



## F1 Digest 2009 Season Preview – The Calendar

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Hello, this is F1 Digest and we have arrived at the third of our Season Preview podcasts. We've covered the teams and drivers, now it's time to whizz through the calendar for a closer look at the circuits we'll be visiting between now and November. We'll run through some vital stats, then a quick round up of what to expect at each event, starting with... Australia.

### The Calendar

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#### Australia

Date: March 29th

Circuit: Albert Park

Laps: 58

2008 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

The season opener in Australia is nearly always chaotic, and plays host to the safety car more often than not. In 2008, we saw only 8 of 22 cars classified, and only 6 actually finished. Albert Park is part street circuit, part racetrack, and the tarmac will be green and dirty when our cars get out there. The weather will likely be sunny, although Melbourne has been known for the odd shower to spice up the action. The first corner is going to be the one to watch, as drivers get used to the dimensions on their new cars. Previous form would favour Ferrari and perhaps Renault, although McLaren have been known to spring an odd win. The last three winners of the Australian GP have gone on to become that year's World Champion.

#### Malaysia

Date: April 5th

Circuit: Sepang International

Laps: 56

2008 Winner: Kimi Raikkonen

The heat and humidity in Malaysia make F1 a real endurance event for one weekend only. It's hot in the garage, it's even hotter in the car and the race seems endless for those concentrating in the cockpit. The track seems to favour Renault, and in particular Alonso, who has seen success on the fast flowing corners, but reliability will be a key factor in Malaysia, as well as driver skill. The tarmac is pretty wide, one of the better circuits for overtaking, although the pitlane is long, meaning a lot of strategic work has to be planned around the stops. Last year was dominated by Ferrari, with both Massa and Raikkonen at the front, until the Brazilian spun off.

#### China

Date: April 19th

Circuit: Shanghai International

Laps: 56

2008 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

China was the penultimate round of the 2008 season, but moves straight up the calendar to become the third event of the forthcoming season. Although initially a popular venue due to great facilities, interest in the circuit is waning, and the grandstands have been more and more empty of late. The future of the race looks in doubt, with a decision likely to be made this year. The track has favoured Ferrari in the past, although Lewis took a lights to flag victory last year. In the five years it's been held at Shanghai, we've seen five different winners. The weather usually stays dry for the event, but it's much earlier timeslot may make conditions unexpected.



### **Bahrain**

Date: April 26th

Circuit: Bahrain International

Laps: 57

2008 Winner: Felipe Massa

Hot, dry and dusty, Bahrain is as much a challenge as Malaysia if for very different reasons. In an attempt to keep sand off the track, the runoff areas are purposefully huge, which does aid drivers that make the odd mistake. Previous years have been dominated by Ferrari and Renault, so look for them to make the best of the circuit's long straights and tight corners. The pit lane starts and ends on the home straight, meaning any stop misses out on the fastest part of the circuit. After 57 laps, 15 corners a lap, the victorious driver will climb to the podium, where they'll spray a non-alcoholic drink rather than the traditional champagne.

### **Spain**

Date: May 10th

Circuit: Circuit de Catalunya

Laps: 66

2008 Winner: Kimi Raikkonen

First and foremost, the Barcelona track seems to favour Ferrari, despite the fact they often ditch testing there with the others for their own preferred tracks. Alonso will always want to do well in front of his home crowd and repeat his 2006 win. Wind is often a key factor during the race, making setup and forecasting really important. The first half of the track is mostly fast and sweeping, whilst the second half makes things a bit tighter. All of it is so well known by the teams, though, it makes mistakes unlikely and overtaking unusual.

### **Monaco**

Date: May 24th

Circuit: Monaco Street Circuit

Laps: 78

2008 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

In 2008, Hamilton achieved his long time goal of winning this race, despite hitting a wall and bursting a tyre. It could only happen at Monaco, and it usually does. The tight, narrow streets of the principality are paved with gold, and stars from all walks of life emerge to support Formula 1 as the champagne flows. For the racers, it presents a unique challenge of intense concentration, very little run off area, and no room for mistakes. Although overtaking opportunities are few and far between, they do occur and can often be magical. Otherwise, Monaco is simply a race of attrition, with only the hardy making it to the end. Traditionally it's a McLaren circuit, but anything can happen.

### **Turkey**

Date: June 7th

Circuit: Istanbul Park

Laps: 58

2008 Winner: Felipe Massa

Turkey is one of the more successful of recent additions to the calendar, and features the tricky multiple-apex corner at Turn 8. Although not much was made of this track last year, it has produced some interesting races in the past. Massa has won the last three of the four races that have ever taken place at Istanbul, with Kimi picking up the first win. Looks like it will be a Ferrari event. The pitlane is situated to miss out the entire back straight, meaning



strategies can be important here. The track also runs anti-clockwise, adding that extra strain on the drivers, and particularly their necks. Organisers in Turkey have been known to get distracted by politics, but as long as the racing is good, we don't care who hands out the trophies.

### **Britain**

Date: June 21st

Circuit: Silverstone

Laps: 60

2008 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

During the British GP last year, buzz-kill Bernie announced Silverstone had lost the race in favour of Donington Park. As hosts of the first ever F1 World Championship race, you can't rival the old airfield for history, even if the facilities could do with an upgrade. As it bows out, then, Silverstone offers up some fast, sweeping corners, with a tricky final complex leading back onto the main straight. History proves to be pretty equal between Ferrari and McLaren, but when Williams have a competitive car, they can do well at their home race. Last year was wet, cold and miserable, but Hamilton stormed to a dominant victory over a minute ahead of second place Heidfeld.

### **Germany**

Date: July 12th

Circuit: Nurburgring

Laps: 60

2008 Winner: Lewis Hamilton

The Hockenheim / Nurburgring roundabout stops at the 'Ring this year, with the Nordschleife hosting the German GP for 2009. With five drivers counting this as their home race, the pressure to perform will be high. The circuit was last on the calendar as the European race of 2007, but it doesn't matter what it's called. Despite being a shadow of the full Nurburgring circuit, the GP has plenty of slow corners and fast straights, a nice balance. The track is situated in a picturesque area of Germany, and temperatures usually settle around the 25 degrees C region. In 2007, Alonso won in the McLaren, and in '08 it was all about Lewis, so McLaren will definitely seem to be the team to watch, no matter where in Germany we are.

### **Hungary**

Date: July 26th

Circuit: Hungaroring

Laps: 70

2008 Winner: Heikki Kovalainen

Hungary is the worst race to feature right before the three week break, as it's notorious for boring races. There are few tight corners, overtaking is scarce, and the result is often predictable. However, last year, Massa was running away with a victory until his engine blew up, and all it takes is a little bit of rain to shake things up. McLaren tend to do well around Hungary, although this was the scene of Honda's first win, so keep an eye on the Brawn. Hungary is on the calendar until 2016, so we need to start seeing some action. In the midst of a hot European summer, though, chances are we'll be watching a procession.

### **Europe**

Date: August 23rd

Circuit: Valencia Street Circuit

Laps: 57

2008 Winner: Felipe Massa



Despite all the hype, the race in Valencia last year left a lot to be desired. The circuit is situated in the dockland area, with cranes and containers as a backdrop. The track itself looked interesting with bridges to negotiate, but led to wide field spread and almost no overtaking. Massa was victorious in a race that left most fans bored rigid. The track is long, with about 25 corners, but none of them stand out as spectacular, especially as they are not yet named. Temperatures in Valencia can verge on 30 degrees C, but as a European track, you can never discount a storm or two. Keep your fingers crossed for better things, as Valencia heralds the return to racing action after the summer break.

### **Belgium**

Date: August 30th  
Circuit: Spa-Francorchamps  
Laps: 44  
2008 Winner: Felipe Massa

Spa is everyone's favourite racetrack, and Eau Rouge ranks up there with the best corners. The likelihood of rainfall increases anticipation of the race, although the chaos that ensues can sometimes be overwhelming. The track is suited to both Ferrari and McLaren although Kimi won back to backs with the silver team, before moving over to the reds. Last year was eventful for all the wrong reasons, with the aforementioned rain providing some stunning action in the last few laps that was then overshadowed with some FIA penalty intervention. Belgium's position on the calendar is constantly in doubt due to financial pressures, so make the most of it while you can.

### **Italy**

Date: September 13th  
Circuit: Monza  
Laps: 53  
2008 Winner: Sebastian Vettel

Italy provided us with one of the great moments in 2008. When the weight of politics was wearing us down, along came Vettel to brighten up our day. Traditionally, the circuit favours Ferrari, and in a wet race, Vettel worked his Ferrari engine to the max. The track itself features only a few corners, with a lot of straight line work, however the corners that are there are tricky. The weather is traditionally variable, but no matter what the fans come out in force to support their home team, and are rewarded with the beautiful surroundings.

### **Singapore**

Date: September 27th  
Circuit: Singapore Street Circuit  
Laps: 61  
2008 Winner: Fernando Alonso

A new addition to the calendar in 2008, Singapore provided an exciting novelty – a night race. It was both stunning and worrying to watch the cars circle the tracks at night, and even with the brighter than the sun floodlighting, there was still a unique atmosphere of experiencing something very different. Unfortunately, the Singapore marshalling left a lot to be desired, and we were lucky there were no serious accidents. This must be improved, as the novelty of night will begin to wear off, and the weather will not always be held at bay. The racing action itself in 2008 was saved from obscurity by Alonso's leap to the front, so who knows what will occur this time round?

### **Japan**

Date: October 4th



Circuit: Suzuka  
Laps: 53  
2008 Winner: Fernando Alonso

The Japanese Grand Prix is another timeshare race. Last year it was at a damp Fuji, whilst this year it returns to Suzuka. As a lot of them seem to be, Suzuka is a Ferrari track, although Alonso was the last to clock up a win there in his Renault, and he took last year's Fuji trophy home too. Nakajima flies the flag as the only Japanese driver now that Sato is stuck in the wings, and the fans can cheer him around Suzuka's twisty course. 17 tight turns provide plenty of opportunity for overtaking and it's one of the more challenging tracks on the calendar. The chances are it still might be wet, though.

### **Brazil**

Date: October 18<sup>th</sup>  
Circuit: Autodromo Carlos Pace  
Laps: 71  
2008 Winner: Felipe Massa

Brazil has been the final race on the calendar for the last three years but is now bumped for Abu Dhabi. The fans in Brazil are amazing, you can feel the atmosphere even when you are not there, through whatever screen you're watching. We've been lucky to experience down to the wire racing, but even when the championship is over, Brazil will still offer up a good race. Last year, of course, sits in the former category, and will take a long time to forget. That last lap action was intense, and all instigated by the weather. Brazil can be in turn super hot, or rather wet, and it's changeable up until the very last minute. The track tends to favour Ferrari, and Massa, Barrichello and Piquet will all benefit with energy from the home crowd.

### **Abu Dhabi**

Date: November 1st  
Circuit: Yas Marina Circuit  
Laps: 55

Abu Dhabi is a brand new track, and therefore an unknown for both us and the drivers. It levels the playing field somewhat, but it usually takes only a few laps of Free Practice for the boys to learn their way around. The circuit is still being built as we speak, but the plans look to be something spectacular, and organizers are trying to rival Singapore in terms of glitz and sparkle, with no expense spared. The track itself has about 20 turns, a really long straight, and runs anti-clockwise. One of the run off areas goes underneath a grandstand and part of the track flies under the hotel. As the last fixture on the calendar, it could all be over by the time we get here, or this race could be the decider. Either way, it seems unlikely they will be able to rival the passion that we've seen previously in Brazil. That completes our whistle-stop tour through all the circuits on our calendar. We're sorely missing Canada, hoping for a US return and waiting for France to get their act together. Meanwhile, let's enjoy the tracks we've got and keep our fingers crossed for good racing.

There's just one more show to this F1 Digest Season Preview special, so stay tuned and before you know it, we'll be racing in Australia.