
Another race, another week spent stuck behind the desk at my day job. Even more rock n' roll? I spent the weekend with my grandmother, introducing her to the delights of the Monaco Grand Prix. She liked it more than I thought she would, and developed a crush on Alonso.

F1 Sofa Blog – Practice in Monaco

Thanks to yet another day spent travelling, I wasn't able to liveblog the practice sessions as usual. Instead, courtesy of a volcano, I was in transit when I should have been glued to a telly. But thanks to the power of the internet, I have now caught up with the day's events.

You may have heard that today is a key F1 anniversary – it was exactly 60 years ago that the first Formula 1 World Championship event took place at Silverstone. And celebrating that anniversary in Monaco, widely held to be the spiritual home of Formula 1, made it all the more special.

Although the principality was not up to its usual glamorous standards when the circus arrived on Wednesday. With the Monaco and Barcelona only four days apart this year, the rush to dismantle, transport, and rebuild the paddock meant that work was ongoing as the media began to arrive. Teams worked through the night to restore the paddock to its usual glory, and all was back up to standard by the time free practice began on Thursday morning.

Fernando Alonso topped the timesheets in both morning and afternoon sessions, and was the only driver able to break into the 1.14s. The Spaniard has won twice in Monaco, for Renault and McLaren. Ferrari have not had a win at the circuit since Schumacher's days, and Alonso could be well placed to break the team's unlucky strike in his first year.

But this was only a practice session, and the defining moment of the Monaco race weekend tends to be Saturday's qualifying session. It is difficult for modern F1 cars to overtake on the narrow streets of the principality, and the race has been won by the pole sitter for four of the past five years. The man who comes out on top on Saturday afternoon is more than likely to top the podium on Sunday, but it was not always so.

Since 1990, the man on pole has won the Monaco Grand Prix nine times, or roughly half of the time. But that statistic belies the fact that overtaking opportunities are limited, restricted by the very streets that make the historic event a nostalgic favourite. Between 1984 and 1993, there were only two winners at Monaco – Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost dominated the event, and a McLaren driver topped the podium nine times.

Of the current crop of drivers, only Thursday pace-setter Fernando Alonso and seven-time World Champion Michael Schumacher have won the Monaco Grand Prix more than once, but Jenson Button, Lewis Hamilton, and Jarno Trulli have all won at the circuit.

Trulli is unlikely to grace the podium this year, but based on Friday's performance, the others could be in with a chance. Alonso's time of 1.14.904s was set towards the end of the afternoon session, and Nico Rosberg was only one-tenth behind on 1.15.013s. The top eight were separated by half a second, with eighth-placed Adrian Sutil lapping in 1.15.460s.

Both Ferraris were quick in the afternoon session, with Felipe Massa's 1.15.120s good enough for fourth. Mercedes were the only other team to count both drivers among the fastest men of the session: Nico Rosberg came in second with a 1.15.013s, while Michael Schumacher was fifth with a 1.15.143s. Sebastian Vettel, who was second-fastest in the morning for Red Bull, posted a 1.15.099s for third, while Renault's Robert Kubica was sixth with 1.15.192s. Lewis Hamilton's 1.15.249s put him in seventh place, just ahead of McLaren teammate Jenson Button in ninth.

Times in the morning were around one second slower, and Alonso was the only man to lap faster than 1.16s. Rosberg's performance was dramatically different in the first session – the man who was second-fastest in the afternoon finished in 11th, as his cars spent the bulk of the morning in the pits.

The top ten was comprised of the same men in both sessions, with the exception of Nico Rosberg and Sebastian Buemi, and it was much as it has been all season. The big four of Mercedes, McLaren, Red Bull, and Ferrari continue to dominate the standings, while Sutil and Kubica fill the remaining spaces. Both men have been driving well this season, and are eighth and tenth in the drivers' standings; the only two pilots in the top ten not to represent one of the biggest teams.

Robert Kubica has been impressive in Monaco today, and has been tipped as a potential winner by a number of pundits. The Pole was third in the morning session, and sixth in the afternoon, three-tenths behind Alonso. With times as close as they are at the top of the charts, Saturday afternoon's qualifying session will be a nail-biter.

In Monaco's narrow streets it is vital to find some clear track for a flying lap in qualifying. But with twenty-four cars on the grid, and six of them considerably slower than the rest of the field, a badly timed flying lap could be ruined by a backmarker. The risk of hitting traffic is one that affects the entire field, and the chance of random upsets is high. Strategy and timing are as important as the driving, and teams will want to get fast laps in as quickly as possible in Q1, as getting stuck in traffic at the end of the session is a surefire route to the dropout zone.

Tomorrow is a day off for the circus, with the track coming to life again for the final practice session on Saturday morning.

F1 Sofa Blog – Alonso crashes out of final practice

It's as sunny outside as it is on the telly, and the toy boats I have floating in the middle of a Scalextric track on the floor have given me my very own piece of Monaco in Oxford. There is absolutely nothing tragic in spending one's Friday night building a scale replica of Formula 1's most famous circuit.

So far this morning I have won the Monaco Grand Prix more times than Ayrton Senna managed in a decade, so I expect a seat with a major team next year. Unless Scalextric experience is somehow irrelevant to life in a single-seater race car.

Hundreds of miles south, at the real race, the day dawned grey and chilly. But the Mediterranean sun has done its work, and as the final free practice session of the weekend begins, the sun is shining, air temperature is 21° and track temperature is 27°.

While Saturday's practice session is the shortest available to the teams, it follows the same routine as every other session – some installation laps, a brief burst of activity, and then something of an on-track lull. Practice might make perfect, but tweaking the set-up makes for perfecter still. (Bow before my awesome command of the English language, oh yes.)

Monaco is something of a schizophrenic circuit, loved for its history and precision, and disparaged for the potential for a procession and a race won in qualifying. The jewel in Formula 1's crown, the track's challenges come from the tight track, narrow walls, and need for total control, not straight-line speeds, wheel-to-wheel racing, and overtaking manoeuvres.

But one of the biggest challenges in Monaco comes from timing – traffic here can ruin a qualifying session, and the narrow streets offer few opportunities to reclaim lost tenths. It is less important in practice than qualifying, naturally, but the shorter Monaco circuit (a mere 3.340 kilometres) and the performance differential between front-runners and backmarkers means the threat of traffic can strike at any time.

Unsurprisingly, this morning's practice session was interspersed with yellow flags, to the extent that their frequent fluttering looked more like bunting than warning. Timo Glock was the morning's first casualty; problems with the Virgin's hydraulics meant that the young German's morning was over before it had begun.

The highest-profile scalp claimed by the circuit this morning was Fernando Alonso; the Spaniard flirted with the barriers at Massanet, losing control of his car and sliding to the outside. The driver was unharmed, but the car was not so lucky – both right-hand wheels went flying, and it remains to be seen whether the Scuderia will be able to rebuild it in time for this afternoon's qualifying session.

Another past winner showing signs of struggling this morning was McLaren driver Jenson Button. While teammate Lewis Hamilton was fourth-fastest, only two-tenths off the pace, Button had problems with grip, and was only able to pull out a 1.15.682s, good enough for tenth. Button fans will remember that the world champion was struggling with grip at 2009's Monaco Grand Prix, but managed to find the sweet spot just in time for pole position and race victory. Will lightning strike twice for the Frome flyer?

Fastest man of the morning was Renault driver Robert Kubica, whose time of 1.14.806s was one-tenth faster than Alonso's best on Thursday afternoon. Kubica has looked strong in all three of the weekend's practice sessions, coming in sixth on Thursday afternoon (but only 0.288s slower than Alonso), and third on Thursday morning. The young Pole won in Monaco as an Epsilon Euskadi driver, in the Formula Renault 3.5 series, and was second here for BMW Sauber in 2008.

And given that four of the past five Monaco Grands Prix have been won by the pole-sitter, Kubica looks to be a serious contender for a podium position, or even the win.

But times were very tight at the top of the charts this morning – the top seven drivers were split by less than five-tenths of a second, meaning that a few milliseconds spent stuck in traffic this afternoon could define the winner of tomorrow's race.

The fastest consistent drivers in the three sessions have all been split by around half a second, and the same group of men have been swapping positions in the top eight: Robert Kubica, Sebastian Vettel, Michael Schumacher, Lewis Hamilton, and Felipe Massa were in the top eight in every session, while Fernando Alonso, Mark Webber, Nico Rosberg, and Jenson Button were up there more often than not. Any of those men could wind up on pole position, thanks to the omnipresent risk of badly timed traffic on a flying lap.

Qualifying in Monaco is an edge-of-your-seat experience, one with the potential for more heartache than the race itself. This year promises to be even better than usual, with nine men well-placed to challenge for the top spot. On-track action will resume shortly, and girlracer will be reporting as it happens.

F1 Sofa Blog – Q1 in Monaco

The biggest story of Q1 in Monaco happened in this morning's practice session. For those of you who spent the time in bed, Fernando Alonso crashed out of practice only twenty minutes into the session, and the damage to his car was such that the Spaniard will be unable to take part in qualifying.

Alonso had been setting fast times at the start of the morning session before ploughing his car into the barriers around the Massanet. Both right-hand wheels came off, and when Ferrari's mechanics finally got the car back to the pits (it's a bit of a roundabout route back to the garages in Monaco) they spotted that the chassis was cracked, damaged beyond repair. FIA regulations mean that the Spaniard will start from the pits, and is highly unlikely to score any points this weekend.

Twice world champion and two-time Monaco winner Fernando Alonso was a strong contender for victory this weekend: he was fastest in both sessions on Thursday and was driving well before this morning's crash. While this year's championship is so tight that the drivers' standings can

change in an instant, Alonso said last weekend that he was targeting a run of podium finishes to strengthen his claim on the drivers' crown in what is likely to be a closely-fought battle. This morning's accident was a great disappointment.

The twenty-minute session has just begun, and the streets of Monaco are echoing to the roar of engines once more. The fear of traffic means that the track is filling up early – no one wants to be stuck in the middle of the pack at the end of the session, unable to post a decent flying lap.

Karun Chandhok is the first man to begin a qualifying lap, but nearly everyone is out of the pits. Traffic isn't too bad in this early part of qualifying, and the 23 cars on track are doing well to avoid each other so far.

No real surprises on the boards yet – Jenson Button is currently at the bottom of the table, but he complained of problems finding grip at the end of the morning session. The usual suspects are trading places at the top of the timesheets, and with 15 minutes of Q1 remaining, there's no point keeping track just yet. Times change too quickly. And as I've been typing, that, Button has found some grip and popped up in the top eight.

Alonso's earlier crash means that only six drivers will be out at the end of this session; based on past performance the assumption is that the three new teams will occupy those places. But Lotus driver Jarno Trulli is a past winner at Monaco, and he could make it into Q2 using his knowledge of the track, especially if a faster car gets stuck in traffic at a crucial moment.

Lap times are dropping quickly in Monaco, as the tyres are settling in nicely on the warm track (37° in Q1). While traffic has compromised a few laps so far this afternoon, the drop zone is made up of the usual suspects. The faster drivers have all been able to find gaps in the traffic on occasion, although Nico Rosberg spent some time in the dropout zone before jumping up to third place. Adrian Sutil is another driver who has encountered problems with traffic, but the Force India driver popped up in the top ten when he found some empty road.

The usual suspects were top and bottom of the timesheets in this morning's session – the Ferrari of Felipe Massa claimed top spot, and the drivers from Red Bull, Mercedes, and McLaren were safely through to Q2. Robert Kubica has looked strong all weekend, and he was joined in the top ten by Renault teammate Vitaly Petrov.

There are only minutes to go before Q2 begins, and a lot can and will change in that short 15 minutes.

Dropout zone

18. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
20. Timo Glock (Virgin)
21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin)
22. Bruno Senna (HRT)
23. Karun Chandhok (HRT)
24. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) DNS, starts from pitlane

F1 Sofa Blog – Q2 in Monaco

With only 15 minutes to play with, and 17 cars on the track, Q2 has begun. The pits are empty, and with all 17 cars currently winding around the narrow streets of the principality the risk of traffic is high.

Drivers are in constant communication with their engineers, trying to find that magic gap that will set the scene for the perfect flying lap. The mirrors on an F1 car don't offer much in terms of visibility, and the computers know more about approaching traffic than the man behind the wheel.

Monaco is the shortest circuit on the Formula 1 calendar, meaning that lap times here are tighter than you'll find anywhere else. While most circuits see drivers separated by tenths, the distances at Monaco are measured in thousandths of a second, meaning that almost anyone can find himself in the dropout zone without warning.

Jenson Button is having the most trouble of any of the championship leaders. The McLaren driver has spent much of Q2 in the dropout zone, and the Brit is currently in tenth place with only a 0.006s lead on Tonio Liuzzi in 11th.

With only three minutes to go, there is a yellow flag in sector one. Vitaly Petrov has thrown his Renault into the barriers, and in the chaos Jenson Button popped up into ninth place. Whether or not that will keep the current champion (and 2009 pole winner) safe remains to be seen.

Nico Rosberg was fastest in Q2, and the young German could be a surprise Monaco pole. Jenson Button only just squeaked into Q3, but with the slate wiped clean for the next session, any of the top ten men could see themselves lining up at the head of the pack tomorrow afternoon.

Dropout zone

11. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams)
 12. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
 13. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso)
 14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
 15. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber)
 16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
 17. Jaime Algeursuari (Toro Rosso)
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F1 Sofa Blog – Q3 in Monaco

So here we are. It's the final qualifying session of the Monaco race weekend, the top-ten shootout many fans believe is more important than the race on Sunday. And it might well be – barring crashes or mechanical failures, recent years show that the pole sitter is the man most likely to win Sunday's race.

Robert Kubica has looked fast all weekend, and he has leapt to the top of the timesheets with a 1.1 second lead on second-placed Lewis Hamilton. If the Pole manages to keep his car on the road at these speeds, he could well be untouchable in the next few minutes.

Jenson Button has been having a difficult afternoon, and Q3 is no improvement. Currently fourth on the timesheets, the current champion has just had a lap ruined by slow-moving Felipe Massa, who was trying to open up a gap for his own pole attempt.

Lewis Hamilton just can't find the two-tenths that are coming easily to Kubica, but the young Brit is the only recent Monaco winner not to have started on pole position. If he can hang on to second place, the former champion could make this his second F1 trophy from the principality.

And while I've been typing, Mark Webber has leap-frogged the pair of them; the Australian takes a provisional pole with 1.14.104, 0.016s faster than Kubica. Kubica and Webber are in an outright duel for pole position, but the Australian has found more time than should be possible and is now holding provisional pole with a masterful 1.13.826s.

The Red Bulls weren't expected to be fast around Monaco, but the team appear to have solved the cars' problems in slower corners, finding more downforce than ever before. On a track with lots of tight corners and no long straights, downforce equals speed.

With Q3 now over, the two Red Bulls have qualified in first and third, split by Robert Kubica. Bring on Sunday's race.

Provisional grid

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.13.826s
2. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.14.120s
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.14.227s
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.14.283s
5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.14.432s
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.14.544s
7. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.14.590s
8. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.14.637s
9. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.14.901s
10. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.15.170s
11. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.15.317s
12. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.15.318s
13. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.15.413s
14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.15.576s
15. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 1.15.692s
16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.15.992s
17. Jaime Algeursuari (Toro Rosso) 1.16.176s
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.17.094s
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.17.134s
20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.17.377s
21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.17.864s
22. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1.18.509s
23. Karun Chandhok (HRT) 1.19.559s
24. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) DNS, starts from pitlane

F1 Sofa Blog – The Monaco post-qualifying analysis

So the Renault engine looks to be happiest around the streets of Monaco. Looking at the cars parked outside the casino, you'd think that the Ferraris would be most at home around this track, following in the rubbery treads of the Enzos, Californias, and F355s that can be found roaring around the streets when the F1 circus has left town.

But with the Renault-powered Red Bulls occupying pole and third position on tomorrow's grid, split only by the Renault-powered Renault, it's a pretty good day to work at Viry-Châtillon.

Unless something very unusual happens in tomorrow's race, a Renault-powered car will win the Monaco Grand Prix, a massive boost for a team that has spent the past two years in the doldrums, battling both scandal and poor performance.

Robert Kubica looked to be in a very strong position for tomorrow's pole, but Mark Webber delivered the perfect lap in the final moments of Q3, pulling it all together to find a three-tenths advantage over the Pole. There had been reports all weekend that Red Bull were holding back in practice, and the team had an advantage of nearly half a second in the middle sector.

What will be interesting tomorrow is the team's ability to sustain that advantage in the 78-lap race. Red Bull have had problems with overheating and separate issues with their brakes, and Monaco is notoriously tough on brakes. Around 21% of the lap is done under braking, and pole position is useless

if the car is unable to go race distance. Red Bull have fitted massive brake ducts this weekend in an attempt to keep their brakes cool, but it is a potential chink in the team's armour, and one that could affect either car.

In fourth place on tomorrow's grid is the Ferrari of Felipe Massa, the only man in a good position to score points for the team. Fernando Alonso, who had hoped for a "perfect" qualifying session, was unable to take part when an accident in morning practice put his car out of play for the afternoon.

The Spaniard will be starting tomorrow's race from the pitlane, and while he is targeting a finish in the points, it will require both skill and luck. Alonso is not one to let an opportunity pass him by, so we should be in for some exciting driving as he battles up through the grid on the narrow streets that make up the Monaco circuit.

Teammate Massa is in the perfect position to capitalise on mistakes – mechanical and human – made by the cars in front, and could deliver a podium finish for Ferrari. But it is worth remembering that Massa is the only recent Monaco pole sitter not to win a race. Lewis Hamilton, the man who did win that race, is behind Massa in P5 on the grid.

McLaren had another unsatisfactory qualifying session. Both cars made it into Q3 – although it was looking pretty hairy for Jenson Button at the end of Q2 – but the team were only able to deliver fifth and eighth place. Button's first flying lap was ruined by Felipe Massa, who was trying to get some space ahead, and the Brit struggled with grip on the softer tyre.

Both McLarens seemed to prefer the harder tyre, so do not be surprised if both drivers choose to pit fairly early, and do a long stint on the medium compound. The tight corners and constant braking mean that Monaco is tough on tyres, but the relative lack of grip suffered by Button is likely to see the smooth driver gamble on his ability to preserve the harder tyre. Hamilton had a better afternoon than his teammate, and will probably stay out on the supersofts longer than Button in the knowledge he will be rougher on the harder compound and might not be able to make them last as long.

Behind Lewis Hamilton on the grid are the two Mercedes of Nico Rosberg and Michael Schumacher. Rosberg outqualified his teammate, but was dissatisfied with his performance. The young German was fastest in Q2, but a combination of traffic, bad timing, and driver error meant that Rosberg was unable to capitalise on his tyres' peak performance, and he lapped seven-tenths off the pace of Webber. Schumacher said afterwards that he had been held up by his teammate, and should have qualified higher up the grid. In the end, the teammates were 0.046s apart in sixth and seventh.

The fifth row is made up of Rubens Barrichello, who managed ninth place for Williams, and the Force India of Tonio Liuzzi in tenth. Both men are just ahead of their teammates: Nico Hulkenberg is in eleventh, while Adrian Sutil will start in twelfth place. The four cars are evenly matched, and this could be a spot to watch on the start. Barrichello often stalls on the start when he's feeling under pressure, and Adrian Sutil has been involved in the odd pile-up in his time. Add to that the relative inexperience of Hulkenberg and Liuzzi, and the middle rows look like they could offer potential trouble off the start line.

Looking further down the grid, Sebastian Buemi (13th) will be lining up next to Vitaly Petrov (14th) and just ahead of the two Saubers of Pedro de la Rosa (15th) and Kamui Kobayashi (16th). All three drivers have been involved in on-track incidents this season, a combination of rookie errors and faulty equipment. Petrov is talented but hungry, a mix that can lead to prangs. Kobayashi is similarly afflicted, but his car isn't as reliable as the Russian's. While overtaking is difficult at Monaco, Buemi will do well to stay ahead of his colleagues off the start.

Behind the Saubers are Jaime Alguersuari and Heikki Kovalainen, past Monaco winner Jarno Trulli and Timo Glock, Lucas di Grassi and Bruno Senna. Karun Chandhok will be alone on the back row, as Ferrari's Fernando Alonso will be starting from the pitlane. Although they might be at the back of the grid, it is these cars that could prove to be the biggest challenge on the streets of Monaco tomorrow afternoon.

Blue flags are all good and well, but every time a front runner has to slow down in traffic – however briefly – he reduces the gap to the man behind. And if some of the less reliable cars or inexperienced drivers find the tight corners and narrow streets to be beyond their abilities in race conditions, yellow flags and safety cars could change the state of play entirely. More interesting for fans, maybe, but very frustrating to the man in the lead.

The thrilling races this season have come from a fast car qualifying out of position. And thanks to Fernando Alonso's accident, we have one very determined man starting as out of position as it is possible to be: from the pitlane. Whatever happens at the head of the pack, you can be sure that Alonso will be the man to watch as he attempts his charge up the field. Love him or hate him you cannot deny that the Spaniard is at the top of his game: his recent dogged determination in Malaysia, charging up the field with a broken clutch, could be but a taster of tomorrow's drive.

Current weather reports say we're in for a dry race tomorrow, with possible clouds.

F1 Sofa Blog – Analysing the Monaco Grand Prix

A quick look at the finishing order makes today's race look like something of a procession. The only change in the top five was a swap for position between Robert Kubica and Sebastian Vettel, and eight of the ten men to finish in the points started their race in a points-scoring position.

But with four safety cars, and the threat of Fernando Alonso moving up the field, there was much more action on the streets of Monaco than shown in the statistics.

There were two races in Monaco this weekend, although they shared the same space and time. Leading one race was Mark Webber, tailed by four men who finished in near-perfect starting order. The other race was being run by Fernando Alonso, as the Spaniard made full use of skill and strategy to claw his way up the field from the pitlane, eventually finishing in seventh place. (Unless the stewards change the results after this is posted, in which case he will be promoted to sixth.)

Were it not for Fernando Alonso, Monaco would have been bereft of much in the way of on-track action. But an accident in practice on Saturday morning left the Ferrari driver ineligible for qualifying, and Alonso started Sunday's race from the pitlane, behind the wheel of a rebuilt car.

Safety cars were the defining characteristic of the 2010 Monaco Grand Prix, and the race was neatly bookended by one in the first lap and one in the run-up to the chequered flag. Both first and last safety car caused casualties beyond the original accidents that brought them to the field: Jenson Button was forced to retire on the second lap when his engine cooked it under the safety car, thanks to a blunder left in error, and Fernando Alonso appears to have lost position to Michael Schumacher in a last minute manoeuvre currently being debated by the stewards.

The lights went out in Monaco and Sebastian Vettel was quick to make a move on Robert Kubica ahead, securing the second place he (to all intents and purposes) held until the chequered flag. Felipe Massa and Lewis Hamilton both attempted to close in on Kubica going in to Ste. Devote, but were unable to make progress. Both men finished in their starting position, fourth and fifth respectively.

Further down the field, Nico Hulkenberg ran wide in the tunnel, lost control of his car, and crashed out on the first lap, bringing out the first safety car of the race. Second retirement went to Jenson Button, courtesy of the aforementioned blunder, but the world champion's lead was enough that he now sits fourth in the drivers' standings, eight points behind the leaders. The current points system means that the standings are changing every weekend; it is likely they will continue to do so for much of the season. None of the big hitters are out of contention just yet.

The strategists at Ferrari made full use of the early safety car, and the team chose to pit Alonso on the first lap, making the switch to hard tyres at the first possible moment. That decision made a points finish a definite probability, provided that the Spaniard could overtake the backmarkers and catch up to the two Saubers before the pitstops began.

Despite some early trouble from Lucas di Grassi, Alonso made quick work of passing the new teams, and by the time McLaren pitted Lewis Hamilton on lap 17, all the major teams were working out how best to cover the charging Ferrari pilot. Hamilton exited the pits just ahead of Alonso, and the young Brit found himself in a Scuderia sandwich until lap 78.

Mercedes driver Nico Rosberg was one of the afternoon's biggest losers. The young German was strong in the early part of the race, setting fastest laps and running in P2 during the pitstop phase, but the ideal window of opportunity for his own pitstop never quite materialised, and a lap 29 stop saw Rosberg reemerge in P9, behind teammate Michael Schumacher. Rosberg's race never recovered, and he eventually finished in eighth place.

But what do today's results really mean? Monaco is in a class of its own when it comes to circuits, and a victory here is not indicative of continued performance throughout the season.

Red Bull's victory is a different matter, however – the received wisdom was that the RB6 would find the streets of Monaco a challenge, as the car was thought to struggle with the low-speed corners. The team's 1-2 finish is the best possible answer to any questions others had about the car's flexibility: the RB6 can deliver in qualifying, and holds its own in fast corners, slow corners, and along the straights. Provided the reliability gremlins are a thing of the past, Vettel and Webber (currently leading the drivers' standings with 78 points apiece) will remain the men to beat in 2010.

Fernando Alonso is still very much in the hunt for the WDC, despite being overtaken by Michael Schumacher for sixth place, and sits third in the standings, five points behind Webber and Vettel. The manoeuvre by Schumacher, which is under discussion as I type, came as the safety car entered the pits at the end of the final lap. Ferrari were under the impression that overtaking was illegal on the run to the flag, Mercedes were not. Schumacher saw the opportunity to overtake Alonso and grabbed it with both hands.

Whether or not the move is allowed to stand – general consensus is that it will be declared legal, as the drivers were not under safety car conditions at the time – it was a spark of the old Schumacher, of the champion always looking for an opportunity to best the competition. It looks like the German legend is scraping off the rust, one race at a time.

McLaren were something of a nonentity this afternoon, with one driver in the pits and the other holding position for 78 laps. Lewis Hamilton was unable to make up any places at the start, and thanks to a well-timed pitstop he spent the race ahead of Fernando Alonso, effectively halting the Spaniard's charge. Hamilton was never in a position to overtake the Ferrari of Massa ahead, and nor did he get much trouble from Alonso behind – it was a very even race for the young Brit, despite mild concern over his brake balance on lap 38.

There were retirements aplenty in Monaco on Sunday afternoon, caused by errors in both man and machine. Hulkenberg's crash may have been triggered by an earlier clutch problem, and Williams teammate Rubens Barrichello retired on lap 31, following a problem with the left rear of his car that saw the Brazilian pointing the wrong way at Massenet, leading to the second safety car.

The two Saubers and both Virgins were next to retire, with all four drivers out of the race by lap 27, roughly one-third of the race distance. Barrichello had his crash on lap 28, and Bruno Senna and Heikki Kovalainen were next out, hanging on till lap 59. There were hydraulics problems on the HRT car and steering issues with the Lotus. It looked as though HRT and Lotus would each see one car pass the chequered flag, but a collision on lap 71 saw Jarno Trulli drive over Karun Chandhok's skull. Both drivers walked away from the accident.

Monaco Grand Prix race result

- 1 Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1:50.00.000
- 2 Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) +0.448
- 3 Robert Kubica (Renault) +1.600
- 4 Felipe Massa (Ferrari) +2.600
- 5 Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) +4.300
- 6 Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) +5.700
- 7 Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) +6.300
- 8 Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) +6.600
- 9 Adrian Sutil (Force India) +6.900
- 10 Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) +7.300
- 11 Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) +8.100
- 12 Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) +9.100
- 13 Vitaly Petrov (Renault) +4 laps

NC Karun Chandhok (HRT) Lap 71
NC Jarno Trulli (Lotus) Lap 71
NC Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) Lap 59
NC Bruno Senna (HRT) Lap 59
NC Rubens Barrichello (Williams) Lap 28
NC Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) Lap 27
NC Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) Lap 26
NC Timo Glock (Virgin) Lap 23
NC Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) Lap 22
NC Jenson Button (McLaren) Lap 3
NC Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) Lap 1
