



F1 Digest - Monaco Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest, coverage of the 2008 F1 season, brought to you by Sidepodcast. Today we are previewing the Monaco GP.

Vital Statistics

Date: 25th May

Circuit: Monte Carlo

Length: 3.3km

Laps: 78

2007 Winner: Fernando Alonso

Last Year

At a track with as much history as Monaco, it seems like a good idea to take a quick trip down memory lane to last year and see how our drivers fared in 2007.

[Begin Montage]

Chris: Oh my god, Raikkonen stopped in the same place on track as Michael Schumacher did last year?

Me: At the Rascasse corner.

Chris: It was brilliant.

Me: What on earth are the chances? You could not write that script, could you?

Chris: You couldn't make it up.

Me: You couldn't say it any better.

[Next Clip]

Chris: Hamilton was really pushing it, wasn't he? He was slipping around all over the circuit.

Me: There was a four wheel slide in there.

Chris: There was some drifting. It was quite exciting.

Me: It was amazing, it was very good driving. Very impressed. It's the first McLaren pole of the season and the first McLaren 1-2 of the season. So they are looking mighty and if it's dry tomorrow, they are going to be amazing.

Chris: So, the top three in qualifying were Alonso, then Hamilton and then Massa.

[Next Clip]



Me: [Yawns] Are you still awake?

Chris: Yea it was rubbish.

Me: That's okay, I needed a sleep on a Sunday afternoon.

Chris: It's all my fault for being so excited about it, it was bound to be rubbish.

Me: How did it start?

Chris: It was a good start, very clean, no accidents.

Me: Not one, I cannot believe it, I'd have put the house on the fact that someone was going to mess up on the first corner.

[Next Clip]

Chris: Cos it's a short circuit, it wasn't long before they were lapping people. It seemed like traffic was quite a problem today.

Me: I'm not sure why the, I guess, maybe it was because the McLaren's were so much faster than everybody else, but why the front of the pack caught up with the back of the pack so quickly. It did seem unusual. Usually it's around the time of the first pit stops, but it was way before that, wasn't it?

[Next Clip]

Chris: In the second round of pit stops, Alonso was in first again, but this time he came out a bit cautiously, having changed to the super soft tyres. It didn't seem to affect him that much though, he was still fast.

Me: I think by that point, he might have got the call from the McLaren guys to say, well, the fight's now over. You're in the lead, you're leading the second round of pit stops, just nurse the car home, take it easy now. Because he didn't look at all bothered, did he? It wasn't a guy who was defending his first place at all.

[Next Clip]

Chris: The final result was Alonso, then Hamilton, then Massa. Then Fisichella, Kubica, Heidfeld, Wurz and Raikkonen, who picked up a point.

[End Montage]

Chris: Before we catch up with how the teams are feeling this year, let's hear from three people with some inside knowledge. Alex Wurz will tell us about his perception of Monaco and safety, ex-F1 driver Christian Danner talks of the technical details, and Nico Rosberg fills us in on why Monaco is special to him.

Alex: You would think it's dangerous, but I think with the speeds we have in Monaco, and really looking at the safety training, the marshals have a lot. I think it's a relative safe race going through the streets of the principality.

Christian: Monaco as such is very, very special. It's a unique circuit in the Formula 1 world. So for Monaco, you need to set the car up very specifically, which means you need a maximum amount of downforce because it's a reasonably



slow circuit. On top of that you need a slightly different mechanical setup of the car to improve the grip. To improve mechanical grip, usually you achieve that by softening the car off a little bit on dampers and on springs, and then obviously you have to adapt the ride height of the car to wherever the bumps are in Monaco.

Nico: I always remember how I'm lying in my bed in the morning at 9 o'clock or whatever and the first practice session starts on a Friday. I think it was even the times when Ayrton Senna was still driving, back in those days, I was seven years old and Michael Schumacher was just starting. I was six or seven years old, and I always remember lying in my bed, sleeping, and there was the F1 cars that started to go round because it's so loud, it's incredible.

This Year

We've seen our fair share of unlucky drivers this year. Nakajima couldn't help Fisichella bouncing over his head, and Kovalainen had no say in getting a puncture. But Vettel, he seems to be the most likely driver to take over the bad luck magnet title from Mark Webber. Whilst Webber is consistently finishing in the points, Vettel had to wait until last race to finally see the chequered flag.

And now, I bet he's rueing that he did. The new STR3 is set to be introduced at Monaco, and the gearbox is installed differently to the old car. That means Vettel has to change gearboxes and that means a five-place grid drop. The weekend hasn't even started yet, and already, he's suffering. Bourdais escapes with no penalty, as he retired in Turkey. Whilst Gerhard Berger says Monaco is the worst place to get a penalty like this, technical director Giorgi Ascanelli is defending the Monte Carlo launch date. "I am both brave and mad as everyone knows. Introducing a new car in Monaco, especially when the weather forecast is for rain is putting at risk our spares availability." He says that delaying the car will limit the experience of the drivers in the STR3 and also, the old car would have baulked at the sight of Monaco.

As I mentioned earlier, Mark Webber in sister team Red Bull has finished in the points every race so far, and team principal Christian Horner is pleased with this. "In general, we have made a significant step forward from last year, both in performance and also in reliability. We are reasonably happy that the car has lived up to our expectations. One area where the car is struggling a little bit is in terms of traction and we are working hard on finding out why. Other than that, the general package is performing much as we had hoped for."

The last race saw Barrichello celebrating a record-breaking number of GP starts, and this week Fisichella has reached the milestone of 200. Although still 57 behind Barrichello, Fisichella is still happy with the statistic, and even happier he's reached it this weekend. "To celebrate this at Monaco is fantastic as it's the best track in the world, one of my favourites, as the twisty track itself is phenomenal, the fans are so close to the cars so you get a real atmosphere, and the surroundings are so beautiful. It's certainly the best place for a celebration - I have to hope that we can celebrate a good result on Sunday too!" Sutil also counts Monaco as one of his favourite tracks, despite not finishing last year.

For BMW, Heidfeld says he is a fan of the narrow street circuits, and says it's impossible to describe what it's like to drive there. Kubica agrees that some of the corners are good, but says it's all about setup. That's down to technical director Willy Rampf who says: "In the absence of traction control, Monaco will be a very special challenge this year for both the drivers and the engineers. Traction is all-important at this venue, where accelerating out of so many slow corners puts a really heavy strain on the rear tyres. Only the softest tyre compounds will be used."

We all know that Monaco is Hamilton's favourite circuit, and whilst last year didn't work out as he would have hoped, Lewis is hoping to build on the momentum from Turkey to get a good result this time round. He does admit that the unpredictable nature of the weekend makes it difficult to be too confident. Heikki has a modest aim for the race: "I want to have a trouble free race and to be able to show the pace we have in the car." CEO of McLaren, Martin Whitmarsh shares a different viewpoint to the usual "lack of overtaking" argument we often hear. "There is a

common belief that overtaking improves the spectacle, but over the years Monaco produces exciting races because the field is often very close together in a train, usually behind a much slower car.”

Both Honda boys add to the praise, with Button saying it’s particularly special. “The Monaco Grand Prix means a great deal to me as it is one of my three home races of the year, along with Silverstone and Japan. However, being a resident of Monaco is of no benefit over the race weekend as the principality is completely transformed!” I don’t think it should be allowed for a driver to have three home races, seems a bit greedy. Anyway, Barrichello is bigging up the fact that he’s raced here 15 times, this will be his 16th, so he knows the track very well. Hopefully he won’t make any mistakes as that would be somewhat embarrassing.

Championship leader Kimi Raikkonen is confident that Ferrari will do well this weekend, after a strong test at Paul Ricard. Talking of their competitiveness, he said: “Obviously, we really struggled last year in Monaco, but I feel Ferrari have really improved in many areas that we were weaker at last year.” Massa, meanwhile, is determined to prove that he doesn’t just do well at circuits he likes, as Monaco is not one of these. He commented: “In terms of driving pleasure, I prefer the fast flowing places like Turkey, Bahrain and Barcelona for example. But that does not mean we cannot be strong here.” Should Massa be worried that the three tracks he favours have already gone and the whole season is still to come.

Alonso won this race in both 2006 and 2007, and although he knows it’s unlikely to become a hat trick, he’s prepared for any opportunity. “At the moment we are fighting for seventh place, but, as we saw in Istanbul, it is possible to do better if one of the favourites has a problem. We therefore need to be ready for any chance that comes our way.” There are rumours abound that Piquet is being scrutinised closely by the team, as he’s not been performing as well as they would hope. It also sounds as though his confidence has been knocked a little: “It has not been an easy introduction to Formula One. I’ve made a few mistakes, had some bad luck and this is not how I imagined my first five races as a Formula 1 driver. But the important thing is that I have gained some valuable experience, and learnt some lessons, which I hope will allow me to become a stronger driver for the rest of the season.”

Toyota add nothing to the corporate speak we have already heard. Trulli enjoys this race as he won in 2004, and he prefers circuits where the driver can really make a difference. Glock is ready to experience his first ever Monaco GP and with all the talk of how legendary it is, he wants to have another first – to score some points.

Finally, Williams have the benefit of it being Nico’s home Grand Prix. He’s excited about the race, of course, but more about the 100 metre walk from his house to the track. Nakajima admits he didn’t fare well here in GP2, so wants to face up to the challenge now he’s in an F1 car. Technical director Sam Michael says the thing to concentrate on is grip, as the street circuit has low levels to start with, and comes into it’s own by the time the race rolls around. By the time the race does roll around, you will have listened to two other F1 Digest shows, one after Free Practice and the other after Qualifying. In Monaco, Free Practice is on a Thursday, so that show has moved up a day. The rest will play out as normal. I will be back on Thursday evening with a full round up of all the action. Join me then.