

Preview

2004 Bahrain Grand Prix

Round 3 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 please use [this link](#) to his page.



A Virtual Lap of the Bahrain Grand Prix Circuit

Heading down the long start/finish straight you brake hard for the first corner. A tight right hander that will be taken in second gear. Accelerating away you go through a right/left sweep accelerating hard down another long straight before again hitting the anchors for a second gear right hander. A shorter straight follows before a left-right section that looks reminiscent of Becketts at Silverstone or Sepang's fast chicane before the drivers hit the brakes for a hairpin right, short straight and then a hairpin left. Another straight follows running parallel to the pitlane which leads into a sweeping left hander rolling into a sweeping right hander (which will probably be taken in fourth or fifth depending upon grip levels) and then leading to another second gear right hander. This leads onto another long straight before yet another second gear right hander sees the drivers back on the pit straight.

Race Name: Bahrain Grand Prix

Circuit Length: 3.381mile / 5.411km

Race Length: 186.004mile / 297.605km / 55 laps

Lap Record: na

David Coulthard's View

"Although I've yet to drive the circuit, we obviously have information regarding the track available to us and can say that a lap of the new track at the Bahrain International Circuit begins on the long start-finish straight, which is just over one kilometer. We will probably reach the highest speeds on the circuit along the straight before braking hard for the slow tight right of turn one. A short burst of power takes you to a left hander, which we may take quite quickly, keeping on the power through the turn, before the slight right of turn three that flicks you onto the second and shortest of the four straights. We will power along here, probably in top gear before dropping down the gears for the tight right of turn four. The sweeping left-right-left of turns five, six and seven follow, and we think this will be a very quick sequence as we meander through the back of the circuit. We then will pick up speed on the exit for the short run down to the hairpin of turn eight. Another quick burst takes you to the two left handers of nine and ten, which will probably start off quite fast and then see us slow for ten. This then swings you round onto the third main straight that runs parallel to the start-finish straight. We should pick up significant speed before braking for the long left double-apex of eleven. It will probably be important to maintain our speed through here, as it leads onto another long and fast sweeping section of the track. This then takes us to the long right of turn 14 which swings the track round onto the final straight. Powering up through the gears before braking for

the final two right handers, which take you back onto the long start-finish straight to start another lap."

Jenson Button's View

"Turn one will be a really exciting corner, especially on the opening lap when we're all racing in there together. It's very tight, so the braking distance will be long - by F1 standards. You then have to keep the car to the right on the exit, ready for the left-hander. This corner is a potential overtaking point because it's slow and comes at the end of a long straight. I think we'll be in seventh gear on the approach, so it'll be quick, but I think it'll be quite easy to defend your line through here. To me this looks like the most exciting part of the track. The fast chicane preceding the corner is similar to Malaysia and such is the layout into the slow downhill right that it should be a really good overtaking opportunity. There is something similar to Suzuka about the next part. The left-hander on the approach to the slow right is similar to Turn 1 at Suzuka and should be flat out. Then we'll be hard on the brakes for the left, where a clear exit will be vital because of the next straight leading into the next section of track which is again similar to Malaysia. This is because the straight run runs back to back with the pit straight. The left-hander at the back end looks like it will be quite quick because you can't let the car run wide on the exit. Like the 'S' bend earlier in the lap, the long right-hander on the approach to the penultimate corner will be quite high G. The aerodynamics will glue the car to the track and we'll be hanging on in the cockpit. Then it'll be a hard brake for the right-hander. The approach is quite steep downhill. We'll be traveling quickly as we hit the brakes and, when the tires start to go off, it could make for some exciting racing onto the start finish straight."

The Track's F1 History

The brand-new Bahrain circuit has the honor of welcoming Formula 1 to the Middle East for the first time, on April 4 2004. The venue is designed by top circuit architect Hermann Tilke. Like Sepang in Malaysia (another Tilke signature track), the Bahrain International Circuit features a straight of more than a kilometer in length, followed by a sharp right-hander that should be useful for overtaking. The rest of the circuit is a mix of quick and slow turns, plus another two substantial straights.

The design of the buildings at the facility is intended to reflect the country's Arabic culture. The pits, paddock and start/finish area has an "oasis" feel, with a healthy spread of specially-planted greenery, but the circuit's two loops into the desert take the cars into a more typical desert landscape.

The track is located within a comfortable drive of Manama, the capital of the small island nation in the Persian Gulf. Although the Bahrain GP represents F1's first visit to the Middle East, it is not the first time a grand prix has been held in an Arab country as the 1958 Morocco GP was won by Stirling Moss.

The country hosts a 24-hour karting race every year. The Bahrain Superkart Challenge takes place at the National Stadium in Isa Town. 70,000 cubic meters of concrete were used in the construction of the track, along with 8,500 tons of steel. The circuit is enclosed by 82,000 tires and 5,000 meters of fencing. The track can accommodate 45,000 spectators — around seven per cent of the population of Bahrain! There is grandstand seating for 10,000 and parking for 13,000 cars. It is expected that the average lap time for an F1 car around the circuit will be 1m33s, with drivers averaging a speed of 130mph. Bahrain authorities have flown in marshals from Australia, Austria and France to supervise this weekend's race.

The Track

A first grand prix in the Middle East has been seen as part of the brave new world for grand prix racing where it expands beyond its traditional European-centric base and reaches out to far corners of the world to be a truly global sport. The track cost \$150 million to complete and the race very nearly didn't occur when the organizers asked to cancel it three weeks ago due to construction work running late. Bernie told the organizers to hire more people and this they duly did! Even so some stands are not going to be completed until after the inaugural race on Sunday. The

preparations that have gone into this race rival any other single sporting event's. Welsh granite was imported for the track in order to give the most grip while the sand immediately surrounding the track has been glued down with a special resin to prevent the track getting too gritty.

Situation

The Bahrain raceway is about thirty kilometers from the city of Bahrain at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Bahrain is rapidly becoming the financial center for the Middle East and this will be the first major sporting event that has been held in the region. Terrorism has been high in the minds of many involved with the race and the Foreign Office's advice not to attend the race shows how seriously it is being treated in some quarters. Still none of the teams or personnel are being put off by this threat and it seems unlikely that the race will be a target.

Setup and Strategy

This seems to be the biggest unknown of the lot at the moment. With an entirely new surface on the racetrack any advantage in terms of circuit knowledge is likely to pay big dividends. It is perhaps fortunate for some that Williams opened the track three weeks ago with test driver Marc Gené doing some demonstration laps, and then some more, and then some more. In the end the demonstration run lasted 26 laps with should have given Michelin and Williams plenty of information going into the race. Ferrari and McLaren have of course complained about this and have demanded a free go on the Shanghai circuit to be used later in the season. It seems likely that this will fall on deaf ears. In the mean time most pundits are reckoning on medium to high levels of downforce with the track's similarity to Austria resulting in similar gear ratios and a similar two stop strategy to the now defunct race.

Standings

The standings page will be updated in each race preview with the latest results.

2004 F1 Driver's Championship Standings

(through 2 of 18 races)

Position	Driver	Team	Points
1	M.Schumacher	Ferrari	20
2	R.Barrichello	Ferrari	13
3	J.Montoya	Williams	12
4	J.Button	BAR	9
5	F.Alonso	Renault	8
6	J.Trulli	Renault	6
7	R.Schumacher	Williams	5
8	D.Coulthard	McLaren	4
9	F.Massa	Sauber	1
10	Z.Baumgartner G.Bruni C.da Matta G.Fisichella N.Heidfeld C.Klien	Minardi Minardi Toyota Sauber Jordan Jaguar	0

	O.Panis G.Pantano K.Raikkonen T.Sato M.Webber	Toyota Jordan McLaren BAR Jaguar	
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2004 F1 Constructor's Championship Standings

(through 2 of 18 races)

Position	Team	Points
1	Ferrari	33
2	Williams	17
3	Renault	14
4	BAR	9
5	McLaren	4
6	Sauber	1
7	Jaguar Jordan Minardi 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)*

Although Schuey won again in Malaysia he had to work far harder for this than the cakewalk Australia turned out to be. Barrichello's fourth place finish showed that the Ferrari can no hope to be entirely dominant on every track in the same way that it was in 2002. Bridgestone have not had Michelin's chance to run around the new track and this will put the team at a disadvantage before the weekend. Even so the car's durability is sure to be its biggest strength. As Michael Schumacher points out "The big question mark in Bahrain is the sand. Everyone's wondering what effect it will have, whether the sand will get into the works or not." Ferrari Formula 1 cars traditionally run like tanks but if sand gets into the engines they will explode just like any other. Ferrari have managed something of a coup in recent weeks, however. The type of tarmac laid at Sakhir was pioneered by Shell and the oil company, as part of their sponsorship deal with Ferrari, recently laid the same type of tarmac at Ferrari's Fiorano test track. This testing data will have given the team (and tire suppliers Bridgestone) invaluable information as to what to expect this weekend.

1. M. Schumacher

With the bomb attacks in Madrid so recent and the Foreign Office recommending people stay away from the race it is not surprising that security is a primary concern to many drivers. Schuey seems to be the voice of many drivers who feel that there is nothing they can do about the situation. "Attacks can be any time, any place. What can you do? You must do whatever you feel is right. I am sure Bahrain will be one of the safest places because its security will be very high." Schumacher knows that the race is likely to be the biggest lottery of the year as far as he is concerned but is still upbeat. Schuey goes into the race

seven points clear of his team mate and eight points clear of Montoya. McLaren's championship challenge seems to be coming off the rails and Williams unable to show their testing pace in the races. Another win seems likely.

2. Barrichello

A poor race by Barrichello's standards saw him passed not only by Montoya's Williams but more surprisingly by Button's BAR! Barrichello still has not quite got his team mate's consistency or luck and this has already seen him slip almost a race win behind in terms of points. Barrichello's decision to stay at Ferrari will almost certainly see him become the second most successful Ferrari driver of all time yet it seems unlikely that Rubens will ever really replace the likes of Villeneuve, Lauda or even Alesi with his single race win in the hearts of the Tifosi in the same way that Schuey hasn't. Barrichello reacted angrily to allegations that he purposely held Montoya up just after the Colombian emerged from the pits for his final charge after Schuey. Whatever the truth of the situation it is clear that Barrichello didn't hurt Schumacher's chances by driving at a pace a second and a half a lap off Schumacher's.

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

Despite Williams getting in trouble for testing, err... I mean formally opening the circuit, at Bahrain the main news this week has to be their trying out former CART front-runner and current IRL champion Scott Dixon. He told AFP: "It's definitely what I want to do. I would get back in the car today if I could. Those cars shocked me. It was unbelievable for the first 20 laps. But I slowly got into it. I had a smile from ear to ear all day. The biggest difference was the braking and the tires. The tires last for about one lap. You have to go out slow on your out lap and then go as fast as you can on one lap." Dixon also struggled to contend with the massive G-forces exerted by F1 cars. He said: "I lasted about three runs before my neck was done. You just can't hold it up. The acceleration isn't too bad because your head is resting most of the time, but the G-forces turning and the braking in the braking zone, your head goes down and you have to slowly bring it up. The forces are way more than what we get." If the 23 year old New Zealander gets the drive it will be good news for Formula 1. A Kiwi has not competed on the grid since Bruce McLaren and Scott has plenty of talent and could well join such luminaries as Montoya, Villeneuve, Andretti and Zanardi in swapping across the pond.

3. R. Schumacher

After testing at Le Castellet in France this week Ralf seemed less perturbed than the team about his recent engine failure. Ralf seemed in upbeat mood though this may have had much to do with his closing in on a Williams deal for the next two years. "I am convinced that the Bahrain Grand Prix will be a lot of fun, for the drivers and for the public. I'm already excited to see how the place has changed since my short visit in December last year. The race is opening new frontiers for F1 but going to a new track inevitably throws up various questions, for example will it suit our car and how comfortable will I feel on the new track? The role the dry heat will play and whether sand will be a problem are also going to be issues we will have to face. Juan Pablo's second place in Malaysia has shown that we are not that far away from Ferrari as we feared, but there's still a long way to go to before we can beat them. Testing at Le Castellet this week has shown that we are working in the right direction so I hope that we will be able to make up more ground in Bahrain."

4. Montoya

At the team's press briefing following their testing Montoya followed his team mate's upbeat mood. Montoya said: "Personally, I believe that Formula 1 going to the Middle East, and to Bahrain in particular, is really important. Racing at a completely new venue is going to be a real challenge for all the teams but also very exciting. The facilities look amazing and the track itself looks state of the art, with several overtaking opportunities. As it was designed by the same guy who worked on the Sepang circuit, I'm sure it will be great, so I am really looking forward to getting there to see what it's like in reality. After my podium finish in Malaysia, I believe all the team are more confident and keen to improve on that

performance in Bahrain." Whether this will be the case remains to be seen but with McLaren struggling Montoya must realize that it is unlikely that he will be in a position to challenge for wins regularly next season.

West McLaren Mercedes *(Grey with West graphics)*

More retirements and slow running in Malaysia continued to enforce just how McLaren seem to have lost it in the off season. The MP4/19 seemed to have made progress in Malaysia and Coulthard managed to fight well with it even though Raikkonen had another retirement. The McLaren seems not to have any obvious vices (in fact it looks like quite a pleasant car to drive — if a little tight! Pedro de la Rosa again lapped well in testing but the pace just does not seem to translate to race weekends. With the Mercedes powerplant looking so fragile at the moment it seems unlikely that both cars will finish the race this time out and the team will have to pull the stops out if they are to remain part of the top four in the constructor's championship with both Renault and BAR currently looking stronger than them.

5. Coulthard

With his services up for hire next season there could be no worse time for Coulthard to experience McLaren's least competitive start to a season since 1995. Coulthard has done a good job of salvaging points for the team and his delicate style of driving clearly sits better with the car than Kimi's more aggressive approach. Coulthard's main weakness is still his qualifying. Though he did better in Malaysia Coulthard seems not to have shaken the poor qualifying performances that have dogged him since the start of the European season last year (ironically Coulthard qualified well in the opening two flyaway races!). Coulthard is experienced enough to sort the car quickly this weekend and looks like he may well be the team's best hope for points though a podium seems unlikely and a victory seems farcical to expect.

6. Raikkonen

Kimi seems quite upbeat about his chances this weekend despite an appalling start to the season. "From what I understand of the circuit itself, there is a good variety of challenges on the circuit, from the four long straights with real overtaking opportunities at the end and some fast, sweeping sections at the back of the track. All this will hopefully make for interesting racing, and I reckon it'll be a good race from the start as we will probably be able to pick up quite a bit of speed along the main straight from the lights to the first corner before braking hard. Another possible overtaking opportunity is the left of turn two." McLaren are said to be working hard on improving the car though the team themselves admit that there is little if anything they can do until they return to Europe in two weeks.

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

After clinching pole and second in Malaysia last year, Renault's points finish this year seemed something of a disappointment. Trulli's eighth place on the grid was due to a mistake but this was nothing compared to Fernando Alonso's excursion into the gravel that saw him start from the back. Handling problems for both drivers saw them finish no better than fifth and seventh but at least with another double helping of points they kept themselves third in the constructor's championship. Engineering director Pat Symonds joked this week that he should ask Michelin for tires used on the Paris-Dakar due to all the sand on the track! More seriously Symonds has said that the track seems different to the other tracks designed by Herman Tilke (such as Sepang and the new Hockenheim layout). Renault seemed to have tire problems last time out intimating that the R24 may be harder on its tires than testing and the first race indicated.

7. Trulli

A fighting performance with Jenson Button all race Jarno Trulli again showed that he is no longer the type to fall asleep after a spectacular qualifying performance and let himself be overtaken. Trulli is being made to fight for his drive with the team and there is no doubt that his future rests as much around his own

performances as it does the performances of Mark Webber and Fernando Alonso. Webber is ultimately going to end up at Renault but with options at Williams and Jaguar open to him it is clear that there will have to be some musical chairs between all Flavio Briatore's charges. How Trulli does in this will depend to a great deal upon how he drives this season. On current form he can expect to be staying with Renault next year. Trulli's incredible stamina and strength are sure to help him this time out and he may well out race his team mate again this weekend.

8. Alonso

Alonso showed how hard he was trying in qualifying by braking a touch too late for turn 14 resulting in a harmless spin into the gravel trap. Relegated to last place on the grid Alonso surprised everyone by not electing to change engines ahead of the race despite the possibility that gravel could have got into the internals. Off the grid the on board camera made Alonso's start look like it should have been from an arcade game as he blasted past five of six drivers without really noticing. From there Fernando drove hard and managed a pretty creditable 7th place finish despite suffering the same chronic understeer that blighted Trulli. Alonso seems to be coming on in his driving this season. He makes less mistakes (qualifying being the exception) and is certainly continuing to impress. Unfortunately the R24 looks like a less friendly car to drive than its forbearer so he's not throwing it around quite as spectacularly. With such a grippy track as Bahrain is promising it will be interesting to see how he copes with the chassis and tires demands.

BAR (*White with Red Lucky Strike roundels*)

Although BAR have finished on the podium twice before with Jacques Villeneuve Jenson Button's third place reflected a new start for the team. Both the previous podiums were achieved due to many retirements and Villeneuve finished a long way behind the winner on both occasions. This time out Button was in contention for the win and, although he was not quite on Montoya's rear wing over the finishing line, he was certainly there or thereabouts. David Richards has, however, warned the team about becoming complacent. "It was very encouraging but we have to make sure we don't get complacent," he said. "For Jenson, it was a memorable occasion but it's out of the way and finished now. We've got to continue putting ourselves on the podium and in situations where we can be on the podium. There's no question that we can think we're there yet. We don't intend to be complacent after just one podium."

9. Button

FINALLY! Button's maiden podium was treated in many quarters in the same way that a maiden win would be treated! Button has often been on the pace and managed to lead both of the last two races last year but it was only this season that Button has really started to show just why he should lead BAR. Jenson nearly capped off his podium with a novel way of celebrating when exhaustion and dehydration almost made him throw up all over Michael Schumacher! Jenson is one of the few drivers to have already driven around the track (albeit in a road car) but he seems certain that the track itself could not have been designed much better in terms of producing an exciting race. Button is more forceful both in and out of the car and it says a lot for the Brit that he is able to convincingly lead the team and Honda's multi-million dollar investment in Formula 1.

10. Sato

While Button has been thriving in having the team built around him Sato seems to be largely forgotten in the greater scheme of things. David Richards has openly stated that Sato is over driving and has said he will be having words to him after the race in Malaysia. Sato's mistake in qualifying which saw him quite impressively fly off the track looked to have been atoned for until his engine expired towards the end of race while the Japanese driver was set for a point. Like Massa in Australia, Sato's heavy handed use of the throttle was found to be a contributory cause of the engine's detonation. Sato will start with a clean slate in Bahrain but, with Anthony Davidson looking extremely comfortable and quick on Fridays and

Jenson Button effortlessly wiping the floor with him in the races, Takuma has to relax and get on with it.

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

The blue Ferraris are making good ground already this season. Although not on the same pace as BAR or Renault, they have managed to get Massa into the points in Malaysia and are looking to progress further this race. As technical director Willy Rampf says Nobody knows what to expect. It is hard at this stage to predict grip and tire wear levels. These may also be influenced further by the sand, especially if there are local sand storms. The effect would be a slippery and abrasive track. I anticipate that the circuit will place similar demands on the drivers to Sepang. For this race we will have the first fruits of our development program in the new wind tunnel ready to try on the Sauber Petronas C23." With the wind tunnel now operating and given that the car effectively is last year's Ferrari with this year's Ferrari engine in it seems likely that both drivers will do well this weekend.

9. Fisichella

Surprisingly behind his team mate in both of the opening rounds of the world championship Fisichella seems not to be the same star driver that everyone thought he was this time last year. It is clear that Fisichella lost motivation last year but to be off Massa's pace this year seems worrying. Giancarlo's race in Malaysia was also anything but spectacular with the Italian unable to drive at anything like 10/10ths of his ability. Massa's experience testing for Ferrari could be a major cause of this. As the Sauber effectively is a license made F2003-GA it shares exactly the same characteristics and Massa has done countless kilometers of testing in the F2003 is not a surprise he is used to driving it. Even so Fisico will need to get to grips with the new car fast if he is not to stall his career.

10. Massa

A surprising eighth in Malaysia, no one really knows why Massa goes fast but he does! Felipe's scrabbling go-karting style is almost reminiscent of Villeneuve or Senna but without the grace or consistency of either of them. Bahrain should be a test of both endurance, durability and driving style. Having out-qualified his highly rated team mate in both the opening rounds this year by a second or so Massa will be hoping to repeat the experience in Bahrain. Assuming Massa continues to outpace his team mate a move to Ferrari is unlikely to follow quickly. Ironically, however, Massa's future hopes can only realistically be tied to Ferrari as his manager is Jean Todt's son and it is unlikely that any other team would wish to have someone so closely linked to Ferrari inside their garage over a race weekend.

Jaguar (*Green with HSBC graphics*)

If nothing else Jaguar's grand prix performance captured headlines! After Webber finished an impressive second in qualifying both cars made terrible getaways from the line and the green cars were left playing catch up from the back. Despite all the hiccups the R5 was around four seconds a lap faster around Sepang than its forbearer was last year. This sort of competitiveness is likely to continue in Bahrain. The long straights are sure to play to the Jaguar's potent Cosworth engine and there seems to be little wrong with the car's grip or balance in either of the opening races. What is perhaps the biggest surprise is Jaguar's ability to cut costs across its F1 operation while at the same time still become more competitive. Jaguar are still, however, stuck on the same tires as the other major teams it is would probably be them more than any other who would be best placed to take a gamble on changing to Bridgestones.

14. Webber

After a fantastic yet awful race weekend in Sepang Webber still managed to emerge from the race weekend in relatively fine fettle. His throwing the car off the track at the final hairpin was due to problems with his brakes rather than out of sheer exasperation (as many thought) and, although an enforced pitstop after being punctured by Ralf, a drive through penalty and dodgy clutch ruined his race he was still impressed with the developments made by Jaguar over the last year. For Bahrain the team will be concentrating on tire wear above all. Despite a great deal of improvements in this regard the R5 still eats

its rear tires in much the same way as last year's R4 did. Webber is still under consideration for a seat at Williams (especially considering it looks more likely that Ralf Schumacher will be in a Toyota next year) so a strong performance in Bahrain may just seal that.

15. Klein

Barely noticeable in the Malaysian race Klein seems to be suffering from the curse of the number two Jaguar (incidentally Justin Wilson has just sealed a drive with Conquest Racing competing in the CART Championship this year after a decent one off sportscar drive at Sebring in an MG). As for Klein, despite some mistakes Jaguar seem happy so far "He's making progress," said managing director David Pitchforth. "You'd expect a few mistakes but we've been fortunate. He's continuing to improve as he gets to know the R5 and his lap-times are getting faster." Klein is hoping that the fact that the track will be new for everyone will allow him to catch up with the rest of the field and seems unconcerned with his gap to team mate Mark Webber.

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

At the center of much of the controversy in the last couple of weeks has been Toyota. Although Toyota are still nowhere near the right pace they are seen by all to be the place to go in the future and Ralf Schumacher has been rumored to be about to sign for \$60 million as has IRL champion Scott Dixon fresh from his Williams test. Technical Director Mike Gascoyne is concentrating on matters closer to home. "Bahrain is completely unknown territory for everyone, so it promises to be an exciting new race on the F1 calendar. It is the first completely new track in Formula 1 since the debut race in Malaysia back in 1999, so the race results will be dictated as much by how quickly teams and drivers can learn the circuit, as it will be determined by competitiveness. On paper, the Bahrain track looks as technically challenging as Malaysia, so we are aiming to maintain our momentum and get both cars to the finish line for the third race in a row. We were just a few seconds from a championship point in Sepang, so there is no reason that we should not expect a point or two if we can bring both cars home on Sunday."

20. Panis

Olivier Panis echoes his team mates feelings when asked for his feelings about the weekend ahead. "From a personal point of view, I think it is very refreshing to have new circuits on the F1 calendar, not only for the racing, but also to be given the opportunity to discover a new country, a different culture and new people. I have not been to the track in Bahrain, although I have been studying the layout and I am really looking forward to the grand prix. Like all drivers, we will only see the track for the first time when we walk around it on Thursday, and I am sure it will provide a real challenge. The last time I drove a completely new track to me was the Indianapolis Motor Speedway back in 2001 and I feel that I can adapt quickly to new situations and conditions, something I aim to do this weekend as we look to make another step forward. I think our overall performance in Malaysia showed that we are working in the right direction and we will certainly continue to do so." It is interesting to note that Toyota seem to have done less preparation than other front running teams in preparing for this race and there is something of a feeling of working it all out when they get there that pervades their preparations for the weekend. Hopefully this is just a smokescreen as Toyota are still the least experienced Formula 1 team on the grid and have yet to start buying in the requisite experience, relying on home grown talent instead.

21. Da Matta

Despite just missing out on a point at Malaysia (which has been a strong track for Toyota in their first three races there) Christiano is upbeat about the race ahead. "My ninth place at the Malaysian Grand Prix and the team's second two-car finish of the season showed that we have the capability of scoring points even at this early stage of the season. As a new track, Bahrain will offer a totally new set of hurdles for us all to overcome, but I will rely on my intensive experience from last season to make progress as quickly as possible. The fact that most of the circuits on the calendar were new to me in 2003 could offer me a slight

advantage this weekend. Last year, I became quite adept at making up ground to my rivals, but this weekend we are all on the same level. The Bahrain Grand Prix is very important to Formula 1 for many reasons, so I am optimistic it will be an enjoyable race weekend."

Jordan (*Yellow with BandH graphics*)

Although the Jordans are not really on the pace it is reliability that is forefront in the teams mind at the moment. Jordan are currently sponsored by the Crown Prince of Bahrain at the moment with the team running a series of inspirational messages on the side of its airbox (the first was Peace and the second was Equality). Despite all this (and the fact that the team took over and EJ12 to promote the event last year) it is unlikely that the cars will do particularly well. The larger teams are already looking at serious development programs and testing has been running apace in Spain, France and Italy even though the race cars have been en route from one venue to the next. With only three cars available to the team there is no way that they can afford to develop their car on a race by race basis or have a dedicated test team running in addition to their race team so it looks as if both Jordan and Minardi will slip behind the rest of the field faster than ever this year.

11. Heidfeld

Although Heidfeld's pace has thus far been unrewarded with points, his speed and dedication to the job has massively endeared him to the team. Nick seems massively encouraged in turn and his feelings ahead of this weekend are very positive indeed. "I'm a little disappointed not to finish a race however on the positive side I have made good starts and my speed has been quite encouraging. I was keeping a few cars behind me at the Malaysian Grand Prix and our pace was quite good. I know the team have been working really hard to sort out the technical problems I have experienced and my target for this race is to finish, and maintain the pace that I have been able to find so far. I'm very much looking forward to visiting Bahrain because I think this new race is good for Formula One, after all it's a World Championship so we should go all over the world. I always like the challenge of new circuits and I enjoy visiting new places."

12. Pantano

Considering Ferrari have been relaying their track with the Bahrain bitumen and Williams have been illicitly testing there it has been endearing to note that Jordan have had little more than a circuit map and a few simulation programs with which to plan for the grand prix. As James Robinson (the head of race and test engineering) says "In preparing for a race at a new circuit, we do as much simulation work as possible, although access issues have prevented us from running our usual track surveys here. Once we have an accurate model of the track we can design a driver model to work out a racing line and run simulation tools to determine car set-up, lap times and downforce data to find the optimum aerodynamic set-up for that track. From that we project fuel consumption, brake wear, set-up criteria and so on. At present we don't know the surface characteristics as we have only a 2D drawing so in many ways it's really a case of waiting until we get there." Oddly enough this lack of data does not seem to concern Pantano who seems as fired up as ever. Pantano is lagging a long way behind Nick Heidfeld in terms of outright pace and it seems clear that he will have his work cut out if he is to remain in the team all year with drivers such as Enrique Bernoldi and Ralph Firman looking adequately funded and driving in the Dallara Nissan Series or in F3000.

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

Some good news for this week for the team when long term sponsor Allegrini agreed not only to renew its sponsorship deal but to increase its involvement. More good news for the team happened in Malaysia when both cars managed to make it to the finish. Spins and excursions in qualifying saw both cars get away from the back row. To help matters further Bas Leinders managed to get his Superlicense so took part in the Friday testing allowing the team to gather valuable data before qualifying. The team are likely to gain additionally from the change to the qualifying rules which

will see second qualifying not take place around 40 minutes after first qualifying meaning that the race style pitstops seen in the first two rounds will not be necessary for the Minardi mechanics.

18. **Bruni**

Bruni started to repay Paul Stoddart's faith in him in Malaysia where he managed to run ahead of several cars despite not having power steering for much of the race. Considering the car's inherent slowness Bruni showed a decent amount of pace and the team looked more respectable than they had at any point since Justin Wilson left them after the British Grand Prix last year. Bruni is certainly a decent pedeller but there is nothing yet to put him in the Alonso/Wilson class and you get the feeling that if the team could afford it they would certainly replace him with Wilson, Anthony Davidson or Marc Gene. For Bahrain the little minnows of the F1 paddock are likely to struggle with the sand and heat likely to affect them more than other, better funded teams. A finish would be a result in itself.

19. **Baumgartner**

Keeping out of trouble (apart from a slip in qualifying) say Zsolt qualify 17th . Despite not having a drinks bottle for part of the race and a handling imbalance throughout it Zsolt still soldiered on and even got ahead of his team mate at one point. Despite all this Baumgartner is no more talented than many F3 journeymen (if that) and it is a pity that his nationality has got him a drive ahead of more talented drivers. For Bahrain Baumgartner is likely to be slow but polite again and this is sure to suffice for what the team want. Ironically Baumgartner's nationality could be an advantage in some respects as Hungarian summers are stiflingly hot and this will help him more than many may think. If only he had the talent to be able to utilize it.

Alex's 2004 Bahrain Grand Prix Predictions

Qualifying

1. Michael Schumacher
2. Carlos Montoya
3. Ruben Barrichello

Race

1. Michael Schumacher
2. Ruben Barrichello
3. Jenson Button