



F1 Digest - Singapore Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest – Sidepodcast’s coverage of a Grand Prix weekend. There’ll be four shows in total, running through all the sessions, but before that we need to preview the most anticipated race of the year.

Vital Statistics

Date: 28th September

Circuit: Singapore

Length: 5.1km

Laps: 61

Insider’s View

Ahead of this week’s race, we can hear from a couple of important paddock insiders. First we have a real ray of sunshine, Jackie Stewart, outlining some of the safety concerns.

Jackie: Practice is going to be a big learning curve for all of the teams, for all of the drivers, for all of the marshalls, for all of the officials. Being able to operate in darkness, there’s gonna have to be a lot of preparation that goes into the medical teams, for example, to go out in the case of an accident, to be able to see if they can see as easily into the depths of a cockpit to assist a driver if required. So all of those things are going to have to happen once the Formula 1 cars get to Singapore. These are the challenges that still face the entire fraternity.

Next up, Richard Cregan, of Toyota at the moment, but soon to be joining the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix organisers, talks us through his weather concerns:

Richard: The key issue is, at that time of year, you obviously have the possibility of rain exactly at that time in the evening because that is the time that your rain will come, following a hot and humid day. So, there’s a lot of issues there, driving at night, under artificial light, with rain, which is obviously something beyond what we’re looking at at the moment as a problem.

And finally, Jarno Trulli likes what he’s seen, but knows there’s much more to learn:

Jarno: I’ve seen the plans, and you know, the Circuit de Grand Prix looks amazing so far. Even if before we can get a real idea we like to drive on the circuit for the first time, or anyway to see the first time the circuit laid down, to understand especially the safety, corners, speeds, then you get a better idea about the setup and the kind of downforce we’re going to run.

Now let’s take a look at what the other teams and drivers have been saying ahead of the weekend.

Team Thoughts

Let’s start with BMW, with a great quote to kick us off from Nick Heidfeld: "Everyone is really looking forward to the Singapore Grand Prix. Firstly because it's a new track, secondly because it's a street circuit and thirdly, of course,



because we'll be driving at night. The floodlights should ensure it is actually as bright as during the day, but nobody has yet experienced how these light conditions will feel at Formula One speeds." He also says that being a night person, he thinks that the rhythm of the weekend should suit him. Kubica says he is looking forward to the race, but isn't getting carried away: "From a driver's perspective I think it does not make a big difference whether we race in the daylight or at night. There are still some question-marks regarding weather conditions and - related to the chance of rain - the light situation. I am sure the FIA have done everything to make it a safe race."

Whilst Heidfeld is happy to be a night owl, Hamilton says they are having to prepare pretty hard. Having lost the appeal over the Belgium penalty, everyone at McLaren says they are turning their attention back to the racing, and Lewis tells us how they're getting on: "Our doctor has prepared a very precise schedule for the drivers to stick to because all the sessions are so late in the day. Essentially we must not acclimatise to the local time, which is totally different to how we normally operate. Our training programmes ensure that over a race weekend we are at peak performance during the afternoons and as a result we are going to be staying in European time so this doesn't get disrupted. Apparently not acclimatising is much harder than adapting, because your body naturally wants to change. For the drivers, our meal, waking and sleeping rhythms will all be in European time, for example we will get up early afternoon for breakfast, have supper at 1am and go to bed at around 3am. It will be very different preparation to any other race but we'll try and do the best job we can." Kovalainen adds to this, saying their hotels will have complete blackouts, the cleaners are banned and the phones unplugged, so they can sleep until late in the day. Sounds like heaven to me.

Alonso says he isn't convinced that night racing is the future of motorsport, but says the weekend will be fascinating, nonetheless. Piquet adds that aside from the lighting, which he isn't worried about as he has faith in the organisers, the main issue is it being a new track: "I have had to learn lots of circuits this year so it's not something that worries me, and like Valencia the track in Singapore will be a new challenge for all the drivers and won't be such a disadvantage for a rookie."

For Honda, Button says he has been spending time on the simulator to learn the twists and turns of Singapore, and will arrive in the country as late as possible to help with the time zone thing. Barrichello has also been studying the track: "The Singapore circuit looks very different to the other new street circuit on the calendar this season at Valencia. Singapore is a much slower lap with many first and second gear corners, although the back straight down to Turn 7 looks exciting in terms of carrying speed through the barriers. " He is feeling relatively confident about racing in the dark though, having plenty of experience with 12 and 24 hour endurance races.

Fisichella hopes to build on his performance from the last race this weekend: "I'm feeling confident going to Singapore now after a good event in Monza. Throughout the weekend we were strong and it was a nice feeling to finally make it to Q2. I was disappointed we couldn't make more of the race as I think we could have finished well, but we were competitive throughout the weekend so we have to be positive from this point of view." Team boss Vijay Mallya says Singapore is closest to their home race: "With the large Indian population and the proximity to India, it's something that we very much look forward to. For the companies that sponsor the car, and others as well, Singapore is going to be a big, big venue. I think it's going to be absolutely spectacular. They have built in a huge amount of entertainment as well and there will be bars and live music, and it will all be open well after the events on the track are over, so I think it promises to be a huge amount of fun. This is what F1 needs."

Trulli gives us hope that there might actually be some action during Free Practice: "For any new circuit, Friday practice is really important because that is when you can understand the track and that is particularly true in Singapore when we are driving at different times compared to a normal weekend." Glock is feeling quietly confident, having raced at night in the US, and also in the Toyota: "I have actually already driven the TF108 at night, on a demo run in Valencia in January, but it will be a totally different experience this weekend. The venue in Singapore looks fantastic and I am really looking forward to this race because I believe we have a good chance to score more points."

Over at Williams the prospect of night racing seems to be a good one. Rosberg is all in favour: "It should be a good race for us as the track looks like it should suit our car pretty well and personally I always really enjoy racing on street circuits. New tracks are often quite demanding and take a bit of time during practice to get used to. Racing at night will add to that challenge, but the whole concept of night racing is fantastic." Nakajima is more concerned about the weather: "I don't think driving at night will be a problem if it's dry but, if it's wet which it looks like it will be, it could be quite difficult with the reflection."

Following the test that saw them separate from all the other teams, Massa believes that Ferrari have now solved their tyre issues, helped by one test day in bad weather. After the test, he said: "To run in these conditions has helped a lot, the car has better grip and this is important in view of races where it could rain again. Clearly I'd prefer it to be dry in Singapore, but we can go well and have a consistent race in the wet too." Raikkonen has been pretty quiet in the run up to this Grand Prix, but has said that he knows it will now take a miracle for him to win the championship from his current situation. All the speculation now is on whether he'll back up Massa if it comes to it.

As ever, there are no preview quotes from the Red Bull teams, with Coulthard and Webber being particularly quiet. Bourdais, meanwhile, has praised the Singapore circuit: "I walked the track for the first time yesterday, and they did a really good job. I'm quite impressed. It is obviously a huge undertaking when you have to build from scratch, but I think they did really well." Vettel has reportedly told the team not to back off now they've got one win under their belts: "We are not on the same level as Ferrari and McLaren, but our target is to do the best we can. If it means winning races then we will take it - although we will just be happy to score points until the end of the season." Let's hope that all the new elements in Singapore will mix up the results yet again.

That's it for our Singapore preview. Don't forget that Free Practice 1 will be on slightly later to try and accommodate running in the dark. It starts at 7pm local time, and mid day in the UK. I'll be live commenting on Sidepodcast.com and I'd love to see you there, but if you can't make it, I'll be back after both sessions with a full round up of the action.