

2005 F1 Season

French Grand Prix Preview

Round 10 of 19

By Alex "Zander" Keep

Circuit Name: Magny-Cours
Circuit Length: 2.64 miles (4.250km)
Lap Record: Michael Schumacher, 1m15.377s
Number of Laps: 72

The Track's F1 History

As mentioned Magny-Cours has a bit of a reputation for hosting dull races. The oppressive heat which has been baking this part of France recently lifted a couple of days ago which means that the race should be dry but without the risk of a storm (which made the race so entertaining last year!).

The track itself is sighted miles from anywhere and as a result is seen as a bit characterless and bland (a little like the races!). The spectator areas are also pretty poor as, like Spain, the grandstands in some parts of the track are the best part of half a mile away from the action.

The track has been used for the French Grand Prix since 1991 and it is normally a place where the Brits go well. Nigel Mansell won the race in 1991 and 1992 and Damon Hill put a good performance in here in 1993 to finish just behind his team mate, Alain Prost.

In 1994 Nigel Mansell made his Grand Prix comeback here and there was a great shootout for pole between him and Damon Hill. In the race itself Schumacher made an excellent start (his Benetton was later found to be carrying illegal traction control software though the team claimed it was never used) and the race was a bit dull!

In 1995 Schumacher pretty much dominated the event in his Benetton Renault though he caused a storm when he alleged that Hill "brake tested" him on the fastest part of the course.

In 1996 Schuey retired early on in the race and Hill took a good win.

In 1997 Schuey fought back with a vengeance with a Ferrari 1-3. Villeneuve ended up spinning out at the last corner as he tried to get past Irvine and it seemed that Williams had thrown their excellent start to the season away.

In 1998 Schuey again dominated as a rain shower managed to turn the track into a bit of a skating rink!

In 1999 Heinz Harald Frentzen took a win for Jordan in very poor conditions. Barrichello took his second pole here (and Stewart's first) and led most of the race. Hakkinen did a great job of catching him as did Schumacher and Coulthard was looking good for a win until his electrics let go. In the end the leaders all had to come in for fuel again leaving Frentzen's Jordan sitting pretty for the win.

In 2000 David Coulthard scored a great victory after showing the race's 300 million viewers exactly what he thought of Schumacher's driving tactics with some rather blatant hand gestures!

In 2001 Schuey and the Ferrari were unstoppable though an excellent pole position by Ralf Schumacher produced a new lap record around the track (one that is almost certain to be lowered this year). Alesi and Burti were a disappointment for France were hoping to chase up their strong result in Canada leaving the team in serious financial difficulties.

Schumacher's dominance continued in 2002 where he won his fifth World Championship. In a race dominated by drive through penalties as a result of an absurdly long pit straight line coming out of the pits Kimi Raikkonen took what was looking like an easy win when the Finn skidded on some oil left by Allan McNish's Toyota blowing up. Michael Schumacher needed no second invitation and took the lead at the Adelaide Hairpin to score a lucky win that sealed his world championship with a fair part of the season still left to run.

In 2003 Ralf Schumacher showed how good he can be in a well setup car by winning the race easily from his teammate. Ralf had won the race before at the Nurburgring and it looked like Williams would be fighting for the title. A feeling backed up by Montoya's second place ahead of the less impressive looking Ferraris.

Last year Michael won again after a stiff challenge from Fernando Alonso who was hoping to give Renault a popular win on their home turf. Barrichello completed the podium ahead of Trulli who rounded off a good performance from Renault. Barrichello's overtaking of Trulli within sight of the chequered flag incensed team chief Flavio Briatore and this would result in Trulli being handed his P45 later in the year. Jenson Button was a relatively lowly fifth ahead of the McLarens and Montoya's Williams.

Kimi Raikkonen's View:

"A burst of acceleration along the short pit straight at Magny Cours sees you reach 170mph / 273kph in fifth gear on the approach to Grand Courbe, before dabbing the brakes slightly to take the flat out long left hander.

The sweeping right hander of Estoril follows immediately, and you must keep as much speed as possible as the corner swings you round 180-degrees onto the longest and fastest section of the track, Golf. Powering along the back straight, which has a gentle curve to the right, you reach speeds of 185mph / 297kph in seventh gear before braking

hard for the Adelaide hairpin, which is a good overtaking opportunity. A first gear right hander, you pull some 4.2g as you slow to 50mph / 80kph to negotiate the tight bend. You push hard on the throttle as you exit, reaching 162mph / 260kph in fifth gear along the straight, through the slight right kink, before dabbing the brakes for the fast Nürburgring chicane. You take the right-left weave at some 130mph / 210kph in fourth. Flicking up through the gears, you briefly touch 162mph / 260kph in fifth gear on the approach to the second hairpin. Wider than Adelaide, and therefore slightly quicker, the 180-degree left hander is taken at 55mph / 88kph in second gear.

On the power on the exit through another right-left weave, you reach 153mph / 245kph in fourth on the approach to the fast fourth gear Imola chicane. The track dips as you take the right-left chicane at 135mph / 217kph. A short burst of acceleration takes you to the Château d'Eau, the long right hander, which has been altered slightly, sees you slow from 140mph / 225kph in fourth to 60mph / 96kph in second.

Accelerating out you reach 160mph / 257kph along the new approach to Lycée, which has a gentle curve to the left. We will have to brake hard for the sharp right of Lycée, which is taken at 50mph / 80kph in second, and leads back onto the start-finish straight, through a right-left kink, to begin another lap."

Jarno Trulli 's View:

"At the start of the lap I enter a very fast left-hand corner and I'll be changing into top gear, taking it at 280 km/h. It is quite easy flat, but I need to position the car well on exit as it leads into the important right-hander at Turn Two. I will be approaching this corner, at just under 290 km/h and due to the camber I almost take two apexes through it, hitting the first one at around 200 km/h and then dropping down to around 175 km/h for the second, while holding fourth gear throughout. It's a difficult corner since the car will always tend to understeer here due to the high loading on the left hand tire and my aim will be minimize understeer to get good speed on the main straight that follows. At the end of this straight, I will be doing around 300 km/h in top gear before braking very hard, typically at 4g, and then dropping down to first gear and 60 km/h for the hairpin.

Exiting the corner is difficult and often during the race the entry to the corner is offline if you have to defend your position. However, on exiting it, I will get up to around 280 km/h in top gear just getting into sixth gear before entering the first of the fast chicanes. This is a right-left chicane with the first part taken at 215 km/h in fourth gear and the second part being almost but not quite flat with just a small lift as I apex around 230 km/h before reaching the next left-hand hairpin. I should get to 260kmh in fifth gear before dropping to second at around 88 km/h, which makes this a slightly quicker hairpin than the first one.

The exit from this corner is similar to exit from the first hairpin in that I will reach 285 km/h in top gear before entering the second of the very fast chicanes. This is again a right-left chicane and it differs from the first one in that the first part of the chicane is quicker than the second part. Like the first chicane it is also taken in fourth gear but my apexes will be at 220 km/h and 210 km/h. In addition, there is a bit of a dip in the track here which adds extra load to the car. On exiting the chicane, I will hold fourth gear to

around 230 km/h before dropping down to second gear and around 95 km/h for another long right hand corner.

As I head back towards the pit area, I should just get into fifth gear at 260 km/h before entering the final chicane, which is much slower than the previous two and is taken in second gear at between 120 km/h and 130 km/h. On exit, I won't get to full throttle before having to brake again for the final very tight corner, which I will take at 70 km/h in first gear. The start/finish line is very close to the exit corner so for a good qualifying lap I need to pay particular attention to this exit as I cross the finish line at 140 km/h in second gear."

The Track

This will be the 91st French Grand Prix, although only the 54th of the official Formula One world championship. The earlier versions were called the ACF, (for Automobile Club de France) Grand Prix, who continued as the organizer of the French Grand Prix until 1967. Indeed, it was that body which organized the very first Grand Prix which was held at Le Mans in 1906, a two-day marathon run over 1236 kms (766 miles).

Renault won that first Grand Prix, but it was to be another 73 years and three days until the French manufacturer won again, at Dijon in 1979 when Jean-Pierre Jabouille recorded the first win for a turbocharged car. It was in that same race that Rene Arnoux, in the second Renault, and Ferrari's Gilles Villeneuve fought their heroic duel for second place. Renault are hoping to celebrate the 25th anniversary of that win with another this weekend.

Turbo charging isn't the only innovation to have found success in France, Peugeot introduced twin overhead camshafts and won in 1912. Jimmy Murphy's Duesenberg had hydraulic brakes that helped him to success in 1921 while Fiat introduced supercharging in 1923 and set the fastest lap before retirement. Jacky Ickx's Ferrari 312 had a small rear wing, which helped him to victory in 1968. In 1926, the smallest ever field contested a Grand Prix, just three Bugattis after all the other constructors boycotted the race at Miramas. The winning margin was a record as well at 15 laps.

Since the World Championship began in 1950, France has organized 50 Grand Prix out of a potential 51, they missed just one in 1955 after the Le Mans tragedy. However, it might be said that they made up for that by hosting the Swiss Grand Prix at Dijon in 1982. But perhaps the most surprising thing about the French Grand Prix is that it has visited seven different circuits in its history, only the American Grand Prix has been to more.

The French started off at Reims then went to Rouen for the first time two years later. Clermont-Ferrand hosted its first race in 1965, before returning to Le Mans in 1967 for a single event, then it went to Le Castellet, or Circuit Paul Ricard as it is also known, in 1971 then to Dijon in 1974 and finally to Magny-Cours for the first time in 1991.

Ferrari has won the French Grand Prix no less than twelve times Lotus and Williams has won seven times. McLaren, meanwhile, has won just five times, and prior to David Coulthard's win here in 2000, the last was back in 1989. The star in France is really Alain

Prost, no less than six wins, including three in succession. In 1989 he led from start to finish, after leading home Ayrton Senna in a Marlboro McLaren one-two the year before. Michael Schumacher has won the event five times with Juan-Manuel Fangio and Nigel Mansell taking four wins on French soil.

While Alain Prost is obviously one of the French Grand Prix heroes, so too is Fangio, although he needed Luigi Fagioli's help to win in 1951. The Italian therefore became the oldest ever winner of a Grand Prix, at 53 years and 22 days. Fangio then led home Karl Kling by just 0.1s at Reims on Mercedes' World Championship debut in 1954, they'd started from pole too. Rather more hard-fought, however, was Giancarlo Baghetti's brilliant debut for Ferrari when he won by a similar margin over Dan Gurney at the same circuit in 1961.

Although McLaren was the last to score a one-two here with Coulthard leading Hakkinen in 2000 and Ferrari scoring one with Schumacher and Irvine in 1998, Williams had a similar result with Hill and Villeneuve in 1996, Prost and Hill in 1993 and Mansell and Patrese in 1992. Cooper did rather better by occupying the first four places in 1960. Williams occupied the front row from 1992-1994 while it was McLaren in 1988 and 1989, but Ferrari's last all-front row was back in 1961, in the race won by Baghetti, with three cars, Phil Hill, Wolfgang von Trips and Richie Ginther.

The most unusual single feature of the Circuit de Nevers must surely be the ultra-tight sequence of ess-bends which leads into the final right-hander before the start/finish line. Approached over a downhill brow, it frequently prompts bouts of over ambitious driving on the part of competitors eager to make up places in the closing stages of the race, in that respect, the final gravel trap before the last corner.

Elsewhere, the circuit is wide and flowing, with generous run-off areas separating the tarmac from vertical concrete retaining walls. This means the spectators tend to be quite a distance from several of the challenging corners, most notably the high speed double-apex Grande Courbe and Estoril right-handers which lead out onto the long, if gently curving back straight.

French drivers to have won their home World Championship Grand Prix include Alain Prost (1981, 1983, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1993), Rene Arnoux (1982) and Jean-Pierre Jabouille (1979). Two French drivers scored points in the very first World Championship Grand Prix at Silverstone in 1950. They were Yves Giraud-Cabantous and Louis Rosier who finished fourth and fifth in their Talbots.

Situated close to the town of Nevers, 160 miles south of Paris, The track was opened to Grand Prix racing in 1991 following an upgrading of the old club circuit. The plan was patronized by none other than President Mitterrand.

The main problem with the place is that it is in the middle of nowhere, and it is a difficult location to get to. But this does not effect the crowd sizes too drastically, even though there have been very few exciting races here.

Recently the French Grand Prix nearly dropped of the calendar due to a conflict between the FIA and the French Government over TV rights to the event. The Government changed the laws to allow the FIA to maintain their exclusive rights over the television broadcast of the race and it was returned to the calendar at the last minute.

In 2000, the French Grand Prix was the scene of David Coulthard fighting wheel to wheel with Michael Schumacher for victory. The race became infamous for the Scot's single-finger salute to Schumacher after he felt the German's blocking tactics were too severe. Coulthard eventually did get past the Ferrari driver and went on to take the win.

Magny-Cours has excellent facilities with a mixture of slow corners and tight hairpins. The jewel in the crown however, is the magnificent Estoril right-hander after the pits which really shows Formula 1 cars at their best.

The Adelaide hairpin is the only significant overtaking point on the track, while the rest of the track is technical rather than challenging. The Imola chicane is a small highlight, the track dipping significantly in the middle of the complex.

Magny Cours is known for being the flattest track on the calendar.

Its long sweeping curves normally mean the race is usually a bit of a snorathon too with the only two real overtaking opportunities being at Adelaide and on the last corner. It is stuck in the middle of no-where-ville as well so those who turn up normally find the whole weekend a bit tedious!

1999 was a cracker however, as rain during qualifying and the race meant that Barrichello got the pole with Alesi second and Frentzen won the race after some superb tactical driving and Coulthard's pressuring of Schuey meant that last year's was not to be missed either. The track's long corners mean that aerodynamics and power are the real names of the game and it can be a bit of a bugger to set the cars up for. In last week's testing both McLaren and Ferrari went well so it will be a very close call while the Nurburgring showed that Williams is there or thereabouts at more tracks than just the fast ones.

This is also a track that Barrichello and Coulthard like so it should be at least a four way fight both in qualifying and in the race. The weather in that area of France tends to be hot in June (surprise surprise!) but there is a good chance of a heavy shower to make things a little interesting. The races here are usually a bit processional as the long corners make following the car in front very difficult indeed.

1999 and last year's races were the exceptions, however, with some great overtaking moves and a great (and surprising) win by Frentzen in 1999. Coulthard produced a brilliant and highly entertaining victory over a Schumacher at his best in 2000 but the German bit back in 2001 while in 2002 a stray patch of oil left by Allan McNish's detonating Toyota engine saw Kimi Raikkonen lose what was a dominant lead and Michael Schumacher take the win and his 5th World Championship.

Last Year's French Grand Prix Results

Position	No	Driver	Team	Engine	Time	Laps	Delay/ Retirement
1	1	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari	Ferrari	1:30'18.133	70	
2	8	Fernando Alonso	Renault	Renault	1:30'26.462	70	8.329
3	2	R.Barrichello	Ferrari	Ferrari	1:30'49.755	70	31.622
4	7	Jarno Trulli	Renault	Renault	1:30'50.215	70	32.082
5	9	Jenson Button	BAR	Honda	1:30'50.617	70	32.484
6	5	David Coulthard	McLaren	Mercedes	1:30'53.653	70	35.520
7	6	Kimi Räikkönen	McLaren	Mercedes	1:30'54.363	70	36.230
8	3	J.P.Montoya	Williams	BMW	1:31'01.552	70	43.419

Championship Standings

Drivers			
Rank	Driver	Team	Points
1	F. Alonso	Renault	59
2	K.Raikkonen	McLaren	37
3	M.Schumacher	Ferrari	34
4	R.Barrichello	Ferrari	29
5	J.Trulli	Toyota	27
6	N.Heidfeld	Williams	25
7	M.Webber	Williams	22
8	R.Schumacher	Toyota	20
9	D.Coulthard	Red Bull	17
10	G.Fisichella	Renault	17
11	J.Montoya	McLaren	16
12	F.Massa	Sauber	7
13	T.Monteiro	Jordan	6
14	A.Wurz	McLaren	6
15	N.Karthikeyan	Jordan	5
16	J.Villeneuve	Sauber	5
17	C.Albers	Minardi	4
18	P.de la Rosa	McLaren	4
19	C.Klien	Red Bull	4
20	P.Friesacher	Minardi	3
21	V.Liuzzi	Red Bull	1
22	J.Button	BAR	0
=22	A.Davidson	BAR	0
=22	T.Sato	BAR	0
=22	R.Zonta	Toyota	0

Constructors

Rank	Team	Points
1	Renault	76
2	Ferrari	63
=2	McLaren	63
4	Toyota	47
=4	Williams	47
6	Red Bull	22
7	Sauber	12
8	Jordan	11
9	Minardi	7

A Lap of the Magny-Cours Circuit

The last corner is a tight right hander so you come down the pit straight with the pits on your left-hand side. Just after the pits exit road the track turns left (this turn is called Grande Curve). It usually requires nothing more than a slight feathering of the throttle to negotiate this though it can be a bit hairy if people are exiting the pits at the same time as cars are barreling down the main straight!

You then accelerate again before breaking for Estoril. This is a long open 180-degree right hand bend that is taken in 4th gear at just over 100mph. Alesi skidded off here and it has a reverse camber (i.e. the face of the road is angled away from the track so it is trying to throw you off rather than keep you on!) so people often come a cropper there.

There is then an enormous straight (going through a right hand kink called Golf) before breaking down from 200mph to 35 in time for the second gear Adelaide hairpin.

This is a really tight one and the main overtaking area on the track. The cars break impossibly late here before accelerating through a kind of up and down kink just after (usually you will see the cars running side by side if they have been overtaken as they try to make the place back.).

The cars then accelerate up to a right/left called Nurbergring before breaking down to 50mph and 2nd gear for the left-hand 180-degree corner.

Accelerating away you then have quite a long undulating straight before Imola. This is a right-left which also goes down into a dip and back up again — it is taken in 4th gear at about 120mph and is a little odd! Prost's having Magny-Cours at their nominated test track means that they have probably the best setup to deal with this and the similar one at the end of the lap.

You emerge out the other side accelerating briefly before breaking to 50mph for the second gear right hander called Chateau d'eau.

After that it is a bit of a straight before breaking for the second of these right/left — down/up chicanes at Chicane. This is somewhat slower than Imola in 2nd and 3rd gears at about 70mph.

As you exit it the pit entrance is on your left and you seem to be heading towards a brick wall! You brake here and shift back down into 2nd Gear for Lycee, the last corner which is a right hander taken at about 40mph.

Strategy

After the shocking events at Indianapolis two weeks ago tires are sure to be the major talking point of the weekend. It is easy to forget that Michelin are French and therefore will be hoping & expecting to produce a performance to help erase the memories of bringing such a poor choice of tires to Indy. Of course whether all the teams will be allowed to race after Wednesday's FIA hearing is another matter.

The Teams

Ferrari

(Red with Marlboro signs)

1. M. Schumacher
2. Barrichello

Back in the title race after their "memorable" 1-2 in America, Schumi is now just 3 points behind Kimi Raikkonen and Ferrari are tied with McLaren in the constructor's championship. Until the team can get their car working with the Bridgestone tires properly the team are going to be playing catch up. Michelin have shown no sign of changing their construction so replicate Bridgestone's more conservative approach and therefore Bridgestone can expect to take more time to get up to speed and then fade during the later stages of the race, posting blistering times during the middle stint.

BAR

(White with Red Lucky Strike Roundels on it)

3. Button
4. Sato

Amazingly 2004's runners up are bottom of the pile in 2005. Jordan and Minardi's points at Indy mean that the team are now officially last in the constructor's championship (with the drivers last in the driver's championship). Obviously the car is quick and the drivers talented but until reliability, pace and talent can work together the team will stay bottom of the pile. Prior to the season the team's management said that they did not care where they came in the championship as long as they won a race - lets hope they are still thinking this!

Renault

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

5. Fisichella
6. Alonso

Renault will be sporting a new livery for the French grand prix. More to the point the car will also be significantly altered for the French race with numerous tweaks to enable it to steal back its early season performance advantage over the lightning fast McLarens. Renault usually perform brilliantly on their home turf and Alonso's harrying of Michael Schumacher last year shows that the team will certainly be in the hunt for a win this time out.

Williams

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

7. Webber
8. Heidfeld

The major news for Williams concerns not the team but their engine supplier. BMW announced last Wednesday that they had bought Sauber with a view to run the team as their official entrant from next season. Although BMW have said that they are happy to continue to supply Williams with engines at least until their contract expires in 2008. Williams is understood to be unhappy with this arrangement and the team is talking to Honda, Toyota and Cosworth about a supply of engines for next year. As in 1999 Williams seem to be at a crossroads and the signs are not looking good.

McLaren

(Gray with West signs on it)

9. Montoya
10. Raikkonen

Indianapolis was a huge hiccup for the Woking team after a run of three victories in the past four races. Kimi Raikkonen has been thrashing the car to within an inch of its life and Juan Pablo Montoya has now settled into the team and car to provide a stiffer challenge as to which of the silver arrows is faster. Magny Cours will help McLaren's complex aerodynamics and the easy handling nature of the car will result in the car probably being easier on its tires than the Renaults. Ultimately the driver's use of their tires (particularly regarding not locking their wheels at the big stop at the Adelaide Hairpin) will be the ultimate deciding factor.

Sauber

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

- 11. Villeneuve
- 12. Massa

BMW's purchase of the team means everything changes for next year. BMW are known to be looking at ramping up the staff and Peter Sauber's building of the most advanced wind tunnel in F1 last year means that the team already have much of the infrastructure in place to make it among the front runners in F1. For the drivers the news is less bright. Villeneuve may well be bought out of the second year of his contract while Felipe Massa's contract is up at the end of this year. It would not be any surprise to see both drivers replaced with Nick Heidfeld and David Coulthard replacing them.

Toyota

(Red & White with Toyota & Panasonic logos)

- 14. R Schumacher
- 15. Trulli

Trulli's first pole position was slightly tainted when the truth of the situation emerged. Having sustained Ralf Schumacher's tire failure Toyota consulted Michelin's former head of tire dynamics (who the team poached at the start of the season) to determine the cause. When it was realized that the situation was more serious than was first thought the fuel was taken out of Jarno Trulli's car resulting in the car only having five laps worth of petrol in it! For Magny Cours a decent points result is hoped for. Ralph Schumacher is still the holder of the fastest lap around Magny Cours so both drivers will be hoping for a good result.

Red Bull Racing

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

- 16. Coulthard
- 17. Klein

Great results in the European race and another double points score in Canada means that Red Bull have not only got more points than Jaguar achieved in any year of their existence but they are also looking at beating Jaguar's total points tally over their entire existence! Coulthard is hot stuff for next season while the rather obscure sharing of the second seat is resulting in some spellbinding drives by both Liuzzi and Klein. Christian Klein drives again this weekend and a solid job is expected from him while Coulthard looks almost certain to be in the points come the end of the race.

Midland Jordan

(Yellow with Sobraine on it)

18. **Karthekeinan**

19. **Monteiro**

Even with Eddie Jordan no longer at the helm the Jordan luck holds. A podium in the US means that Jordan is now only one point behind Sauber in the constructor's championship. The EJ12 is going to be heavily revised for Silverstone so this will be the final outing for the now venerable EJ12. The EJ12B is said to effectively be an entirely new car and great things are expected from it. Whether the car (& the team) live up to initial expectations remains to be seen.

Minardi

(TBC black, white & red - OzJet on the sidepods & engine cover)

20. **Leinders**

21. **Freidsecher**

More lucky points. It is nearly ten years since Minardi got two points finishes. That said Paul Stoddart is anything but happy over the situation in F1 and seems to be the shop steward of the team principals. His repeated calls for Max Moseley's resignation has shown that the Minardi man is punching way above his team's (very limited) weight. I just hope that Minardi can up their pace to reflect their status as a Formula 1 team.

Alex's 2005 French Grand Prix Predictions

Qualifying	Race
1. Fernando Alonso	1. Kimi Raikkonen
2. Kimi Raikkonen	2. Juan Pablo Montoya
3. Juan Pablo Montoya	3. Fernando Alonso