



F1 Digest - Europe Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest – dedicated race coverage brought to you by Sidepodcast. Today we are previewing the European Grand Prix which takes place on the brand new Valencian Street Circuit.

Vital Statistics

Date: 24th August

Circuit: Valencia

Length: 5.4km

Laps: 57

Insider's View

The European GP last year was held at the Nurburgring, so we won't be looking back at the show from 2007. Instead, we'll get straight on to our paddock insider's thoughts. First up we have Toyota's Chief Race and Test Engineer, Dieter Gass, with his worries for the coming weekend.

Dieter: We will have to see how the surface is. Usually on a road course you are faced with some bumpy areas which may line braking areas or even the corners, which is something we will have to face. It turns out we can expect Valencia to be a race which is going to be very hard on the brakes, a little bit similar to Montreal and Bahrain, so for sure this is going to be one of the major focuses for Valencia.

Next, ex-F1 driver Christian Danner gives the track his seal of approval.

Christian: I think the compromise on modern street circuits like Valencia and Singapore, on safety issues, is way good enough to hold a Formula 1 race, and I personally think it's a very good move to come race in the streets.

And finally, Timo Glock is looking forward to it.

Timo: It looks pretty interesting, and I think for a street circuit with over 5km is quite long, and I think it will be a good show when we race in Valencia.

Team Thoughts

That's a selected few thoughts, now I'm going to take a look at what all the teams been saying ahead of the race weekend.

We'll start with McLaren, and Lewis Hamilton says he has spent the three week break getting completely away from racing and having a good rest. However, now he's back, he wants McLaren to start getting consistent to win the championship. Of Valencia, he says: "going to a new circuit doesn't really change my preparations. Everybody's in the same situation so I don't treat things very differently. Of course, we've done some preparation back at the McLaren Technology Centre ahead of this race, but our main focus will still be the three free practice sessions ahead



of qualifying.” Kovalainen is coming off the back of his maiden win in Hungary, but says that hasn’t changed much and he is still concentrating on improving, and like Hamilton, raising the consistency.

Jenson Button’s main worry about the new circuit is obvious as the problem gets two mentions in his pre-race press release: “My first thoughts are that it’s a circuit that we haven’t raced at before and it’s got barriers all around it!” and he goes on: “It’s also got the added excitement of being surrounded by barriers which really focuses your mind and demands that you give full concentration around every single lap.” Who’s money is on a safety car then? Barrichello says he’s looking forward to learning the new track, especially as it’s quite unusual.

For Renault, Alonso is continuously encouraged by the ongoing improvement at Renault, and is eager to drive at his second home race of the year. He says: “It’s always a special feeling to race in front of my countrymen and I’m really looking forward to it.” Piquet is also ready to get going, saying: “I would like to have another solid weekend, starting off with a good day of practice on Friday, qualifying in the top 10 and showing good race pace to hopefully finish in the points.” Sounds like Nelson’s got it all planned out.

Raikkonen contradicts himself almost immediately, with: “It’s time to concentrate again on my work now. Formula One is a sport which never stops.” If it never stops, what has he been concentrating on? He also says that every race until the end of the season is now super important because the championship is so close. Massa hasn’t said anything recently, but I’d imagine his position hasn’t changed post-Hungary, when he said that Ferrari need to stop making mistakes and get more reliable.

At Williams, Nico Rosberg says he didn’t rest over the break: “I’ve had a nice, but not particularly relaxing couple of weeks in the Alps during the break. I’ve spent some time with family and friends but mostly I’ve been training.” He should be nice and ready for the new track, and team mate Nakajima thinks they will do well. “As at Monaco and Montreal, our car goes well at these kinds of tracks, so I’m hoping we’ll put in a good performance there.”

The Toyota quotes are odd because Trulli seems to be more enamoured with the atmosphere of Valencia rather than the track, and Glock says he is still smiling after his Hungarian podium. So, we look to Senior General Manager Pascal Vasselon for some interesting insights into their research: “We are well prepared for Valencia. Of course, we started our preparations for this new track by looking at the FIA information and that allowed us to put forward some speed profiles in order to estimate downforce and braking requirements, for example. We also sent staff to look at the inaugural race meeting there at the end of July and that gave us additional data with regards to speed profiles, driving lines and track surface.”

Heidfeld likes the look of the circuit, saying: “I’m always pleased when a new race track turns up in the calendar, and I’m particularly keen to experience Valencia. It will be an authentic street circuit in the sense that it runs through the town centre, unlike the Melbourne or Montreal tracks. In terms of its charms and challenges, the Valencia race will probably come closest to the Monaco Grand Prix.” Kubica tells us how he will be preparing for the race: “The lap time improvement has to be gained step by step, you cannot drive in too wild a style. Also, in terms of the racing line you have to approach this gradually. It is very important to walk the track before driving it the first time to get a feeling for the surface and the layout.”

Force India are being very quiet ahead of this weekend’s race, but that may be because Vijay Mallya is already looking towards 2009. Recent quotes from the man say that he reckons he has managed to catch up from three years of financial neglect for the team, so he’s proud of that feat. Now he’s ready for the challenge of 2009 to get Force India nice and competitive. Of course, this weekend the team have the new seamless shift gearbox which should give them an advantage over their previous performances, but probably not over their nearest competitors.



As ever, we have no previews from Red Bull or Toro Rosso, but I do know that Mark Webber has been trying out a simulator to try and get his head around the track. He doesn't think it is particularly helpful for the feel of the circuit but will at least let him learn the layout. Bourdais has been pretty well shown up by team mate Vettel this year, and tries to convince us that he's getting there. He says: "We all have a driving style that suits us, and mine is ill-suited to a car that understeers in fast corners and oversteers in tight corners. I have found several small things which helped me to understand the car better, even if I am still not totally at ease with it, but it is getting better, little by little."

That's it for this preview. Live commenting this weekend is bound to be brilliant, so if you are free for any of the sessions, please join us on Sidepodcast.com as we all enjoy the Valencian Grand Prix weekend. As ever, I will be back with a full round up of all the Free Practice action tomorrow. See you then.

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