



Episode 5 – Pre-Season Testing

[Intro: Rich Reich, Keeping Up With The Race]

Chris: This is Sidepodcast, Episode 5 – Pre-Season Testing. In our show today, we're taking a look at the testing that's been happening at various circuits over the past few weeks. Who's good, who's bad, and who really needs to try harder. Testing sessions can generally be split into two categories, open testing and closed testing. We tend to get more information about the open testing sessions, because any team can attend, they just have to pay a small price to be there, and the media is usually invited. Closed testing sessions, that would be mostly Ferrari having their own testing track. Before Christmas, testing was all about Hamilton. He was racing away in his McLaren, and all the media attention was on him, but to be fair, the other top drivers were suffering from contractual obligations. Alonso only had one day in the McLaren, and Raikkonen was unable to get into his Ferrari. Which makes me wonder why they do testing before Christmas anyway. They've got their old drivers, they've got old cars, and I don't see the point.

Me: Well, that is true. You sometimes wonder if maybe they don't just try to look busy, in order to fox the opposition. Like, yay, look how hard we're working, we're gonna beat ya, you'd better be working that hard too. That kind of thing. So, that's a fair point, a lot of it is probably pointless. Maybe this year was a little bit different because they're on the new Bridgestone tyres, they wanted to see how the control tyre worked with their new chassis, but I take your point. The 2007 stuff that's going on right now, that's way more important. They've got the right drivers in the right teams, they've got the right people in place, that kind of stuff. That's all much more important than what was going on in November, December.

Chris: So the testing that's been happening so far this year, got me a bit confused. Because there was teams in different places, it was all very sporadic. I couldn't work out who was where or where they were gonna be next.

Me: Yea, the rules have changed this year, haven't they? Didn't you have information on that?

Chris: I did. I went and found out the official information. So, pre-season, there are team tests which are central tests where all the teams can run, so everyone can be there. There are five 3-day tests during the pre-season. Then there are private tests where each team has the right to conduct a single 3-day test at a different venue at the team tests. So they can pick wherever. And then there are shakedown which is when each team conducts a single-day 1 car shakedown with unlimited mileage before the first test.

Me: I'm a bit confused by that one. Surely the point of a shakedown is when you build a new car and you put new components in, you want to make sure the wheels are going in the right direction. You want to make sure you've got all the bits in the right place.

Chris: That always helps.

Me: So if you're racing two cars, what use is a one car shakedown?

Chris: I guess if they know it works on one, assume it works on the other.

Me: Fair enough. Seems a little bit odd to me.



Chris: And in season, the teams are allowed eight 3-day test sessions, where they can only use one car during the session. Another one car thing.

Me: Aren't we going to one of those?

Chris: We might be able to attend one, yes.

Me: Might we be going to Silverstone?

Chris: We might be able to. And the teams are also allowed a fixed number of shakedown and aero tests during the season. I found this information on the Renault F1 Blog.

Me: Ah, what a blog that is.

Chris: You like that blog.

Me: I like that blog. It's probably, in terms of corporate marketing, or whatever you want to call it, corporate outreach, I think that Renault are well ahead of all the other teams. In terms of getting out there and speaking to the fans, because there's thousands and thousands of comments on that blog going way back. It's been going for 12 months or so now.

Chris: I like the ones that are in French.

Me: Do you? I think the guy that moderates it, I think he can speak a couple of languages, so it turns up in all sorts. There used to be a Spanish version when Fernando was in the team. I think it might have gone now, but yea, it's a very open and involved website.

Chris: It's not too marketed. Like, you don't think they're just telling you this to sell it to you, they're actually giving you information.

Me: Yes, it's not sanitised. It's raw opinions and feelings. I think Ferrari have one too, I think they were the only other team.

Chris: You have to sign in for that kind of thing.

Me: You do, it's not open, it's not a proper blog.

Chris: So you like that blog? Even though they told you to wait and see the Renault on the track before you judge the colours.

Me: Yea, it's a very open community and people can voice their opinions, and people obviously have a lot of opinions about the new R27 colour scheme, myself included. One of the responses from the moderator, the guy who looks after the whole of the Renault blog, he said, yes on paper the colour scheme doesn't look that great, but I promise you when it's going round the track, it's gonna look amazing.

Chris: And did it?

Me: No.



Chris: It still looks hideous.

Me: It looks absolutely terrible. There were some videos on YouTube of Renault testing in Valencia. Really good videos, if you've got time to check out YouTube just enter F1 Testing Valencia.

Chris: We'll put a link on the blog.

Me: We should do that, yea. Do that. And you watch the Renault. It just looks awful. I can't. It's horrible. I was divided, I was not too sure about it. The blog said wait and see, I gave them the best chance, I can't stand it. Bring back the old colours.

Chris: Anyway, back to the testing, but still on a Renault theme. On the 11th January, at Silverstone, there was a secret test, although pictures made it out onto the internet, obviously.

Me: Go bloggers.

Chris: The R27 was driven for the first time.

Me: So Renault were the first team on track this year?

Chris: They absolutely were. And it rained. But it was just straight line testing with Nelson Piquet. The following Tuesday in Jerez, Fisichella went out in his Renault and he was the first man to spin off.

Me: Was he?

Chris: Well, I should say the first man in a 2007 car, not the first man ever, obviously. How embarrassing.

Me: I don't think it was his fault, wasn't it a mechanical problem?

Chris: Yea, it was probably raining. That seems to be the theme this year.

Me: He's not Massa, he can drive in the rain.

Chris: Next important testing date, 17th January. First public test at Jerez. There were only three teams there, Super Aguri, Renault and Williams. You'll never guess who came out on top.

Me: Haven't a clue.

Chris: Well, it wasn't Williams. And it wasn't Renault. Anthony Davidson, in the Super Aguri was at the top of the timesheets on that day. How impressed are we?

Me: Wow, he did well.

Chris: At the same time, Alonso was wowing the fans at Valencia. 10,000 people turned up.

Me: How many?

Chris: 10,000.



Me: Good lord, that is more people attending a test than attended the US Grand Prix last year.

Chris: Don't be silly. So we've talked about it raining, but then the weather took a turn for the worse. It rained some more, Ferrari had to change their plans, it rained even more, in fact, it hailed. Presumably, that's the team's excuses for all the crashes that happened after that. On 25th January, McLaren's were testing at Valencia, Hamilton had an almighty smash [*Sound FX: Crash*], broke his car into a million pieces.

Me: That's gonna hurt his insurance.

Chris: Being a young driver and everything.

Me: Young driver, new licence.

Chris: But the day after, Massa crashed at Vallelunga and broke his front end.

Me: Ouch. That's his no claims out the window.

Chris: Getting right up to date now, this week has seen the first full team with 2007 cars and pretty much every team. The 30th January saw every team except Spyker and Toro Rosso turning up to Valencia. Raikkonen got his first taste of the 2007 Ferrari. Massa was given the day off after his crash. I think he was asked to stay home.

Me: Please stop hurting our cars. Was it still raining?

Chris: I think it was raining.

Me: Yea, I'd have asked him to stay at home too. Give the man a canoe.

Chris: Proving that Super Aguri's good day with Anthony Davidson was not just a fluke, they've been beating Red Bull. It's not a good sign for Coulthard or Webber.

Me: Good lord, is that the new Red Bull?

Chris: Yes, the one that looks like a McLaren. The 1st February saw Ralf Schumacher at the top. [*Sound FX: Giggle*] I'm not kidding.

Me: You must be making that up.

Chris: I'm not kidding. It was the first dry day. But we don't know whether that means they'll be good in the dry or not because they weren't there the next day. Testing was extended by a day, you see, because of the bad weather, but Toyota decided to go home early. Couldn't be bothered.

Me: I'm sure they had other plans.

Chris: Hamilton was at the top that day, obviously recovered from his crash.

Me: Fair enough. Aiming to make amends.

Chris: That's a brief view of the events of testing, but what do you think?



Me: Well, I mean, some things are pretty clear. McLaren? A force to be reckoned with. Alonso, a force to be reckoned with, wouldn't you say?

Chris: Absolutely. Renault seem to be doing pretty well. I didn't think they would be very good, but they're always there, 2nd or 3rd.

Me: They tend to run quite heavy in testing, they sort of run with 20 laps of fuel, at almost all times.

Chris: So that means they're even faster really.

Me: Potentially McLaren maybe not quite as heavy, but that's a pretty good place to be for Renault. McLaren, awesome. Who's third at the moment? Who's looking the best of the rest? Ferrari?

Chris: Yea, and Toyota were up there but you just can't tell.

Me: Bit hit and miss with Toyota. They might have had a couple of low fuel runs just to get themselves up the top.

Chris: Honda are useless. Where are Honda? We didn't mention Honda at all, that's because they weren't anywhere.

Me: About 13th or 14th. Something like that.

Chris: Jenson did hurt himself but...

Me: The only thing I could say in Honda's defense is last year they were right at the top of every timesheet and everyone said 2006 is gonna be Honda's year. 2006, a force to be reckoned with Honda. Turns out they were running light in every single test session they did. They got a lot of stick and a lot of criticism for not doing a proper testing and just trying to get loads of press and PR out of it.

Chris: So they've learned their lesson this year.

Me: Maybe they've done the opposite this year and shoved an absolute shedload of fuel in it, and just trundle round the back.

Chris: And then they'll prove us all wrong in the races.

Me: Maybe, I don't know. I think maybe they're just trying to keep a lid on expectations this year, because they just got such a kicking at the beginning of last year. So I'm not sure. I still have hopes, I'm forever optimistic with that team.

Chris: And Super Aguri obviously, very impressive. A lot of that's probably down to Anthony though.

Me: Do you reckon? No chance it's down to the Honda chassis.

Chris: Well that as well. But they're finishing ahead of Red Bull all the time. Red Bull must be gutted.

Me: I get the impression, I read an interview, Coulthard said he was a bit frustrated, saying he hadn't done much running, the weather had affected them more than most. I don't know.

Chris: Why would it? Why would it affect them more than anyone else? Seems like an excuse to me.



Me: You're so mean. The only thing I think, maybe they've only got one chassis, maybe they don't want to damage their chassis. Everyone else is willing to stick it on the limit, you know, Massa chucking it in the wall again on a puddle. Maybe they're being conservative, I'm not sure on that one. They are dire, they are really, really low down, worse even than last year, which is not good. Williams haven't picked it up much. I thought this year...

Chris: No, I haven't seen anything about Williams either, or BMW, really.

Me: BMW were there, maybe in the earlier test they were around and about and in the right areas, at least roughly to where they were last year. At the launch of Williams car, Williams obviously launched their car this week, they were saying they were hoping the 2007 car would be a kick up the backside, and they were gonna be climbing to the top, and thus far...

Chris: Not so much. I'm not actually that impressed with Kimi in the Ferrari. I thought he was just gonna fly, you know, great driver, good car, but he still doesn't look a patch on Alonso.

Me: Where is he at the moment, 5th is he? 5th and 6th, those kind of regions? He's not breaking any records, is he?

Chris: He's got the McLaren's and Renault in front of him. You wouldn't have expected that.

Me: No I agree with that at the moment. They could be taking the conservative approach, maybe not trying to set expectations again.

Chris: It has been known. I have noticed that it seems to be mostly race drivers doing the testing rather than test drivers.

Me: They're getting the miles in.

Chris: It doesn't seem to make sense. Isn't that what test drivers are there for? Especially because Spyker, this week they've announced four test drivers.

Me: 4?

Chris: Four actual test drivers.

Me: Are you sure?

Chris: Yes. I could name them, but I can't actually pronounce their names. But four. Why do you need four?

Me: I have absolutely no idea.

Chris: Everyone made a fuss when ages ago, Ferrari announced a third person to test, now we have four. How many do we need?

Me: Bring in some money? They may be pay test drivers. That can't be right can it? I don't know. The only thing I can assume is that the rules have changed again in terms of Friday drivers. The limits have been lifted on engine restrictions on Fridays.

Chris: All the teams can run a third driver on a Friday.



Me: Yes, well, they can run without engine restrictions, I believe, can't they?

Chris: But only BMW have signed up to that so far.

Me: I think only BMW have signed up to the fact that there's a third driver. I think maybe the other teams are planning to use their race drivers, possibly?

Chris: So do the race drivers get a payrise?

Me: They're doing more work and more miles. I don't think they do, no. Again, this is entirely conjecture and no one's really sure what's gonna happen. People are keeping their cards close to their chests, some people don't want to say, some people don't know, that kind of thing. But as I understand it, most teams are planning to use their regular race drivers for Fridays to get as many miles as they can, to get as much practice in as they can, because obviously, as you said earlier, testing is restricted in 2007. So it's possible, maybe over winter, they just want to get more miles under the belt of the drivers.

Chris: That's all we've got on testing. Next week we'll be talking about drivers, who they are, whether they'll be any good, what we're expecting in the season approaching. Before we go though, I should just tell you that we are now on Digg.

Me: Are we not in the Up and Coming section on Digg as well.

Chris: In the Sports section, yes.

Me: So if you've got nothing to do during the week, you're listening to the podcast, you're twiddling your thumbs, thinking websites, where could I go? Where could they go?

Chris: That would be Digg.com/podcasts/Sidepodcast.

Me: Hold on, I didn't get all that, I'm just typing this in there. So if I go Digg.com.

Chris: Yep, /podcasts, with an s, /Sidepodcast.

Me: /podcasts/sidepodcast, one word.

Chris: And there's a button there and it says Digg It.

Me: And can't people Digg individual episodes as well.

Chris: You can, you can Digg your favourite episode.

Me: That's amazing. If people could do that during the next 7 days, that would be excellent.

Chris: And then we'd be Dugg.

[Out: Rich Reich, Keeping Up With The Race]