



## F1 Digest – Australia Preview

---

### *Intro*

Welcome to F1 Digest, this is our Australia Preview. If you have tuned in to this show before, you'll know how it works, but for any new listeners out there, the premise is simple. For each race weekend, you'll get four F1 Digest shows. On Thursday, we preview the upcoming event, on Fridays we review Free Practice, Saturdays are all about qualifying, and then post-race, we'll discuss all the action from Sunday. The show is designed for anyone who misses the sessions to catch up, for those who want to make sure they didn't overlook anything, or for anyone who just wants to relive what they've already seen.

Let's kick things off, then, with our Australia Preview.

### *Vital Statistics*

On the 29<sup>th</sup> March, 20 cars will line up on the grid at Albert Park. The track is 5.3km long, which will be 58 laps. The weather is normally sunny, and the long range forecast confirms that, but there are showers floating around at the moment. The lap record is held by Michael Schumacher with a 1:24.1, pole position in 2008 was 1:26.7 by Lewis Hamilton and the fastest lap during the race was 1:27.4 by Heikki Kovalainen.

### *2008 in 30 Seconds*

Ready? 3-2-1. The cars lined up on the grid in Australia without traction control, and that was the only moment of peace we had. The first few corners saw five drivers out before they'd even begun. Hamilton led from the front, the Safety Car came out three times, and DC's car disintegrated after contact with Massa. Glock suffered a sizeable accident, but was ultimately unharmed, whilst Barrichello injured a few mechanics in the pitlane, was penalised, and then disqualified. The podium line-up was Lewis Hamilton, Nick Heidfeld and Nico Rosberg.

### *From the Comments*

The Sidepodcommunity have been gearing up for the new season, and it looks like the anticipation couldn't get any higher. However, it's all slightly marred before it's even started, Steven Roy says:

"I am really looking forward to the start of the season and for the first time ever I have no idea what is going to happen on track. I don't know who is fast, who is slow and who is going to win. Unfortunately the season seems destined to be dominated by politics. Max wants to establish his authority before his re-election. Bernie wants to show everyone he is still boss and FOTA want to start throwing their weight about. Despite all the politics that I know are coming I am still excited about what is going to happen on the track."

And MattW sums it up in a single sentence: "I am really excited now that the political bickering is about to get underway again, I was getting slightly bored of the on track action."

Meanwhile, Scott won't let the politics get him down: "Once again we're at the beginning of a new season and also a new era of Formula 1. Pre-season testing has only quenched our thirst for on-track action so much and now with the start of the first race just literally days away, the excitement is building as every minute goes by. I am so psyched for 2009 and greatly looking forward to what should be a fascinating championship opener. Brawn GP for the win!"

And this last comment from Gavin: "It finally hit me this morning that the F1 season is less than 24 hours away! Normally I can't stand the wait during the off-season but this year was loads of fun as it was my first with the



Sidepodcast community. I'm so excited with the racing just a few days away and 2009 looks like it's going to be a fantastic year - because we have no idea what's going to happen!"

### *Team by Team*

---

It may just be me, but I was really excited when the team previews started appearing over the weekend. It signals that the race isn't far away, and it's always worth having a quick look through them to see how the teams are preparing for the upcoming Grand Prix.

Let's start with McLaren and their defending champion Hamilton. He is eager to get going in Australia, saying that it's the perfect place to start the season with: "The weather is fantastic, the facilities are excellent and the people of Melbourne make us all feel extremely welcome." He adds that although the team don't appear to be as competitive as they were over the last two years, it just means they're going to work even harder. Meanwhile Heikki agrees that he enjoys the "back to school" feeling when the first race rolls around, and he's looking forward to getting back in the paddock and catching up with everyone.

For BMW, Kubica is already getting his mindset locked onto the task at hand, saying: "I like street circuits in general, so Albert Park is one of my favourite race tracks. You have to be very precise. That applies to the whole circuit; you need to stay on the clean line." He also adds that the first corner is going to be super important this year, because of the humungous front wings. He might not have said humungous. Heidfeld can't wait to find out how the testing performance relates to the results out on track. He says: "Last year, winter testing did not go as well as it might have done for us, and we surprised everybody with our strong performance in Australia. This winter all of our testing went pretty well, and I hope this impression is confirmed in Melbourne."

Ross Brawn reckons that his main goal for 2009 was to be on the grid at the first race of the season. Mission accomplished. That doesn't mean they're giving up though, with both drivers putting in maximum preparation. Button won't be getting a moment's peace: "I'll be doing some fitness work with my physio in preparation for the race weekend, hopefully in the sunshine along the coast. We will also be linking up with some local triathletes to train with them." Rubens is concentrating more on getting the most out of the track: "As the circuit uses public roads, there are a lot of bumps under braking and if your car is prone to rear-locking, you have to be careful that these don't unsettle the car enough to throw you off the circuit. It's reasonably difficult to overtake... with Turns 3 and 13 offering the best opportunities."

Next up, Toyota, with Trulli in an extremely positive mood.

**Jarno Trulli:** I am very confident, ready for it, as usual, as it's the first day of school and I'm always excited and fired up for this single season.

He believes the TF109 is the best Toyota car he has driven in winter testing, and confidence is high. Glock is also very comfortable, not just within the car, but now that he's finding his feet within the team: "It's a different emotion to be starting my second year with Toyota compared to 2008 because now I am much more familiar with the team and I feel I can really start the season strongly." He adds that it took a few races last year to get the setup to suit him, but doesn't think he'll have the same problem in 2009.

Meanwhile, Rosberg is hoping to repeat his podium success of last season and bring Williams some improved results. Of the car, he says the FW31 is strong enough to be competitive and fight for the podium, if not wins, although Nico admits it's not quite there yet. He says: "The potential for development is huge because of the new rules, so we will be looking to make strong progress throughout the year." Nakajima will be feeling a little more confident after finishing off the test at the top of the timesheets, even if it was only above McLaren.



It would be remiss of me to discuss Brawn, Toyota and Williams without mentioning the diffuser argument, but it isn't really in the scope of this show. All I'll say is that the stewards in Australia have deemed the design to be legal and acceptable to race, but this will not be the end of it.

Anyway, let us continue. For Renault, Alonso wants to keep the momentum going from their strong finish in 2008. After a poor start, they secured two wins, but Alonso isn't sure it will be easy to pick up where they left off. He says: "We have lots of new regulations this year and nobody really knows what will happen when we get to Melbourne. From what we have seen in testing it seems all the teams are very close and so we will certainly have a fight on our hands." Piquet is another driver entering into his second year in F1, and says he learned a lot last season which will make things a little easier for him this time round. His initial target is to reach Q3 in qualifying, and after that, who knows?

Toro Rosso is the only team with a brand new driver on board, and Buemi is both anxious, excited, eager, nervous about making his F1 debut.

**Sébastien Buemi:** To be the driver of Toro Rosso is like a dream for me. I'm so happy now to be confirmed but, I mean, now the start of the season, it's the start really to work. We will start now and see what happens, but I can really focus myself on the job now, and not on something else. So, I feel a bit more relaxed now and we can really start working hard.

Replacing Vettel isn't easy, but team principal Franz Tost is aware that they most likely won't repeat the success they enjoyed last season, especially as they have had very limited testing. Bourdais, though, is hoping to improve on his own performance last year.

**Sébastien Bourdais:** It's been a tough one for me last year, we've had a lot of mishaps during the races. We qualified decently, especially in the last half of the season but it hasn't really turned into reality for the races. I'm really hoping for a little bit better luck in the season this year, and hopefully to score more points, and to fulfill the targets of the team.

Big sister team Red Bull will be determined to outperform STR this year, after being thoroughly embarrassed in 2008. Webber is feeling optimistic, but not taking too much notice of the winter performance: "It's been a different testing situation with the testing ban, so a lot of teams are probably a little bit undercooked, but we are all in the same boat – so we are all looking forward to getting the season under way."

Next, let's hear from Vettel about how he planned to prepare himself for the first race of the season.

**Sebastian Vettel:** It's not a big secret, just try to use the time I have to prepare myself. I mean, you would do the regular stuff, mainly or mostly for endurance – biking, swimming, running, just to keep us fit. Obviously, the driving helps a lot for the neck muscles, so I think we should be fine once we are in Australia.

Force India are another team who had very little testing, and they have switched to Mercedes engines this year, from Ferrari in 2008. Sutil thinks downforce is their main problem, though: "Balance-wise I think it's much better than last year. We need more downforce but we're working to get it as soon as possible. After these eight days of testing, it's not enough, but we did all our programme - race simulations, so I'm set up well." Fisichella agrees, saying that grip is a problem but once they return to Europe after the first four races, and get KERS bolted into the car, things may start to improve. The Italian knows this is a key season though: "This year is a very important year for me. I need to know what I have to do for the future. Obviously another difficult season means it will be difficult to continue, but I am looking forward."



With McLaren openly admitting they are off the pace, Ferrari look like the team to beat, and Massa is quick to point this out: "A lot of people say that the tests are not as important as a race weekend, which is true, but when you are always running behind it shows that you are not doing well." Do I sense a little bit of bragging there, Felipe? Räikkönen is very confident that the new car will suit him much better than the F2008. Although he doesn't want to make predictions, Kimi says: "It's always a good thing for a driver and a team to have a good start into the season, especially when we remember how the last two seasons ended as far as the drivers' championship is concerned: I won with one point in 2007, and my teammate was one point short in 2008. That means every point counts."

That's all for our preview of the Australian Grand Prix. Please join me again tomorrow and we'll take a look at all the action from Friday at Albert Park.

sidepodcast.com  
YOUR WEEKLY F1 FIX