



My first Grand Prix as a fan, and I was travelling solo. It was an experience, especially after the media cossetting of Bahrain. I wasn't expecting the massive hike to the circuit from Montmelo, the total lack of trackside entertainment, or the persistence of fans who wouldn't stop hitting on me even when we'd established we had no languages in common.

## F1 Barcelona Blog: Not another volcano

So I'm confused. Should I be getting ready for bed, in the full knowledge that I've got to be up at 5am to head over to Barcelona, or should I spend the evening pressing refresh on the airline's travel update page? I spent some of today tracking the path of the second ash cloud, and it's 50-50 as to whether or not I'll actually make it to Spain.

And if I can make it to Spain, will I be able to make it home again? This is the trouble with having a day job – my bosses are less inclined to be accepting of the ups and downs of the F1 travelling circus than an editor or broadcaster would be.

Assuming I do make it, there's a lot to look forward to.

HRT announced earlier today that Christian Klien had been signed as the team's second test driver, and the Austrian will be making his returning debut (you know that makes sense) on Friday. "This role offers me the opportunity to rejoin the Formula 1 environment and drive again, which is naturally where my longer-term ambitions lie," Klien said. "My goal was always to get back into F1, so I feel a lot of satisfaction that I can still be hired as a grand prix driver for my speed and skills. That is proof enough of Colin Kolles' faith and trust in me."

Klien last raced in 2006, when he drove for Red Bull. In 2007 he was Honda's test driver, but didn't get much time behind the wheel, appearing only at the British Grand Prix in a practice session. He had even less time behind the wheel when he served as BMW's test driver in 2008 and 2009, but didn't dedicate the time to thumb-twiddling and navel-gazing: Klien also races sports cars, and will continue to do so while serving as HRT's second test driver.

But the real excitement in Spain is going to come from the Scuderia. Not only is it Spanish driver Fernando Alonso's first home GP in the famous red race suit, but the Italian racers have been given permission to try and hammer the reliability gremlins out of their engine.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks in Alonso's pursuit of the WDC is the Ferrari engine – not only have the Spaniard and teammate Felipe Massa suffered from overheating problems and outright engine failure, but the Ferrari-powered Saubers have seen issues of their own.

Alonso is understandably keen to make his mark on Maranello by bringing home the WDC in his first year for the team, and the double world champion has performed brilliantly so far. While he may not be topping the leaderboard, he has put in successive drives worthy of a championship, not least the heroic charge we saw in Malaysia when the Spaniard was struggling with a failing clutch.

But it looked like the car beneath him might lose the championship, despite Alonso's on-track efforts. With the engine allowance capped at eight and a 19-race season, the pattern of engine failures would have lost Ferrari both championships before the circus left Europe had it been allowed to continue.

Ferrari said in a statement: "A lot of work was carried out on the test bench, completing several long runs and this work produced some solutions which it is felt will solve the reliability problems experienced in Bahrain and Malaysia. The team therefore requested and received authorisation from the FIA to make some changes within the framework of the current engine regulations and these modifications will be fitted to the engines to be used in Spain.

"While since China, everyone in the Gestione Sportiva has been working hard as always on their various areas of activity, it is fair to say that over the past weeks, the staff in the engine department really produced a major effort, working night and day to analyse, evaluate and solve issues that have affected engine performance in past races."

With possible rain forecast and a freshly-powered Alonso looking to impress at his home grand prix, Barcelona should be another great race weekend. If only I knew I could definitely go...

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## F1 Barcelona Blog: F1 live from Pelouse

This is odd. Very odd. I am writing with only half the information to hand, thanks to the total failure of my dongle (love your work, 3 mobile!) and the lack of public WiFi at the circuit. So no FIA official timings, no press releases, nothing except that limited stretch of circuit I could see with my own two eyes.

Think of this as the impressionist F1 weekend – in homage to Hunter S. Thompson, father of gonzo journalism, I'm going to bring you the sights, the sounds, and the smells, and I'll leave it up to you to correct me in the comments.

There is English coverage of the practice sessions over the loud speakers, but with my earplugs in I can't hear it. With my earplugs out, the noise of the engines makes it impossible to hear anyway. Ah well – you lose some, you lose some.

So what can I tell you? First, if you're ever going to the Spanish Grand Prix, don't stay in Barcelona. It took me over two hours to get to the circuit this morning – walk to the metro, wait for the metro, wait for the train, take the train, and then walk for half an hour along a busy road and up a steep hill to get to the circuit. Apparently there should have been shuttles to take the fans to the circuit, but...

In organisational terms alone, Bahrain beats Barcelona hands down. Although no Bahrainis actually seemed to go to the GP, they were all aware of it. You had to be – there were directions to the circuit at every major hotel, and banners proclaiming the first race of 2010 wherever you looked. In Barcelona Sants station, nobody even thought to put up a few posters telling F1 fans that trains to Montmelo left from platform 13, and that Montmelo's not listed as a destination on the route.

Spain may have the passion, but passion isn't everything. When putting on a massive event on the scale of a grand prix, organisation and forward planning pay dividends.

But on to the racing. Or practicing, rather. I wasn't fast enough to write down the timings, but I did manage to get the finishing order, and there weren't many surprises in the top 10. We had two McLarens, two Red Bulls, two Mercedes, two Renaults, a Ferrari and a Sauber.

The surprises were that the Ferraris don't seem to be particularly fast so far this weekend (Alonso was 1.1s off the pace in P8, while Massa was 1.8s off in P12). Schumacher has finally outperformed Rosberg, finishing in P3 (and topping the timesheets briefly) when his teammate was back in P6. Kobayashi was the final top 10 surprise – top of the timesheets early on, he finished the session in P10. Light-fuelled, or new upgrades doing the trick? You decide.

I spent the morning sitting in Pelouse, the grassy area that is open to cheapskates such as myself. I do have a ticket for the stands, but it took so long to get to the circuit this morning that I didn't have time to find my seat. Pelouse seems to be where all the Ferrari fans sit, but it is also a haven for people with no spatial awareness whatsoever.

This is Friday morning – not many people are here, and there are plenty of spaces to sit. But if you're in Pelouse, why bother sitting when you can stand directly in front of someone and block their view entirely? And who needs to see the giant TV screens to keep an eye on action around the track? Pelouse sitters seem to think it's an expensive backrest, and gathered in front of it to block as many times as possible.

Disgruntled, watashi? It's surprising what too little sleep and barely any caffeine will do to a girl.

But it's not all moaning – I made a few general observations that could be of interest for the weekend to come. First, whatever HRT and Virgin have done to their cars, they still suffer from pretty substantial understeer in tight left-handers. Klien was able to keep a better line through the corners than Senna, but (as I scrawled in my notes) 'car wobbles like jelly'.

Watching the various drivers go round the same corner for 90 minutes was pretty illuminating – watching the camera footage at home or in the media centre is great for a general overview of the race, but for a direct comparison of how the different cars and drivers handle the same corner you can't beat it. The undoubtedly talented Hamilton, Alonso, and Vettel took a slightly wider line around the bend than their teammates, and most of the rookies were turning in too tight, presumably to compensate for understeer.

One of the highlights of the morning came from the small children sitting nearby. The two young boys had been bored senseless all morning, plugging their ears and looking unhappy whenever an F1 car zoomed by. Then a forklift trundled along the access road, and two kids came to life, running to get as close as they could and following its progress. Who needs world-beating technology when you've got Bob the Builder?

There were occasional bursts of smoke from the back of at least one of the Virgins, which I presume was oil burning off. Hopefully for the team that will have been standard burnoff, and not a leak. (See what I mean about you being better informed than I am?)

Oddly, given that they're both using the same engine, the Red Bulls were significantly louder than the Renaults all morning. And when I saw loud, I mean it – it was tough through earplugs, whereas the other cars just sounded as sexy as ever. And speaking of engines, Alonso's engine didn't sound quite right on his last few laps. I don't think it was the new engine, or it would have been deep and throaty all morning; only the last couple of laps were affected.

Anyway, that's enough from me. Here's the finishing order for F1: as I said earlier, I wasn't able to get the times down quick enough.

F1 standings

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
  2. Jenson Button (McLaren)
  3. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
  4. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
  5. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
  6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
  7. Robert Kubica (Renault)
  8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
  9. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
  10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
  11. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso)
  12. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
  13. Paul di Resta (Force India)
  14. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
  15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India)
  16. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
  17. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams)
  18. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)
  19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
  20. Timo Glock (Virgin)
  21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin)
  22. Christian Klien (HRT)
  23. Bruno Senna (HRT)
  24. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) no time set
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## F1 Barcelona Blog – FP2 and the endless chill

Sometimes I hate technology. Thanks to the dongle failure, and lack of WiFi at the circuit, I can only file copy from my hostel.

Problem is, the computers at the hostel are on between 7am and 10pm. I leave for the circuit before the computers are on, and I get back after they're switched off. And I've not been able to find a 24 hour internet cafe, which I hoped would be the saving grace.

So I don't know if you'll even see these reports until after the race weekend has ended, by which point they're fairly useless. I feel that I've let you down, and that I've let myself down. The one thing I have learned from this weekend, however, is that it's nearly impossible to report on F1 without the magic press pass. But I can't let that stop me. Impossible is just another word for challenging.

Since I can't give you any on-track information that you haven't got already, the only unique service I can offer is to bring you to the circuit with me, to give you a sense of the feeling on the ground. And from where I'm sitting, wrapped up in all the layers I brought with me, the ground is feeling mighty chilly.

You will have seen by now that Ferrari have scrapped their infamous barcode. I think the white rectangular outline now in its place looks more like the top of a packet of cigarettes than the barcode ever did – can you see a packet opening, or is it just me?

And while the Scuderia have been criticised for cigarette advertising – as well they should be, if they were flouting the law – Sauber have turned up at the track with sponsorship from Burger King. Ah, junk food. There's absolutely nothing in the combination of salt, sugar, and fat used in junk foods designed to get people addicted to an unhealthy substance, nosireebob.

You can argue that burgers can be healthy when eaten as part of a balanced diet, and that is true. But the millions of obese people suffering health problems and adding to medical costs suffer from the same lack of willpower as a smoker. Will anyone protest the Burger King sponsorship? Probably not. After all, gambling is promoted on a number of high profile F1 websites, and that too is addictive.

But I suppose motorsport is an addiction in and of itself – I know I get antsy in the off-season, and dedicate more time than is healthy to counting down the number of days between races. And who could fail to get hooked on the adrenaline, the speed, and the glamour? We're all addicted to something..

The atmosphere at the Circuit de Catalunya is unlike any I've experienced before. Fernando Alonso is bigger than The Beatles, and even shots of him in the garage get a cheer from the crowd. I was sitting next to a Spanish family this afternoon, and the young son got excited and cheered whenever a Ferrari drove past. At one point his father leaned over and said 'be calm – it's only Massa'. Poor Felipe.

And there's a bit of a Scuderia snobbery going on amongst the fans. Ferrari have produced special merchandise just for Alonso, using the blue of his home province of Asturias, and it has been selling like hotcakes. There is now a division between Alonso fans in blue, and general Ferrari fans in red – they might be rooting for the same team, but they size each other up like Hibs and Hearts fans on match day.

When the crowds aren't talking about Alonso, they've been slagging off Timo Glock, who was slower than teammate Lucas di Grassi in this afternoon's session. I feel sorry for Timo, as he doesn't deserve it. What with the longer wheelbase (roughly 10 cm have been added to the car), the new fuel tank, and a host of changes to the car, Glock has effectively been doing a shakedown today. Not only that, but he and di Grassi have been running completely different programmes. Let's wait until tomorrow's qualifying session before casting any stones.

Out to dinner tonight, and I hope to pick up on some of the paddock gossip. I've heard a couple of rumours already, but they're beyond ridiculous. I'm not going to repeat them here for fear of being done for libel and slander, but imagine that someone told you that the tectonic plates had accelerated

and were now moving so quickly that the American continent would join Eurasia in your lifetime. That's about as realistic as some of the stories I've heard this weekend.

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## F1 Barcelona Blog – FP3 under the Catalan sun

I think my face is going to suffer third degree burns. I've been applying factor 50 sunscreen since 7am, it's not yet lunchtime, and I can feel sunburn coming on. But out here on the circuit, there's nowhere to hide.

Part of me is glad it's not raining, because I don't want to get wet and grumpy. But the rest of me wants just enough rain to spice up the qualifying later. We shall see – it's a lot hotter at the circuit this morning, and the gathering clouds don't look ominous.

Although I'm not sure if the clouds are weather based or caused by the incredible quantities of cannabis being consumed at Pelouse. The circuit smells like Amsterdam, and I'm surprised the drivers aren't getting a contact high. But at least the smell is better than the rancid sweat that was a hallmark of Friday afternoon. F1 – it's all glamour, make no mistake.

It rained overnight in Barcelona, but that doesn't seem to have affected the track much. It was looking a bit green when I first arrived, but the GP3 and Formula BMW cars have been out since 8.45 this morning, laying down lots of rubber for their Formula 1 colleagues.

Some rumours from last night – McLaren are thought to be sandbagging, but we'll see the truth of that in qualifying; Lotus have taken a bit of flack for not gaining as much time as they'd claimed they would (but they've been running well nonetheless); and the hunt for the 13th team may be over.

This is my first race weekend surrounded by significant numbers of Tifosi, and judging by the passion and enthusiasm I've seen this weekend, Monza must be thrilling and terrifying in equal measure. The roar from the crowd when a Ferrari goes by drowns out the engines. In my stretch of Pelouse, there's one woman who stands up and claps whenever Michael Schumacher drives past. She has been getting some pretty hostile stares from those sitting nearby. I think it will take some time for the Tifosi to get over his 'betrayal'.

But the crowds here seem to get excited by everything – hoardes of people stand up and wave whenever the helicopter flies past, and there are airhorn battles going on up and down the hill. Oddly, Pedro de la Rosa gets lots of roars from the home crowd, while fellow Spaniard Jaime Alguersuari was lapping without any reaction. Maybe he has yet to prove himself and win the hearts of his homeland?

One of the oddest things about this morning has been the crowd response to the McLaren drivers. Lewis Hamilton has suffered a lot of aggravation from Spanish fans in the past, but this year he is more popular than teammate Jenson Button. There's not much of a reaction from the crowds when Button flies past (with the notable exception of a woman wearing two inflatable hands with the St George's cross motif, who goes mental), but Hamilton gets applause and cheers. Not what I was expecting, and I have been pleasantly surprised.

I was also amused to note a problem with the leaderboard on display at the circuit – conspiracy theorists would have had a field day. While I'm sure it was a technology failure that meant Alonso spent much of FP3 ranked three places higher than his actual lap times, it did lead to a great atmosphere at the circuit. The leaderboards on the giant TVs were accurate, but the huge tower by the grandstands ranking the top ten drivers spent much of the morning showing Alonso twice, in his real position and three slots higher.

Fingers crossed they sort out the problems before qualifying, or that will be very confusing...

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## F1 Barcelona Blog – The first European qualifying session of 2010

Still hot. Still sunburned. Still sitting on Pelouse, surrounded by Tifosi. It could only be the Spanish Grand Prix.

And thanks to my lack of internet, my distance from the TV screens, and the fact that the only leaderboard I can see only shows the top 10 drivers, I am going to have to spend much of qualies on the phone to my boyfriend back home. He's watching the BBC, and knows more about what's happening on track than I do.

I've got myself as good a seat as it was possible to find, just above turn 6, meaning I can see parts of the pit straight and the approach to turn 1, and turns 6 and 7. But I can't see any of the writing on the TV screens, as they're too far away and too lo-res. I'm sure Bernie doesn't read my pieces, but if anyone from FOM comes across this one, I've got an easy and fairly inexpensive way to improve the race experience tenfold for all fans – on top of the giant tellies, get massive LED scrolling screens showing positions and lap times. After all, race fans want to know how fast everyone's going. Speed is kind of important to Formula 1.

Watching a race weekend live, the qualifying sessions seem to be over in a flash. In the press room, there's time to write a piece on every session. At home, I hang on the edge of my seat for what feels like hours (thrilling hours). But here at the Circuit de Catalunya, it feels like Q1 was over in seconds. And that's the longest of the three sessions – will I be able to complete a sneeze in Q3?

Not many surprises in Q1, to be honest. Thanks to the performance gap between old and new teams, it's a case of six newbies plus one out in the first session. Today, that plus one was Rubens Barrichello, who has spent the weekend hovering around the bottom third of the pack. Teammate Nico Hulkenberg has also been struggling to lap as quickly as expected, but F1's latest talented young German made it through to Q2. Given that the car doesn't appear to be delivering for either driver at the moment, his P13 start is pretty impressive.

The Q2 dropouts were neatly bookended by the Force Indias of Tonio Liuzzi in 17th and Adrian Sutil in 11th. They were joined by the Toro Rossos of Jaime Alguersuari and Sebastian Buemi (16th and 15th), Vitaly Petrov (14th), Nico Hulkenberg (13th), and Pedro de la Rosa (12th).

But de la Rosa's qualifying session doesn't do justice to his on-track performances so far this weekend. I don't know what Sauber have done to the car, but both he and teammate Kamui Kobayashi appear to be driving a completely different beast. The handling seems smoother, there's more pace, and assuming that reliability gremlins leave the team alone for a while, we could be seeing the resurgence of a team written off earlier this season.

The home crowd support factor might explain some of de la Rosa's performance, but we're a long way from Kobayashi's birthplace. Kobayashi made it through to Q3 and qualified in P10, meaning that we could be in for a real treat tomorrow if he's able to find some of that fire that made him so exciting to watch in the final races of 2009.

But it will not be easy – the Japanese driver will be just ahead of his teammate and Adrian Sutil, both with fresh rubber and out to impress. And next to him on the fifth row is Felipe Massa, who will be looking to catch up with Alonso. Just in front are Nico Rosberg and Robert Kubica. Kubica has been driving well all season, and Rosberg will be desperate to overtake him and be in with a chance of catching Michael Schumacher.

Schuey has had a very good weekend so far – for the first time this season, he has been faster than his teammate in all practice sessions, and outqualified Rosberg. The seven-time world champion will not want to give an inch if he can help it, and the battle for position between the two Mercedes drivers could be a real treat.

Assuming anyone manages to overtake, that is. The Circuit de Catalunya is not known for its overtaking opportunities, so we could be in for another Bahrain style procession. Ever the optimist, however, I am keeping my fingers crossed for wheel-to-wheel action and daring manoeuvres.

Based on today's qualifying session, McLaren don't appear to have been sandbagging, as was suggested yesterday. Unless they sandbagged in qualifying, that is, and I don't see that as being a particularly effective strategy. While Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button both performed well (they qualified in third and fifth, respectively), Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel locked out the front row for Sunday's race.

The Spanish Grand Prix tends to be won by the pole sitter, which works in Webber's favour. But it is also a race that has been won by world champions on all but seven occasions, so who knows what will happen.

I think it will be very interesting off the start line. Webber will remember Vettel's Malaysian manoeuvre, where the young German tussled with his teammate before taking the lead in turn 4, and if the Australian works too hard to protect himself from Vettel, he could leave the door open for either Hamilton or Alonso to slip through.

The calibre of talent in the first five rows should make for some good action in the early part of the race. Every man in the top 10 has something to prove this weekend, be it supremacy over a teammate or silencing critics in fans and media. Hamilton will want to capitalise on outqualifying Button, and Jenson will want to outdrive Lewis without risking his championship lead. Just look at the final grid order – the battles practically write themselves.

#### Provisional grid

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
5. Jenson Button (McLaren)
6. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
7. Robert Kubica (Renault)
8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
9. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
11. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
12. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber)
13. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams)
14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
15. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso)
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
17. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India)
18. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)
21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
22. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin)
23. Karun Chandhok (HRT)
24. Bruno Senna (HRT)

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## F1 Barcelona Blog – The Borecelona Grand Prix

Wow. To think that fans were up in arms after Bahrain, complaining that the race was a snorefest. Could anyone have dreamt that Barcelona would make the desert parade look like an edge-of-your-seat nail-biter? I certainly didn't.

It is a shame that the torrential rains that fell when I was walking back to Montmelo didn't begin during the race itself. While I would probably have pneumonia by now, that would be a small price to pay for some on-track excitement.

And I was not the only person bored senseless by the action on track – the fans on Pelouse began packing up and leaving with about 15 laps to go. Having spent the previous hour watching the same cars circulate in roughly the same order, the sense was that no one would miss much (except traffic) by leaving the circuit early. A text I got from a friend in the media centre half-way through read 'done deal or dull deal?'. I think my correspondent was right with the latter.

But I bet the departing fans were kicking themselves when they heard news of Lewis Hamilton's retirement...

Sure, there were odd moments of low-level excitement throughout the race, but former ITV commentator James Allen summarised the afternoon perfectly: "it was a bit like staying in a bar all night with only a half of shandy for company."

Compared with the on-track antics fans saw in the GP2 and Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup races on Sunday morning (I was queuing to get in during the GP3 race, and so missed it), the Formula 1 event was bereft of action.

And even compared with Bahrain, very little happened. Cast your mind back to mid-March – the so-called desert procession offered prangs and overtakes, retirements from the new teams, and rookie errors from the new boys in established teams. Much of the excitement in Formula 1 comes from mistakes, either human or mechanical, especially on a track where over-taking is near impossible. And in that regard, Sakhir Circuit and the Circuit de Catalunya have a lot in common.

Yes, Jenson Button and Michael Schumacher tussled lightly, but when I was timing the gaps between the two cars it never looked as if Jenson had much of a chance. Now that the world champion has become a more confident and considered driver, he would never throw away the chance of a near-certain P6 for the possibility of a P5 that could lead to retirement if the manoeuvre didn't come off as planned. It's all about consistent finishes and harvesting points these days, not out-and-out racing.

So what were the excitements, limited as they were? You're probably better informed than I am in that regard – while I could see some of the action on the giant TVs, the only thing that actually happened in front of me was Karun Chandhok's retirement, and a man pulling over to the side of the track and parking is hardly the highlight of a race weekend.

Mark Webber ably defended his position going into the first corner, and was untouchable for the rest of the race. The Australian capped off a decade of pole sitters winning the Spanish Grand Prix, a statistic that speaks volumes about the ability of the Circuit de Catalunya to offer on-track excitement.

And a few of the key overtaking manoeuvres happened in the pits. While the Mercedes mechanics should be rightly proud of the 3.8 second tyre change that enabled Michael Schumacher to leapfrog Jenson Button, I'd much rather see overtaking happen on the track. Lewis Hamilton also benefitted from a pitstop overtake; exiting the pitlane the young British driver found himself in the perfect position to move up from third place to second, separating the two Red Bulls.

And it was about the most exciting thing that happened during the race. Both Hamilton and Vettel had scores to settle after their infamous pitlane battle in Shanghai, and when the two drivers found themselves positioned for battle on lap 18, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that we would see some action. Lewis left the pits at the perfect time to tussle with Sebastian and possibly gain a place, and when the two cars came across a slow-moving Virgin going into Turn 1, it was clear that one man would gain the advantage. That man was Hamilton, as he forced Vettel to go wide and pushed the young German off track.

Fernando Alonso had a very lucky race weekend. The Spaniard started the race in fourth place, and it looked as if he would remain there until the chequered flag – there was a substantial gap between him and Hamilton and Vettel, but problems for both drivers promoted Alonso first to the podium and then to a second-place finish.

Vettel was the first casualty among the leaders, in that he suffered problems with his brakes and a brief flirtation with the gravel that necessitated a late pitstop and a drop from third place to fourth, promoting Alonso to the podium. But the gap between the four front-runners and Michael Schumacher was such that he was only at risk of losing a single place.

It was Hamilton's penultimate lap retirement that promoted Alonso to second place. While I have already heard mutterings that Lewis overworked his tyres and got what was coming to him, those mutterings are sadly misinformed. According to paddock insiders who spoke to Martin Whitmarsh, the problem was a wheel failure, not a tyre failure. Sheer bad luck cost the boy from Stevenage 20 points and second place in the WDC.

As for the action further down the field, there wasn't much to speak of. Pedro de la Rosa punctured a tyre very early on, and the resulting confusion led to some changes in position in the cars around him, most notably Jaime Alguersuari's leap from 16th place to 9th. But the young Spaniard was unable to capitalise on his gain, as a run-in with Chandhok's nosecone led to a drive through penalty, and Alguersuari only just finished in the points.

So what did we learn from the Circuit de Catalunya? I wouldn't go so far as to say that the naysayers were right, and that we will only get good racing in bad weather. A brief glance at the circuit characteristics (and statistics about past winners) shows that it's not a shoe-in for good racing. While weather can spice up even the dullest of races, in 2010 it seems that it is the circuit itself which will define the level of excitement available to fans.

#### Spanish Grand Prix results

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) +24.065s
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) +51.338s
4. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) +1.02.195s
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) +1.03.728s
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 1.05.767s
7. Adrian Sutil (Force India) +1.12.941s
8. Robert Kubica (Renault) +1.13.677s

9. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) + 1 lap
  10. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
  11. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) + 1 lap
  12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) + 1 lap
  13. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 1 lap
  14. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) + 2 laps
  15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) + 2 laps
  16. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) + 2 laps
  17. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) + 3 laps
  18. Timo Glock (Virgin) + 3 laps
  19. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) + 4 laps
  20. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) RET
  21. Karun Chandhok (HRT) RET
  22. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) RET
  23. Bruno Senna (HRT) RET
  24. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) DNS
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