

Preview

2004 Malaysian Grand Prix

Round 2 of 18

by Alex "Zander" Keep



View from the Cockpit

I will be taking the course during the 2004 season using **EA's F1 Challenge '99-'02**. To make it more contemporary I will be applying Ralph Hummerich's excellent carset to it as soon as it is ready. I have chosen Ralph's carset as, in addition to him being a thoroughly top notch person, in my opinion his carsets are the best available and it is an honor for SimHQ to have an exclusive Beta version to be able to use for its screenshots. Many thanks Ralph! If you wish to try his 2003 add on here's the web site address: <http://www.emac1.com/>



A Virtual Lap of the Petronas Grand Prix Circuit



Going at pretty much full pelt over the start finish straight I look to the left and see the hibiscus shaped awning stretching over the huge grandstands and the pitwall to my left as the track slowly starts to climb to Turn 1. I brake down to second gear feeling the back end squirm and wishing that EA could model the brake dust you see flying out of the cars when to see them on screen!

Taking a late apex in order to set myself up for the slow left hander. There is often a crash here (or a brave overtaking move) in the early laps as the corner is a tight downhill left hander and is vaguely reminiscent of a miniature version of the corkscrew found at Laguna Seca in the US. Accelerating away from that around the sweeping left hander the traction control is really cutting in and the car is again snaking around as the deficiencies of the Toyota aerodynamics are being exhibited for all to see! The Toyota is similar to the FW24 I saw testing at Silverstone a couple of years ago — coming out of Woodcote it would be half way down the pitlane before you could here the engine running without traction control because of the lack of grip!

Moving over to the right of the track and passing the point where Coulthard retired last year (was it me or was anyone else wondering if he'd get bitten by a snake trampling to the pits through the long grass?!). I swing through the first sweeping bend with barely a lift before entering the right hander. Another straight follows before heavy braking (Herman Tilke designed this track — as he has all the modern grand prix circuits — and every single one features at least one straight with a heavy braking area). Coming into the corner it is easy either to carry too much speed, lose the back end under braking or miss the apex but somehow (more through luck than judgment) I scrabble through, traction control chattering again as I swing through the left hand kink before hitting the long S curve left-right that frames turns 5 and 6. This section feels a little like a faster version of the Brooklands Maggotts sweep at Silverstone and the forces are building on my Microsoft wheel as I finish powering through them. When you consider the incredible heat and the drivers having to wear three layers of Nomex one can only imagine how exhausting the G-forces there must feel after nearly two hours of racing!



Turns 7 and 8 follow quite quickly and braking down to third gear and popping the car through doesn't seem too tricky though it is amazing how quickly you can run out of track on the second corner if you don't take the first part well! Another charge down a straight and more grandstands come into view. Though based on a similar design to the main grandstands you can tell that these must be the cheap seats as they seem smaller and slightly stuck away! Another heavy braking area and probably the tightest corner on the track. Unlike on TV it seems incredibly easy to spin here yet you rarely see drivers having to apply opposite lock let alone swapping ends which seems strange!



Turn 10 is entered and taken flat out but it tightens into turn 11 which requires some practice to get right and although I flick down a couple of gears I still find myself running out of track and brake further ending up below my optimum revs in 4th rather than having been sensible and selected third.

Accelerating again through the left hand turn 12 I hit turn 12 and 13. Once again the turn has a fast entry and tightens and, like I suspect most simmers and real life drivers, always feel I could take it faster until I end up in the gravel! Coming out of turn 14 the enormous grandstands appear to the left and the absence of anything on the right seems a little strange as I zip down the straight.



Most real world drivers say that they find braking for this final hairpin difficult due to the width of the track (a combination of factors that makes this point one of the main overtaking points on the circuit). Personally I find staying to the right hand side of the track allows me plenty of marker points for braking down and gives lots of space for turning through the apex and back onto the main straight thereby giving me a chance to try a slingshot overtaking move onto the main straight. Once again the traction control cuts in and my speed builds up as I rocket into another lap...

Race Name: Malaysian Grand Prix
Circuit Name: The Petronas Grand Prix Circuit, Sepang
Circuit Length: 3.3453 miles
Race Length: 183.9913 miles 55 laps
Lap Record: Michael Schumacher 1m36.412s



Ralf Schumacher's View

"The season opener in Melbourne clearly demonstrated that there is still quite a lot of work ahead of us if we want to fight for the World Championship this year. Even if we can't close the gap to Ferrari straight away, we must do better in Malaysia. The car and the Michelin tires are better suited to Sepang and

Malaysia's hot weather, but we can't rely on this alone.

From the physical perspective, I feel well prepared for the heat despite what happened last year. When I was climbing up the field from 17th to 4th place, the device that drives the air into my crash helmet was ripped off by accident. As a result, the temperature in the helmet was stiflingly hot, making it hard to drive. Hopefully though, I'll have a better experience this year."

Fernando Alonso's View

"The Malaysian Grand Prix is full of fantastic memories for me: I scored my first ever pole and podium for Renault at the circuit last year. I think it is the best circuit we go to in terms of facilities — they really did a great job on the paddock and garages — and the track itself is very challenging. I can't wait to start running. Honestly, I think Sepang is perhaps the most difficult circuit of the year, and it is certainly one of the most technical that we go to. When I say technical, I mean that your car needs to be strong in every area: all the corners tend to be high-speed, so you need a perfect car balance and good aerodynamics. The long straights mean good performance on the brakes is an absolute must. The corners open out, so you need to be careful with tire wear. Everything has to be absolutely spot on to go quickly at Sepang. And of course, it's fun for the drivers: lots of high speed corners and overtaking opportunities are what we look for from every circuit."

The Track's F1 History

The Sepang circuit staged its first race in **1999** and the event is already a favorite on the calendar even though this is only its sixth race. 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 and 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 and, after the melee in Australia, 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 and the drivers can expect to lose around 3.5 litres of sweat.

This circuit has probably the most variety seen in a new Grand Prix circuit since the introduction of the "Senna chicanes" brought in in **1994** (2nd gear 70 mph chicanes that seem to be everywhere in F1 these days and are usually named after Ayrton Senna). In **1999** there was a good race with a revitalized Schumacher winning the race for Irvine and 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 and 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 and 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 and 6th. Last year 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.

2003 Malaysian Grand Prix Results

Circuit Name: The Petronas Grand Prix Circuit

Location: Sepang, Malaysia

Position	Driver	Team	Engine	Time	Laps
1	Kimi Raikkonen	McLaren	Mercedes V10	1h32m22.195s	56
2	Rubens Barrichello	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	1h33m01.481s	56
3	Fernando Alonso	Renault	Renault V10	1h33m26.202s	56
4	Ralf Schumacher	Williams	BMW V10	1h33m50.221s	56
5	Jarno Trulli	Renault	Renault V10	-	55
6	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari	Ferrari V10	-	55
7	Jenson Button	BAR	Honda V10	-	55
8	Nick Heidfeld	Sauber	Petronas V10	-	55



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 and most humid time of the year. The excess of heat and 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 and the hot temperatures will emphasize this so some teams may have trouble getting through scrutineering afterwards.

Setup and 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 and Monaco!). The key to a quick lap around Sepang is being able to turn in accurately and get the power down early. A two stop strategy is usually the way to go though you can just have a one stopper as most of the teams did last year (this seems far less likely this year with the ban on refueling between qualifying and the race). The increased wear on the tires from the higher temperatures and the higher pitlane speed limit for this season makes this less attractive this time round, however. There is a high likelihood of rain at some point in the race.

Standings

This page will be updated in each race preview with the latest driver and constructor results.

2004 F1 Driver's Championship Standings

(through 1 of 18 races)

Position	Driver	Team	Points
1	M.Schumacher	Ferrari	10
2	R.Barrichello	Ferrari	8
3	F.Alonso	Renault	6
4	R.Schumacher	Williams	5
5	J.Montoya	Williams	4
6	J.Button	BAR	3
7	J.Trulli	Renault	2
8	D.Coulthard	McLaren	1
9	Z.Baumgartner G.Bruni C.da Matta G.Fisichella N.Heidfeld C.Klien F.Massa O.Panis G.Pantano K.Raikkonen T.Sato M.Webber	Minardi Minardi Toyota Sauber Jordan Jaguar Sauber Toyota Jordan McLaren BAR Jaguar	0

2004 F1 Constructor's Championship Standings

(through 1 of 18 races)

Position	Team	Points
1	Ferrari	18
2	Williams	9
3	Renault	8
4	BAR	3
5	McLaren	1
6	Jaguar Jordan Minardi Sauber Toyota	0

The Teams

This section will be updated in each race preview with the latest news and tidbits regarding the 2004 F1 Teams and their drivers.

Marlboro Ferrari *(Red with Marlboro graphics)*

That was not what was supposed to happen! Before the season it was widely expected that this would be even closer than last year. As it was Bridgestone gave its teams a distinct advantage in the race and Ferrari romped home to a win so dominant it had not been seen since Hakkinen and Coulthard lapped the field at the beginning of the 98 season. Bridgestone spent the winter alternately testing its tires construction and compounds alternately. This resulted in the tires never seeming particularly fast whilst still allowing the scientists plenty of data to perfect their experimentation. The only hint at what lay ahead was when Ferrari went comfortably quickest in the final test at Imola. With a car new from the nose back (despite its similarities to last year's F2003GA) and two winning drivers it is easy to see another year of domination. If Ferrari win in Malaysia in the same way that they won in Australia we may as well give up watching now!

1. **M. Schumacher**

A great 71st win for Schumacher showed that he is still the class of the field. Schumi was happy to admit that he found the new qualifying procedures almost as boring as the viewers (There are rumors of some of the drivers dozing off in the garages whilst waiting!). The stop start nature of the Albert Park track coupled with the low temperatures meant that the situation was perfect for Ferrari and Bridgestone to exploit. In Malaysia the temperatures will be far warmer and many of the turns are longer and more sweeping. As a result it is hoped that the other teams will at least be able to challenge Ferrari even though beating Schumi may be more difficult.

2. **Barrichello**

One of the performances of the weekend came from Rubens Barrichello. Although Rubens was left by his team leader he managed to easily fend off Fernando Alonso's Renault despite having fading brakes that had worn to almost nothing by the checkered flag. Barrichello seems highly motivated at the moment and it is clear that, although he can't always beat his team leader, he can at least challenge him

and be a thorn in his side to a far greater degree than Trulli at Renault or Coulthard at McLaren. All it would take is a few lucky races and Rubens could have a shot at the championship.

BMW Williams F1 (*Dark Blue and White with Compaq and Allianz graphics*)

Although they are certainly the ugly ducklings of the paddock, Australia showed that there was nothing wrong with the Williams FW26. The cars were regularly slower than the Ferraris but were the best of the rest when it came down to pure speed of design. The BMW engine ran like a train and it was only impetuosity on the part of Montoya and Ralf's trouble with his tires and traffic that resulted in such a relatively lowly showing. The car will certainly get better and the team seem pretty adept at setting it up. Whether the team can yet challenge Ferrari (something they themselves are unsure of) remains to be seen.

3. R. Schumacher

Although this was not one of Ralf's totally anonymous races, he still seemed relatively pedestrian compared to his team mate. Schumi Jr had a almost race long battle with, Jenson Button's BAR (which was suffering badly on its new Michelin tires) until he finally got clear of him. Both Ralf and Montoya suffered from graining tires at the end of their stints but unlike Montoya who can still drive the wheels of a car with only three wheels fitted(!), Ralf found that his problems cost him time. Ralf does look more resolute this year and this may well be due to his feeling he is on his way to Toyota. Expect an announcement about Ralf's future in the week after this race.

4. Montoya

Strangely the overriding impression gained by watching Montoya in action all weekend was how poorly the car seemed suited to him. Juan Pablo must have wondered why on earth he signed for McLaren as the grey cars spluttered slowly around the circuit all weekend and it was possibly because he knew that he may suffer next year that he attempted to wring all he could from the car all weekend. Despite this the stability offered by the twin keel design seemed curiously at odds with Montoya's driving style and JPM seemed to always be unsure of just where the limits of the car were. Malaysia requires plenty of front end grip and JPM could be due a well deserved debut win there this weekend.

West McLaren Mercedes (*Grey with West graphics*)

An appalling week for McLaren was salvaged by a distant eighth place finish for Coulthard. After the race both drivers admitted that the MP4/19 was efficient in every area with aerodynamic grip poor, mechanical grip worse and the engine clearly down on its rivals. It was in Malaysia last year that McLaren scored its last win and, considering their win in Australia a fortnight previously, it seemed unfathomable that they should not be regular winners throughout the rest of the year. This year the fact that the team has been testing most of the MP4/19's components for a year makes their poor race pace in Australia equally unfathomable. A common criticism laid at the door of the team is that its principal Ron Dennis has been too involved in other aspects of the organization. He will have to concentrate hard on the team if he is to return them to their winning ways.

5. Coulthard

Many thought that Coulthard would turn up to Australia in some way different from his usual self. The only thing different about DC ended up being his having got engaged to his long time girlfriend Simone. Coulthard made a bit of a hash of qualifying (again) when he ran wide on the final turn. Even so the team admitted that he had just about wrung everything he could out of the chassis and engine and it was with a sense of resignation that he lined up on the grid. DC did fight well but with Button's BAR as well as the Renault's, Ferraris and Williams all ahead of him eighth place was all he could realistically hope for. Coulthard has already virtually admitted that this will not be his year and his sights must now be set on where he goes next year.

6. Raikkonen

Engine failure may have ruined his race but his season had been ruined ever since he realized how far behind the MP4/19 really was. The design could well be McLaren's worst since the triplane MP4/10 of 1995! McLaren have got the resources to get it right and Pedro de la Rosa wet fastest in testing in Spain last week at a test attended by Williams and Barrichello's Ferrari amongst others so it is clear that the car has potential. Unfortunately the car seems nervous and difficult to set up and, although once it is set up it goes like the clappers there is too limited an amount of running in the new race weekend scenario to allow it to be so finely honed. Another difficult weekend in Malaysia looks assured.

Mild Seven Renault (*Dark and Light Blue and Yellow with Mild Seven graphics*)

Easily the most convincing team behind Ferrari, the Renaults looked easy to drive and quick throughout the weekend. The team have managed to get around the ban on launch control by controlling the ignition system of the engine at the start rather than the throttle. As a result the driver can be said to start manually even though complex electronics will minimize wheelspin away from the grid! The "old" Supertec engine seems to have plenty of poke and, had Michelin supplied a tire close to being on a par with Bridgestone, Alonso may well have challenged Schumacher (and would certainly relieved Barrichello of second place).

7. Trulli

Compared to his team mate Trulli had a pretty anonymous race. At the Jarno flat spotted both front tires in order to avoid his team mate ad was rewarded for this by a smack up the bum by Sato's BAR which broke his diffuser (oo-er!). Unable to set close to representative times because of this (the diffuser is some aerodynamic bodywork under and at the back of the car which greatly helps stability and downforce). He had a pretty quiet run dropping back to seventh by the flag. Trulli believes he could have won in Malaysia last year and his second place qualifying (on a lot more fuel than his pole sitting team mate) backs this up. With Renault looking even better this year a win is just about possible.

8. Alonso

A brilliant start on the grass past Montoya saw Alonso race up to third. Although he couldn't keep pace with the Ferraris he was notably faster than them through the quicker corners. Like Trulli, Alonso could well be the best chance of a thorn in Ferrari's side this weekend though an awful lot will depend upon Michelin. Having been caught on the hop in Australia he tire company looked pretty flat footed compared to their Japanese rivals and it was notable that almost all of the teams running at the recent Spanish test revolved around tire compounds and testing. Having three of the top four teams to test for you will help Michelin but it will be too much to expect an immediate catch up this race.

BAR (*White with Red Lucky Strike roundels*)

A fantastic start to the season for BAR saw Button line up 4th on the grid with Sato only three places behind. In the race things were not quite so rosey unfortunately. Although Button finished 6th and gained three valuable points for the team, both drivers were in the wars and the car used its tires too hard which led to wear problems and a lack of grip in the latter parts of the race. The team managed to sort many of their problems in Spain and Anthony Davidson provided plenty of feedback to allow the team to look happy and confident for Sepang. All in all points seem likely and a podium is not beyond the bounds of possibility. A welcome fillip for the team after years of underperforming and allegations of running underweight through the winter.

9. Button

Jenson seems as fired up as his team going into the second race. With one of the best test drivers on the grid backing him up and compliments from all and sundry ringing in his ears it is not surprising that

Jenson is considerably more chipper than he has been since racing for Williams in 2000. "After the encouraging start we had in Melbourne, the Malaysian GP is looking good for us. It's great to be on the scoreboard already and we are going to Sepang with an even better package, so there is no reason to think we can't qualify and race well again. It's given me confidence that the BAR Honda 006 was so reliable, and now that we have more experience with the car and Michelin tires, we should be able to further improve on our race pace."

10. **Sato**

Although the team enjoyed a great weekend it is difficult to see how Sato can have felt he lived up to his potential. Sato said he was planning on outqualifying and outracing his team mate. As it was Sato was not only slower than Jenson Button but was also outpaced by tester Anthony Davidson for much of the weekend. Sato's kamikaze attack on Trulli's rear diffuser damaged his nose and he was easy pickings for Coulthard's McLaren as well as Trulli and Ralf Schumacher. For Malaysia Sato will be hoping that his experience and formidable fitness will help him. Even so it is difficult to see Takuma do anything more than occasionally get near his tea leader until the mid season at the earliest.

Sauber Petronas (*Mid Blue with a yellow airbox, white nose and front wing with Credit Suisse Red Bull and Petronas graphics*)

An interesting weekend for Sauber in Australia must give hope or another good performance at their principal sponsor's track this weekend. Although Fisichella was stuck fighting it out in a rather physical battle with Heidfeld's Jordan for much of the race, Massa incredibly managed to get a few places higher and was taking on Raikkonen and Coulthard for much of the race. It was in attempting to pass Massa that Raikkonen's engine blew early in the race and it seems more a matter of bad luck and having the wrong driver in front that led to the team being denied points. With Petronas doing their usual excessive show of sponsorship this weekend the drivers will be expected to perform on Sunday (particularly considering that they are in a car not entirely different from the class of the field at the moment and powered by the same engine).

9. **Fisichella**

It must have been pretty galling for Fisichella after his months of dejection seeing out the season with Jordan to have found himself tucked up behind a Jordan after a few laps in Australia! Although Fisi eventually nerfed Heidfeld out of the way it wasn't the most genteel of overtaking maneuvers and spoke volumes of Giancarlo's frustration at the situation in which he found himself. Fisichella usually goes well in Malaysia and Ferrari have proved that Bridgestone are the tires to have. With such a huge supporter as Peter Sauber behind him it seems clear that the only things stopping Fisi from a potential podium are his fitness and himself.

10. **Massa**

A year away testing with Ferrari and Felipe Massa has returned as wild and woolly as ever! In his duel with Raikkonen it was difficult to see how Massa was keeping the car on the track and if I were Raikkonen I would have been terrified as Massa never went through the same corner the same way twice! Not surprisingly his engine failure late in the race was eventually found to be from over revving it and, although Massa is certainly spectacular (& great fun) to watch, he needs to calm down if he is to forge a career for himself in Formula 1.

Jaguar (*Green with HSBC graphics*)

The teams early testing problems seem largely to be a thing of the past and Webber produced his usual scintillating performance in the early part of the race. It was apparent throughout the weekend how important test driver (and F3000 champ) Bjorn Wirdheim was to the team's preparation and this is clearly a new structured way to heavily involve test drivers within the race team (this also illustrates why the team were so keen to allow Justin Wilson to test for them until he was deemed ineligible). On a day when Michelin showed that they were some way behind

Bridgestone it was good to see Jaguar starting this season fighting above its weight (and its paltry budget). Webber can be expected to look confident for this race.

14. **Webber**

Qualifying sixth and racing eighth until his gearbox let go showed Webber has lost none of the grit and determination (not to mention speed) that made him such a popular driver last year. This year the media attention for the homecoming hero was huge and there was a sigh audible above the remaining 18 engines when Webber retired after a freak problem on lap 27 robbed him of gears. Webber went well in Malaysia last year and the R5's run in Klein's hands suggests that the team have done much to prevent the car from eating its tires whilst still allowing it to keep a good pace. In keeping close to Montoya's Williams (and ahead of Schumacher's) Mark is illustrating how desirable it would be to have him replace one of these drivers for next year.

15. **Klein**

With a pay driver tag around his neck like a latter day albatross Klein was always going to struggle on his first outing. As it was most pundits reckon he did pretty decently. Although he never really got within a second of Webber he did at least give it his best shot, beat Wirdheim in the same machinery and didn't make any mistakes on his run to 11th. Malaysia is going to be a tricky track to learn and Klein's fitness level will be sorely tested in the humidity and heat. The R5 seems a pleasant car to drive and Klein seems to be taking to it well. Unfortunately Christian's learning curve may well expect to be accelerated in the next few races as Ford are not well known for giving their new drivers much time to get settled (no matter how much money is behind them) and Klein will be expected to perform in one or two races time.

Panasonic Toyota *(Red and White with Toyota and Panasonic logo graphics)*

Easily the second most disappointing team in Australia after McLaren, Toyota left the Australian grand prix with a hell of a lot of work to do to make their car competitive. The main failing of the TF104 seemed to be a lack of aerodynamic grip. Amazingly new technical boss Mike Gascoyne did not have a clue about the deficiencies of the car before it hit the track and, although the car was designed prior to his arrival, he says he fully expects question marks to appear in the media about his future in the team. Luckily both the board at Toyota and the drivers are sure that Gascoyne will be able to effect the much needed changes in both the team and the design of the car but it will be several races until the red and white cars are anything other than back markers.

20. **Panis**

With several drivers being named as being lined up for the tea or 2005 Panis tried to do the only thing he could & let his driving do the talking. Unfortunately for Panis in order to do this you need a car under you and Olivier's rage when his car wouldn't fire for his qualifying lap was plain for all to see! Being lapped twice on your way to being the last of the classified drivers was bad enough but Panis is fighting for his career in these opening races! At least Olivier can look forward to some aerodynamic tweaks for Malaysia as well as a new front wing.

21. **Da Matta**

Echoing his team mate's disastrous weekend da Matta at least managed to squeeze a few places up on the grid by having a qualifying run (even though he then ran wide in turn 14!) . With running limited by an electrical problem on Friday and his race being further stymied by stalling the car at his first pitstop. Last year Malaysia was the first circuit at which Christiano really shone and the balding Brazilian will need to produce something pretty decent this time out too. It is clear that the Toyota board are already getting antsy about the enormous budget they are putting into the team and they are already looking at ways of reducing this. The team have already fired both drivers once and it would be a surprise to see this

happen again.

Jordan (*Yellow with BandH graphics*)

What a neat little car the EJ14 is! Considering the lack of budget it is clear that Jordan know what they are doing in its design. What was interesting at the weekend was noting the Trust logos on the front wing. Trust's sponsorship of the team was initially linked to Jos Verstappen's driving for them this season. It is clear that Eddie Jordan has somehow talked the company around to sponsoring Jordan anyway. Considering both Trust and Jordan were united in their condemnation of Jos' manager this is not too surprising but a welcome boost to the team anyway. For Malaysia the team will be hoping to produce another spirited performance. The team have always been giant killers and all it would take is a slice of luck for some heavy points to come Jordan's way.

11. Heidfeld

An excellent performance by Heidfeld eventually was stymied by a clutch failure. Nick ran as high as eleventh at one stage and it seems clear that the familial atmosphere suits Nick down to the ground. Heidfeld was unfortunate to skid into two mechanics while pulling in to retire but no harm was done either to Heidfeld's reputation or the mechanics (save a little bruising to the mechanics!) and all will be back in action in Malaysia. With the team on Bridgestone tires it would take no more than the monsoon conditions we saw in Malaysia in 2000 for a lucky podium to come their way.

12. Pantano

A steady rather than spectacular performance from Pantano. He qualified two seconds but only one place behind Nick Heidfeld but was fending off Minardi from the start. An unspectacular run at least saw him gain valuable track time and finish a creditable fourteenth. Pantano admits that he is likely to suffer on the early flyaway races as he doesn't know the tracks but has suggested that his performances will improve markedly once he gets back to the more familiar stomping grounds of the European circuits used in F3000. For Malaysia another learning experience can be expected but Pantano should keep his nose clean and provide valuable data both for himself and the team.

Wilux Minardi Cosworth (*Black, white and Wilux written in Light Blue on White on Sides and rear wing*)

The team suffered an immediate set back on Friday when test driver Bas Leinders was deemed too inexperienced to be given an FIA Superlicense (this is a licence that allows you to compete or take part in an FIA test session). There were clearly political motives behind this most probably caused by team principal Paul Stoddart's threat to remove his support for the continued use of traction control. Leinders now has his license having completed 3 days running at Vallelunga in Italy and the team can rely on a full test session prior to qualifying on Saturday. Talking of qualifying it was notable how Minardi did not change engines or play any similar tricks following qualifying. With both their cars on the back row the team would have had nothing to lose by putting a fresh engine in the back of their drivers cars yet they must have been warned off such a measure (or are planning something similar for Malaysia!).

18. Bruni

Paul Stoddart's latest great hope for the future did not have the glittering start that Justin Wilson or Fernando Alonso enjoyed. Bruni was far from dominant in the team through the weekend and it was a surprise to see him occasionally outpaced by his team mate. Bruni has plenty of talent but it seems clear that he needs more running and time to find his feet before he can produce the sort of form demonstrated by his illustrious predecessors in the team. To give him credit Bruni did overtake both Olivier Panis and Christian Klien and was only really hobbled by a misfire which required several laps in the pits to treat. Hopefully Minardi and Bruni can both tighten up their loose ends and produce a surprise this weekend.

19. Baumgartner

A surprisingly steady run from Baumgartner showed that there is more to this Hungarian than pots of cash. His record in junior series is far from impressive and his time at Jordan seemed anything but spectacular. That said it is entirely possible that the setup dramas and poor performance of the EJ13 may well have contributed to his lack of comfort in the team. At Minardi the setup options are far more limited (most Formula 1 racing games have more options available to drivers than you would find driving a Minardi) and this may well play into Baumgartner's hands. A ECU failure led to his retirement in Australia and the hot temperatures in Malaysia may lead to more problems for both car and driver this weekend.

Alex's 2004 Malaysian Grand Prix Predictions

Qualifying

1. Rubens Barrichello
2. Fernando Alonso
3. Michael Schumacher

Race

1. Michael Schumacher
2. Fernando Alonso
3. Jenson Button

More images of Ralph Hummerich's 2004 cars at Sepang



Copyright 2004, SimHQ.com. All Rights Reserved. Contact the [webmaster](#).