



## Getting to know the Autodromo Nazionale Monza

The temple of speed. La Pista Magica. Parabolica, Ascari, Lesmo. It can only be Monza, home to some of the greatest races in single-seater history.

If you only know one thing about Monza, it's probably this: the Autodromo is the fastest track on the F1 calendar. Fast tracks mean low drag set-ups, full throttle racing, and heavy demands on the engine, and Monza is the most challenging of them all.

To put it into perspective, consider this – the average lap speed on the F1 calendar is 211kph, while the average lap speed at Monza is much higher, clocking in at 255kph.

According to David Mart, Renault Sport F1 engine engineer, “Italy is the toughest circuit of the year for engines due to the high percentage of wide open throttle time per lap. Seventy-five percent of the 5.793km lap is spent at full throttle and near maximum revs – it’s comparable to high speed oval racing in the States. As such we need to create engine maps that allow the engine to work well at the top of the revs, from 16,000rpm to 18,000rpm, with a smooth power delivery which peaks to a maximum obtainable from a 2.4 litre naturally-aspirated V8 engine, to ensure that the car doesn’t get out of shape and can go as quickly as possible.”

Of course, demands on engines vary between suppliers – the Mercedes engine spends 83 percent of the Monza lap at full-throttle, while the Cosworth is closer to the Renault on 76 percent. Ferrari have not released the data for their engine.

Given the track characteristics – straights, chicanes, and the tiniest smattering of actual corners – the brakes (when used) are put through an aggressive work-out. Stability under braking is vital, as the top-line speeds of approximately 350kph on the main straight do not give much of a margin for driver error.

According to Cosworth, Turns 1 and 2 are the real danger zones for brakes: “Brakes will be tested rigorously, particularly with the aggressive deceleration into the slow first gear chicane at Turns 1 and 2.”

And if that weren’t enough to keep you hanging on the edge of your seat, with two separate DRS detection and activation zones, there is a good argument for saying that Sunday’s race might be similar to the Monza slipstreaming battles of yore.

“I think DRS will make a huge difference to our lap times, and I really want to get the maximum out of the car in quali – and then look forward to a strong race, of course,” McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton said.

“With unlimited use in quali, and those four long straights, I think qualifying’s going to be pretty intense: we’ll be 20km/h faster at four key points of the circuit, so our quali times are going to be much faster than in the race. That should be pretty exciting. For the race, you’ll also need the downforce, though, because you’ll want to be quick enough out of the second Lesmo and Parabolica to be in with a chance of challenging for position down the following straight.”

Getting the right gear ratios to maximize DRS efficiency in both qualifying and the race is likely to be an engineering headache this weekend, and it’s a problem mentioned by McLaren team principal Martin Whitmarsh in the British team’s pre-race preview.

McLaren are not the only team with DRS on the brain this weekend – Force India circuit engineering director Dominic Harlow also commented on the drag reduction system at Monza in his team’s race preview.

“The [DRS] effect will be quite a bit smaller [this weekend], because the amount of downforce the wing is generating is less. You’ve got 80 percent of the maximum downforce on the car, but the reduction comes nearly all from the wings. Given that the wings are roughly 30 percent each of the overall load, with the rest coming from the floor, it cuts quite a lot of their authority.

“It’s interesting that the FIA hasn’t set [the DRS zone] before and after the Parabolica,” Harlow continued, “on the basis that you might catch someone, maintain a minimum gap in the Parabolica, and then be able to make a pass on the pit straight. I guess they reasoned that was possible

already and overtaking into Parabolica would be very difficult, so they've tried it in the other area for perhaps a larger laptime advantage for the trailing car."

In their Italian race preview, Virgin team principal John Booth took a holistic view of the demands of the Monza circuit, and it is worth quoting.

"Drivers are on full throttle for most of the lap, making it a very demanding track for the engine," Booth explained. "So here the emphasis is on engine power and aerodynamic efficiency, which require the cars to be set up with a special low-downforce aerodynamic profile to minimise drag. This can make the car a bit difficult to handle, particularly on the brakes for the first and second chicanes. The famous Lesmos, Ascari and Parabolica turns are all about balance: if the driver has the right balance then he has the confidence to carry speed through the corner and into the next straight."

But putting together the perfect lap at Monza is not just about having the most powerful engine, the lowest drag setting, or the balls to leave your braking until slightly after the last minute. As Team Lotus driver Heikki Kovalainen explains, the kerbs are also a major factor.

"For Monza you'll hear a lot of the drivers talking about how one of the keys to a quick lap is how well you use the kerbs," the Finnish driver said. "Getting over them as efficiently as possible helps minimise the overall length of the lap and it might only be fractions of seconds, but shortcutting as much as you can, obviously within the rules and as much as the car can take, saves time and helps you maintain momentum onto the straights. To the viewer on TV and even at the track the kerbs don't look all that hardcore, but when you're in the car you hit them pretty hard and you need to be ready for it to get out of shape and even start to snap away from you."

And from kerbs to KERS, which should have a real impact this weekend.

In their pre-race preview, Mercedes explained why Monza was the Holy Grail of racetracks for KERS usage.

"The best-case scenario for KERS boosting is relatively slow corners followed by very long straights – exactly what Monza features plenty of. There are four times in the lap (out of Turns 2, 7, 10 and 11) when the car accelerates from relatively low speed to near terminal velocity, and this means that there is a relatively large lap-time benefit from boosting out of any of these four corners. Typical KERS deployment in Monza would see four boosts per lap, which are delivered to the wheels 20ms after the button is pressed.

"The cars spend over 12 percent of the lap (more than 10 seconds) on the brakes in Monza, with the braking event for Turn 1 seeing them shed around 265kph," the Mercedes explanation continued. "However, Monza is actually the most marginal circuit of the year for KERS harvesting, owing to the low number of braking events during the lap: just six in total (Turns 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 11)."

Sauber technical director James Key was another man to query the effect of the DRS at the Italian Grand Prix, given the low-drag set-ups the cars will be running, although his comments came as part of a general overview of a Monza lap.

"Although the lap is quite simple, it's quite technical particularly with the downforce level you are running," Key said. "You need a well balanced car through these corners. It's also critical for braking, because the top speeds are by far the highest of the year, and you're braking down to a very low speed for the two chicanes. In addition, the kerbs play their role in these chicanes, although in recent years the amount of kerbs you can use has been limited a bit. So it has a lot of different aspects to it. Overtaking can be expected in two places, although we don't know yet how effective the DRS will be in such a low downforce setting."

Pirelli's examination of the track from a tyre's point of view is all-encompassing, and takes in the kerbs, the suspension, and the set-up.

"There are also some high kerbs on the chicanes that put huge lateral loads through the tyres, adding to the gruelling workout that the rubber receives over the 53 laps of the race," Pirelli said in their preview. "Despite this being one of the most demanding tracks of the year, where the contact patch of the tyres on the straight can increase to three times its size when stationary due to downforce, between two and three pit stops are expected for the leading runners as usual.

"At Monza the cars run the lowest downforce of the year in order to eliminate drag. A typical aerodynamic package for Monza will generate about 15 percent less downforce than is used in Spa, the venue of the last race. This has a profound effect on the tyres, allowing them to slide more," Pirelli continued.

"Suspension is another area of set-up for Monza that impacts on the tyres," the preview concluded. "The low downforce means that the cars rely heavily on mechanical grip, so the suspension set-up is designed to ensure the best possible traction under acceleration and braking, while allowing the drivers to attack the chicanes."

The current configuration of the Autodromo Nazionale Monza has been in use since 2000, when the Variante Rettifilo was modified, and measures 5.793km. Presuming it runs for the full distance, the Italian Grand Prix will last for 53 laps, bringing the total distance run to 306.720 kilometres.

The group of past Monza winners – on this track configuration – currently racing in F1 is fairly small: Fernando Alonso (2007, 2010), Rubens Barrichello (2002, 2004, 2009), Sebastian Vettel (2008), and Michael Schumacher (2000, 2003, 2006).

The group of previous pole sitters is marginally bigger: Fernando Alonso (2007, 2010), Lewis Hamilton (2009), Sebastian Vettel (2008), Rubens Barrichello (2004), and Michael Schumacher (2000, 2003).

Fastest laps in Monza have been claimed by Fernando Alonso (2007, 2010), Adrian Sutil (2009), Rubens Barrichello (2002, 2004), and Michael Schumacher (2003).

The current lap record at the Italian circuit is Rubens Barrichello's 2004 time of 1:21.046s, set at an average speed of 257.321kph.

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# F1 Italy Blog – Thursday press conference at Monza

We're in Monza, home of the tifosi, and as a result passion was at the forefront of the press conference.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) Tonio Liuzzi (HRT), Felipe Massa (Ferrari), Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Alonso, Monza winner and Ferrari driver, had the most to say.

"It's very special obviously. I think racing at Monza is special with any team because Monza is a very unique track – the highest speed we will reach in the Championship again this year and it remains a very special track for us. Not only for the layout, for the proper speeds that we reach here and the atmosphere and the fans and the place the circuit is in. It's a good place and obviously winning for Ferrari last year was an amazing feeling. We call them tifosi for all the passion people in Italy feel for Ferrari and it was great and obviously the aim, the target for this weekend, is again to do well, to enjoy the race and make the grandstand also enjoy the show.

"I think there is a special atmosphere, a special motivation this weekend for all of us," Alonso continued, "starting from the mechanics and the engineers, they have their families in the grandstands, they have people they know in the paddock and it is a race.... We all do 100 per cent every weekend we go, but here in Monza there is this extra care in everything we do and we want everything perfect, from tomorrow's practice to Sunday. So I'm sure that all of us will make an extra effort to do everything perfect this weekend."

Asked whether the support of the tifosi made a difference, Alonso agreed whole-heartedly.

"It does a lot, for sure. Being at the home grand prix is always special. We have an extra power from the people. I won two races in Brazil and the power from the people helps. It gives a lot of support, a lot of confidence as well. And here it's the same. By being here and looking at everyone in red pushing us to the front is very, very special and I hope we have another good weekend like it was last year."

Liuzzi highlighted the importance of Monza in the context of Italian circuits.

"Monza is the only really historical circuit that Italy has left, one of the few at least, and because of the long history I would especially keep this circuit because it is quite different to all the other circuits in F1, this season especially," Liuzzi said.

"It makes everything different. And I think every driver likes it because it is the only circuit with such a top speed and low downforce, so at the end of the day it is good to have the grand prix here, even though we have circuits like Imola and others that could be competitive – but I like this circuit because it is different. But at the end of the day that's how it is. I'm sure Mr Ecclestone will keep on going with the Italian Grand Prix as long as possible and hopefully it will be here in Monza."

Trulli was the lone dissenter, but even he agreed that the atmosphere was special.

"It's nice to be in Italy but I actually don't live in the north of Italy, I actually live, I come from the centre of Italy, so from Abruzzo, so I don't have a special, special feeling [at Monza]," he said. "Obviously, it's important, it's nice to be in Monza, also because Monza is special, the atmosphere is special for every driver not only for an Italian one because we've got the Italian supporters, the Ferrari supporters – the tifosi – so that makes this event special. For myself it's nothing different compared to any other race."

Once the nostalgia was out of the way, the drivers were asked to review Monza from a racer's point of view – was it up there with Suzuka and Spa, or was it all about the atmosphere?

"It's quite different of course," Liuzzi said. "It's not like Spa, that I think every one of us loves. But, from my point of view, it could be much more interesting than a lot of new different circuits that have a different shape, but Monza is beautiful because even though there are just five or six corners, not many, but all the corners are crucial for the lap time. Even if it's a simple chicane, it has such a long straight after the chicane that you really need to be precise and sharp to have the best exit out of it. So, at the end of the day it's different. It might seem less interesting than other races but for the driver it's really difficult to achieve the 100 per cent lap every time in qualifying and in the race. That's why it makes it really hard in that even if you do have a lot longer time between the corner to think about it or relax."

Trulli agreed with his countryman.

"I do agree," the Team Lotus driver said. "It's still an interesting circuit. It's very different from Spa. Spa is the best in the world. It's a challenging and technical. Here it's not the most technical even though it has some technical. But still, you've got to know where to put your tyres in order to get a lap time around this long circuit. There are some crucial corners or corner exits, which are really important in order to get it right."

Massa was more technical in his reply.

"Monza is definitely different to the other tracks, not just because of the long straights, but from a driving point of view you have low downforce," he said. "By having the low downforce to be quick on the straight, it's also true that you have very strong braking. With low downforce the grip is not normal like at other tracks where you have higher downforce and very strong grip and braking. Here you have a little bit less. But you also need a good car over the kerbs. For sure you have less corners than a normal track but it's also not easy. You need to put everything together. You need to have a good car in terms of speed and braking and over the kerbs. This is a part of that. It's very special to race here because of the history we have on this track. The people – the love of motor racing is completely inside."

Moving on from Monza, the Trulli was asked to clarify comments he had made earlier about Ferrari casting a shadow over Italian racing.

"I think only an Italian driver can understand this feeling because Ferrari is a unique team," Trulli explained. "It's a myth and as an Italian in a way, we all have to be proud about that because there is nothing close to what Ferrari is around the world."

“But unfortunately for any Italian driver, it makes life a little bit hard – I’m saying in motor sport, not only for a Formula 1 driver but in motor sport because obviously mainly when you’re born, you don’t know about Formula 1 or what you do know about Formula 1 you know about a red car,” he continued. That’s what Formula 1 means for any Italian family and young guns and drivers. And this takes a lot of attention away from the motor sport and growing young drivers.

“So on one side, it’s very good because, as I said, we have to be proud about that, because there is nothing and no one close to compare with Ferrari around the world. On the other hand, it makes our life a little bit hard, but honestly, I’m lucky in a way, because I made it to Formula 1 and I have never really suffered from that, because I’ve dealt with it pretty well. I actually get on well... I’ve always had a very good relationship with Ferrari even though I’ve never driven for them, but I don’t have any feeling of what... it’s just a matter of understanding what is motor sport and Formula 1 in Italy,” Trulli concluded.

Liuzzi chimed in to say that – as a fellow Italian – he agreed with Trulli’s comments.

“I agree completely with Jarno,” the HRT driver said. “It’s more difficult, for sure, because you are a bit more in the shadow, but he covered all areas, you could say, so I completely agree with him.”

Pirelli’s proposals to change the tyre allocations for the 2012 season only got the briefest of mentions courtesy of Webber, who was undecided at best.

“It obviously throws a little bit more into the mix,” the Red Bull driver said. “It would not be easy to pick [the tyres] a month before, in terms of allocation and what specific venues might need, but there’s enough data to float around so that you could probably get quite accurate with what your car would need. Obviously, that’s what the teams would be targeting. Clearly Ferrari, at some venues this year, would probably take a different type if they could but they don’t have that luxury at the moment. It’s the first I’ve heard of it, not easy for you guys to explain in terms of commentary... I suppose different people having different problems with tyres.

“But, yeah, not a stupid idea but obviously it needs a bit more thought to see how it would work over the course of a full season, and obviously for the lead teams to make the decision... it’s another part of our week in that we would have to make a decision, as we have to do with lots of other components on the car,” Webber continued. “The compounds would be another part of that mix.”

Finally, the drivers were asked about Lewis Hamilton’s driving style. The question and replies have been copied in full.

Q: What do you think about Lewis Hamilton’s driving style, in terms of aggression, and do you consider that he’s too aggressive?

MW: No, he’s not that aggressive, he’s OK. He’s just had a tough run in the last few races.

FA: Good.

FM: Yes.

KK: I think he’s OK as well. Maybe I think you need to be aggressive when you’re racing.

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## F1 Italy Blog - F1 in Monza

As tends to be the case with Friday practice, it was a low-key session in Monza this morning, with teams checking out set-ups and wing configurations for the weekend ahead.

While speed isn’t everything on a Friday morning – and it can be hard to make any real statements based on times set in practice, there will have been smiles on the McLaren pitwall as the session came to an end.

Lewis Hamilton was the fastest man on track, beating teammate Jenson Button by nearly a second, and besting Sebastian Vettel by just under 1.5s.

The Autodromo Nazionale Monza is not traditionally a Red Bull track, but the same could be said for Spa two weeks ago, where the championship-leading team managed a 1-2 finish.

Ferrari were unable to put a smile on the face of the attendant tifosi on Friday morning – both drivers were significantly off Hamilton’s pace, and found themselves in P7 and P8 on the timesheets, behind both McLarens, both Red Bulls, Adrian Sutil, and Vitaly Petrov.

However, as it’s only practice, there’s no reason for the sea of red to start crying just yet.

While there were some incidents of note in F1, they were all fairly minor. Roughly one hour into the session, Michael Schumacher came within a hair’s breadth of hitting the wall at Parabolica. The Mercedes driver managed to hold it together and emerged with himself – and his car – unscathed.

Team Lotus driver Heikki Kovalainen then retired with unspecified technical difficulties, shortly before Virgin’s Jerome D’Ambrosio ground to a halt with suspected engine trouble.

The most interesting aspect of F1 was the split of times in the middle of the pack. Ten of the 24 men out on track set lap times in the 1.26s, but all of those times fell between 1.26.550s (Sutil in P5) and 1.26.996 (Kamui Kobayashi in P14).

Less than half a second split both Force Indias, both Ferraris, both Saubers, Petrov, Jaime Alguersuari, Schumacher, and Rubens Barrichello. Should this pace continue throughout the weekend, it will make for a nail-biting qualifying session on Saturday.

F1 timings (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.23.865s [18 laps]

2. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.24.786s [19 laps]
  3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.25.231s [25 laps]
  4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.25.459s [24 laps]
  5. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.26.550s [23 laps]
  6. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.26.625s [20 laps]
  7. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.26.647s [20 laps]
  8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.26.676s [24 laps]
  9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.26.694s [28 laps]
  10. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.26.696s [15 laps]
  11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.26.699s [21 laps]
  12. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.26.826s [21 laps]
  13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.26.836s [25 laps]
  14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.26.996s [29 laps]
  15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.27.365s [25 laps]
  16. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.27.385s [23 laps]
  17. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.27.433s [25 laps]
  18. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.27.492s [24 laps]
  19. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.29.539s [10 laps]
  20. Karun Chandhok (Team Lotus) 1.30.148s [19 laps]
  21. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.30.609s [27 laps]
  22. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.30.619s [24 laps]
  23. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.31.052s [12 laps]
  24. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.31.899s [22 laps]
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## F1 Italy Blog – FP2 in Monza

Another practice session, and another set of times to analyse without making assumptions. It can only be Friday afternoon of a grand prix weekend.

While at first glance it might look as though Sebastian Vettel's pace-setting time will cause headaches for his rivals this evening, the reality is somewhat more complex.

Both Vettel and Lewis Hamilton were roughly matched for pace this afternoon, but the McLaren driver was on course to beat Vettel to the top spot on the timesheets when he encountered a slowing Jaime Alguersuari and was delayed by those vital milliseconds.

Vettel's pace-setting afternoon lap was slower than Hamilton's best F1 effort had been.

The fact that the Red Bull was able to compete with the McLaren on a track that is known not to suit the RB7 is still a cause for concern for anyone not looking forward to the umpteenth Vettel pole of the season, but – as is always the case in Formula 1 – there are no guarantees that speed today means speed tomorrow.

The first incident of the afternoon came around ten minutes into the session, when Sebastien Buemi smacked his Toro Rosso into the wall at Parabolica after running wide at the corner exit. The Swiss driver escaped unhurt, but the damage to his car was such that he was unable to continue.

The next incident came as the chequered flag fell, when Sauber driver Kamui Kobayashi ground to a halt on his slowing down lap. The yellow flags came out, and it looked as though the Japanese driver had run out of fuel.

HRT's Daniel Ricciardo spent the bulk of the session in the garage as the mechanics fought to resolve an electrical fault on his car. In the end, the Australian only managed seven laps before the chequered flag fell.

Nico Rosberg was bizarrely slow, causing numerous scratched heads in the media centre as assorted journalists tried – and failed – to get to the bottom of his reduced pace. Teammate Michael Schumacher ended the afternoon in P3, 0.3s slower than Vettel, while Rosberg was five seconds down on the frontrunners.

### FP2 timings (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.24.010s [37 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.24.046s [21 laps]
3. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.24.347s [39 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.24.366s [33 laps]
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.24.433s [31 laps]
6. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.24.468s [32 laps]
7. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.24.508s [30 laps]
8. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.25.097s [39 laps]
9. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.25.182s [37 laps]
10. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.25.325s [38 laps]
11. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.25.450s [31 laps]
12. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.25.496s [39 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.25.683s [37 laps]
14. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.25.758s [29 laps]
15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.26.202s [36 laps]

16. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.26.353s [40 laps]
  17. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.28.347s [5 laps]
  18. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.28.559s [32 laps]
  19. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.28.603s [32 laps]
  20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.28.804s [25 laps]
  21. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.29.162s [34 laps]
  22. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.29.184s [29 laps]
  23. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.29.622s [34 laps]
  24. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.29.841s [7 laps]
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## F1 Italy Blog – Friday press conference in Monza

It might surprise you to learn that Toro Rosso's Giorgio Ascanelli is one of the coolest people in the paddock. But once you discover that he will happily answer questions using Latin, you will understand his awesomenity. Yes, that is a word. As of now.

Ascanelli wasn't asked a question until the press conference was two-thirds run, but his opening gambit was legendary. The exchange has been copied in full below.

Q. Giorgio, sorry to keep you waiting...

GA: Dulcis in fundo.

Q. Sorry?

GA: It's Latin, it means 'the sweetest at the last moment!'

Somebody give that man a medal, stat.

Latin aside, the team representatives press conference was full of the usual drama that makes it one of the paddock's hot tickets. Present on Friday afternoon were the aforementioned Ascanelli (Toro Rosso), Eric Boullier (Renault), Stefano Domenicali (Ferrari), Tim Goss (McLaren), and Peter Sauber (Sauber).

While there were all sorts of interesting discussions, the only moment that approached any form of drama came when Domenicali was asked to clarify comments he had made earlier in the week about Sebastian Vettel's leadership skills.

The exchange – which was very funny live, and featured squirming among media and team personnel alike – has been copied in full below.

Q. Stefano, it seems that there is a battle on the track with Red Bull but also in the media over the last days between you and Christian Horner.

SD: Me?

Q. Yeah, he's not very happy about your interview today.

SD: That's the first time that I hear that.

Q. Because today he said that it's...

SD: That's a new one. I will speak with him, without speaking to journalists. I want to see what he's saying. I don't know, honestly. I don't have to verify anything. If he has a quarrel with me, he has to verify, I have nothing to verify.

Q. There was an interview in Germany where you said that Vettel is not a leader as Michael or as Fernando, that's what...

SD: I said that in my view... well, I know what I said so... I said that speaking about the drivers, to be a leader you need to have experience, points, championships, leadership and a relationship with the people and so on. So I said that in my view at the moment, the ones that I said – Fernando and Michael – were already doing it and Sebastian is on the right route to do it. With this year's win, he will be there very very soon so I don't think that I've said something strange. I think that's a fact, but it's interesting to see Christian's reaction. Maybe he will have something to say to me. He knows my telephone number.

Ascanelli provided the press conference with a combination of interesting information and light relief, which is always a winning combination. His comments are best repeated in full and in context.

Q. We've heard that the team has invested quite a lot over the year and there is a three year development plan now. How has that manifested itself for you: a huge rise in staff it would seem?

GA: Yeah, I have to say that since the new Concorde Agreement, that imposed on us to become manufacturers and adjusted the rules, we had a nice riddle which was how to find a wind tunnel, how to calibrate it, how to buy a CFD cluster, how to hire sixty engineers in four months. I think we've been lucky because something has happened. Now we are learning to use our tools and I have to say we are a happy team.

Q. Now Spa was your best qualifying – not the best race of course – but you could see that there had been a lot of progress for that...

GA: Ah, it's overrated. I think Spa was a good result but at the end of the day, I have to be objective and recognise that Fernando, Jenson, Adrian, Paul, Michael would have been ahead of us if they didn't have a sort of misunderstanding either within their teams or within the circuit, so at the end of the day we were sixth and eleventh. I think that we would have been happy to be eleventh and twelfth and that's probably our value, which is much better than seventeenth and eighteenth as we had been in the past and it's probably better than how we're going to end up here.

Q. So could you see that progress continuing for the rest of the season, or are you now winding... what's the balance now?

GA: We have now stopped the development of the concept of the STR6 and we are focusing on STR7 but as we are a small team, we will introduce something new in the next grands prix because there's something in the pipeline. I would say the strongest part of a Formula 1 team nowadays is the time to market, and the strongest guys have got a very small, a very short time to market. We're not that clever yet but we're trying. This has the consequences that probably we will feed something in the latter part of the season, because we have not been able to do as much as to translate into facts the concepts and ideas of our studies.

Q. And the question to Mr Ascaneli: can you say something about the rumours of the movement of your team to Abu Dhabi?

GA: Germans. [Author's note: The question was asked by a German journalist.] The movement of my team to Abu Dhabi? Do they make good pasta in Abu Dhabi?

Q. And in Italy, is there space in Formula 1 in Italy in motor sport that is not Ferrari?

GA: Well, first of all, we have three sponsors - we have acquired three new sponsors this season in the last few days, they arrived in the last moment, it appears on the rear wing, it doesn't appear yet on my shirt although my shirt is very wide and probably would guarantee more exposure than the rear wing! They are three different sponsors which we deal with separately. I don't think there is any discussion about the fact that the ownership pertains and remains in the hands of Mr Mateschitz so far. I have never been bothered about what's going to happen in the future in any team I have occurred to work with in the last 28 years. I've always tried to do my best; sometimes my best has not been enough and sometimes it has been enough. I'm relaxed about the matter. It is good to have a little bit more money to do some more things. Mr Sauber just highlighted just how large an issue that might be. What I can say is that Mr Mateschitz and Red Bull since two years have promoted the expansion of Toro Rosso in Faenza and a new facility will be ready in the next two years. Then, if we have to move everything to Abu Dhabi, well, we will see. If there is space in Italy for another team like Ferrari? I think one of the difficulties which I experienced personally when I worked at Ferrari and one of the experiences which I am experiencing here in Toro Rosso is the fact that the market is not as alive as it is in England. Now if our wind tunnel is in Bicester, it is a deliberate choice although it is more difficult than most people think to make a car by fax. Nowadays it's easier because you've got satellite transmission and connection but having a melting pot of technicians in 150 miles is a large advantage, so I think there is more space for Formula 1 in Italy, and I would be welcome to see it.

In contrast, some of the other players at the press conference came across as a little monosyllabic...

Q. Eric, first of all, Bruno Senna had a fantastic start in Spa with a great qualifying performance. What has he brought to the team and we will come to the commercial side of that in a moment?

EB: Nothing.

Q. But in terms of his presence?

EB: I don't know. I think his eagerness and freshness is clearly a good asset, a good new value for the team, which we didn't have during the summer and were struggling a little bit with the development of the car. Now it looks like we are back a little bit and are in a good shape and clearly Bruno brought with him his enthusiasm. He knows the team very well as he was working very closely with the team since January.

Q. Presumably, that presence since January had made him popular and that is why people are pleased to see him in the car?

EB: Yeah, exactly. He has spent a lot of time in the back of the garage, in the trucks, with the engineers and the mechanics and he was very helpful as well for the race drivers as he was clearly committed and dedicated to help and pushing for the team so the team knew him and was pleased to see him doing well in qualifying.

Q. You have four new commercial partnerships, two of which have Brazilian connections. Just talk about those.

EB: Everybody thinks Bruno came with a bunch of money, which is wrong, obviously. The only link was Embratel. Yes, Embratel was a personal sponsor of Bruno and this is clearly linked to Bruno. This is clear, nothing to hide. The two others, or the three others actually, are not related to Bruno. We were talking to them for a long time and the opportunity when we told them Bruno would be racing they just decided to do an 'mediatic shot' and use the opportunity to have this 'mediatisation' and just go for it.

Q. What are your plans for Romain Grosjean, as there were thoughts he might be in the car, though may be not from you?

EB: Some people were thinking for me, which is good. I appreciate sometimes, sometimes not. Romain had a job to do to be a GP2 Champion. He is now officially the third driver and we will see what happens to him but there is no plan for him.

Q. So he will come to all the remaining races?

EB: Yep, definitely. As the third driver.

Q. Peter, looking at your team which direction would you like it to go in from now? Is it a financial direction? Where would you like improvement? Financial, technical, resources, where do you see the effort being applied now?

PS: Forward.

Q. Just forward?

PS: Just forward. I think the infrastructure is excellent and, of course, with more money we can be faster. In our case it is very easy.

Q. Do you want more staff?

PS: Yes, it is possible to have more. We have about 280 and it is an advantage to have more staff.

Q. Just tell us about the performance today. We saw Kamui Kobayashi pull off right at the end of practice, but up until then the performance was possibly better than you thought it was going to be?

PS: It is better than we expected, yes. Kamui, I think was a transmission problem. But the speed was good today, especially the long runs.

Q. Why did you think you were not going to be particularly good here?

PS: I think our problem is the hot-blowing diffuser, the hot-blowing exhaust. That's our problem. The system doesn't work very well and then we stopped the whole development around Barcelona as in this time, not only us, we had the opinion that it will be forbidden from Silverstone onwards.

Q. Talk about the Mexican connection you have with Sergio Pérez and Esteban Gutierrez. How is that coming along?

PS: The relationship with Telmex is excellent. We are very happy with Pérez. Don't forget he is a rookie and he is a part of the Telmex family. We are also happy with Telmex as they opened the door to different and other companies in this region.

Finally, Tim Goss and Stefano Domenicali got down to the serious business of talking technical details concerning the weekend ahead.

Q. Tim, looking back at the last race, at Spa, what sort of indicators did you get from Spa in terms of the set-up of the car and the specification of the car for this race?

TG: The pace of the car has been very good over recent races and we have been pushing Red Bull quite hard. Clearly going to Spa it was a lower downforce and we brought a sort of new breed of rear wing. We have abandoned the concept we were working on. Well not necessarily abandoned it but we have switched to a different concept for the lower downforce wings and we are quite pleased with our pace. Obviously we would have liked to come out of Spa with a better result in the race. We felt that we were very strong during the race and could have challenged for a win. Certainly we were looking good for a podium. Car pace was very good. Had we avoided the mistakes we made in qualifying then Jenson (Button) should have been up there rather than having to do the 20-30 overtakes to get to third place. We have discovered a bit of a sweet spot with the car. Those themes that we know work well with our car we are pushing now and looking forward to taking those further similar developments on this season.

Q. In terms of Spa to here was there much change?

TG: Yeah, I mean it is a lower downforce circuit again so we have brought further developments to this circuit as well as just the Monza specific package so today's pace looked very good and we are confident that the changes we've made have actually brought us that little performance step that we are after.

Q. The actual challenge of this circuit seems remarkable. Obviously, you have got to go for low drag, low drag, low drag and yet at the same time you have got the kerbs and everything else. Then at the same time you have now got this business of DRS, which you can use for something like 74 per cent of the circuit but during the race itself you have only got two DRS zones. How do you tune the car?

TG: Yeah, it is a very complex optimisation exercise. Clearly you have got DRS all the time in qualifying but then in the race you have only got it when you are behind another car. We are looking for the best compromise of both raw speed in terms of lap time and tactical advantage to either defend or overtake other cars. I think you will see out there that there are a variety of solutions. We have put an awful lot of simulation effort into trying to pitch ours about right and I think we have got it right. Sunday will tell us whether we have or not but it is more than just chasing end of straight speed these days. It is about other things. As I said, tactical advantage, protecting tyres and qualifying pace, so it is a difficult job. We think we have got it right but Sunday will tell us one way or another.

Q. Stefano, yesterday Fernando and Felipe talked a lot about the extra motivation for the team to be here in Monza in front of your tifosi. Could you explain to us exactly how the situation is and if you can give us some more ideas how you approach this race?

SD: From my side, I always keep people with their feet on the ground to make sure that they work hard and stay concentrated, but for sure it's great to see the enthusiasm that is around the track for our cars, for our drivers so that's the feeling that everyone is enjoying when they are here but this is giving you extra pressure that has to be managed, as I said before. This is why I never said anything over the lines because I know that by saying something like that it gives more expectation that is already high. I know that when you are here... I remember last year when it was a fantastic emotion to share with all the tifosi when we won the race and that would really be a fantastic opportunity if this would happen again, but as I said, no more than that.

Q. A question to Stefano: I don't know what Ferrari's chances of victory are on Sunday after what Sebastian has somewhat surprisingly done today, but would a win here in Monza be enough to appease you after now seeing the championship become almost impossible for you?

SD: I don't think so. Sorry. I think that for sure if you win in Monza, it's an important result for the team and for everyone that is feeling that Monza is a particular race but that's it. For sure, this championship is not really the best one, even if I think we could have won more races this year, to be honest, and the situation would have been different in terms of the championship, in terms of the situation. I can easily remember a couple of them. So we need to take the situation as it is without crying and be sure that the extra races that are from here to the end are very important, because, as I said to all the guys, we need to maximise the points because we are fighting for something, in any case, positions and other stuff and use that to also make sure that we can anticipate some work that can be used for the 2012 project. So, that's what I feel.

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## FI Italy Blog – FP3 in Monza

Fast, faster, fastest. Red Bull might have struggled on their traditional hunting ground of Silverstone, but Monza is proving to be a walk in the literal park for the current world champions.

While the team feared that Ferrari and McLaren would dominate the weekend, Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber pulled off their traditional timesheet-topping act in Monza on Saturday morning, with Vettel half a second faster than Felipe Massa in P3.

All is not lost for McLaren and Ferrari, who were chasing down the RB7s, although Fernando Alonso did his chasing from P8, nearly a second slower than Vettel.

Given Massa's speed, however, it's safe to say that the Scuderia aren't overly concerned that their star pilot is down in P8. There's obviously more speed to come from the Ferraris, and the steadily increasing track and air temperatures are likely to play into their hands this afternoon.

There was less clustering in the timesheets this morning. Both Friday sessions showed significant chunks of the pack lapping within half a second of each other, and while the Force Indias, the Renaults, and the Saubers were all grouped together between 1.24.5s and 1.25s, that is only to be expected given the relative speed of the cars in question.



While there was a lot of chicane-skipping and apex-missing action this morning, there were no real incidents of note, and all 24 men were able to complete a decent amount of running in the hour-long session.

#### FP3 timings (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.23.170s [18 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.23.534s [19 laps]
3. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.23.668s [14 laps]
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.23.741s [17 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.23.787s [16 laps]
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.23.875s [22 laps]
7. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.24.114s [20 laps]
8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.24.133s [14 laps]
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.24.543s [21 laps]
10. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.24.581s [22 laps]
11. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.24.853s [20 laps]
12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.24.889s [19 laps]
13. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.24.948s [22 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.25.261s [21 laps]
15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.24.319s [19 laps]
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.25.426s [19 laps]
17. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.25.439s [22 laps]
18. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.25.539s [19 laps]
19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.27.328s [19 laps]
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.27.491s [21 laps]
21. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.28.186s [23 laps]
22. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.28.441s [22 laps]
23. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.28.962s [17 laps]
24. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.30.316s [16 laps]

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## F1 Italy Blog – Q1 in Monza

As the pitlane opened for business during the first Monza qualifying session, the air temperature was 29 degrees and the track temperature had climbed up to 43 degrees, playing into Ferrari's hands.

Word on the street is that – following their impressive showing in FP3 – the Red Bulls are the top tip for pole position. But they've been the top tip for pole all season, so that's not saying much.

The 107 percent rule could be something to look out for this afternoon, given the performance gaps we've seen between top and bottom in all three practice sessions.

There's no point clocking the 107 percent time until the likely frontrunner have put times on the board, and the fastest man on track right now is Jaime Alguersuari, who is unlikely to hold that position once the Red Bulls come out to play.

Halfway through the session and the bulk of the grid now have times on the board.

Lewis Hamilton, Felipe Massa, Nico Rosberg, Pastor Maldonado, Michael Schumacher, and Mark Webber have yet to set times, and the group comprises an unlikely dropout zone.

And with that, it's all change thanks to laps from Hamilton – who goes fastest – Massa, and Rosberg. But Hamilton's time at the top is limited, and he is soon replaced by Sebastian Vettel.

Maldonado has a bit of a moment on track, spinning before smashing his nose in the wall. Out come the yellows, and it will be a P24 start for the Venezuelan driver.

It's only a matter of moments before the track is deemed clear, and the lapping begins again in earnest.

With nine minutes remaining, the dropout zone is made up of Maldonado and Webber – who have yet to set times – plus Heikki Kovalainen, Timo Glock, Jerome D'Ambrosio, Tonio Liuzzi, and Daniel Ricciardo.

Hamilton goes fastest again, roughly 0.025s ahead of Vettel.

With his first timed lap, Webber lifts himself comfortably out of the dropout zone, which is now comprised of the Lotus pair, both Virgins, both HRT drivers, and Maldonado. While the order in the back might change, the list of names is unlikely to.

And with no movement at the front of the pack, the only man at risk of falling foul of the 107 percent rule is Maldonado, who will almost certainly be given permission to race.

The order at the top isn't hugely relevant in a knock-out session, but Hamilton currently leads Vettel, Button, Alonso, Webber, and Massa, which is the expected list of names in an order that doesn't exactly defy expectation.

Huh – defying expectation, Maldonado’s made it back out. That’s some pretty quick work from Williams. And thanks to that speedy effort from the team, the Venezuelan driver has made it into Q2, knocking Alguersuari out in the process.

It is worth noting that Ricciardo has outqualified Liuzzi for the first time, only five races into his F1 career.

Dropout zone

18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
  19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
  20. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
  21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
  22. Jerome D’Ambrosio (Virgin)
  23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
  24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
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## F1 Italy Blog – Q2 in Monza

And we’re off again! Q2 is now underway at the Autodromo Nazionale Monza, temple of motorsport and home to the world’s worst – and priciest – internet connection.

With the drivers from Team Lotus, Virgin, and HRT (plus Buemi) all knocked out in Q1, this session will be a battle for survival from the midfield. Laptimes have been particularly close all weekend between the Saubers, Force Indias, and Renaults, with the three teams split by a hair’s breadth on the timesheets.

That, my friends, is where the action will be in the next few minutes.

Williams are almost certainly out with the chequered flag. The British team have shown no sign of pace this weekend, and the general feeling in the paddock is that they’ve given up on making much of an impact this year, come what may.

Track temperatures have increased to 45 degrees, which should mean a safe run through to Q3 for Ferrari in front of their legions of fans. Not that making it into Q3 should ever be a worry for the Scuderia, but such things are even more important at one’s home race, especially when your team is a national symbol.

But the little red cars just don’t seem to have the pace this afternoon. For Q3, certainly, but not for a full-on battle for pole. Of course, they could be holding something in reserve, but that’s very risky strategy to take at this stage in proceedings.

With only a few minutes remaining of Q2, the dropout zone is almost exactly as I called it – Bruno Senna, Adrian Sutil, Rubens Barrichello, Pastor Maldonado, Sebastien Buemi, Sergio Perez, and Kamui Kobayashi.

Of the three teams I expected to be fighting for a spot in Q3, only Vitaly Petrov and Paul di Resta have been able to make it through, although Senna is currently on a flier and might just knock out di Resta.

Senna sneaks across the line in P10 as the flag falls, pushing di Resta out of Q3.

Knocked out are: Paul di Resta, Adrian Sutil, Rubens Barrichello, Pastor Maldonado, Sergio Perez, Sebastien Buemi, and Kamui Kobayashi.

Dropout zone

11. Paul di Resta (Force India)
  12. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
  13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
  14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
  15. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
  16. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
  17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
- 

## F1 Italy Blog – Q3 in Monza

The media centre officials at the Monza circuit celebrated the end of Q2 by killing the internet. What a way to anger a bunch of journalists who’ve paid €120 a head for the privilege of not being able to do their jobs.

As the pitlane opened for business, track temperatures had fallen by two degrees to 43°C.

It’s a straight fight between five teams this afternoon, with both men from Red Bull, Ferrari, McLaren, Mercedes, and Renault all competing for a slot on the front row. These boys are the big five, and they’re proving it at F1’s big circuit.

Alonso was the first man to put a time on the board, but he was quickly beaten by Vettel, Button, and Hamilton as the others crossed the line on their

own timed efforts.

Half-way through the session, and Rosberg, Webber, Schumacher, and Senna have yet to complete timed laps. This should be a balls-to-the-wall final few minutes while the McLarens and Ferraris try to end Red Bull's dominance as the others pick up the spoils.

Webber's first effort puts the Australian in P5, but there is time for at least one more flyer if the tyres can hack it. Vettel is holding on to provisional pole, with Hamilton one-tenth behind. Alonso has provisional P4, and it's not looking like Ferrari's weekend.

Senna is still sitting pretty in the garage, which means Renault have decided to save tyres and prevent the rest of us from enjoying the chance to watch his qualifying attempt. Good strategy maybe, but a very poor show. The tactic should lead to a penalty of some sort.

Schumacher is putting all his eggs in a one-lap basket, and crossed the line in P8.

Both McLarens were on flying laps and then aborted them at the last minute, handing pole to Vettel. The Red Bull driver was almost a shoe-in for pole, but there's no need to make it easier for him than it needs to be.

#### Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
3. Jenson Button (McLaren)
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
5. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
7. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
9. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
10. Bruno Senna (Renault)
11. Paul di Resta (Force India)
12. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
15. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
16. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)

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## F1 Italy Blog – Saturday press conference in Monza

Another Saturday, another Red Bull pole position. Joining Sebastian Vettel in the post-qualifying drivers' press conference were McLaren drivers Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button.

Given that Vettel was celebrating his tenth pole of the season, it will not strike you as odd that a lot of the chatter was concentrated on his impressive run.

Asked whether he thought Red Bull would secure every pole of the season, Vettel refused to be drawn. Maybe he doesn't want to jinx it.

"I don't know," Vettel replied. "We had a similar question I think going into this weekend or the last race. I don't know. I don't care as well as I think we have to go step-by-step. This weekend we knew it is not easy for us. So far it has been excellent but it is not over. The main task is coming tomorrow. So far we haven't scored a single point. We have put ourselves in as strong as possible a position but that's it so far for this weekend. After tomorrow's race we focus on the next one and then we go step-by-step. If you ask the same question going into the last race and we still have the chance to keep that record up we will see. I don't know, but it is not our target. Obviously, our target is to maximise the points tomorrow."

A follow-up question asking whether the young world champion's goal was to equalise – or beat – Nigel Mansell's 1992 string of 14 poles in a season, Vettel was equally unwilling to commit himself.

"I don't know," he said. "We still have some races to go. So far we've had a fantastic run on Saturdays and Sundays, to be fair. It's not always as smooth as you would like it to be, but I have to say this year we have put everything together and most of the time we've got it right. It's not really the target. If you come back to me and say that I've got a big amount of poles, I think it's nice to hear but I think the most impressive one on pole positions on Saturdays, and it will probably always be, is Ayrton Senna. The amount of poles he got during a year and then for three or four years in a row, I think that's the real benchmark."

All of the assembled drivers were surprised by the half-second gap to Vettel, given that lap times had been pretty close throughout the weekend's practice sessions.

“We thought it would be much closer than that,” Vettel admitted. “I had a bit of an improvement in the first run for my second lap. We weren’t sure whether the tyres worked best in the first lap or second lap, but then I did a bit of a mistake and we stayed out and focussed only on the last run we had. I knew I had a bit more time in the car. The first lap I did on my own without anybody and on the second run I think I had one or two cars ahead down the road, which always helps you in Monza. But we would not have thought of going on pole by that big margin today on a track which, to be fair, the last two years did not suit us.”

Hamilton was blown away by his opponent’s pace.

“I didn’t have another half-a-second in the bag,” he said. “I think we perhaps could have got another couple of tenths out of the car. Firstly, the guys did a fantastic job to bring the new components to the circuit and clearly we are very competitive. Both me and Jenson were able to be up here so that’s a great step, but no, Sebastian was mega quick today. It looked like we would be quite competitive throughout the weekend but today in that last lap – that was untouchable for me.”

Button was equally puzzled.

“Looking at today I totally agree with Lewis,” he said. “Even if we had got a little bit more out of the car we were never going to challenge Seb. They were very fast today. The strange thing is that these guys don’t look like they were carrying a lot of wing but they are sort of half-a-second quicker than us in the last sector which is the high speed corner so difficult to understand. That is something we will have to look at.”

In the run-up to the session Hamilton was quoted as saying he looked forward to an exciting qualifying thanks to the added bonus of the DRS. Asked whether he thought the promised excitement had been delivered, the British driver had to admit it hadn’t.

“It was pretty straightforward really,” he said. “Obviously Q1 and Q2 I think were relatively close then as always they pull out another half-a-second in Q3, so whatever happens there happened. But I am very happy to be back up here again and another opportunity to have a good race tomorrow. I really hope that things turn out better than they did in the last race.”

From a technical point of view, Vettel was asked if he was concerned about being overtaken off the start thanks to his short seventh gear ratio, but the German driver feels no fear.

“No, I think we have a good chance,” the Red Bull driver said. “It’s a long straight but tomorrow, I think, the conditions will be a bit different. As I said, our approach might be racy but the race is obviously most of the time without DRS but with DRS, which we did consider, it should be fine. As Jenson touched on, it will still be difficult to use both of the zones, especially the second one down to Ascari. It looks very tight and I think if the guy defends well on the inside then you need a lot of speed around the outside to pass him but all these answers we will get tomorrow.”

Finally, given that Sunday’s race falls on the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, the drivers were asked to share their memories of the occasion.

“I think of all us – it would normal – remember pretty well what we were doing on that day,” Vettel said. “I remember I was going mountain biking, and just before I left, I saw on TV a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. I couldn’t really believe it but I had to make it – I don’t know what time I was supposed to be there, but to be perfectly on time, German efficiency... So I left and went mountain biking because I thought ‘it’s not true, something is wrong’ whatever.”

“When you are 14, you don’t think about these things too much. Then I went biking, then two hours later I came back and obviously we saw the pictures again and I think, as I said, it’s something we will never forget. I also remember the race taking place here in Monza, I think a week after, where the Ferraris had a black nose. Things like this you surely don’t forget. It’s 10 years now, and I hope nothing like that will ever happen again. As I said, we all remember pretty well what we did.”

“I do remember, yeah,” Hamilton said. “I’m only a couple of years older than you [Vettel]. I was at home and it was quite a tragic time, obviously. Probably one of the most devastating things that has happened in my lifetime, a huge moment for everyone in the world and as Sebastian said, I hope that never happens again.”

“I don’t think any of us can really forget it,” Button agreed. “I think we all remember it like it was yesterday. It’s amazing to think that it was a decade ago that it actually happened. I think we remember all the details so this is a time to remember and also a time to move on as well, a very important moment, I think.”

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## F1 Italy Blog – The Italian Grand Prix as it happened

There are empty seats in the main grandstand in Monza, which is a strange sight. Stranger still, not everyone in the grandstands is wearing red – I’ve seen a number of Italian McLaren fans, which I didn’t think possible.

As the drivers lined up on the grid for the Italian Grand Prix, the track temperature was 42 degrees and climbing, while air temperatures are holding steady at 30 degrees.

And they’re off!

Alonso grabs the lead off the line as Hamilton is pincered by the Ferrari driver and pole sitter Vettel.

Behind the leaders it’s carnage, thanks to a first corner crash involving Petrov, Liuzzi, and Rosberg, and the Safety Car is deployed. Liuzzi ran wide and span across the grass into the cars ahead, cutting the corner and gaining position as a result. Not the best way to make up places, mind...

Ricciardo stalled on the grid and avoided the mess as a result.

Kobayashi is the first man to pit under the Safety Car.

Lap 2, and the order behind the Safety Car is Alonso, Vettel, Hamilton, Schumacher, Massa, Button Webber, di Resta, Maldonado and Perez.

D'Ambrosio is the first man to officially retire, but I have a feeling he won't be the last.

The marshals have done an impressive job clearing up the wreckage, and the Safety Car is coming in at the end of lap 3.

Alonso holds the lead when the Safety Car withdraws, and Webber has a moment of contact as the cars get going. Schumacher passes Hamilton for P3.

Webber caused himself a spot of trouble at the chicane, hitting Massa in the process, and is now out of the race. The Red Bull is in the gravel at Parabolica, giving the team their first retirement of the season.

Lap 5, and Vettel made it past Alonso to reclaim the lead; he needs to pull out a significant gap as soon as possible as the DRS has just been deployed.

Hamilton is trying to chase down Schumacher to reclaim P3, but the Mercedes is so much faster than the McLaren on the straights that the DRS doesn't seem to make a difference. The two drivers are split by two-tenths, but it's not enough to allow a pass.

By lap 9, Vettel had pulled out a 4.2s lead on the pack, disappearing off into the distance in his trademark fashion.

Lap 10, and Vettel has extended his lead by another second. By lap 11, it's up another second, giving the Red Bull driver 6 seconds in hand over the opposition.

Sutil has retired from the race, stopping his car at Turn 5.

Hamilton is still trying to get past Schumacher, and keeps getting close. Just not close enough. They're glued together in the corners, semi well-matched on the straights, and the Mercedes driver's defensive driving is making the pass impossible as things stand.

Lap 12, and the order is Vettel, Alonso, Schumacher, Hamilton, Button, Massa, Maldonado, Perez, di Resta, Alguersuari.

Hamilton gets past on lap 13, but Schumacher reclaims the position almost immediately. The battle between the two has enabled Button to close the gap, and Schumacher is now leading the McLarens around the Monza parkland.

This has become something of a race of attrition, with retirements from Sutil, Webber, D'Ambrosio, Petrov, Rosberg, and Liuzzi. That's 25 percent of the grid, stats fans.

By lap 15, Vettel's lead on Alonso has extended to just shy of 9 seconds.

Button, Hamilton, and Schumacher are now fighting for position. Button makes it past Hamilton, who now has to chase down at least two men if he wants a podium this weekend.

The 2009 world champion then slips neatly past Schumacher, taking P3. Schumacher responds by pitting on lap 17.

Lap 18, and it's Button's turn to pit. The McLaren driver emerges in P5, behind Massa in P4.

Hamilton pits from P3 on the next lap, and returns to the track in P6, behind Schumacher.

Alonso pits on lap 20, handing P2 to Massa, but a quick stop from Ferrari enables the Spanish driver to hold on to P3. Lap 21 and Vettel pits from the lead. There appears to be a slight delay to the stop, but it doesn't affect his position.

Schumacher and Hamilton continue to battle, and while it makes for exciting racing there have been a number of moments of weaving from the German driver. Exactly the sort of behaviour that would see Hamilton hauled up in front of the stewards, but Schumacher doesn't seem to be getting into any trouble.

The stewards haven't been twiddling their thumbs, however – the lap 1 incident involving Liuzzi will be investigated after the race.

Lap 23, and Vettel has a 11.7s lead on Alonso in P2. But the real action is the ongoing battle between Schumacher and Hamilton, which just will not quit.

Kobayashi has stopped his car at Parabolica, bringing out the yellow flags. He appears to have retired from the race, but all the TV coverage is showing is the Schumacher-Hamilton fight. Oh, and Jay Kay from Jamiroquai. Because that's interesting.

Ricciardo is still circulating, some 12 laps down on the leaders – this appears to be an extended practice session for HRT, who are determined to see one car to the chequered flag this afternoon.

Meanwhile – and not on screen – Button has been closing on Alonso in P2. The gap between the two is now 0.6s, and the Ferrari driver is vulnerable to a DRS-powered overtake.

Lap 28, and Hamilton finally makes it past Schumacher. The McLaren driver is 21.5s off Vettel in P1, and chances of a podium finish are looking slim.

Vettel is on for the win, as usual, assuming that he doesn't suffer any mechanical issues. With a 1.3 second lead on Alonso in P2, it would take a special effort from the current world champion to balls this one up.

Button is slowly chipping away at Alonso's lead, which is now down by 0.2s to 0.4s. With any luck, now that Hamilton's made it past Schumacher, we might be able to see some of the other battles going on in Monza.

And as I typed, Alonso found more speed, increasing the gap to 0.7s. By lap 32, the gap is up to 1.4s.

Di Resta pits from P10 at the end of lap 32, and emerges in P12, splitting the Williams drivers.

Barrichello and Button pit at the end of lap 34, and they nearly came together at pit entry. But a collision was avoided, and Button returned to the track in P5.

Perez is now out of the race, having done something off camera that led to his car being in the gravel at Turn 3. The yellows are out.

Alonso pits on lap 35, as does Hamilton, and the order is now a bit chaotic. One lap later Vettel pits and maintains the lead.

Vettel leads Schumacher, Alonso, Button, Massa, Hamilton, Alguersuari, Buemi, Senna, and Maldonado.

Schumacher pits from P2 on lap 38, and returns to the track in P6, behind Hamilton.

Button has managed to get past Alonso, and the order at the front is now Vettel, Button, Alonso, Massa, Hamilton.

Maldonado pits from P10, promoting di Resta - the race's only surviving rookie, given that Ricciardo is 900 laps down and effectively retired on the grid - into the points.

Button is 15.7s down on Vettel, and there are 14 laps remaining. It's possible, but unlikely, that the British driver will be able to pass the championship leader.

Lap 41 and Buemi and Senna pit together from P8 and P9 respectively. Massa joins them from P4, handing the position to Hamilton just after the McLaren driver claims the fastest lap of the race thus far.

By lap 44, Hamilton is only 2.2s down on Alonso and closing fast. There could well be an upset for the tifosi and 2-3 for McLaren. Vettel had the win all wrapped up about a month ago.

Alonso gets a burst of speed, and extends the gap over Hamilton to 3.1s.

Buemi and Senna nearly make contact in what all and sundry agree was a pretty hairy manoeuvre, but both men get away with it. Even Jean Alesi thought it was close, which is saying something. They are battling for P9, and split by less than half a second.

Alonso continues to extend the gap back to Hamilton by increments - it's now up to 3.8s.

Senna slips past Buemi for P9 on lap 48, and we have five laps remaining.

Hamilton claims fastest lap again, but is 4.3s down on Alonso and unlikely to make it onto the podium this afternoon. Vettel has won the race, and is almost certain to take the drivers' title in Singapore.

Four laps to go and Hamilton is closing in on Alonso once more. There's not much time left, but we could be in for a dramatic fight to the finish between the two former teammates.

But despite the promised drama, little seems to be happening in the closing laps.

There are two laps to go, and the order is unchanged. Hamilton has chewed away at Alonso's lead, but it's unlikely that he'll pass at this late stage.

As the final lap gets underway, Vettel coasts to a comfortable finish, chased by Button, Alonso, Hamilton, Schumacher, Massa, Alguersuari, di Resta, Senna, Buemi, Maldonado, Barrichello, Kovalain, Trulli, and Glock. Ricciardo is out on track, but 14 laps down on the race leader.

Vettel takes the chequered flag. Quelle surprise.

#### Italian Grand Prix results

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Jenson Button (McLaren)
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
5. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
7. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
8. Paul di Resta (Force India)
9. Bruno Senna (Renault)
10. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)

11. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
12. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
13. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
14. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
15. Timo Glock (Virgin)

Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) Finished 14 laps down

Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) RET  
Adrian Sutil (Force India) RET  
Mark Webber (Red Bull) RET  
Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) RET  
Vitaly Petrov (Renault) RET  
Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) RET  
Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) RET

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## F1 Italy Blog – Sunday press conference in Monza

Magical red suits, the end of the championship, and a bit of chat about racing. It can only be the post-Monza press conference, starring Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Jenson Button (McLaren), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

Following Vettel's commanding win at Monza on Sunday, what everyone wanted to know was whether or not the championship leader was ready to rest on his laurels. The best exchange followed a question by the fabulous Ian Parkes, of the Press Association, and it has been copied in full for your amusement.

Q: Sebastian, you could go on holiday from now until Abu Dhabi and still come out of that leading by a fair chunk of points. Any chance of you doing that so we can have an exciting end to the season?

SV: I'm contracted to do all the races, so maybe you need a word with Christian. No, I love coming here, I love racing. Obviously we will see what happens during the next races but yeah, we have to go step by step really. I don't know. No plans. I think it's wrong to plan before something happens. It would be wrong for you to plan what you would do with a million dollars if you won the lottery tomorrow. First you have to win, then you worry about what you do with your winnings.

JB: I think you have to plan a bit more if you win the lottery. You don't want to waste it.

SV: We will see.

But Parkes was not the only one to question the need to carry on racing – Vettel would have to try very hard to lose the drivers' title at this stage of the game.

Asked for his thoughts on the fact that back-to-back world championships are now a near certainty, Vettel replied: "No thoughts. Wow. I don't know. It has been an incredible year so far to be honest. We have progressed so much as a team and have become so much stronger in the last two years and again from last year to this year made such an incredible step. I think we have put ourselves in a very good position. But I love racing. We enjoy racing as a team altogether every weekend, unpacking the car, you can see the passion and it is great. You can feel the challenge. We want to make sure that we have a very good weekend and we squeeze everything out of ourselves.

"Of course, it is very nice to win but if we have a good Sunday and we finish third or fifth still you feel that we are very good in optimising the result so I don't know really," he continued. "I think we just do Singapore as we did all the other races this year. Go there and take it step-by-step and see what we can do. I love the circuit. It is very interesting. I remember I had a nice race there with Fernando, obviously to his advantage, as he finished first but it was great. I think we had a tough race there. It is a long circuit so I am looking forward and we will see what happens then."

Vettel was then asked at what point he would accept – as his opponents have – that the 2011 drivers' crown would be his.

"I think I allow myself to say we are in a great position," he said. "I think if you ask Fernando or Lewis or Jenson or anybody, Mark, I think they would like to change, swap positions so no doubt about that. But it's over when it's over, not before. I think look at last year as the best proof. You don't know until the last lap of the last race. Obviously, this year it might be a bit different, but there are still a lot of races to go."

Vettel was then asked about the emotional impact of winning in front of hordes of booing tifosi, and the wording of his reply is almost certain to get the tabloids foaming at the mouth over a possible move to Ferrari for the current world champion. Again.

"I think all the people who had a Red Bull shirt or Red Bull flag were very happy [about my win], but the majority came here this morning dressed in red. Fair enough, it's Ferrari's home grand prix. It's an atmosphere that all the other teams are allowed to enjoy as well, because so many fans... you know, before the race, down on the grid, I thought – looking at the grandstands, seeing so many people, ignoring the colour of their shirt, seeing the crowd – life doesn't get much better than this.

"So many people cheering what we are doing, and being one of the drivers allowed to race; as I said earlier, the only thing that could make it a little bit better on the podium is if you are wearing a red suit, so I guess it was a very special for Fernando here last year. Obviously I know how it feels to listen to the Italian anthem from three years ago. This year it was a bit different, but still, it's very special, it means a lot to me," he concluded.

The next exchange – copied in full below – was more fuel for the tabloids' fire.

Q: Sebastian, you have twice said how nice it would be to win here wearing a red suit. Is this a dream for you, do you expect to win one day wearing a Ferrari suit?

SV: Just speaking to Jenson as well, also on the podium, of course there were people who were very happy with our result but I think the majority,

after a while, didn't enjoy the fact that we were enjoying ourselves. You could also hear that. Jenson said to me that's normal here.

JB: I've had it for the last two years.

SV: I think I had that experience last year as well. I think that the only thing that makes it really special – better than today here – is wearing a red suit, to really be appreciated by all the fans. We will see what happens in the future, but for now I am very, very happy. I think the story has been unbelievable so far. I owe a lot to Red Bull. Without them I wouldn't be here. They gave me the chance when I was just a little kid, 12 years old. It goes back a long way so it's very special for me to race for that team and being able to win races is fantastic, but of course, one day you don't know what's happening. We will see.

But the press conference was more than just The Sebastian Vettel Show. Button and Alonso both got a look in, although the bulk of their comments were reviews of their race performance.

Button described his passes on the battling duo of Lewis Hamilton and Michael Schumacher, a move that would prove critical to his race result.

"I think Lewis got a bad run out of Turn 2 and I used the KERS," he said. "I think I passed him on Turn 2. Used the KERS to my advantage, then got a good run on Michael down into Ascari. I saw Lewis tried a few times on the outside but it didn't work but gave it a go and braked as late as I could and the pass came off. Pretty good pass. Probably one of my best so very happy with that. And again with Fernando I think he made a bit of a mistake out of Turn 2 and now we have KERS as soon as someone makes a mistake you can pounce and make the pass."

Button was then asked to describe his front row seat to the Hamilton-Schumacher battle that occupied much of the race.

"It wasn't too bad," the McLaren driver said. "At the start of the race I knew I had to catch them. The problem was Lewis is in the DRS zone behind Michael so they just pull away massively on the straight and I have to close on them at the corners. It was tricky to catch them but when I did all hell broke loose really. There were cars everywhere. It was a lot of fun."

Alonso talked about his own fight with Hamilton, which added excitement to the closing laps.

"I think it was close," he said. "One or two more laps and probably we lose the podium position as he was much quicker than us in the last couple of laps. We were a little bit lucky with Michael and Lewis's battle in the race as Lewis lost maybe 10 or 15 seconds in those battles during the first 30 laps and we managed that gap. Definitely it was an interesting race, especially the start. It was again very good and here in Monza we exploit the potential as turn one is a long way and we knew the potential. I think the race was quite smooth for us with no big problems and in the last stint, as we are unfortunately used to, with the medium tyres we were less competitive, and Jenson overtook us and as I said Hamilton was getting very close."

Finally, the Ferrari driver acknowledged that the drivers' title is now out of reach for all but Vettel, and that the rest of the frontrunners are merely competing for second place.

"Six races to go so obviously the championship is impossible," he said. "Not mathematically, but we are no longer in contention so we try to enjoy every race, we try to go for individual victories, also fighting for second place in the championship. It's always better to finish second than fifth. I think I'm second today after Mark's retirement so I will try to get second place as I did last year.

"Of the races remaining I think Singapore is probably the best one for our car characteristics," the Ferrari driver continued. "In Monaco we were fine, we were second. The car was maybe not very competitive in that part of the year so now that the car is a little bit better, on a street circuit we should maybe perform well. I love the Singapore circuit so the next race will probably be it."

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