try and maximise speeds, particularly in qualifying. The grip levels can be shocking when the weekend's action first begins, as the Korea International Circuit is not in use often outside the F1 weekend. Expect the first free practice to be dominated by drivers willing to go out and clear up the track for everyone else.

As more rubber goes down, the tarmac should evolve and get faster, so that by the time we get to qualifying and the race, we could be looking at the times dropping in a very short space of time.



Following the night race spectacle at Singapore, Korea hosts the first of two back to back events, continuing F1's current stint in Asia. The teams will need to pack up quickly and move on once the race is over, hustling across to Suzuka for the fifteenth round of the season. Upgrades are still being brought to the cars but in smaller volume, due to the flyaway nature of the events, and the concentration on development for 2014 rather than the current championship season. It's all about consolidation from here on in!

Meanwhile, the circuit at Yeongam is not a popular one with journalists, as the travel to and from the track is lengthy, with hotel accommodation at a considerable distance to the race destination. The surrounding area can also be less than savoury in nature. Ticket sales have been disappointing and visitor figures low, meaning the event makes a loss, and thus there are endless rumours swirling about the future of the Korean Grand Prix in Formula One. Of course, the lack of fans physically present at the track could be a good thing so that dominant racer Sebastian Vettel escapes yet another weekend of booing from the crowd.

The only championship movement that followed the last race in Singapore came as Nico Hülkenberg jumped ahead of Daniel Ricciardo for 13th place, and Esteban Gutiérrez took 17th from Valtteri Bottas, despite them both being on zero points. The tally at the top altered a little but with no change in position. Sebastian Vettel keeps hold of a sturdy lead at the top, with Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton chasing him. The only other drivers still mathematically in contention for the title are Kimi Räikkönen, Mark Webber and Nico Rosberg.

On the constructor side, things are slightly more mathematically open, as there are so many points available, but it's almost impossible to imagine someone overhauling Red Bull's 103 point lead. Ferrari are currently the closest, but it's their battle with Mercedes that is providing the most interest. The Scuderia have seven points over the Silver Arrows, so the balance of power could change very quickly in the second and third spots.

Sauber's rookie driver Esteban Gutiérrez missed out on a top result at the Singapore race, after qualifying exceptionally well compared to his usual form. He's heading to Korea having visited the track before, but never racing there. He describes his preparation, saying: "I have mostly learnt from and analysed data and notes from previous years. I also watch a lot of on board videos and, of course, walk the track... With the two weeks between Singapore and Korea, I had plenty of time to study the track and make sure I'm as best prepared as possible."

Where Gutiérrez had a good Saturday in the car in Singapore, Kimi Räikkönen had a poor day out, owing to a bad back. The Finn was able to race and finished on the podium, but his concerns aren't over, he says: "It's not the first time I've had a problem, as there have been some issues with my back for a long time. We'll have to see how it is when I get out on track on Friday in Korea." In slightly more positive news, he is hoping the car can perform as well as it did last time out, as he says: "The car felt good for the whole race and it was a nice feeling racing too."

And finally, Adrian Sutil is hedging his bets about the upcoming race, he says: "I quite like the track and I'm looking forward to it. I haven't been so successful there yet, but I want to make up for that this year. The circuit has a nice layout and a nice flow in the second part of the lap with some high-speed corners. Let's see how the supersoft performs because the corners are very hard on the tyres. That could open up some interesting strategies."

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