



## F1 Digest 2009 – Bahrain Preview

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Bahrain Preview.

The second of two back-to-back GPs in a row, Bahrain sees an end to the flyaway racing. Everyone is tired, but still looking forward to some great action.

### Vital Statistics

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The Bahrain Grand Prix will take place on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009, at the Sakhir circuit. We'll hopefully be treated to 57 laps which translates to 5.4km. The weather is usually hot and dry, a massive change from the last two races we've witnessed. However there is talk of sandstorms, like those that affected the winter testing in Bahrain, so the race may not escape the weather this time round either. The lap record is held by Michael Schumacher – a 1:30.252. Pole position in 2008 was a 1:33.1 by Robert Kubica, whilst the fastest lap was Heikki Kovalainen with a 1:33.2.

### 2008 in 30 Seconds

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Kubica scored a surprise pole position this time last year, but he couldn't hold the lead through the entire race. Massa took him in the first corner, whilst Hamilton barely got off the line, dropping backwards. In his eagerness to work back through the pack, Lewis ran into the rear of Alonso, and the subsequent damage meant his afternoon was tough. He finished 13<sup>th</sup>. Other retirees included Vettel who still hadn't completed a racing lap, Button who collided with DC, and Piquet who had gearbox problems. The podium was Massa (his first win of the season), Raikkonen and Kubica.

### From the Comments

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Chris Evans isn't really looking forward to the race ahead: "Ah Bahrain, my least favourite of all the Tilkedromes. At least his other tracks have some kind of character or unique features. Bahrain is just bland and uninteresting. Needless to say, I'm not expecting too much from the racing, but then I said that before China last week, so who knows what might happen. At least we will probably see someone other than Felipe win."

Meanwhile, Scott Woodwiss believes the weather may play it's part: "Bahrain usually signifies the end of the first stint of fly-away races and this season is no exception. The main issue here is not the heat or humidity but the wind. Strong gales blowing across the circuit push sand and dirt onto the track, and this means an increased chance of falling off the road. But falling off is something I'm sure Vettel and co at Red Bull aren't too keen on doing so. There's hardly been any time for them to let their Chinese success sink in and it's straight back to racing already. Brawn will be their nearest challengers, but I'm naming Toyota as the dark horses. The pre-season testing here should give them a slight head start on the other frontrunners and who knows - we may see Jarno or Timo on the top step come Sunday."

And Journeyer wonders if history will repeat itself: "When Jenson Button was asked to give his first impression of the Sakhir circuit in 2004, he said it was "half-Melbourne, half-Sepang". He won both those races this year, and he still must be the favorite for this weekend. But it's easy to forget that Robert Kubica took his maiden pole here last year, and his team BMW have always scored well here. Robert and Nick Heidfeld cannot be underestimated this weekend."

### Team by Team

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Rosberg likes Bahrain, not because it is interesting but because he has good memories there. He also thinks this year could be their time: "Last year the car went well there and we won't have any issues with warming up the tyres."



Downforce level is always really important there for the corners, but then there's a compromise required so you can fight the other cars on the fast straights. We're confident going to Bahrain that we can finally get a good result." Nakajima is less confident as he found last year quite difficult, but he's hoping things will be different this time round. However, he adds: "Bahrain isn't a particularly interesting place to visit! There's not much to do or see so I think I'll be staying in my hotel a lot!"

Jenson Button disagrees: "Bahrain is always one of my favourite races on the calendar as I love the country and the circuit has some great fast flowing sections that really suit my driving style and allow you to push the car to its limits. It's a good circuit for overtaking, particularly at Turn 1 after the long straight where you brake very hard from over 300kph in seventh gear down to first gear." He adds that the trick is to catch out a driver braking early, so you can make up positions on the straight. Barrichello has his fingers crossed that the conditions won't affect the action: "The last two race weekends have turned out to be really eventful with the weather affecting the outcome in Malaysia and China but hopefully we can expect a dry race here in Bahrain this weekend."

Over at Force India, Sutil ponders how well their new additions will help them: "The new parts we have coming through for this race should keep us close to the others and I hope we will be able to have a good, competitive race. But we need to focus on our own performance and try to improve as much as possible so when we get to Europe we can really be fighting." Fisichella reviews how things are going so far: "Mechanically, the VJM02 is good. It feels quite balanced and consistent and is a big improvement from last year. We're working well with the new team partners, McLaren and Mercedes, and I think we have a lot we can be positive about. We know where we need to improve."

Trulli is hoping their winter experience at the track will help them: "I am looking forward to racing in Bahrain after the tests we had there over the winter. Bahrain was the first chance I had to really test the TF109 in dry conditions and I knew immediately we had a competitive package, which has proved to be the case now the season has started." Meanwhile, Glock is putting bad memories behind him: "Last year I was pretty unlucky in Bahrain because I had to back off with a small technical issue when I was sure I would score my first points for the team. But this season has started in a much better way compared to 2008 and I am confident I can continue to show that good performance."

BMW ran well last year, and Kubica thinks they could do well again, although it won't be easy: "The wind blows sand onto parts of the track, which leads to changing grip conditions. Luckily we had the chance to test the F1.09 car in Bahrain in February, although weather conditions were unstable and windy then." Heidfeld likes the circuit, and particularly remembers the afterwards concert by Akon from last year. It must have been really good to get a special mention in his preview!

McLaren are looking much improved already, and Hamilton hopes to continue that trend. "We seem to have a solid direction within the team – all our upgrades invariably bring a laptime improvement and our direction on set-up and strategy shows what a strong group we still are. I still think we are several races away from being truly competitive but a straightforward race at Bahrain would give us a very good opportunity to accurately assess where we sit among our rivals." And Heikki enjoys the track: "It's a circuit you have to attack to get a good time – I really enjoy the high-speed esses and uphill sweeps around the back of the circuit. I'm looking forward to another strong weekend and the opportunity to put some more points on the board."

Alonso has set his sights high for this weekend: "Hopefully we can repeat the performance we showed in China so that we can reach Q3 and fight for points in the race. It's still an early stage in the year and already the team has made incredible progress, which gives me the belief that we can still fight for the championship." Piquet, meanwhile, is worried about the chances of making an error: "If I'm honest it's not one of my favourite circuits although there are exciting parts of the lap such as Turns 5 and 6. However, the location means that the track surface is always pretty dusty, especially off-line and so you can't afford to make a mistake and run wide without losing a lot of time."



For Ferrari, Raikkonen has decided to continue without KERS, for Free Practice at least. Massa will have the device fitted back into his car, so we should be able to see the difference between them on Friday. Boss Stefano Domenicali isn't expecting great things in Bahrain, and is hoping that their improvements will start to show by Spain.

No preview from Toro Rosso or Red Bull, but Franz Tost has suggested that Buemi's start to the season is a nice surprise. He said: "We did not expect him to score points during the first three races. We expected him to increase his performance from race to race and then he can score in the second half of the season. But we are not dissatisfied if it's in the first half of the season as long as the amount of points is doubled or tripled in the second half." No pressure there, then. Meanwhile, Bourdais has figured out the car doesn't quite suit him: "If you only look at the papers this year should be worse because the tyres are much harder. It's harder, because you have 20% more grip at the front. This is the exact opposite of what I need. I mean, that's my weakness and I know it. It still doesn't mean that I can't go fast with these cars." Except it kinda does, of course.

Red Bull have been keeping very quiet, but Adrian Newey says it will take them a bit longer than everyone else to bring in the double diffuser – but it's definitely worth having. Christian Horner, meanwhile, says the pressure isn't off them because they've won a race, it's actually more because they want to go out there and repeat the success.

That's it for today, don't forget to join us in the live comments on Sidepodcast.com during Free Practice. After the event, you can leave your short summaries on the blog and they'll make it into the show. See you there.

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