



You'd think that my home grand prix would be an easy one, even with the day job, right? You'd think wrong. I'd run out of annual leave by this point, but managed to swing the Friday as flexi. Missed out on the Thursday action, but made up for it by drinking twice as much Tiger at Red Bull's celebration of Thailand on Friday night.

## F1 Silverstone Blog: F1 on the new circuit

So who's going to be the first driver to turn off and try to drive the old track? Apparently it's a mistake everyone was making on the simulators this week, so they should have got it out of their systems by now. I hope.

It's Friday morning at Silverstone, home to the first Formula 1 World Championship event 60 years ago. And boy has it changed since – Juan Manuel Fangio and chums would have trouble recognising the track these days, although Copse is still the same.

As usual, the first half hour of practice is relatively quiet, as installation lap follows installation lap, with no times up on the board. McLaren, one of the home favourites this weekend, has a lot of set-up work to do on their blown diffuser, the official term for the low-slung exhaust configuration pioneered by Red Bull.

Mercedes took a backwards step in Valencia with their blown diffuser; the extreme heat of the exhaust gasses ended up melting bits of bodywork, while tyres and brakes degraded even more rapidly than usual. McLaren are trying to avoid similar problems this weekend, and will be doing a lot of testing before making a decision on whether or not the new configuration will be worth the gamble for the race.

The blown diffuser is worth between two-tenths and half a second per lap, depending on whose figures you believe. While that pace is obviously desirable, if it comes at the cost of reliability then team and drivers will find it too high a price to pay.

Jenson Button was the first driver to set a time on the new Silverstone circuit: a 1.37.994s. Feedback from the drivers says that the track is still very slippery, especially the new section. It will rubber in over the course of the weekend, and there's no rain predicted, so grip levels should have improved by Sunday. Unlike some of the other circuits on the F1 calendar, Silverstone actually gets regular use.

The big story of the morning – technically the big story of last night – is the fact that Bruno Senna will not be driving for HRT this weekend. Japanese pay driver Sakon Yamamoto has stumped up some much-needed cash for this weekend's drive, meaning Senna is temporarily out of a seat. HRT have been increasing pressure on Senna and Karun Chandhok to cough up more cash for the privilege of the drive, and it seems that the bank balance just reached critical.

While the cash might be much-needed, this is a very bad move for HRT in PR terms. Their financial difficulties now common knowledge, rather than credible hearsay, which is very off-putting for potential sponsors. Not only do they have to contend with their brand being associated with a backmarker, but the team is having to take on short-term pay drivers to make ends meet. Is there a better way of losing potential sponsors in a hurry? Other than parking your car in a wall to win a race, obviously.

Other replacement drivers on the track today include Fairuz Fauzy, Lotus test driver and temporary Jarno Trulli, and Paul di Resta, who is pretending to be Tonio Liuzzi. Both test drivers are driving on Friday for the track time, but will not take their adopted seats in the race.

There's not much point comparing times at the top of the board, as this morning's practice session is the proving ground for new parts up and down the grid. Red Bull, who have been comfortably at the top of the time sheets for much of the morning, have brought some minor upgrades to Silverstone. This is a cause for some concern throughout the paddock, as the Milton Keynes team finished 1-2 here last year, and have been dominating qualifying throughout the 2010 season.

McLaren were light on the tweaks at Valencia, as they were saving their massive upgrade (the aforementioned blown diffuser) for the home GP this weekend. Ferrari have done the reverse – their big reveal was at Fernando Alonso's alternative home GP, while the major change for the Scuderia this weekend is their brand new logo, which reminds me of something I can't quite put my finger on... </sarcasm>

But with upgrades galore, from Lotus' new cokebottle to Virgin's lightweight aero changes, this morning is an exercise in establishing whether or not new bits work properly, not making performance assumptions based on pace. The best you can do there is to compare teammates, most of whom are running the same bits of kit. And there aren't many surprises there: Kubica is faster than Petrov; Rosberg has outpaced Schumacher; Alonso is ahead of Massa, etc.

FP1 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.32.280s
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.32.614s
3. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.32.725s
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.32.747s
5. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.32.968s
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.33.318s
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.33.377s
8. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.33.519s
9. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.33.955s
10. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.34.016s
11. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.34.132s
12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.34.365s
13. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.34.490s
14. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.34.580s
15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.34.710s
16. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 1.34.901s
17. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.35.037s
18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.35.318s
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.36.747s
20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.37.330s
21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.37.518s
22. Karun Chandhok (HRT) 1.38.735s
23. Fairuz Fauzy (Lotus) 1.39.510s
24. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 1.39.673s

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## F1 Silverstone Blog: FP2 in sunny Britain

Yes, you read that right – sunny Britain. According to people more statistically minded than me, this weekend will be the hottest British Grand Prix since 1983. I'm willing to believe it – as the cars begin firing up in the pitlane below, air temperature is 27 degrees, and track temperature is up to 43 degrees.

The fastest man this morning was 2009 Silverstone winner Sebastian Vettel, followed closely by 2008 victor Lewis Hamilton. But both Red Bull and McLaren were trying out new components this morning, and McLaren aren't 100% happy with the performance of their blown diffuser, a complicated bit of kit to try and integrate properly. It remains to be seen whether both drivers will use the new exhaust system this weekend, or if it will stay in the garage on Sunday.

Ferrari were fairly low down the timesheets this morning, but that doesn't mean a thing, as the Scuderia were working on a number of set-up tweaks, not going for outright speed. Fernando Alonso briefly topped the timesheets early on in FP2, proving that the F10 can fly when needed. All that Alonso and teammate Felipe Massa need is some clear air in qualifying, and then we'll see how effective Ferrari's Valencia upgrades really were.

Rubens Barrichello spent a few laps early on in FP2 at the top of the timesheets, an improvement on this morning's session when he was outpaced by rookie Nico Hulkenberg. The press room is abuzz with news of Rubens' performance on the Top Gear test track earlier this week: I'm not going to spoil anyone's TV viewing, but I wish I could tell you how he did...

Laptimes at the top end of the board are all in the 1.32s, while the bulk of the field is lapping in 1.33s. Fastest lap on the old circuit configuration was Michael Schumacher's 1.18.739s, set in 2004. The track was nearly a kilometre shorter then, at 5.141km.

The new track configuration presents its own challenges for the teams. Not only are there a host of new concrete kerbs that the drivers aren't happy about – Club joins Maggotts and Becketts on the list – but the bump going into Abbey is dramatic enough that it's shifted the Silverstone needs a stiff set-up paradigm. Lunch was spent frantically analysing data as teams worked out how best to allow for the new section of track without compromising performance everywhere else.

Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel have locked out the top of the timesheets for now, but both Ferraris are looking fast, as is Nico Rosberg. The two McLarens are going more slowly than the home crowd would like, but there's still plenty of time remaining for the boys from Woking. They are testing new components, which puts us all in the dark when it comes to pace. After all, if the blown diffuser doesn't work, they'll drop it.

Sebastian Vettel spun the car off track at Turn 7 a few minutes ago, but held the car well. He is currently pulling in to the pits below me, and his tyres are looking about as bald as you'd expect – bits of track, some red clay, lots of grass, and one giant flat spot on each of the four wheels. Nothing worse than you'd expect to see lining the paddock after a race, but seeing them on a car 20 feet below me is a new experience.

For what I think is the first time this season – although I could very well be wrong – Vitaly Petrov is ahead of teammate Robert Kubica on the timesheets. Petrov is currently in P4 with a 1.32.745s, while Kubica is in P9 with a 1.33.188s. Half a second might not sound like a lot between

teammates, but it will be a victory of sorts for the Russian rookie, whose solid debut season has been overshadowed by Kubica constantly taking the R30 places it didn't deserve to be.

The majority of offs so far this session have taken place at Abbey, as expected. But Cospse has also claimed its fair share of scalps, with both Ferraris coming off there, five minutes apart. Spectators with general admission tickets would do well to find a spot near Abbey on Sunday.

Mercedes have been performing surprisingly well this afternoon – Michael Schumacher was in P4 for some of the session, although Nico Rosberg's P3-worthy L32.166s pushed the German legend back down to P5. The team admit that the Valencia upgrades actually led to a drop in performance, so what we are seeing here at Silverstone is a return to Canada form – Rosberg and Schumacher both ran well on Friday in Montreal, although Schumacher was knocked out in Q2 on Saturday.

The top six places on the leaderboard have been locked out by the drivers from Red Bull, Ferrari, and Mercedes. McLaren are languishing much further down the timesheets, with both Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton currently in the pits. Button has been slower than Hamilton all day, but that appears to be a recent trend – it looks like the Somerset driver is having his traditional mid-season dip, where he just can't get the tyres to work for him in practice or qualifying.

Lotus are continuing their climb to the midfield – this morning Heikki Kovalainen was 0.6s slower than the Toro Rosso of Jaime Alguersuari, while he is currently 0.8s behind. That might look like a backwards step, but given the numerous set-up changes needed to maximise performance from what is essentially a new aerodynamic shell, the fact that the gap has held at under a second is impressive, and a significant improvement on Bahrain.

Nothing has been officially announced yet, but word in the paddock is that Tony Fernandes will be buying Lotus out of their Cosworth engine supply deal and swapping to Renault from 2011. An announcement is expected at some point this weekend.

With Friday's practice sessions now over, it looks as though Ferrari and Red Bull will both be in a strong position to challenge for pole on Saturday. Red Bull have dominated qualifying this season, claiming pole in every race barring Canada, but it wasn't supposed to be quite so easy for them here – despite the team scoring 1-2 at Silverstone last year, the changes to the circuit layout were thought to make it less RB6 friendly.

In theory, Mercedes should not be discounted. But Mercedes have had a few weekends this season in which Friday was full of promise, and the rest of the weekend a crashing let-down. It is worth bearing that in mind before betting the family home on Schumacher's first podium of the season, although the picture there should be a bit clearer tomorrow.

As for McLaren, the home team favourites? While their times today may not seem to be cause for celebration, remember the amount of data they have been harvesting while testing the waters of the blown diffuser. If the team decide they were better off as they were, all of today's running will be irrelevant to Sunday's performance.

For all the gossip I can't print here, don't forget to follow me on Twitter: FIKate

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.31.234s
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.31.626s
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.31.875s
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.32.099s
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.32.166s
6. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.32.660s
7. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.32.745s
8. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.32.757s
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.32.787s
10. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.32.967s
11. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.33.019s
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.33.164s
13. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.33.200s
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.33.402s
15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.33.728s
16. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.33.836s
17. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 1.34.051s
18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.34.643s
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.35.465s
20. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.36.237s
21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.36.553s
22. Karun Chandhok (HRT) 1.37.019s
23. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 1.38.303s
24. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.42.901s

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – the team principals' press conference

I am sitting in a room with Christian Horner, Martin Whitmarsh, Tony Fernandes, and Ross Brawn. No, I've not won the best competition in the world – it's the team principals' press conference.

I was outside on the phone when the team principals began to arrive. Horner and Fernandes came in together, laughing and joking. I overheard

Horner congratulate Fernandes on Lotus' progress, which was nice to hear. Whitmarsh was third to arrive, and Brawn turned up a few minutes later.

So far, the press conference is pretty standard. All of the men present think of Silverstone as being one of the most significant events on the calendar, one of their many home grands prix. Because most F1 teams are based in the UK, the British Grand Prix is the only race where the home team can see the cars in action. British factories are all empty this weekend, as the staff are here to see their hard work bear fruit on track.

There is as much camaraderie between the team principals as you usually see between the drivers, which surprised me. Despite being accustomed to seeing the drivers joke with each other when they're not on screen, I wasn't expecting the team principals to be the same. Competitors they might be, but there is an underlying affection there. Or, bare minimum, respect.

According to Martin Whitmarsh, the final components for the MP4-24 upgrades arrived at 1.30am on Friday morning, hot off the presses and a trek up the A43. The team were up for most of the night fitting the blown diffuser for today's practice sessions, par for the course in Formula 1. Some of the parts McLaren are running this weekend were supposed to debut at Hockenheim in two weeks' time, so it has been a hard slog at the McLaren Technology Centre to get everything ready for this weekend.

Christian Horner has just said that the current iteration of the RB6, if it went back to Sakhir Circuit, would be around a second faster than it was in March. Horner was replying to a question and looked put on the spot, but it would be an interesting experiment. Watching Lotus lap Sakhir today would be more dramatic – the team are nearly four seconds faster than they were four months ago.

The floor has been opened to questions from the media, and journos are now trying to stir up trouble between Horner and Fernandes. The press is desperate to apportion blame, and appear to be hoping for a fist fight between Heikki Kovalainen and Mark Webber. Horner apparently spoke to Heikki this morning, and told him to fit some brake lights, given the vastly different braking points of the two cars: everyone (including Fernandes) had a jolly chuckle.

No war between Lotus and Red Bull, then.

And now we're on to driver management. Turkey was three races ago, but the Red Bull Istanbul Park fiasco isn't allowed to die. Horner is answering questions in a very media friendly way, but as far as Red Bull is concerned, the story is over.

Lots of laughs when Whitmarsh is asked if he and Bernie Ecclestone are due a punch-up over Ecclestone's comments that there is no place for FOTA in Formula 1. Whitmarsh says that the sport will benefit most if all of the organisations involved in F1 – FOTA, the FIA, FOM, and the GPDA – work together. Future developments and improvements to the sport need to come out of general consensus and cooperation.

And with that bombshell, the team principals depart, all looking very chummy.

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – FP3 is the place to be

Forgot we were in the UK this weekend, so was trying to convert track start times to local time. Oops. The end result was that I was a bit late for FP3 this morning, and was walking through the tunnel to the centre of the track when cars started pouring out of the pitlane. I've never been beneath F1 cars in action before, and it was quite a sound.

I've been at the circuit since 7am, like a good little journalist, but there's no rest for the wicked, or for F1 journos – pre-practice there are interviews to book, quotes to find, and breakfast to munch. The quality of yesterday's bacon sarnie led me back to the McLaren brand centre for this morning's breakfast, where the gossip (the horse's mouth gossip at that) was that the team are worried about the weekend ahead.

Following yesterday's relative lack of pace, the team have taken the decision to scrap the blown diffuser for now, but they will be running with the new front wing. The set-up will be the one used for Valencia a fortnight ago, but adding a new component to a tried and tested set-up can lead to unforeseen problems. There is an outside chance that following today's practice session, McLaren will revert to a full Valencia spec, wing included.

As usual, Lotus are among the first cars out on track. It's installation lap city up and down the paddock, but the boys in green and gold have set times and are continuing to work on finding that elusive 0.6-0.8s that will see them fighting for position with the Toro Rossos.

This being a morning session, the track has yet to reach tyre-melting temperatures. Air temperature is 22 degrees, while the track is a relatively mild 26 degrees. All that will soon change.

So far this morning, the only offs have come from the two McLaren drivers – Jenson Button came off at Abbey, where most drivers were having trouble yesterday, while Lewis Hamilton came off at Copse, a manoeuvre that was the preserve of the Scuderia yesterday. The more we see of the McLarens on track this weekend, the less likely a Brit on the Silverstone podium appears.

Tonio Liuzzi has joined Hamilton in coming off at Copse, so it might just be the trend of the morning. Both Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa have been off at Copse, so it looks like Turn 1 is proving more troublesome today than it was yesterday. But it's a right-hander designed to be taken in seventh gear, so are you really that surprised that it's causing problems? The surprise is that it's the experienced drivers who seem to be having the most trouble.

This being a practice session, there are the usual caveats about not reading too much into the times. But as it's FP3, the cars are running in close to race trim while the final adjustments are made to deliver the perfect car for this afternoon's qualifying. So there are some things you can say for sure, although it is a repeat of yesterday's educated guesses...

Ferrari are definitely fast. If this is the pace they thought they had at Valencia, I can see why they were so miffed to have lost the chance of victory to a safety car. That's not excusing their reaction, by the way – over the top doesn't even begin to cover it. But anyway. Both Ferraris are looking fast

again, with Alonso running 0.4s faster than Massa.

As usual, Red Bull – read Sebastian Vettel, as Mark Webber is currently languishing in P19 – are looking good for pole, but Alonso will prove to be more of a threat than he has been at any race thus far. The only fly in Fernando's ointment is an unexplained problem with the car. Ferrari tweeted "we need to check something in the car so [Alonso] will miss his run on soft tyres". No further news yet, but when it comes...

Webber has now popped up in P2 on his soft run, so the top four is Vettel, Webber, Alonso, and Massa. The times behind are falling constantly, as the session is drawing to a close and nearly everyone's out on track for their last dash run on the option tyres.

Lotus have been having difficulties today – another supplier problem. Without looking it up it feels as though 80% of Jarno Trulli's running problems this season have been down to hydraulics failure, but whatever the actual statistic it's disproportionate. Lotus have been far too nice to spread the news, but the fragile hydraulics system is actually an outsourced part. I don't know the details of the supplier relationship, but I hope the contract allows for a refund once failures get above an acceptable level...

Hotspots for the race are likely to be Abbey and Copse, although there have been offs at Brooklands and Ireland. But Abbey (with its bump problems – one missing on the apex, that the drivers used for added speed, and one where no one expected it) and Copse (the first corner is a seventh-gear sweeping right-hander) have seen nearly all of the drivers off at one time or another.

And with the session over, Lewis Hamilton is slightly better off than he was with the blown diffuser, but still looks unlikely to challenge for the lead. Jenson Button is miles behind, with Michael Schumacher, Pedro de la Rosa, and Rubens Barrichello all ahead of him.

Qualifying looks like it will be a head-to-head battle between Ferrari and Red Bull, although Nico Rosberg and Robert Kubica are also in a good position to surprise us all.

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – Q1 under cloudy skies

So much for sunny Silverstone. The clouds are drawing in, providing respite from the heat for those fans out in the open. Rain is unlikely, but shade is fabulous. Air temperature is a fairly steady 24 degrees, while the track has climbed to 35, a significant increase from the morning practice session.

Sebastian Vettel had a mini nose cone failure at the end of the morning session, but it has not stopped the young German from setting the headline times of the day. And nor should it – a snapped connector is easily fixed, and isn't likely to reoccur. Last year's winner is still the best bet for pole this afternoon. (Although I've probably just jinxed the poor lamb.)

Qualifying sessions seem to whip by in milliseconds, especially when you compare the frenetic pace with the relative languor of free practice.

But the impressive speeds at the front of the pack pale in significance when you consider that the seven most important men on track are those at the back, ready to drop out in a few minutes' time. As ever this season, six of the seven places are filled by the new teams, and everyone else is competing not to be number seven.

At the head of the pack are the fast cars you'd expect to see – none of the headline names are in danger of ending their qualifying sessions now, although Michael Schumacher is dangerously close to dropping out in Q2 unless he finds a lot more pace.

McLaren were faster than they looked this morning, which will be a source of some comfort to the home fans – looking out at the crowds, all is a sea of orange and silver (sorry, 'rocket red' and silver). But while McLaren were fast, Ferrari were faster. Red Bull was fastest of all, with Sebastian Vettel setting the fastest time of the session.

After a brief battle with Tonio Liuzzi, Jaime Alguersuari has become the seventh man to wave goodbye to. Q2 will begin in a few minutes, so stay with girlracer for updates.

### Drop-out zone

- 18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.32.430s
- 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.34.405s
- 20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.34.775s
- 21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.34.864s
- 22. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.35.212s
- 23. Karun Chandhok (HRT) 1.36.576s
- 24. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 1.36.968s

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – Sun shines, but not for Button

And with the sun peeking out from behind the crowds, temperatures here at Silverstone are hotting up. It's 39 degrees on the track, and 25 degrees in the air. Seven men have been disposed of, and it's now time to work out who's next to go.

Michael Schumacher has failed to break out of Q2 on more than one occasion of late, and his Q1 time would see him out in this session if not improved upon. But one thing that the seven-time German legend can do is surprise us all when it really counts. The Mercedes driver was briefly in P2, but had dropped to P6 in the time it took to type this sentence.



Lewis Hamilton is faster this afternoon than he was this morning, and currently sitting in P4 behind Mark Webber and the two Ferraris. The Scuderia will be hoping to get both drivers on the podium at the British Grand Prix, payback for Hamilton and Jenson Button taking up valuable podium space at the European Grand Prix, one of Ferrari's home races.

But lap times keep falling, and with seven minutes left on the clock – enough time for four more laps from each driver, if they're well-planned – there's not much point keeping track of the changes on the leaderboard. It would be like trying to liveblog the minute-by-minute changes in the stock market.

Currently at risk of dropping out in Q2 are Vitaly Petrov, Sebastian Buemi, Nico Hulkenberg, local hero Jenson Button, Tonio Liuzzi, Robert Kubica, and Kamui Kobayashi.

Given the problems Button has had this weekend – he has struggled more than his teammate with the revised MP4-25, as he is less adaptable, less flexible, when it comes to driving style – it is not a huge surprise to see him in the dropout zone for now. But Button's track record involves a lot of nail-biting Q2s before he pops up in a safe position with only seconds to go, so it's not all doom and gloom.

The fact that Kubica is in the dropout zone is another matter entirely. The Polish driver has been consistent this weekend, not in setting headline-grabbing times, but safely in the top third of the field. Maybe he and P5 Michael Schumacher had a Freaky Friday-style swap in the lunch break?

And with the session over, there are a lot of disappointed fans in the stands. World Champion Jenson Button dropped out in Q2, and will be lining up on the grid behind such luminaries as Nico Hulkenberg and Kamui Kobayashi, out-qualified by Michael Schumacher. So much for the McLaren 1-2...

#### Drop-out zone

11. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.31.399s
12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.31.421s
13. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.31.635s
14. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.31.699s
15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.31.708s
16. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.31.796s
17. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.32.012s

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – Q3 is full of surprises

Or is it that Q2 was full of surprises? No one expected to see Pedro de la Rosa in Q3 at Silverstone, much like few of the assembled fans would have expected to see the current world champion knocked out of Q2 in his home grand prix – the missing jewel in his crown.

But with the final qualifying session of the Silverstone weekend now underway, it's all to play for on track. Barring any crazy incidents that could lead to a Sauber on pole, we're almost certainly looking at a straight fight between Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel. Again.

Lewis Hamilton is a bit of a dark horse – his car isn't quite fast enough of its own accord, but if ever there was a driver capable of finding hidden tenths under pressure, that man is Hamilton. And with Button out of the picture, Lewis knows that he alone will be carrying the flag for McLaren tomorrow. After all, there's not much that can be done from P14, as Button is hardly John Watson. Could Hamilton wind up on the first or second row? We'll know in a matter of minutes.

Pedro de la Rosa is currently in P10, and the Spanish driver is almost certain to stay there – ahead of him are both Red Bulls, both Ferraris, both Mercedes, Hamilton, Robert Kubica, and Rubens Barrichello.

I was wrong – de la Rosa has pushed Schumacher into P10. Being beaten by a Sauber has really got to hurt. The European Grand Prix may have been the worst result of the German's career, but this has got to be one of the biggest humiliations.

And that's that. Red Bull have – are you sitting down? Prepare to be shocked – locked out the front row yet again, with pole for Vettel. Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton are on the row behind, with Rosberg and Kubica on row three. Brazilians Felipe Massa and Rubens Barrichello will be side by side on row four, while Schumacher will be with de la Rosa on row five.

What a turn-up for the books.

#### Grid (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.29.615s
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.29.758s
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.30.426s
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.30.556s
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.30.625s
6. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.31.040s
7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.31.172s
8. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.31.175s
9. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 1.31.274s
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.31.430s
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12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.31.421s

13. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.31.635s
  14. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.31.699s
  15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.31.708s
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  20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.34.775s
  21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.34.864s
  22. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.35.212s
  23. Karun Chandhok (HRT) 1.36.576s
  24. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 1.36.968s
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## F1 Silverstone Blog – Welcome to Scandalstone

There's something about life inside the rarefied world of Formula 1 that reminds me of high school. You have the popular jocks (drivers) and cheerleaders (their girlfriends), the boffins (mechanics, designers, and engineers), and the oddballs (the press corps). And in the rigidly defined social structure you get cliques, drama, and all manner of gossip.

While one scandal hanging over from previous races only exists in the minds of Ferrari, the Red Bull favouritism story is set to run and run.

So what's the story this time round?

Like many of the teams competing this weekend, Red Bull brought some new parts to Silverstone. In the care package from Milton Keynes were two new front wings, one each for Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber. Or so Webber thought.

Towards the end of FP3 this morning, Sebastian Vettel was in P1 when the connectors on his nose cone snapped. It's a pretty small part in size terms, but is a vital component when it comes to having a car that can lap in one aerodynamically efficient piece.

The team were not worried that the broken connector would jeopardise Vettel's chances in the afternoon qualifying session, because it was a simple fix. At least, that was the assumption in the paddock. Boy were we all wrong.

When his connector broke, Vettel was running with the new front wing. With the wing damaged, everyone assumed that Vettel would revert to the Valencia spec wing, which was good enough for a win in Spain.

Instead, Red Bull calmly set about removing the front wing from Webber's car so that Vettel could use it. As the second-placed Red Bull driver in the WDC standings, Webber had to give the new wing to his teammate, like it or not.

And based on the Australian driver's body language in the post-qualifying press conference, like it he did not. Asked whether he was a victim of favouritism within the team, Webber replied "I think the team is happy with the result today."

Where the Silverstone debacle differs from Istanbul Park is in Red Bull's openness. When asked whether the team were favouring Vettel over Webber, the answer was yes. Not because of anything to do with the colour of each man's passport, but because at the mid-point of the season, Vettel now leads his teammate by 12 points.

Given that a win is now worth 25 points, and there are still ten races left to run of this season, a 12 point margin at Silverstone is hardly the sort of unassailable lead that should see a team favouring one driver over another.

Red Bull's decision is particularly odd when you consider that, unlike Vettel, Webber has qualified in the top three at every race since Bahrain, had four podiums, and only one retirement. Were it not for Valencia's air race, Webber would have finished in the points in every race this season, a feat Vettel is desperate to emulate.

But one thing that Red Bull should be commended for is learning from the mistakes of the past. Favouritism might leave a bitter taste in your mouth, but at least the team are being honest about how things stand. The Turkish scandal came out of obfuscation and misinformation, so at least Scandalstone is clear as crystal.

Every cloud has a silver lining?

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – Favouritism at the post-qualifying press conference

Fernando Alonso looks very grumpy. Especially for a man who's just qualified in P3 for one of the more high profile races on the F1 calendar. His first comments cover the points lost at Montreal and Valencia, although that wasn't the question asked, so it's not hard to guess what's at the forefront of the Spaniard's mind despite his many assertions to the contrary.

All three of the drivers present – Alonso, Sebastian Vettel, and Mark Webber – look absolutely knackered, which isn't surprising in and of itself. But when you think that this isn't the hottest GP by any stretch of the imagination, it seems odd. Looks like the new circuit layout is more physically demanding than anyone really expected.

Vettel can't stop smiling, and they're genuine smiles that reach his eyes, unlike some of those forced rictus grins you often see at press calls. Home GP or not, Silverstone is special. This marks Vettel's tenth career pole, a statistic that puts him on level pegging with 1970 World Champion Jochen Rindt.

Interesting statistic, fact fans – Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton have each had 18 career poles.

Mark Webber looks less much amiable than usual, and his body language is veering towards livid. He doesn't usually spend press conferences horsing around, but the usual twinkle in his eye is nowhere to be seen. The Australian driver doesn't suffer fools gladly, and was visibly unimpressed when asked if he would rather be in P1.

But the question about grid position does spark some banter between the drivers: Webber is now joking with Alonso about swapping places on tomorrow's grid – Alonso would rather start in P2, while Webber would prefer to have the clean side of the grid in P3.

And here's another dig about Montreal and Valencia from Alonso. Time to let it go, methinks – what might have been cheeky once or twice is looking more churlish by the second.

But the press are now back onto the Red Bull favouritism story, another tale that will not die. Maybe with good reason – the team had two versions of the new front wing this weekend, and both went to Vettel, despite the young German's problems in practice. When asked if that was a sign of ongoing favouritism within the team, Webber's reply was short and to the point. "I'm sure the team knows what they want." Vettel tried to rescue the situation, but you could cut the atmosphere with a spoon.

And after a brief respite for World Cup questions, a British reporter asks Vettel 'did you benefit from favouritism today?' He gives a standard PR friendly answer, but is visibly uncomfortable. When the reporter presses the issue, Vettel obfuscates, saying that no one knows if the new wings are better or not.

The tension is palpable from my seat 50 feet away, and the press conference is brought to a rapid end.

Turns out Red Bull only give Seb wings.

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – Ferrari disappointed by Silverstone Safety Car

Since improving the outright pace of their car, Ferrari have been unable to demonstrate their speed in a race situation. Silverstone brought another disappointment for the Scuderia.

Fernando Alonso was fast enough in Saturday's qualifying session to line up in P3, behind Sebastian Vettel on the clean side of the grid. But he and Felipe Massa each proved to be the other's worst enemy, as contact between the two on the first lap saw Massa limp to the pits for new tyres, effectively ending his race.

Alonso wasn't forced to pit after the prang with Massa, but on lap 17 he cut a corner in trying to overtake Robert Kubica, and failed to give the position back as he should have done. The stewards investigated the incident eight laps later, and the Ferrari driver was issued with a drive-through penalty.

Had the team called Alonso into the pits for his penalty as soon as it was announced by the stewards on lap 27, the Silverstone Grand Prix might not have been an outright disappointment for the boys from Maranello. But the Safety Car was brought out at just the wrong time – as far as Alonso's race was concerned – and the prancing horses, who had seen both cars qualify in the top ten, finished the race without collecting a single point.

Under the rules of the Safety Car – which have been revised and re-revised all season – Alonso was not allowed to complete his drive-through until the Safety Car was called in. What could have been a quick penalty and a likely P3 finish turned into a Tifosi nightmare, wherein Alonso rejoined the grid at the back of the pack and was unable to finish in the points, despite a host of increasingly desperate overtaking manoeuvres, many of which paid off.

Tonio Liuzzi held the Spaniard off for much of the end of the race, in an echo of the Massa-Sutil battle happening further ahead. Alonso managed to overtake in the final laps, but made contact with Liuzzi while making the move stick, and ended up pitting for new rubber on lap 50.

The only source of comfort for the Scuderia is the news that Ferrari now hold the record for the fastest lap of the new Silverstone layout. Fernando Alonso managed a 1:30.874s on lap 52, clinching the record, while Felipe Massa had the second fastest lap, a 1:31.646s also set on lap 52.

Ferrari as a team are still hung up on what they feel was an unfair penalty for Lewis Hamilton in Valencia. While the team accept that the penalty handed to Alonso this afternoon was fair, the residual bitterness was evident in their tweet: "You can just say one thing: if a penalty must be punishing it must be always like this."

Alonso's punishment came about because of a failing in strategy. Had the team elected to take the penalty as soon as it was issued, the Spanish double champion would have finished in the points this afternoon, most likely in P3. But because the team elected to try and build up a gap behind Alonso before calling the Spaniard in to serve his penalty, they were caught out by the safety car. The technique that worked for Hamilton in Valencia cost Alonso points in Silverstone.

Such is the nature of luck, good or bad.

Despite the disappointments of recent race weekends, Alonso – who is currently fifth in the WDC, 47 points behind championship leader Hamilton – remains bullish about his prospects for the drivers' crown.

"This is just the half way point of the season, so all the points that we have lost in this first half is because we haven't done things as well as the



others,” Also said after the race. “So in the second half of the championship we are going to try to do better than the others and recover one point more than what they have now. The season is very long and we are not going to give up.”

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – the post-race analysis

Racing aside, the Silverstone Grand Prix is always a big event. As the home race for two-thirds of the teams on the grid, it's a sponsorship-happy, celeb-filled event where half of the audience in the paddock seem unaware of the race going on in the background.

But the 2010 Silverstone GP was always going to be a bigger event than usual. Not only are the home crowds celebrating another 17 years of racing at the circuit thought to be gone for good this time last year, but going into the grand prix weekend British drivers Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button were 1 and 2 in the drivers' standings.

The revised Silverstone circuit has passed the overtaking litmus test. Thanks to three fast cars finding themselves out of position relatively early on – Felipe Massa, Sebastian Vettel, and Fernando Alonso – we saw a host of overtakes as each man clawed his way back up the grid.

But fast frontrunners out of position overtaking slower cars is hardly a vindication of the new circuit. Where the altered layout really bore fruit was in the battles for position up and down the grid. Some overtaking happened in the pits, as ever, but everyone was at it, from battles between backmarkers to hard-fought battles for points among the midfield. Hotspots were Brooklands and Village.

One of the highlights was watching Sebastian Vettel – called Baby Schumi by the German media – overtake his namesake on lap 40 at Brooklands. It was Vettel's second attempt at a move on the old master, but the protege made it stick and claimed P8 from his mentor.

There were two key moments that mattered on Sunday afternoon at the circuit, events that went on to shape the race as a whole. The first was the start, where drivers on the dirty side of the track found they were blessed with more grip than their compatriots on the clean side. The unexpected advantage of being on the dirty side of the track meant that the first lap was sheer chaos as drivers tried to capitalise and gain position.

Mark Webber and Lewis Hamilton made the most of their starts, and led the race 1-2 from the end of the first lap. Vettel was the first big loser of the afternoon, when he was overtaken first by Webber, then by Hamilton, going off track and picking up a puncture in the process. Vettel had to pit at the end of his first lap, rejoining the field in P24. It was the end of his afternoon, despite a credible fight to a P7 finish.

Fernando Alonso also lost out at the start of the race, but that was the least of his worries by the time the Spanish driver saw the chequered flag. Teammate Felipe Massa was another casualty; a first lap collision with his teammate forced the Brazilian into the pits with Vettel and the two men spent the rest of the afternoon trying to make up for lost time.

Jenson Button was the other driver noteworthy for making the most of an excellent start and first lap. The British champion suffered a disappointing qualifying session on Saturday afternoon, and his attempt to extract some real speed from the car proved to be fruitless. But Sunday was another matter entirely, and the Somerset lad took advantage of the start line chaos to jump from P14 to P8 by the end of the first lap.

Both McLaren drivers had struggled with the car over the weekend, Button more than Hamilton, but the car that was twitchy in qualifying proved to be easier to handle in the race, as has been the case more than once this season. But easier to handle doesn't mean easy, as Hamilton emphasised in the post-race press conference.

The second key moment was the emergence of the Safety Car on lap 28, which was deployed to protect marshalls clearing on-track debris following a collision between Adrian Sutil and Pedro de la Rosa.

We have seen races shaped by Safety Cars on more than one occasion this season, and Silverstone brought more of the same. Sebastian Vettel's race was rescued by the safety car, as the bunching of the field essentially served to deliver Vettel a 55 second advantage in terms of time lost and regained.

Before the Safety Car was deployed, Vettel was 83.394s behind Webber in P1. By the time the Safety Car returned to the pits on lap 30, that gap had been whittled down to 10.812s by the compression of the pack.

And once Vettel found himself in the middle of the pack, not chasing it, he set about gaining position as quickly as possible. Critics of the young driver often say that he cannot drive his way out of a bad situation, that he succumbs to pressure and is unable to overtake when needed. However true that may have been in the past, it was not the case this weekend. Over subsequent laps, Vettel overtook Felipe Massa, Jaime Alguersuari, Vitaly Petrov, Kamui Kobayashi, Michael Schumacher, and Adrian Sutil.

Admittedly, none of the cars could hope to compete with the RB6. But it was an impressive display from the young German nonetheless – rather than losing his head when he lost the pole advantage, Vettel was able to use the new front wing to salvage a P7 finish from a race he had started in the ideal position to win.

Fernando Alonso's race was lost to the Safety Car, although this time the blame for the loss can be placed only at the feet of Ferrari, who made the wrong strategic call when deciding when to pull the Spaniard into the pits for his penalty.

It was another case of bad timing for the team, who cannot be criticised for failing to be psychic – no one expected the Safety Car, and its deployment led to mass confusion among those who had missed the shots of debris flying from de la Rosa's car following a bash from Sutil.

But psychic or not, the Scuderia gambled that by putting off Alonso's drive-through penalty until the last possible minute, they would be able to minimise the positions lost during the low speed run through the pits. Ironically, this is exactly the gamble that McLaren made with Hamilton in Valencia, the gamble that led to vociferous protestations from the Ferrari garage, who initially called the race manipulated.

McLaren got lucky in Valencia, Ferrari were unlucky at Silverstone.

In two weeks' time the F1 circus will be at Germany's Hockenheimring, home grand prix to six of the grid's 24 full-time drivers: Nico Rosberg, Michael Schumacher, Sebastian Vettel, Nico Hulkenberg, Timo Glock, and Adrian Sutil.

#### Drivers' standings

1. Lewis Hamilton 145 points
2. Jenson Button 133 points
3. Mark Webber 128 points
4. Sebastian Vettel 121 points
5. Fernando Alonso 98 points
6. Nico Rosberg 90 points
7. Robert Kubica 83 points
8. Felipe Massa 67 points
9. Michael Schumacher 36 points
10. Adrian Sutil 35 points
11. Rubens Barrichello 29 points
12. Kamui Kobayashi 15 points
13. Tonio Liuzzi 12 points
14. Sebastian Buemi 7 points
15. Vitaly Petrov 6 points
16. Jaime Alguersuari 3 points
17. Nico Hulkenberg 2 points
18. Pedro de la Rosa 0 points
19. Heikki Kovalainen 0 points
20. Karun Chandhok 0 points
21. Lucas di Grassi 0 points
22. Jarno Trulli 0 points
23. Bruno Senna 0 points
24. Timo Glock 0 points
25. Sakon Yamamoto 0 points

#### Constructors' standings

1. McLaren 278 points
2. Red Bull 249 points
3. Ferrari 165 points
4. Mercedes 126 points
5. Renault 89 points
6. Force India 47 points
7. Williams 31 points
8. Sauber 15 points
9. Toro Rosso 10 points
10. Lotus 0 points
11. HRT 0 points
12. Virgin 0 points

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## F1 Silverstone Blog – “Not bad for a number two driver”

The title of this piece says it all. Mark Webber, winner of the British Grand Prix and the only driver to win three races in 2010, is seriously miffed with the team that's given him his race-winning machine.

Webber has long been Red Bull's de facto number two, thanks to the huge sums of Austrian money invested in photogenic German speaker Sebastian Vettel by the Red Bull driver development programme. But in Turkey and Silverstone, Webber's true status within the Austrian team has become a matter of public knowledge.

Today's victory at Silverstone is testament to Webber's strength of character, and to his skill behind the wheel. Where many would be cowed by public humiliation, it has stoked Webber's fires, giving him yet more of a reason to push ahead and win.

Some people prefer to win when the perfect situation has been tailor-made for them, from the car to the specially-designed tyres.

Champions prefer to win when the odds are stacked against them. Webber – a champion in spirit, if a champion in waiting – is one such man.

Sebastian Vettel started this afternoon's race from pole position, and could have won it, had he not lost the lead to Webber in the first few corners. Webber had a better start than his teammate, and made the most of the opportunity. By Becketts, Vettel was on the grass and heading for new tyres on the second lap, while Webber raced into the distance, the McLaren of Lewis Hamilton following closely behind.

And while Vettel made the most of a later Safety Car to claw back 55 seconds of lost time, eventually finishing the race in P7, it was the end of the

road for the new front wing, source of so much controversy.

Ever the master of understatement, Webber said of his race "I did the best job I could today, and it worked out okay."

Okay means that Webber now has a seven point lead over teammate Vettel in the drivers' standings. Going by Christian Horner's comments on Saturday evening, that means the Australian should now be treated as Red Bull's number one driver, and given priority access to upgrades.

While Webber was aware of the McLaren in his wing mirrors, the difference between the RB6 and the MP4-25 is such that Hamilton was not a massive threat. The gap between the two men hovered around three seconds for much of the race, although they eventually crossed the line 1.5 seconds apart.

The greatest threat to Webber's race came when a Safety Car was brought out to clear up debris from a Lap 27 prang involving Pedro de la Rosa and Adrian Sutil. But the experience of holding off the field when leading behind four separate Safety Cars at Monaco paid dividends, and Webber led from the first lap.

In the man's own words, "I was hoping it was going to be my day, and it was." Wise words from the winning number two.

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