



F1 Digest - Italy Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest, your dedicated race coverage. After wanting to put the European GP behind us at Spa, it's now time to put the Belgian GP behind us this weekend, in Italy.

Vital Statistics

Date: 14th September

Circuit: Monza

Length: 5.8km

Laps: 53

2007 Winner: Fernando Alonso

Last Year

Before we get onto what the drivers are expecting this week, it's worth looking back at 2007 and reminding ourselves what happened at Monza last year.

[Begin Montage.]

Chris: In Free Practice 3, Raikkonen had a humungous crash. It was so fast, 200 mph, straight into the tyres.

Me: It looked horrific, didn't it? On the replays, on the onboard footage. He went under the tyre barrier a bit, so they kind of fell on his head.

Chris: He did get out okay, he was generally fine.

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Chris: Alonso got a good start, Hamilton, he dived towards Massa.

Me: Bit of a Schumacher chop. Not for the first time this year. I heard some criticisms at the beginning of the year, against Hamilton and his starting procedure. And he doesn't seem to have backed off at all from that plan.

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Chris: Vettel went into the back of Davidson, knocked off his own front wing, and he had to go into the pits at the end of the lap. But it wasn't so bad, because David Coulthard crashed and a safety car came out.

Me: Big crash.

Chris: Yea, he had made up five places on the first lap and then he headed straight off the track at the Curva Grande, big crash, but he got out okay.



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Chris: Massa pitted on lap 9, which was unscheduled, but he didn't make it very far around his outlap before slowing right down. He started cutting corners, couldn't be bothered to turn the steering wheel because he knew he was going straight in the pits and retiring.

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Chris: Hamilton went in for his second pit stop and he actually came out behind Raikkonen, and it was very exciting but only for one lap. Because he recklessly overtook him and when I say reckless, I mean stunning.

Me: That was a pretty good overtaking manoeuvre from a long way back. Took Kimi by surprise.

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Chris: The final points positions were Alonso, Hamilton, Raikkonen, Heidfeld, Kubica, Rosberg, Kovalainen, and Button – yay.

[End Montage]

Insider's View

This week we have our paddock insider regulars, Rosberg and Wurz. Firstly, Nico tells us why he likes the Italian Grand Prix.

Nico: I'm someone who really enjoys Italy, most of my friends are Italian, I've grown up with the Italian culture also here in Monaco, because many Italian people. So I really enjoy it and I like the way people are, also, in Italy.

And then Alex gives us a bit more of an insight into the race itself.

Alex: Every straight you do, you are about 330, 340, 350 k's an hour and all the corners following that long straight are very slow corners, most of them chicanes, 2nd gear. So you have to kill that energy in the braking and that's of course very hard for the brakes which get very hot at the end of the race and you have a very long pedal because the brake wear is very high. Monza is for sure the hardest circuit for the brakes in the Formula 1 cars.

Team Thoughts

I've decided BMW are my favourite team because more often than not, they are first out with their quotes. Makes my life just that little bit easier. Anyway, going into the Italian Grand Prix weekend, Heidfeld says that the high speeds are the key thing at Monza. "What is crucial in terms of performance is a good aerodynamic package that doesn't generate much drag. Nowhere else does the car carry as little wing, and our team normally does a pretty good job of providing us with this special aero package." Kubica points out some of his favourite parts of the circuit: "The track is unique because of some very long straights where we easily reach more than 300 km/h. There are some really famous corners such as Parabolica, Ascari, or Lesmo, and they are faster than the first chicanes. But you have to approach them braking heavily." He also said he will celebrate that his first podium in 2006 was at Monza, with a special helmet design.

Trulli is excited as the Italian Grand Prix is his home race. He says it's nice to be in the country, but it doesn't give him any extra motivation – he reckons he's motivated enough already, especially after last week. "It was very frustrating not to score points in Belgium after such a fantastic start when I was fighting for third place going into turn one after



starting 11th. I had a great chance but once again in Spa I was very unlucky.” Glock says their test at Monza gave them a lot of useful information, and his main aim is to score some points.

For Honda, Button enjoys the atmosphere at Monza, and says the Italian fans are really passionate about motorsport. Barrichello also says the track is special, and having won there a couple of times previously, he has good memories of the event. Team Principal Ross Brawn gives us more of an insight into what the team are doing to prepare for the weekend: “The engine cover, bargeboard and other chassis devices have all been analysed for their aerodynamic efficiency and amended or reduced where required. The lap at Monza has a number of big braking areas so it can be very hard on the brakes. It is also quite bumpy, which combined with the low downforce, means that the suspension settings have to be right without compromising the car’s ability to ride the kerbs.”

Alonso is playing the game for his team, rather than aiming to get points for himself. He says: “Our objective is clearly to finish in fourth place in the constructors’ championship and I’m determined to do all I can to help the team do that. The battle is very close, as it has been since the start of the year, and each point will be important at the end of the season. We are five points behind Toyota with five races to go, so I think that is an achievable target.” Piquet is glad there was a test at Monza recently, to give the team information, but also to give him a chance to get to know the track in an F1 car. He thinks he’ll be feeling comfortable after another go in Free Practice on Friday.

Sutil says he’s feeling positive about Monza, thinks qualifying is the vital element of the weekend, and is disappointed when he does a good lap and lines up on the grid at the back. However, with Honda as they’re nearest competitor, things are looking up for the team. Fisichella is looking forward to his home race, and says that although the circuit looks easy, it’s all about getting the right setup to start with. Team boss Vijay Mallya says the race will be almost a year since they bought the team, and he has mixed feelings about their progress so far. He’s happy that they are much more competitive than they were previously, and can be compared to teams with much higher budgets, but he still wants to get into Q2, and maybe even chase those elusive points.

For Williams, Rosberg says he can’t wait to get going at Monza, saying: “It’s really fun to drive because of the super fast start-finish straight, the tight braking events at the end of the lap, and also the kerbs which you have to ride as much as you can.” Nakajima is hoping that his lack of experience won’t hinder him. “I tested in Monza just before the race in Spa, but prior that, it was exactly a year since I had driven on the circuit. The test reminded me that Monza is very exciting, very fast, and a very technical track.”

Martin Whitmarsh sums things up for McLaren, saying: “The truth is, both Lewis and Heikki have previously gone well at Monza; they both like the track and are looking forward to the race, and that certainly helps. On the engineering side, we came away from the recent test very encouraged by the pace we showed. Of course, we’re under no illusions that Ferrari will be strong, and we expect them to be stronger there than they were relative to us last year, but we go to the event with high expectations.”

This weekend is Ferrari’s home race, so they’ll be hoping for good results. Raikkonen, also, will be desperate for a win. He says he hasn’t given up on the title yet, even though the maths is going against him. “We’ll give it all to win, for the team and for the fans. This is Ferrari’s home race and it would be fantastic to win the Italian GP for the first time. I’ve got nothing to lose, so I’ll give it all, going flat out.” Massa, meanwhile, will have his engine checked by the FIA as part of their random checks on homologation. This will take place before the race.

I have no Red Bull or Toro Rosso preview to bring you, but with Franz Tost saying that his team’s improvement shouldn’t be a surprise to everyone, Red Bull are probably hoping they can keep their heads down and just get on with things. It’s not fun to be shown up by your supposedly little sister team. We’ll be watching very closely in Italy, to see how they get on.



That's it for today's preview. If you're around during Free Practice, visit Sidepodcast.com for live commenting, or if you have to miss the sessions, you can catch up at the end of the day right here on F1 Digest.

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