

2005 F1 Season

Malaysian Grand Prix- Round 2 of 19 Sepang, Malaysia

By Alex "Zander" Keep

Circuit Name:	The Petronas Grand Prix Circuit, Sepang
Circuit Length:	3.3453 miles
Race Length:	183.9913 miles 55 laps
Lap Record:	Juan Pablo Montoya, 1: 34: 223

Juan Pablo Montoya's View

"The Sepang circuit is one of my favourite tracks, it is really fun to drive there and you usually see interesting races. Turns five and six are probably the most challenging and exciting to drive. You try to take this high speed S complex flat out and to achieve this, your car needs to be very well set-up. For the race, this sees a compromise between slow corner grip and high speed efficiency, as we have long periods of full throttle, with top speeds of up to 330km/h. For the drivers and team members it is important to acclimatise as the heat is enormous, for example temperatures in the cockpit can be over 50 degrees centigrade and we can lose up to four litres of fluid during the race. This is why I travelled to Singapore following the Australian Grand Prix, and I have been following a training and hydration programme with my trainer to get my body used to the conditions to ensure I can perform to my best all weekend."

Giancarlo Fisichella's View

"We had a great weekend in Australia, a quick car and some luck too, and the team did a great job in making sure we had no problems at all. But we are all focused on the future now, and looking ahead to the race this weekend in Sepang. We know the weather made the circumstances strange in Melbourne, so we expect other teams like Ferrari and McLaren to be much stronger in Malaysia. But we have a good package, so let's see what happens. Sepang is a circuit which shows if a car is good or not. The long, fast corners mean you need a very stable rear end, and a consistent car balance so that you know the car's reactions through the quick sections. There are some corners where the drivers can really make the difference as well. At the moment, nobody knows how the tire performance will unfold in temperatures like we have in Sepang, and it will be interesting to find out. All we know is that Michelin have done a great job this winter and in the first race. The tires in Melbourne were very consistent, and the performance was there. In Malaysia, they will have to be durable under much tougher circumstances, but

the R25 seems to manage the tires well. I am confident we will have good performance there. The race in Malaysia is always very tough physically, and I said before Melbourne that it is very easy to make mistakes at the end of the race when the tires are old. With the fatigue from the heat as well, that is even more true for Sepang, but I have been really motivated in training this winter and I am not worried about the physical side. As for expectations? The team is very optimistic, and I think we will expect to fight at the front again. But if bad weather does not play a part, I am sure the race will be a lot closer than in Australia."

The Track

The Sepang circuit staged its first race in 1999 & the event is a favorite on the calendar despite its lack of history. Its layout is very similar to that of Donnington Park though at 3.33 miles is a fair bit larger! Petronas (the petrochemical company) built the circuit & is made up of a number of different corners with the overall nature of the corners being similar to those at Silverstone or Montreal (though a slippery track means downforce is much more of a requirement). The monsoon conditions in 2001 led to a topsy turvey race & there is a good chance that similar could happen this time - especially as it is currently monsoon season. This race is the most humid of the season & the drivers can expect to lose around 3.5 litres of sweat.

This was the first challenging circuit to be introduced in a new Grand Prix circuit since the introduction of the "Senna chicanes" brought in 1994 (2nd gear 70 mph chicanes that were everywhere in F1 until recently & were usually named after Ayrton Senna). In 1999 there was a good race with a revitalized Schumacher winning the race for Irvine & generally being the class of the field. Even so Coulthard still managed to get ahead of Schumacher in the best move I have yet seen from the Scot. In 2000 Sepang was the last race of the season after Schumacher had already won the driver's championship. The race itself was another demonstration from Schumacher as he disappeared into the distance while the McLarens were beset by a string of niggling problems which awarded Ferrari the constructor's championship as well. The race also saw the end of Johnny Herbert's career with a disappointing crash for the Brit. In 2001 the race was moved to the start of the season & was dominated by the weather. A downpour just after the start saw mayhem in the early part of the race as numerous cars skidded off allowing Trulli to lead a few early laps (the only time last season that a car outside the top 3 teams managed to lead a grand prix). In the end Schumacher asserted himself & comfortably won from Barrichello with Coulthard third. Jos Verstappen was, however, the star of the race running as high as third in his Arrows before fading to finish 7th. 2002 was a Williams 1-2 as Raf Schumacher and Montoya dominated the podium in what would turn out to be one of only two races not won by Ferrari. A coming together between Montoya and Schumacher led to the German having to pit whilst Montoya was later forced to take a drive through penalty (despite the coming together being at best blameless. Michael Schumacher finished third. Jenson Button was cheated of a maiden podium in the Renault after a storming race was ruined by a late puncture while Allan McNish was cheated of a point when his Toyota' rear suspension collapsed on the last lap allowing Felipe Massa to get his first point as Sauber finished 5th & 6th. 2003 saw Kimi Raikkonen take his first and (so far) only grand prix win. The Renaults of Alonso and Trulli started on the front row but for once their launch control let them down and it was David Coulthard who seemed well set until his electronics let him down. Raikkonen took over and sailed on serenely to a classy debut win. Last year the worries over Ferrari's

pace proved to be well founded as Bridgestone dominated the race for Ferrari. Juan Pablo Montoya did an excellent job of keeping up with Michael Schumacher in the grotesque tusk nosed Williams but when he was given a controversial drive through the penalty despite which he still ended up second and managed to get the fastest lap of the race. Jenson Button confirmed that BAR were in for a good year with third - his first podium.

Last Year's Result

Position	Driver	Team	Engine	Time	Laps
1	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1h31m07.490s	56
2	Juan Pablo Montoya	Williams	BMW V10	1h31m12.512s	56
3	Jenson Button	BAR	Honda V10	1h31m19.058s	56
4	Rubens Barrichello	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1h31m21.106s	56
5	Jarno Trulli	Renault	Renault V10	1h31m44.850s	56
6	David Coulthard	McLaren	Mercedes V10	1h32m00.588s	56
7	Fernando Alonso	Renault	Renault V10	1h32m15.367s	56
8	Felipe Massa	Sauber	Petronas V10	-	55

Championship Standings

Drivers			
Rank	Driver	Nation	Points
1	Giancarlo Fisichella	ITA	10
2	Rubens Barrichello	BRA	8
3	Fernando Alonso	ESP	6
4	David Coulthard	GBR	5
5	Mark Webber	AUS	4
6	Juan Pablo Montoya	COL	3
7	Christian Klien	AUT	2
8	Kimi Raikkonen	FIN	1

Constructors			
Rank	Team	Engine	Points
1	Renault		16
2	Ferrari		8
3	Red Bull	Cosworth	7
4	Williams	BMW	4
5	McLaren	Mercedes	4

Situation

Sepang is built on reclaimed forest land just outside of Kuala Lumpur. In having the race in March the organizers have placed the race in the hottest & most humid time of the year. The excess of heat & humidity may well lead to problems for all the drivers (it is even possible that Schumacher may actually break a sweat!) while the less fit drivers can expect to emerge from their cockpits at the end of the race looking like they have just done a couple of lengths of the pool rather than driven a race! What this also means is that you can expect a lot of mechanical failures towards the end of the race as well as the cars getting quite strung out as the drivers get tired out. Sepang is quite hard on tire wear & the hot temperatures will emphasize this so some teams may have trouble getting through scrutineering afterwards.

Setup & Strategy

Sepang is a great mixture of all types of corner but the slippery nature of the track has led to many teams running very high levels of down force (some teams even claim that this has the third highest down force settings after Hungary & Monaco!). The key to a quick lap around Sepang is being able to turn in accurately & get the power down early. In the past a two stop strategy was usually the way to go though you can just have a one stopper as most of the teams did in 2003. The increased wear on the single set of tires from the higher temperatures should make one stopping less attractive though the increased work load on the already one race old engine for each pit stop will also come into play.

A Lap Of Sepang

The start line is about half way down an 800 m Straight. At the end of this speeds can build up to 186mph before squeezing into a tight right which is taken at 60mph in 2nd gear. This is immediately followed by a tight left which is taken at around 55mph also in 2nd. Coming out of that tight S is a long right hander where speeds can build up to around 155 in 5th. This leads into a short straight by which time the cars will be approaching 175 in 5th. This will probably be one of the main overtaking areas as it leads into a sharp right which is taken in 3rd gear at about 75mph this is followed by a long left & right taken at about 140 & similar to the S's found at Suzuka & then a short straight leads to two identical rights which are both taken at 100mph in 4th. A slightly longer straight follows before another tight left hander which is taken in 2nd at 55mph. This again leads into a long right & then another tight right hander that is taken at around 90mph. A quick left hander follows & then a long right hander which tightens down from 135 to 80 mph & goes down 2 gears. This leads onto the first of the 800m straights which will lead to the cars going at anything up to just under 190mph & then a 65 mph hairpin & the second straight which will signal the end of the lap.

The Teams

Ferrari

(Red with Marlboro signs)

1. M. Schumacher
2. Barrichello

A bizarre race for the Scuderia in Australia. Neither car was near the front due to the lottery that was qualifying. During the race Schumi drove as he did at the end of last season (looking very scrappy and ending up in the kitty litter after a coming together with Nick Heidfeld that looked at best 50/50. Apart from a blip in 2003 Schumacher has dominated Malaysia and, as long as the Bridgestone tires hold together, there is no reason why Michael cannot show his usual sort of form. In Australia Rubens put in a brilliant but mostly overlooked drive to claim second spot from the faster cars of Alonso and Coulthard. Ferrari clearly have some pace and certainly have some talent but mating the two will be more tricky than in previous years.

BAR

(White with Red Lucky Strike Roundels on it)

3. Button
4. Sato

It must be said that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the BAR007 from what we saw in Australia apart from the tiny fact that it is just not fast enough! Honda have had more than their fair share of reliability gremlins in pre-season testing so it was perhaps no surprise that the team elected to retire both cars from the race in Australia so as to have fresh engines for Malaysia. Button got his first podium in Malaysia and the increased overtaking points around the track mean that both drivers can go on maximum attack. Jenson's smooth driving style is sure to help him later in the race while Taku may well do well earlier on as he is sure to be on maximum attack. Whether the car can match their pace is another matter and it seems likely that Sato is more likely to through it off the road than succumb to the car's poor pace.

Renault

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

5. Fisichella
6. Alonso

The season could not have got off to a much better start for Renault. A dominating performance by Fisichella to finally stand on top of the podium for the first time (he won in Brazil two years ago but was robbed of the podium ceremony due to an error by officials). Perhaps more impressive in terms of showing the pace of the car was the performance of Fernando Alonso. Having to fight through the traffic allowed the Spaniard to show just what the car could do with the result that he set the fastest lap time and managed to finish third despite starting ten places further back on a circuit where it is impossible to overtake! Malaysia is sure to play to the Renault's strengths more than Australia and it would be a brave man to bet against either driver this weekend.

Williams

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

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

Although neither driver can claim to have had a good race in Oz, there was room for encouragement in the light of the weekend. The FW27 may not set the world alight but it is a reliable base for development and both drivers seem quietly confident that they will be able to do a better job in Malaysia. Mark Webber has qualified second in Malaysia driving the Jaguar last year so will be hoping for a decent performance on a circuit he normally performs strongly on. Nick Heidfeld will have the benefit of a fresh engine this weekend following his coming together with Michael Schumacher in Australia so may go well in Malaysia as he traditionally managed to do with Sauber.

McLaren

(Gray with West signs on it)

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

Easily the most disappointing team in terms of their pace over the race weekend in Australia, McLaren are hoping to turn things around in Malaysia. Ron Dennis' criticism of Montoya was in marked contrast to his writing off Raikkonen's incidents and poor pace as "one of those things". Although it is too early to say definitely Dennis seems to be continuing the treatment meted out to Coulthard during his nine years with the team. There is little doubt that both drivers are quick but it seems that if there were one driver in McLaren who needed reassurance and kid gloves from Dennis et al it would be Montoya and not Raikkonen. That said the drivers are there to race and not be mollycoddled and a turnaround in form can be expected this time out.

Sauber

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

- 11. **Villeneuve**
- 12. **Massa**

Although the Saubers are a couple of the prettiest cars on the grid, their pace last weekend left something to be desired. Massa did a great job of salvaging a respectable placing after being stuck at the back of the grid following his being caught in a downpour on slick tires in qualifying. By contrast Villeneuve had a terrible race. Starting fourth he managed to get passed at the start and acted as a mobile chicane for the entire race in a show of blocking not seen since Rene Arnoux was finishing off his career with Ligier in the late eighties!

Toyota

(Red & White with Toyota & Panasonic logos)

14. **R Schumacher**

15. **Trulli**

A flukey front row start for Jarno Trulli promised great things in the race. In the end neither driver was able to make much of an impact on the result. Trulli claimed to have been handicapped by a poor tire which slowed him all race. In the end Trulli finished a distant 9th, three places ahead of Ralf Schumacher (who had a similarly uninspiring drive). Despite such a poor race pace designer Mike Gasoyne still believes that there was promise in the car's performance. Ralf managed to pass both Sato and Villeneuve despite having to pit an extra time to reattach his seatbelts. The Toyota seems similar in stature to the Williams in terms of chassis performance - a kindly but not very quick car that is likely to be highly developed as the season progresses.

Red Bull Racing

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

16. **Coulthard**

17. **Klein**

The surprise of the weekend (to everyone who doesn't read my previews!) Red Bull showed how the former Jaguar management of Pitchforth & Purnell had got something right before they were shown the door at the start of this year. By both finishing in the points Coulthard and Klein managed to achieve something that Jaguar did not manage in the five years that they competed! Coulthard seemed robbed of his podium after the final stops but even so there is cause for optimism that the team can spring a few more surprises this season. It seems a little much to hope for them to repeat their Australian form but more points is a must and the team must be hoping that they can retain their third place in the constructor's championship for at least one more race!

Midland Jordan

(Yellow with Sobraine on it)

18. **Karthekeinan**

19. **Monteiro**

Some seriously dodgy handling with both cars saw the driving skills of Monteiro, and particularly Karthekeinan, graphically displayed all weekend. Monteiro showed himself to be a decent enough driver but nothing special (something anyone in CART could have told you for free last season!) while Karthekeinan showed why he is marked out as a talent of the future with an epic display of car control that was reminiscent of his Formula 3 battles with Jamie Davis, Anthony Davidson and Jenson Button in 1999. The cars are some way behind the rest of the grid but some way in front of Minardi so a boring race can be expected by both drivers this weekend!

Minardi

(Black with white & red - Ozjet on the rear wing)

20. **Leinders**

21. **Freidsecher**

Concerning himself more with the politics of Formula 1 and less with the efficient running of the team, Paul Stoddart's efforts to run his old cars seemed to do no one much good, particularly himself! The cars were woefully slow with both drivers struggling to get out of the cars lapping them quickly enough. Malaysia is likely to be more of the same. Stoddart's confrontations with the FIA are not doing the sport any good and are instead making several of the F1 powerbrokers wonder why Minardi are in F1 at all. Clearly it would be a huge shame to lose Minardi from the grid but Paul Stoddart has to concentrate on his team rather than the FIA if he is to run a tight ship.

Predictions

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