



F1 Digest 2009 – Monaco Preview

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After way too much politics, F1 returns to the glamorous heart of the action at the race where anybody who's anybody wants to be seen.

Vital Statistics

The Monaco Grand Prix takes place on the 24th May 2009 round the streets of Monte Carlo. The circuit is 3.3 km long which will mean 78 laps. The record holder is Michael Schumacher who posted a 1:14.439 in 2004. Last year's pole position was a 1:15.787 by Felipe Massa, and the fastest lap during the race was Kimi Raikkonen with a 1:16.689. You might say this is a Ferrari friendly track. Early weather reports have the sun shining for the whole weekend which would make a nice change.

2008 in 30 Seconds

Last year was a wet race. Three drivers had gearbox penalties, Kovalainen stalled on the grid, and Massa led the way. Coulthard crashed into the barriers, and seconds later Bourdais managed to crash into the back of the stationary Red Bull. Hamilton clouted the wall and had to pit with a puncture. Alonso tried to overtake at the hairpin and caused one hell of a pileup. By the time the pitstops played out, Hamilton was in the lead through another safety car period caused by Rosberg. Raikkonen accidentally took out Sutil coming out of the tunnel, knocking the Force India out of fourth place. The final podium was Hamilton, Kubica and Massa.

Team by Team

Let's start with Force India, where Sutil gets the ball rolling suggesting that Monaco is one of his favourite circuits. However, he still has what happened last year with Raikkonen weighing on his mind somewhat: "It was like a dream, or a nightmare actually. You think you're going to wake up, and nothing's happened. It sounds dramatic, but that's how it really was. Still I think it was a very great weekend. I made the most of it, and I was very proud." Meanwhile, Fisichella is feeling particularly optimistic ahead of this race: "The front adjustable wing seems to make things easier and with the modifications coming through now I think it looks OK for the second part of the year. If we can qualify better than we have been doing so far, we could get some better results."

For Toyota, Trulli explains why the Monaco GP is a good one: "It is so challenging and the driver can really make a difference so this suits me well. It is always special to go to Monaco because the atmosphere is different to any other race and the circuit is unique. I know it's slow in terms of average speed but when you are driving it feels really fast as the barriers are so close." Glock adds that he's enjoyed some strong performances round the streets in GP2, and he's hoping to do better than he did in Spain.

Lucky old Jenson Button gets two home races. He says: "The Monaco Grand Prix is always a very special race weekend, and as a resident of the principality, it will be my first home race of the season with the British Grand Prix at Silverstone following next month. To go to Monaco with the lead in both the Drivers' and Constructors' Championships is fantastic but we saw in Barcelona that the performance margins at the front are extremely close." Teammate Barrichello has a lot of experience under his belt: "Driving a Formula One car around Monaco is a fantastic challenge. This will be my 17th Monaco Grand Prix but the weekend has lost none of its appeal and is always one of my favourite races on the calendar. Experience counts around Monaco and it's going to be a fascinating weekend..."



Over at McLaren, Hamilton is just hoping for good things: "There's an expectation that Monaco will be another good circuit for our car package because the combination of low-speed corners and absence of any really fast stuff should suit MP4-24. I really hope so because it would be fantastic to have a competitive car and to be fighting at the front again." Kovalainen is looking to test out their new technology: "We will be using KERS in Monaco and one of the questions will be whether we'll actually be able to use it to get past other cars – as usual, KERS will be a benefit for us, but anything can happen in Monte Carlo. Coming off the back of a disappointing race in Spain last week, I'm more determined than ever to get a strong result under my belt."

Alonso has managed a couple of wins in Monaco previously, but he isn't expecting more of the same this year: "All the teams bring new packages to Monaco as the track is so unusual and we will use a special set-up to cope with the bumps and tight corners. In terms of a result, I think we can realistically hope to qualify in the top ten and aim for points in the race." Piquet is hoping his new car will work to his benefit. Of the race in Spain, he says: "It was difficult to find the right balance with the car all weekend and so it was a tough race. I didn't have all the new developments on my car and so I was missing some performance, but hopefully I will be able to use them in Monaco."

Rosberg is another driver looking forward to wowing his local crowds: "Monaco is my home town so all my friends and family will be there supporting me which will be great. Living within 100 metres of the track also makes life so much easier over the weekend as well. "To me, Monaco is my home so I'm used to it but it is a completely different place when Formula One is in town. Normally it's quite quiet, just like anywhere really, but the Grand Prix weekend brings a different atmosphere to the place and that's really special to be a part of." On the complete opposite end of the scale, Nakajima isn't really a fan of the principality: "I know I should be more excited about Monaco, but it really is just another destination for me. The glitz and glamour is all a bit too much for me to really enjoy myself there so I'll be keeping my usual routine of working hard at the track during the day and then having quiet evenings at the hotel, probably some training and treatment followed by a quick supper and an early night." Bless.

For BMW, Kubica says he's a big fan of street circuits, and is looking forward to seeing how the 2009-spec cars will fare, especially with the slick tyres. And Heidfeld sums up why Monaco is so important: "There may be a bit less hype nowadays, but the Formula 1 weekend in Monte Carlo is still something special. It's all about Formula 1 and parties."

Ferrari appear to have had their mind on other things for the past few weeks, what with taking the FIA to court and everything. Their bid was unsuccessful, so perhaps there is just time to concentrate on the racing before they make their next move. Both drivers are hopeful that Monaco will go well for them – Massa says the race could be the turning point of the year for the team, whilst Kimi would like to emulate some of their more successful weekends around the streets of Monte Carlo.

Finally, Red Bull and Toro Rosso spent some time last weekend entertaining the crowds in Hungary, with Vettel and Buemi driving up and down the streets of Szeged. Now, their attention shifts to the upcoming race, and Red Bull team principal Christian Horner says the pressure is on. "The team is on a high after the result in China, which was backed up by Sebastian's podium in Bahrain and Mark's in Barcelona. Our focus now is very clearly to close the gap to the Brawns - and Barcelona has shown that we have done that - and we still have a lot more development potential open to us." Despite earlier protests that the diffuser would be hard to adapt to the RB5, Vettel did say they would be bringing a new version to Monaco, so keep your eye out for that.

That's all for now, Free Practice in Monaco is on a Thursday, so if you're available during the sessions, you can join us on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting. Otherwise, I'll be back tomorrow with a roundup of the days action. with a full rundown of all the action.