

2005 F1 Season

Australian Grand Prix - Round 1 of 19

Albert Park, Melbourne

By Alex "Zander" Keep

Circuit Name:	Albert Park
Circuit Length:	3.274 miles
Race Length:	58 laps
Lap Record:	Kimi Raikkonen, McLaren, 1:27:724

Rubens Barrichello's View

"I will enjoy the challenge of having to put in a quick lap the very first time I go out on track on Sunday morning. In practical terms, it just means we will be a bit busier and have less chance to relax a bit before the race. We will have to learn the best way of getting the most out of the Bridgestone tyres during qualifying. My main hope is that the new format is interesting and easy to understand for the spectators."

Jenson Button's View

"Starting the lap, I will accelerate up to top gear and a speed of around 310kmh at the end of the pit straight before braking down to third gear for the first right hand corner, which I take at around 135kmh.

That's immediately followed by a left hand corner, making it almost a chicane, although I accelerate all the way through the left-hand part of the corner, apexing at around 200kmh in fourth gear. On the short straight that follows I will continue accelerating up to 300kmh, moving through the gears before braking hard down to the 80kmh, second gear right-hander. Again, this is followed almost immediately by a left-hand corner, but I only have to break very lightly, taking it at around 145kmh in third gear.

There is no rest after this as I accelerate all the way into the long right-hander with, again, just a very light touch on the brakes as I enter it and I will go through that at around 215kmh in fourth gear. The next straight is relatively short and I will only reach something over 280kmh before slowing right down again for a second gear corner, which I take at just under 130kmh.

The circuit map then shows a long right-hand corner, but I can actually take all of this flat out and it is here where my body receives the maximum cornering forces at around 265kmh in fifth gear. I will finally reach around 285kmh before braking very hard again and dropping down to just over 100kmh for the next second gear right-hand corner. From here a fast switch into a long left hand corner demands high concentration and I need to be very careful as I enter it at around 180kmh in third gear and accelerate all the way up to around 300kmh as I end the section.

From here there is a fast and very difficult fourth-gear chicane, and I will take both left-hand and right-hand parts at around 210kmh, before rising back up to 300kmh. The next corner is a second gear right-

hander, the first of two very difficult corners, and I will have to brake very hard, down to second gear at 120kmh. Between this and the second of the two right-handers a brief acceleration will increase my speed to 230kmh and I will move up two gears to fourth. I stay in fourth gear for the next part but brake down by 50kmh as I head for the next tight left-hand corner, for which I accelerate back up to 245kmh before dropping to second gear for the 80kmh left-hand corner.

The final corner, which leads me back onto the pits straight, is taken at around 150kmh in third gear, and a good exit from this corner is crucial to give me a good speed as I prepare for another lap."

The Track

Albert Park managed to secure the Australian Grand Prix away from Adelaide 7 years ago & the races since then have been either fascinating or deadly dull! In 1996 Hill won a close race from Jacques Villeneuve on his formula 1 debut after Villeneuve's engine started leaking oil. Until then Villeneuve was looking set for taking a win in his first formula 1 race. In 1997 David Coulthard won for McLaren after Villeneuve was taken out by Irvine (along with the unlucky Herbert) & Schumacher's car expired. This was the first win for McLaren in four years (the previous one being the 1993 Australian Grand Prix won by Senna). In 1998 McLaren managed to lap the field & finished a comfortable 1-2 with Coulthard letting Hakkinen through after a confusion on the radios. In 1999 Irvine won his first race after both McLarens retired & Schumacher had a gear selection problem due to a faulty steering wheel. Frentzen was a creditable second for Jordan & Ralf Schumacher was third for Williams. In 2000 Michael Schumacher claimed his first win in Australia after a dominant showing in the new Ferrari, Barrichello produced a dream start to his a career for Ferrari with second place while Ralf showed that, despite testing problems, the new Williams BMW package had potential by finishing 3rd. Jenson Button had a packed weekend, crashing on the Friday & then eventually qualifying well down the field. Despite this a fabulous drive saw him get as high as 4th before his engine gave out. Similarly both Jordans & McLarens were looking good until they were afflicted by gremlins allowing BAR to pick up their first points. In 2001 Michael Schumacher repeated his 2000 win followed by Coulthard & Barrichello. Barrichello managed to get by Frentzen's Jordan by using some very questionable argey-bargey tactics though a more serious coming together later in the race saw Ralf Schumacher & Jacques Villeneuve collide at high speed. One of Villeneuve's wheels came off & flew through a gap in the fencing killing marshal Graham Beverage. Mika Hakkinen crashed spectacularly as well resulting in his helmet glancing the wall. It was this which he cited as being his initial reason for considering retirement. Both Saubers showed that they were likely to be better than usual with 4th for Nick Heidfeld & 6th for Raikkonen on his controversial debut. Frentzen caused further controversy by claiming that there was some form of traction control being run by Ferrari as Heidfeld's Sauber seemed to pull away under acceleration despite sounding as if it was misfiring. 2002's Australian Grand Prix was another traumatic race with a huge pile up at the start taking out much of the field. A fascinating duel ensued between Trulli, Raikkonen, Montoya and Schumacher which was resolved in Schumacher's favour with Montoya second, Raikkonen third and Trulli spinning into retirement. Despite this the focus for the partisan crowd was the dice between Mika Salo's recovering Toyota and Mark Webber's Minardi behind Eddie Irvine's Jaguar. With both driver and team owner proudly proclaiming their nationality all weekend it was not surprising that the crowd went mad as Salo spun whilst trying to overtake Webber with a handful of laps left to run. The two points Minardi achieved were the first in over a year and attained their stated pre-season goals resulting in Webber & Stoddart celebrating their own podium ceremony after the race! Off the track problems surfaced when the Phoenix team attempted to secure Prost's entry (and revenue) for the race. This was later exposed to be no more than Tom Walkinshaw trying to defraud the FIA in a futile effort to keep the struggling Arrows team alive. In 2003 David Coulthard won after Juan-Pablo Montoya spun away the lead with a few laps left to run. Kimi Rakkonen and Michael Schumacher had a ding-dong battle which was resolved in the Finn's favour after Schumacher's car dissolved when it was forced to go over kerbing. With Trulli having a spell at the front and Barrichello crashing heavily it was an eventful race in what turned out to be an eventful year. With winter testing suggesting another exciting year in store the Australian Grand Prix brought fans crashing back to real life. Bridgestone had

tested the tyre construction and compounds separately through the off season with the result that Ferrari's form was effectively masked until the final test. Schumacher and Barrichello disappeared into the distance leaving the other teams to look distinctly amateur. The only slight challenge came from Fernando Alonso though he completed the race 21 seconds adrift. The other teams finished further behind in what was a pretty dull procession.

Last Year's Result

Melbourne. 58 laps, 307.57km

Position	Driver	Team	Engine	Time	Laps
1	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1h24m15.757s	58
2	Rubens Barrichello	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1h24m29.362s	58
3	Fernando Alonso	Renault	Renault V10	1h24m50.430s	58
4	Ralf Schumacher	Williams	BMW V10	1h25m16.180s	58
5	Juan Pablo Montoya	Williams	BMW V10	1h25m24.293s	58
6	Jenson Button	BAR	Honda V10	1h25m26.355s	58
7	Jarno Trulli	Renault	Renault V10	-	57
8	David Coulthard	McLaren	Mercedes V10	-	57

Situation

Albert Park is built in the middle of Melbourne on reclaimed park land (which normally leads to the threat of protesters invading the track at some stage over the weekend) in the centre of Melbourne. Although much of the track is situated on public roads, the track is much smoother than traditional road races (such as Monaco) & allows for the less prepared teams to treat the first race as an elongated test session. Due to the nature of the track's design there are plenty of passing opportunities & the long straights & tight corners take a terrible toll on brakes (Frentzen had a nasty off in 97 when the brakes on his Williams exploded at the end of the start/finish straight). The season opening race has a strange habit of having the eventual world champion winning it & it is only twice in the last 11 years that this has not happened (Coulthard's win in 1997 & Irvine's win in 1999). Like most years teams are berating how quickly this race has come about & the inability to test before 1st January has meant that retirements here should be even higher than usual. This will further be affected by the new one engine per weekend rule.

Setup & Strategy

As mentioned above, the track is very much a stop/start venue where acceleration, breaking & top speed are far more important than the handling of the chassis. In addition the race normally represents the first time the cars have run in "proper" hot weather & the first time the cars have run in race trim with race stresses being put on them. Usually retirements are high here (the 1997 race ended up being a demolition derby!) & I would be surprised if there are many finishers on Sunday. Despite this results tend to be a pretty good indication of the season's form so I think we will find that whoever winds up on top of the podium will be in a strong position going into the European season (however he finishes in Malaysia & Brazil). The pit stop strategy of the race is likely to be a two stop one with the first stop being between lap 18-20 & the second around lap 38. There is enough flexibility for some teams to try running a one stop strategy but tyre wear normally rules this out. The qualifying procedure has quite an impact on the race with teams having to model their qualifying performances into their race preparation, topping the car up for the right amount of fuel for their strategy before qualifying. With only one engine allowed per car any problem in testing or qualifying will be severely punished with a 10 place drop on the grid.

A Lap Of The Track

The start finish/straight is quite long (you can normally get up to 180-190mph) & leads into a fast chicane (the Jones & Brabham corners) Jones is a right hander taken at around 75mph in third gear & Jones is the left hander that is taken in 4th at around 95mph opening out into a short straight where you can get up to 175mph. If your traction control is playing up or you are just a little ham-fisted it can be easy to spin here — just ask Juan-Pablo Montoya who spun away his lead here last year! It was also where Kimi Raikkonen FIRMLY closed the door on Michael Schumacher. Turn 3 (it doesn't have a name which is a bit silly as it is the main overtaking point on the track) is a right hander & is taken at around 60mph in 2nd gear. It was here that Martin Brundle had a pretty spectacular accident in the 1996 Grand Prix. Whitford is a relatively gentle left hander which involves feathering the throttle rather than any braking & is taken in 3rd or 4th gear at between 80-90mph, you then accelerate hard until you get to another unnamed corner which is a fast right hander taken at 105mph in 4th gear. This is the only really fast testing corner on the circuit & it is quite common to see cars bouncing across the sand on the outside of it as they suddenly realise the limits of their car's grip (Verstappen came a particular cropper in the Tyrell in 1997 where he managed a 7 or 8 foot jump in the car managing to break the floor of the brand new car!) After all this skidding between corners you then floor it to get up to 175-180mph before taking the right-left from Albert Road into the Marina Section. This is one of the most spectacular places to watch the cars as they swoop around the Lauda right-hander in 5th at 155mph & then accelerating up to 170mph or so in 6th gear before braking for the Clark Chicane (here is another overtaking point but it is a very tricky place to try it & you usually see a couple of cars come a cropper as they get their braking wrong during the race!) You then get a good blast out of here up to 175mph & through the fast left hander which they claim you drop a gear for but they normally just seem to feather the throttle again instead in order to save time. You then come upon the Waite left & right handers which are both taken in 4th gear before building back up to 160mph & top gear for the Hill corner. You then brake down to 70mph & 3rd gear for Ascari before the Stewart corner which is entered in 4th gear at 135mph & then tightens down to 95mph at the exit. You then have a very short straight before at tight (45mph 2nd gear) left hander, to you right as you exit this is the pit entrance while the non-pitting cars have to enter the Prost right hander which is taken at 80 mph in 4th gear (it was here that Hakkinen crashed on his first practice lap out as World Champion in 1999!) you then accelerate down the start/finish straight.

The Teams

Ferrari

(Red with Marlboro signs)

1. **M. Schumacher**
2. **Barrichello**

Although Ferrari claim to be using last year's car for the initial few races in reality only the monocoque has been carried over from last year's championship winner. Both Ferrari and Bridgestone are concerned about speed and it is thought that Maranello may even rush introduction of this year's F2005 if the F2004M (M standing for Modificato) is not up to speed. As far as the drivers go both are easily up to winning though Bridgestone's lack of data through only having two top cars to gain information from may see them suffer under the new tyre regulations.

BAR

(White with Red Lucky Strike Roundels on it)

3. **Button**
4. **Sato**

The off season has seen some notable changes occur within BAR. David Richards has been replaced by Nick Fry (his old number 2) and Honda has bought nearly half of the team as a precursor to a complete takeover from BAT. Although these changes are sure to make an impact on the team in the long run, for now the instability and potential dissention from both this and Jenson Button's aborted move to Williams may lead to errors being made by the team. In testing the BAR007 has not been all that fast and reliability has been a serious issue. Even the drivers admit that challenging for the top spot looks unlikely early in the season.

Renault

(Dark & Light Blue & Yellow with Mild Seven on it)

5. **Fisichella**
6. **Alonso**

One of the pre season favourites, Renault, have been putting in some amazing times during testing. Fisichella seems to have settled back at his old team very easily and already seems as dialled into the car as Alonso (and therefore more familiar than Trulli or Villeneuve ever were). The RS05 looks to be a clever design though the mechano style wings and vents are carried over from last year's car — a strange decision considering how they hampered development. Renault need to be showing some more consistency if they are to challenge for the title and the RS05 may be just the car to deliver it.

Williams

(Dark Blue & White with Compaq & Allianz signs on it)

7. **Webber**
8. **Heidfeld**

Over recent seasons Williams have struggled to keep up with both their rival teams and engine supplier BMW's aspirations. The team have not had a genuinely front running design since 1997 and have instead relied on engine power and a healthy development budget to get the car to the front - even when it didn't belong there. The clear out of drivers in the off season seems to have been a good thing for the team who were in dire need of a clean sheet after an unhealthy atmosphere last year where the team knew both drivers were on the verge of leaving. Webber and Heidfeld (in particular) have been a breath of fresh air and, although they admit that the FW27 is currently off the pace, both drivers are down to earth and hard working enough to ensure that the situation is swiftly addressed.

McLaren

(Grey with West signs on it)

9. **Montoya**
10. **Raikkonen**

In contrast to several of the more highly touted teams last season McLaren have been quietly restructuring through the winter in order to mount a serious challenge this year. Divesting themselves of David Coulthard was a good move for both parties and it is clear that Raikkonen and Montoya are getting on far better than either has with his team mates in the past. The spirit of competition within McLaren looks to be flourishing and both Montoya and Raikkonen are safe within the team with long contracts under their belts so can concentrate on racing for themselves and the team. The MP4/20 is a

useful design and has flown in testing. The team will be disappointed with a podium on Sunday.

Sauber

(Mid Blue with a yellow airbox & white nose & front wing with Credit Suisse & Petronas written on it)

11. **Villeneuve**

12. **Massa**

Massa's outpacing of Villeneuve and in testing and some doubts over the true speed of the C25 remains unknown. Everyone within the team will be hoping that Jacques steps up a gear when the season starts for proper otherwise the former world champion could see himself replaced by the likes of Alex Wurz or Anthony Davidson as early as Imola. To be entering a season with these sorts of question marks hanging over you is not constructive and this may well prove detrimental in itself. Massa is still too inconsistent to be viewed as a genuine contender for anything other than minor points and as such Sauber may find themselves less competitive than they ought to be this weekend.

Toyota

(Red & White with Toyota & Panasonic logos)

14. **R. Schumacher**

15. **Trulli**

Although Toyota's build up to the start of the season has been anything but encouraging, recent testing has looked more encouraging for the Japanese squad. Toyota are making a fuss over moving the Japanese grand prix from Honda's facility in Suzuka to their track in Fuji. Mike Gascoigne and both drivers have been a lot more positive of late about their new challenger and progress has clearly been made on improving the pace and consistency of the car in recent tests. Points seem likely though a race win is still a while away.

Red Bull Racing

(Dark blue with yellow airbox & thin red and white stripes down the side)

16. **Coulthard**

17. **Klein**

What a difference a winter makes. The former Jaguar team have gone through the mill and are now touted by many (including Sir Frank Williams) as the team most likely to spring a surprise! Coulthard is flying while Klein has made less spectacular progress but still looks a decent second seat driver. Stewart and Jaguar found running two equal cars a struggle and Coulthard's popularity within the team makes it pretty clear who will get preferential treatment. Even so both drivers will be looking at points this weekend.

Midland Jordan

(Yellow with Sobraine on it)

18. **Karthekeinan**

19. **Monteiro**

Anyone who wants some entertainment should have a look at the Jordans in qualifying! Poor balance and poor reliability will make the car more than a bit of a handfull throughout the sessions while reliability is unlikely due to lack of running. Despite all this the weekend will be good experience for the Midland crew as they take charge on their first grand prix weekend. Lack of sponsors this season is not a problem and the team are looking at next March rather than this one. Trevor Carlin is still positive about his first race as team principal and the team are sure to do their usual professional job.

Minardi

(TBC black, white & red - principal sponsor is yet unannounced)

18. **Leinders**

19. **Freidsecher**

Despite 8 of the other teams agreeing Ferrari's refusal to allow Minardi to field their 2004 cars (despite being 5 seconds off the pace) means that the team will not be on the grid this weekend. Paul Stoddart may still appeal and has said that he will be looking at pursuing legal action in the future but for this weekend the grid will be down to 18 cars. Jean Todt seems happy to portray the villain in this scenario and it is clear that some form of dealing is going on between the FIA and Ferrari regarding their treatment of Minardi. If Ferrari wish to alienate their supporters and undermine their stated views in the past then they are welcome to. Whether their behaviour will endear either themselves or the sport is another matter entirely.

Predictions

Qualifying	Race
1. Montoya	1. Alonso
2. Alonso	2. Fisichella
3. Raikkonen	3. Schumacher