

2005 F1 Season

Grand Prix Preview San Marino, Autodromo Enzo & Dino Ferrari — Imola 15th April 2005

San Marino Grand Prix- Round 4 of 19

By Alex "Zander" Keep

Circuit Name: Imola
Circuit Length: 3.063 miles
Lap Record: Michael Schumacher, 1m20.411s
Number of Laps: 63

Last Time

Bahrain

BOOM! I would dearly love to know how much all those engine failures cost the various teams in Bahrain! Alonso's second win of the season is making him look like a good bet for the world championship this year. The season has proved there is no such thing as a certain favorite as Michael Schumacher again retired after his tires had already deteriorated far below where he was a factor in the race. Toyota are now looking like a good bet for a race win though Ralf Schumacher has been conspicuously slower than his team mate - it will be interesting to see how Toyota's management view this..... McLaren again underperformed even though De La Rosa's race was one of the most enjoyable drives for ages! The Williamses again looked decent but nothing more though their tire wear, like the Ferrari's gave cause for concern (did anyone else think that Mark Webber's flying off the road looked fun?!). BAR looked awful through the race and both drivers were more interested in their future test session than they were in soldiering on in the dog that is the BAR007. Red Bull had their first uncompetitive weekend and it was interesting to hear how DC did not hold back in laying into the team during debriefs. Add in the fact that Red Bull's management are already talking about giving Coulthard his P45 at the end of the season and it all seems like some tension may well bubble to the surface before too long. Jordan again did a decent enough job with Minardi laughably slow at the back of the field. A new Minardi, some European temperatures (which Bridgestone are more familiar with) and new aerodynamics for almost every team means that the season almost begins again this weekend in Italy.

History

The Imola circuit was built in 1950 and will, unfortunately, always be remembered as the place where Ayrton Senna lost his life.

Imola has held a Grand Prix on behalf of the tiny San Marino principality since 1981 and it has been the scene of many memorable races and some enormous accidents, such as Gerhard Berger's fiery wreck in 1989. It has also seen several thrilling wet-dry races, notably in 1981 and 1995. In the turbo era, Imola was notorious for being tough on fuel consumption. Cars often ran dry in the final stages and there were rarely many finishers.

Unfortunately the shine was taken off it for the 1995 race with the heavy safety changes brought about by the deaths of Roland Ratzenberger and Ayrton Senna the year before. It is also a pity that such a place will always be associated with the great Brazilian's demise. Tamburello, the scene of Senna's accident, has been re-profiled and is now a left-right-left section that is still quite tricky. Villeneuve is now broken up by a chicane, making Tosa much easier than before. Piratella remains a fast and demanding bend, while Acque Minerali has actually got quicker than it used to be. Imola may have changed a great deal, but it is still one of the more challenging venues on the calendar, with some of the least offensive chicanes in the world.

Jacques Villeneuve

"In Bahrain the car was stronger and I could drive more aggressively so that's encouraging for Imola. I am looking forward to going there — after a good race where I almost got points — so hopefully I will get them this time. Imola is a very different track; It's got numerous chicanes and the curves are particular so the driving style is different. There are a lot of difficult corners as well and it's a very demanding track for the engine and brakes so it will be a little bit difficult for everyone I think. In addition to this, there is still room for improvement on the set-up side so I will be working even harder with my engineers to help the car go faster in this first European race of the season. However, it seems that we are going in the right direction, so that's positive."

Alex Wurz:

"I am really happy to have the opportunity to race MP4-20 this coming weekend at Imola. Since joining the team at the end of 2000, I have completed over 70,000 testing kilometres and it will be great to have the chance to actually race a Team McLaren Mercedes car. I am looking forward to getting back to competitive action and hope I can secure a good result for the team. The Imola circuit is all about braking hard and accelerating, with all the chicanes and short straights, which means traction, braking performance and stability under braking are all key. To get a good lap, you need to be aggressive and really attack the curbs. It goes without saying that I wish Juan Pablo a very speedy recovery."

The Track

After Ayrton Senna's death in 1994, Imola became the focus of the "Ban Motor Racing" fraternity's campaign. Senna's death at Tamburello would have been survivable had a piece of the suspension arm not pierced his helmet visor. It could honestly be said to be an occurrence that could happen anywhere. Roland Ratzenberger's death the day before was a far worse indictment of the safety standards in Formula 1 at the time as his impact was into a wall at close to 200mph. Either way both Tamburello and Tosa (where Ratzenberger crashed) were reprofiled with chicanes emerging at both locations. Nelson

Piquet and Gerhard Berger had both had big accidents at Tamburello while the nature of Ratzenberger's accident was such that it had to be changed. Though no one would want to see that level of danger return to F1 (the death of Dale Earnhardt is an illustration of just how unacceptable such an amount of danger is in modern sport is). Unfortunately this has led to much of Imola's old spirit being destroyed (I have never understood why they didn't just bring Tamburello forward to just after the start/finish straight in a similar way to that at Magny-Cours). Despite all the chicanes there are still a few good corners and the race in 1995 showed that the track can also still hold a good race. The teams all enjoy San Marino as it is the start of the European Season and therefore a hell of a lot easier to get to than the first two "flyaway" races. This also means that parts can easily be flown out to the teams from their factories. In addition it is the first Italian race and the Tifosi (Ferrari supporters) will be even more fired up than usual as both Schumacher and Barrichello have a good chance of winning. Imola has seen both the largest and the smallest field enter the race. In 1989 39 cars attempted to enter the race with 26 cars starting (the usual number until 1995). In 1982 internal F1 politics saw the British teams stay away — leading to a field of just 14 cars taking the start. Although this should have led to a dull race the inter-team scrap between Gilles Villeneuve and Didier Pironi absorbed the watching masses after Pironi broke a promise to his teammate not to overtake him. It is Villeneuve's fury regarding this race which many feel led to his death in Zolder in the following race.

The Last Few Years

Although Imola is still overshadowed by the crashes in 1994, the race has been held there 6 times since then. In 1994 Schumacher won the race from Nicola Larini's Ferrari and Hakkinen's McLaren was third. In 1995 Damon Hill managed to assuage the spirits that must have hung over the Williams team by scorching to a great win on a drying track. Coulthard got involved in a bit of argey bargey with Jean Alesi's Ferrari while Michael Schumacher went off in quite a big way when he lost it going over Piratella. In 1996 a smart strategy from Adrian Newey combined with an unstoppable Hill to take a second successive victory. The race was also memorable for Michael Schumacher's qualifying effort where he literally drove the wheels off his Ferrari in order to claim pole position, the car's suspension failing after he crossed the start finish line. In 1997 Heinz Harald Frentzen claimed his one and only win for Williams when he beat off sustained pressure from Schumacher, Villeneuve and, later, Irvine. In 1998 Coulthard managed to win a pretty straightforward victory from Michael Schumacher and Eddie Irvine. After Schumacher had barged Coulthard out of the way in the previous (Argentinean) race many thought that the win was just revenge on the part of the Scot. In 1999 Schumacher won after Hakkinen made a mistake while leading comfortably. Coming out of the final chicane Hakkinen managed to get a wheel on the dirt and the car pivoted into the safety wall. Schumacher ended up winning after Coulthard was held up for a number of laps by Olivier Panis in the Prost which led to questions being asked about both Coulthard's ability to lap people and the place of backmarkers in contemporary racing. The other worthy point of that race was it was Damon Hill's highest finish that year. In 2000 Schuey had another win and, by that stage, was looking unassailable in the championship battle despite the closeness of his battle with Hakkinen. The real fight in the race was between Villeneuve's BAR and Salo's Sauber though Coulthard and Barrichello also had a good scrap. 2001 saw Ralf Schumacher score his debut win at Imola with Schumacher putting in his least impressive race of the season while his older brother retired with problems with his brakes. Montoya put in a couple of great moves but eventually retired as did

Raikkonen, who had the terrifying experience of having his steering wheel come off in his hands! At Imola in 2002 the beginning of the Ferrari steamroller for that season started as Michael Schumacher cruised to an effortless victory having secured an all Ferrari front row the day before. The race saw the debut of the F2002 for both drivers and Rubens Barrichello's easy second place showed that the team was going to be a force to be reckoned with for the rest of the year. In 2003 the race was overshadowed by the death of the Schumacher brothers' mother on the Saturday night before the race. Michael and Ralf qualified 1-2 and both then immediately left the track to be with their mother. Michael went on to score an emotional victory while Ralf faded to a distant 4th behind Montoya and Raikkonen. Last year the most major point of interest happened in qualifying rather than the race. Jenson Button upset the Ferrari hegemony by qualifying on pole. Unfortunately his early lead could not be held through the pitstops and Schumacher's Ferrari carried on sweeping all before him. Button held on for second and Montoya rounded off the podium. The Renaults showed that they were still a force behind Montoya while the sister Ferrari and Williams followed them with the underperforming McLaren of Raikkonen rounding out the points.

Last Year's Results

Position	No	Driver	Team	Engine	Time	Laps	Delay/Retirement
1	1	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1:26'19.670	62	
2	9	Jenson Button	BAR	Honda V10	1:26'29.372	62	9.702
3	3	J.P.Montoya	Williams	BMW	1:26'41.287	62	21.617
4	8	Fernando Alonso	Renault	Renault V10	1:26'43.324	62	23.654
5	7	Jarno Trulli	Renault	Renault V10	1:26'55.886	62	36.216
6	2	Rubens Barrichello	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1:26'56.353	62	36.683
7	4	Ralf Schumacher	Williams	BMW	1:27'15.400	62	55.730
8	6	Kimi Räikkönen	McLaren	Mercedes	1:26'20.284	61	

Championship Standings

Drivers			
Rank	Driver	Team	Points
1	F. Alonso	Renault	26
2	J.Trulli	Toyota	16
3	G.Fisichella	Renault	10
4	D.Coulthard	Red Bull	9
5	R.Schumacher	Toyota	9
6	R.Barrichello	Ferrari	8
7	J.Montoya	McLaren	8
8	K.Raikkonen	McLaren	7
9	M.Webber	Williams	7

10	N.Heidfeld	Williams	6
11	P.de la Rosa	McLaren	4
12	C.Klien	Red Bull	3
13	F.Massa	Sauber	2
14	M.Schumacher	Ferrari	2
15	C.Albers	Minardi	0
=15	J.Button	BAR	0
=15	A.Davidson	BAR	0
=15	P.Friesacher	Minardi	0
=15	N.Karthikeyan	Jordan	0
=15	T.Monteiro	Jordan	0
=15	T.Sato	BAR	0
=15	J.Villeneuve	Sauber	0

Constructors

Rank	Team	Points
1	Renault	36
2	Toyota	25
3	McLaren	19
4	Williams	13
5	Red Bull	12
6	Ferrari	10
7	Sauber	2

A Lap Of Imola

A lap of Imola effectively consists of going around and then up and down a hill a couple of times. Coming out of the last chicane (the Variante Bassa) at 80mph you accelerate hard over the Start/Finish line. By the end of the straight you are doing around 160mph in top gear at which point you take a slight left hand kink flat before getting up to around 180mph before braking into Tamburello. This is now a protracted 3rd gear chicane which is taken at around 65mph with the second part taken a gear higher and 60mph faster. Coming out of Tamburello you again accelerate hard towards Villeneuve which is now a left/right taken in 4th at around 110mph and then 3rd at 85mph. (Before the circuit changes in 1995 this entire section was virtually flat out with Tamburello taken flat and Villeneuve taken in 5th or 6th depending on the ratios of your car.) You then get to accelerate again up to 145mph in 5th before braking hard for Tosa. This is a tight left hand hairpin that is taken at 50mph in 2nd. It is the slowest corner on the track and was a great overtaking point. These days it is a lot more easy to defend the inside line into Tosa so it is generally useful for lapping people rather than overtaking for position. Though Coulthard also found it a useful place to take sideswipes at people in 1995!). Coming out of Tosa it is a straight drag up the hill until you reach about 170mph (in 6th or 7th gear obviously) as you reach the brow where you have to brake for Piratella which is one of the few demanding corners left at Imola. This is a left hander taken in 4th at 95mph but the fact that you can't easily pick out when to brake can lead to even the best drivers coming a cropper there (just ask Schuey). From Piratella you accelerate around

to the left dropping back down the hill and reaching 165mph before you brake for the double right at Acque Minerali (named after the springs that emerge near the corner). The first part of Acque Minerali is taken in 4th gear at 125mph while the second left is tighter and is taken in 3rd at about 65mph. Although these corners may seem relatively easy it is normally your speed through Acque Minerali which will determine whether you get a good lap time. Coming out of Acque Minerali you start the ascent down the hill towards the Variante Alta. You accelerate to about 170mph before having to brake down to 70mph and change down to third gear for this right/left chicane. Once again the chicane is taken virtually blind into the braking zone so is another tricky one. Accelerating away from the Variante Alta, you reach your highest speed on the track as you reach the bottom of the hill — just before braking into the double right angled left handers that make up Rivazza (the downhill nature of the bend makes it easy to lose the back end into here). The first of these you take at 55mph in third gear and the second at 70mph (still in third or maybe just getting to change up to fourth). Accelerating again you can see the grandstands in front of you to your left and the pit road straight in front. The pit entrance is directly in front of you, so to complete the lap you must instead brake down to 50mph, and take second gear for the Variante Bassa chicane, accelerating up to 80mph, and 3rd gear for the right hand part of it that leads to the start finish straight.

Imola in F1C

Accelerating over the start/finish straight I Jenson Buton's BAR the pitstraight and grandstands flash by to my right and left respectively. It always amazes me how much bigger the grandstands seem here than they are in real life but this could well be to do with how large they also appear on television! The track snakes to the left and I find myself positioning the car or the entry into the Tamburello chicane, the wall where Sena crashed still painted green and visible about 200 yards distant.

Possibly the most important single ability necessary to lap Imola quickly in F1C is the ability to straightline chicanes as much as possible. Although this is similar to real Formula 1 the curbing in EA's game is far more abrupt than you find in real life (for example when was the last time you saw someone actually be pulled around into a spin by the curbing at Imola? It happens at Monza but is extremely rare at this Northern Italian track). Jenson Button found to his cost how difficult it is to master the curbs at Imola when he first visited here in 2000 but softer suspension settings and tightened roll bars seem to counter this in the game. I accelerate through the faster Villeneuve chicane, braking lightly with my left foot and feathering the throttle on the exit to prevent the car from running wide as I again accelerate to Tosa. I brake hard and stick to the outside of the track (as people do in real life) but find that the game engine allows cars more ability to pass me too easily. I instead find that I lose no time by sticking close to the middle of the track, turning in early and then using the curb to help me turn the corner (Mika Hakkinen used to do exactly the same thing so at least I know I'm in good company!). Accelerating back up through the gears towards Pirantella it is more through luck than judgment that a decent line and braking point can be found and I drop down a couple of gears before turning in, making sure I don't unsettle the car by clipping the curb too much. I descend down the hill and will be careful to stay to the track as I go through the first part of Acqua Minerale chicane — again being careful not to unsettle the car as I brake for the second part of the double right hand corner — taking plenty of curbing as I again accelerate to Variante Alta. I am never too sure how well this chicane is modeled in F1C as some drivers appear to almost straightline it whilst others lose a

stack of time here and there have been numerous crashes from people trying too hard. I take a more cautious line and turn slightly right as I cross under the bridge and head downhill towards Rivazza, As in real life not letting the back end go loose under braking is difficult here and I turn in feeling the car beginning to slide wide. A flick of opposite lock and I correct this luckily finding myself nicely set up for the second left hander. I again accelerate seeing the race control building ahead and brake as late as I dare for the final chicane (the Variante Bassa) taking less curbing on the entry but a load on the exit and hearing the traction control protest as I again accelerate for another lap.

Strategy

Imola is traditionally a two-stop race as the high fuel consumption makes a one-stop race impractical. After Ferrari's winning three stop strategy it is possible that some teams may try to emulate that tactic (fresh tires are worth quite a bit here) and some may well try running on a one stop strategy (as Coulthard did in 2000). Imola is the other anti-clockwise track on the calendar but it's lack of long corners means that the drivers do not have the same troubles as many experienced at Interlagos. The pit lane is quite long but the advantage is more than made up for in track time — especially if you do not hit traffic in your laps immediately after the pitstop — as the stop start nature of the narrow track means that passing can be difficult — even if it is lapped traffic. The difficulty in passing may lead to some interesting adjustments between qualifying pace and outright pace in the race. With qualifying so open now a surprise could be on the cards. Problems with tire wear are likely to be less of a factor than they were in Bahrain and Malaysia.

The Teams

Ferrari

(Red with Marlboro signs)

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

Talk of crisis at Maranello seems two a penny at the moment. There is no doubt that Ferrari are deeply unimpressive in terms of their (or rather their tire's) performance but even so Schumi showed in Bahrain that the F2005 is a fast car as long as its tires are able to stay intact for a race distance. Pressure on Bridgestone has led to intensive testing and completely new compounds being introduced for this weekend's race. Although such extreme development could be just what the partnership needs, the associated risks makes it seem more likely that at least one of the red cars won't last the distance on Sunday.

BAR

(White with Red Lucky Strike Roundels on it)

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

The main news for BAR is that they are bringing a new front wing and aerodynamics package to Imola. Button blitzed the lap record in Barcelona in testing so, not surprisingly, hopes are running high that the new kit will turn BAR's season around. Although the BAR007 should have found some speed, doubts still remain over the Honda engine's reliability. The team are chasing a win more than they are chasing a position in the constructor's or driver's championships. Although this seems a high risk strategy as far as retaining Jenson Button goes with arch rivals Toyota coming on form this season, the team are being forced to work hard to stay ahead. Former Indy 500 winner Gil de Ferran has been brought on board to take charge at race weekends and he will be a huge boost to the team.

Renault

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

5. Fisichella
6. Alonso

Another win in Italy? Renault have so far enjoyed a clean sweep this year but things are bound to be tougher for them this weekend. Alonso certainly looks like a champion in waiting and there is nothing wrong with the car. The main question mark over Renault's form is whether the team can keep development on it going through the season. By the end of last season, the team looked like "also runs" despite Trulli's win in Monaco and some impressive performances early in the year. Imola will be the team's first true test and Fisichella's engine blow up in Bahrain can not have left the team feeling confident. Fisi will have a more powerful engine in Imola (which Alonso will get for the next race).

Williams

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

7. Webber
8. Heidfeld

With both drivers nursing injuries Antonio Pizzonia is ready on stand by to take one of the seats this weekend. Nick Heidfeld's injury seems the more likely to put him out of action. Heidfeld is suffering from a trapped nerve which seemed to have been caused by his twisting his body in the seat when testing in Barcelona. In a normal road car this would be normal enough but in an F1 car you are strapped up so tightly that you can hardly breath so it seems strange to say the least. Williams are under intense pressure from BMW at the moment and a good result is a must to ensure continued support from Barvaria.

McLaren

(Gray with West signs on it)

9. Wurz
10. Raikkonen

Montoya has still not fully recovered from his tennis/motor cycling accident so Alex Wurz

will be replacing Pedro De La Rosa on race duties this weekend. De La Rosa did an impressive job in Bahrain but Wurz's extra natural speed in the cockpit and the fact he was fastest in practice for Bahrain (even though he was driving with only one hand for most of the lap!). Montoya's injury and the speculation regarding what caused it has done nothing to help him fit in with the team so far. JPM will be in attendance at the race (unlike last time) and is expected back in time for Spain but even so this is not only denting his championship hopes but also alienating him from the team - not a good start.

Sauber

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

- 11. Villeneuve
- 12. Massa

Another driver who is struggling to get on good terms with his team is Jacques Villeneuve. Villeneuve was due to test with the team for three days in Spain last week. Unfortunately after the first day of wildly erratic, slow lap times and constant criticism of the car from Villeneuve JV was replaced by Felipe Massa. Despite assurances that all is peachy from both team and driver it is believed that Villeneuve is looking at driving in the US should his grand prix career with Sauber come to a sudden end. How he performs, particularly with regard to his young team mate, will be crucial in determining just when that is.

Toyota

(Red & White with Toyota & Panasonic logos)

- 14. R Schumacher
- 15. Trulli

Another double points haul in Bahrain and Toyota are looking like serious contenders for the constructor's championship this year. After untold millions being pumped into the racing team it is clear that Mike Gascoigne is turning the team into serious contenders. Worryingly for the senior management Gascoigne, whose career is best described as flighty, seems to be considering a move back to England (the team are based near Cologne). Testing has been consistent and encouraging though it is notable that Ralf has always been slower than his team mate. Considering their respective salaries Ralf should be hoping to make more of a go of it at Imola - a race he has won in the past.

Red Bull Racing

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

- 16. Coulthard
- 17. Klein

A change of number two driver allows Vittorantonio Liuzzi to make his F1 debut at his home race. Liuzzi and Klein are expected to be Red Bull's drivers next season so it makes a certain amount of sense for them both to be given a chance to show their form this year (even though this does result in the team having an extra headache they don't

need!). Red Bull have (surprisingly) managed to get the FIA to drop the rule restricting Friday testers from having recent F1 experience and, as a result, Red Bull will employ Klein in their Friday testing role during Liuzzi's three races with the team. Coulthard is not likely to be affected by this and will be hoping to continue his 100% points scoring record this season.

Midland Jordan

(Yellow with Sobraine on it)

- 18. **Karthekeinan**
- 19. **Monteiro**

Now the team have a testing budget both drivers were hard at work at Silverstone after they arrived back in England. The team are hoping that the introduction of new tweaks will help the team in the face of the new Minardi (see below). There is little chance of the team even remotely challenging anyone in front of them this season but Jordan are making a star out of Karthekeinan and getting plenty of experience for next season when they expect to be a far more credible challenge.

Minardi

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

- 20. **Leinders**
- 21. **Freidsecher**

Watch out Renault the new Minardi's here!!! Although the PS05 is not likely to be challenging for pole position anytime soon, the advent of the new car should put it in a position to get a fair bit closer to the rest of the field and it may well be challenging the Jordans and Villeneuve's Sauber in the near future. The PS05 features the same engine as the Red Bull RB1 (which has proved pretty handy this year) and consequently a marked improvement in performance can be expected from the team. The only real downside is that the car has only completed 200kms of testing prior to this weekend so a number of parts are likely to be relatively untried and reliability could be a little suspect.

Predictions

Qualifying	Race
1. Schumacher	1. Alonso
2. Alonso	2. Trulli
3. Trulli	3. Fisichella