

## F1 Digest 2009 – Spain Preview

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Spain Preview.

We've had the first proper rest of the season and now teams are bringing new parts for the European races, so what should we expect in Spain?

### Vital Statistics

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The Spanish Grand Prix is hosted at the Circuit de Catalunya near Barcelona. The race will be on the 10<sup>th</sup> May, and the circuit's 4.7 km should translate to 66 laps. The teams know Barcelona very well, as they test there frequently, and they'll have lots of data to work with. Early weather indications suggest that it'll be sunny Friday and Saturday, but we could see some rain on Sunday. This is very liable to change, of course. Kimi Raikkonen holds the hat trick with lap times – the lap record is 1:21.670 from 2008, so it was naturally the fastest lap during the race then. Kimi also scored pole position last year with a 1:21.813.

### 2008 in 30 Seconds

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Last year's race was dominated by Ferrari, as we have seen by the lap times mentioned a few seconds ago. Alonso qualified on the front row beside Kimi, but disappointed the home crowds by suffering engine problems and retiring from the race. Heikki Kovalainen was the big talk of the day though, as a huge crash around Turn 9 saw the McLaren slide under the tyre barriers. He emerged with concussion but was generally okay. Teammate Lewis Hamilton finished third, Felipe Massa ended up second and Kimi Raikkonen took his second win of the season.

### Team by Team

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Let's start with Toyota and Trulli is glad that the first few races are over and done with. He says: "It's good to be coming back to Europe again after the long-haul races as this makes things a little easier for everyone. The opening races of the season have shown the potential we have in the new car..." Glock is feeling very positive about what can be achieved this weekend: "Barcelona is one of the tracks I know best after all the testing and racing I've done there over the years and I'm feeling optimistic going into the Spanish Grand Prix. I have scored points in all the races so far – only two other drivers have done that – and I certainly expect to continue that run this weekend.

For McLaren, Hamilton is wary of the fact that they have already shown their hand: "We won't have the bigger upgrades of some of the other teams as we already introduced several new parts during the opening flyaways, so it will be interesting to see where we sit in the order." Heikki isn't letting bad memories get the better of him, he says: "Going back to the scene of last year's accident doesn't change anything for me, I really enjoy this track. I had a great race to fifth here in 2007 and I love the high-speed corners, where you've got to push hard to get the maximum from the car."

As ever, Alonso is looking to do well for the home crowd, saying: "It's always very special to race in Spain and I'm lucky to have two races at home this year in Barcelona and Valencia. Seeing the support of the fans always gives me a boost and I just hope that I can make them happy and have a strong weekend." Piquet is also hoping for better things: "It has been a difficult start to the year for me, but I feel I've learnt a lot from the first four races. The wet races in Malaysia and China were quite frustrating and we couldn't really judge the performance of the car, but I'm feeling a lot more positive after Bahrain where I raced with the new diffuser."

For BMW, Kubica's official quote says: "We will bring a new aero package and we hope to improve significantly compared to our recent performance, as it is our goal to close the gap to the top teams." However, a few days after the preview quotes were released, he added that although the data seemed to be showing at least half a second off



their current times – the gap is so huge, it might take something drastic to make the difference. The team have decided not to run KERS this weekend either. Heidfeld adds to the aero debate, saying: “If the wind, temperature or grip levels change even slightly, a set-up which was fine one minute is suddenly all wrong the next. Like everybody in the team, I am also placing my hopes on our new aerodynamic upgrades.”

Sutil is counting on their testing miles to help them this week: “It means you can go to the circuit with a set-up that’s pretty much ready to go. I like the circuit, it flows quite well, apart from the chicane at the end though, of course. The crowd is always huge as well – it gives you a buzz when you drive round.” Fisichella delves into his vast history for some good moments, saying: “I enjoy going to Barcelona as it’s good to get back to Europe, with the tracks we know very well. I also posted two fastest race laps there in 1997 and 2005.” Does he know that 1997 was over a decade ago?

Rosberg must be reliving the same experiences from last year all over again, he admits: “It’s been a bit of a frustrating start to the season. We should be going into Europe with more than 3.5 points from the first four races. We were looking competitive at the outset in Australia, but things just haven’t gone our way.” Before the break, Nakajima let us know what he would be doing: “It’s nice to be home after so long away. I’m spending the ten days in Oxford and will catch up with friends over some football and, hopefully, a softball game at the weekend. There will also be a few visits to the factory to talk to my engineers about Barcelona and to use the simulator to prepare myself as much as I can for the track. No doubt my trainer will also be putting me through my paces as well!”

Brawn GP are perhaps one of the few teams without enormous amounts of recent data at Barcelona, however Jenson says he knows the track inside out, so it shouldn’t be a problem. He also knows that keeping their lead in the championship is going to be tough but he’s ready for the fight. Barrichello guides us through the circuit: “Although the track has lost some of the high speed challenge that it once had, it is still an interesting and physical lap to drive. You need to find a good rhythm to make the most of the combination of the high speed corners, particularly at turn three which is very fast and demanding, and the slow corners in the final sector of the lap.”

For Ferrari, both Massa and Raikkonen are hoping to get back some winning spirit, Kimi says: “At Barcelona in 2008 I had my best weekend with Ferrari: pole position, victory and fastest race lap. Since then I came very close several times - I'm thinking of Magny-Cours, Montreal and Spa - but for one reason or the other I could never make it. Having said that, a driver never loses the lust for winning and I want to have that feeling again as soon as possible.” The team have confirmed they will be running KERS this weekend, despite whatever problems they have faced before, because it’s a circuit they believe it will run well on.

Red Bull have had a good break, as they managed to confirm Brendon Hartley as their reserve driver – freeing Coulthard from the responsibility. Meanwhile, boss Christian Horner has said that despite a win already under their belts, the team have more to give: “We have got a lot of developments to come and we still have the double-diffuser to look forward to. So it is still early days, but we have clearly demonstrated in wet and dry conditions now what our potential is.”

Finally, Toro Rosso’s chief of engineering spoke to the Red Bulletin about how the team will go about bringing in their upgrades, and said: “As far as upgrades are concerned, I’m sure we’ll try to start on Friday with as many new items as possible, because time is limited. Then we will probably share the set-up work between the cars to see which direction will best suit these new parts and then investigate different set-up directions with both cars to find the best way to get the most out of the new parts.”

That’s it for today. Don’t forget to join us for live commenting tomorrow if you’re available – threads will be opened on Sidepodcast.com before each Free Practice session. I will be back tomorrow with a full rundown of all the action.