

Preview

2004 Japanese Grand Prix

Round 17 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* and Ralph Hummerich's excellent *RH 2004 Season* carset that's available from [this link](#).

A Lap of Suzuka

The straight is on a downward slope which can lead to all sorts of fun when starting (ask Michael Schumacher!) You then go into the first corner at about 130 mph in 5th gear (though I am pretty sure 4th or 3rd are normally used there) — it then tightens up to 3rd and about 95 mph you then climb up to the S curve which is a left-right taken at 130 mph in 4th and then immediately into the Dunlop Curve which is a right hander taken at 115 in 4th.

The course then swoops up to the left before the double apex Degner curve (the first apex is taken at almost full pelt in 6th while the second is taken at 75 mph in 2nd (there is also not much run off there if you get it wrong so crashes can be both spectacular and painful!)).

You then accelerate under the cross over point of the circuit up to the hairpin which is taken at 45 mph in 2nd. You then accelerate downhill arcing around to the right before you hit the Spoon Curve.

This corner is undoubtedly one of the most difficult to get right in Formula 1. Hill and Coulthard both got it hideously wrong in 95 and it was probably this which cost both men their jobs at Williams. It is a double apex corner on a gradient



in a sort of irregular bowl shape (hence the name) you hit the first apex at about 140 mph in 5th gear and then accelerate slightly before braking to take the second apex at 100 in 4th or 3rd. A great deal of feeling is required to get this right as you must get as much speed on the exit as possible due to the long straight that follows the corner.

On this straight you go over the cross over point and are normally going around 180-190 by the time you arrive at 130R. This corner is so named because it is a 130 degree right hander. This can (supposedly) be taken flat though you have to be either brave or mad to attempt this and Allan McNish showed last year what happens if you get it wrong when he destroyed his Toyota and nearly destroyed himself in the process!

This then leads to another straight (with the pit entrance 4/5ths of the way down on the right hand side) and this signals the braking point to the main overtaking point on the circuit the Casino Chicane which is a right/left chicane taken at 35 mph in second. You then accelerate around to the right to the start/finish straight.

Race Name: Japanese Grand Prix

Circuit Name: Suzuka

Circuit Length: 3.636 miles

Race Length: 53 laps

Lap Record: M. Schumacher Ferrari F2002 (1'36"125)

Ralf Schumacher's View

"I am not sure if I have a favorite track in the Formula One calendar, but Suzuka is one of my preferred venues. The S-corner and the very fast 130R are probably the most demanding combinations of track that Formula One offers, making them a real challenge for car and driver alike.

I am due out in Toyko one week before the race due to a BMW marketing commitment. I enjoy staying in Japan after my experience of racing Formula Nippon in 1996."

Jarno Trulli's View

"Approaching Turn 1, I will be at the maximum speed that we generally see at this circuit although it is slightly dependent on wind: this is typically 320 kph. Turn 1 is very fast and I just drop to 5th gear, braking quite lightly to take the corner at 250 kph.

Turn 2 requires much heavier braking as I must go down to 3rd and 150 kph. Exiting Turn 2 leads me into the very tricky section behind the pits which consists of a number of continuous left-right corners which require a very smooth style and a finely balanced car.

The first of these, Turn 3, is approached with very light braking as I take it in 4th gear at 225 kph. I am almost immediately turning right into Turn 4, again with a light touch on the brakes to slow to 185 kph, before holding 4th gear for Turn 5, which is taken at approximately 200 kph.

Turn 6 is a little trickier in that it is almost two corners, which I take at approximately 170 kph, this time in 3rd gear.

Turn 7, the final corner in this sequence, is approached at 230 kph and I can actually turn into this corner without braking, just slightly scrubbing speed to apex at 205 kph in 4th gear.

Approaching Turn 8, I will get up to 290 kph in top before having to brake very hard and change back down to 4th gear to take the corner at 210 kph.

Turn 9 is much tighter and I will take it in 2nd gear at approximately 130 kph. Passing under the bridge, I will approach the hairpin at 270 kph in 5th gear. Braking for this corner is quite difficult as I have to shed almost 200 kph but as I enter the braking zone, there is still a lot of lateral force on the car from the small

kink that precedes the corner. The hairpin itself is taken in 1st gear at 70 kph.

Turn 12 is an extremely long corner but taken completely flat out. I will enter it at 180 kph in 3rd gear and exit at 295 kph in top. The loads are high enough that the car tends to bog down through the corner, meaning the approach to Turn 13 will only see me at 300 kph.

Turn 13 is a 4th gear, 200 kph which has an important exit in order to get the right line for Turn 14, which I must take in 3rd gear at 150 kph.

Approaching Turn 15, I should reach 315 kph in top gear for this very fast, quite bumpy corner that I will take at approximately 290 kph. Leading up to the chicane, my speed will have built up again to 385 kph before braking hard for this complex, both parts of which are taken in 1st gear at 65 kph. I need to use the curbs here and therefore require good ride from the car.

The final corner is in fact flat and I accelerate through it, exiting at approximately 270 kph in 5th gear, crossing the line in top at around 310 kph."



The Track's F1 History

McLaren and Ferrari have a habit of having title showdowns in Japan. The first Japanese Grand Prix was held in **1976** at the Fuji circuit and was the scene of a terrific showdown between Niki Lauda (who had just returned to motor racing after his crash at the Nurburgring) in the Ferrari and James Hunt in the McLaren. Lauda retired in monsoon conditions and James Hunt just held on to become World Champion.

In **1989** Prost and Senna collided their McLarens at the last chicane to give Prost the title while in **1990** Senna's McLaren deliberately ran into Prost's Ferrari at the first corner to give Senna the title (Piquet won the race and Moreno came second in the Benetton).

The next time the World Championship was decided at Suzuka was in **1996** when Damon Hill sensationally won the race to beat Jacques Villeneuve (who retired) to the World Championship and in **1998** Hakkinen beat Schumacher in a similar way to claim the World Championship.

In **1999** Japan was the final round of the FIA championship where Irvine and Hakkinen were racing for the championship. Irvine was the hot favorite for the win due to his experience at Suzuka but an off during qualifying effectively wrecked his weekend. During the race Irvine ran a poor third while Schumacher ran behind Hakkinen. Schuey later admitted that he did not press Hakkinen quite as hard as he might, realizing that the Jaguar-headed Irvine would realize the goal which Schuey had tried for since his joining Ferrari in 1996.

In **2000** it was another title showdown even though Japan was the penultimate round of the season. Michael Schumacher won from Hakkinen sealing his third world championship and his first for Ferrari. Hakkinen got away better than Schuey in the early stages of the race but Schuey kept close in the greasy conditions and superior pitstop work got the German ahead after which Hakkinen's challenge seemed to dissolve handing Schuey the race win and the championship. One of the stranger aspects of the race was an earthquake hitting the circuit during a practice session!

In **2001** the championship was decided by the time the circus reached Japan and the race concentrated upon the constructor's championship than the driver's. Schuey and Montoya seemed to be the drivers to beat again as Ralf Schumacher's poor form continued. The race saw the signing off of Jean Alesi and Mika Hakkinen. Alesi's race was ended by a massive crash with Kimi Raikkonen in the Esses. Schuey went on to win from Montoya (just) with Coulthard behind them and Hakkinen and Barrichello also enjoying a race long scrap to finish 4th and 5th respectively while Ralf set fastest lap in the process of a recovery drive that saw him claim the last point. Two years ago Schuey finished the championship off with an easy win though Alan McNish's huge accident in qualifying overshadowed the race. There was huge local support for home driver Takuma Sato who got his first points of the season with an inspired drive to 5th place in Jordan's last race with Honda. Last year Rubens Barrichello ruled the roost in a championship showdown that was just a little too close for comfort. Schumacher needed just one point to secure the title from Kimi Raikkonen but the German trailed around at the back of the points and tripped over a number of drivers including the returning Takuma Sato (who replaced Jacques Villeneuve in an 11th hour deal at BAR) and his own brother. Luckily for Schumi Rubens drove superbly and rescued his team leader's bacon winning from Raikkonen with Coulthard finishing third while Button was fourth, Trulli fifth and Sato an excellent sixth. Past Winners: 1993 Senna, 1994 Hill, 1995 Schumacher, 1996 Hill, 1997 Schumacher, 1998 Hakkinen, 1999 Hakkinen, 2000 Schumacher, 2001 Schumacher, 2002 Schumacher, 2003 Barrichello.

The Track

The Japanese Grand Prix first took place at Fuji in 1976 and played host to the famous showdown between James Hunt and Niki Lauda that year. After a nearly a decade away from the F1 calendar the race returned at the Suzuka circuit which was built by Honda. The Japanese giant were disappointed in that inaugural race as Gerhard Berger won for Ferrari despite a strong Honda presence.

Suzuka has seen its fair share of controversy over the years due to its traditional place on the calendar as the season finale. Ayrton Senna was a legendary presence at the track at during the late Eighties and Early-Nineties. He took his first title at Suzuka in 1988, although he lost out a year later after the first of his famous clashes with Alain Prost. The Brazilian more than made up for this one year later when he collided with Prost at almost 160 mph to cement his second world title. He scored his third title a year later when he gifted victory to teammate Gerhard Berger after main rival Nigel Mansell crashed out.

Suzuka is regarded by the drivers as one of the great motor racing circuits in the world. The Spoon Curve and the 130R are two of the best corners in motor racing while a lot of time can be made through having a balanced car in the esses.

It is notable that many of the ideas in the design of the corners of the new Sepang circuit seem to mirror those found at Suzuka. Suzuka is also well known for it's figure of eight configuration in that it crosses over itself.

At this time of year it is not unknown for torrential rain to be a factor in the race (as it was in 1994).



Strategy

One or two stops is again the way to go in Japan. In 1994 the two part nature of the race helped Damon Hill's one stopping Williams eek a crucial advantage over Schuey's two stopping Benetton in what was arguably the most thrilling Japanese Grand Prix to date. Since then the teams have tended to opt for a similar strategy to each other with two stops usually being the way to go due to the high degradation of the tires and the handling characteristics of the circuit.

Standings

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

2004 F1 Driver's Championship Standings

(through 16 of 18 races)

Position	Driver	Team	Points
1	M. Schumacher	Ferrari	136
2	R. Barrichello	Ferrari	108
3	J. Button	BAR	79
4	F. Alonso	Renault	50
5	J. Montoya	Williams	46
	J. Trulli	Renault	46
7	K. Raikkonen	McLaren	34
8	T. Sato	BAR	26
9	D. Coulthard	McLaren	24
10	G. Fisichella	Sauber	21
11	R. Schumacher	Williams	12

12	F. Massa	Sauber	11
13	M. Webber	Jaguar	7
14	Olivier Panis	Toyota	6
	A. Pizzonia	Williams	6
15	C. da Matta	Toyota	3
	N. Heidfeld	Jordan	3
	C. Klien	Jaguar	3
16	T. Glock	Jordan	2
17	Z. Baumgartner	Minardi	1



2004 F1 Constructor's Championship Standings (through 16 of 18 races)

Position	Team	Points
1	Ferrari	244
2	BAR	105
3	Renault	96
4	Williams	64
5	McLaren	58
6	Sauber	32

7	Jaguar	10
8	Toyota	9
9	Jordan	5
10	Minardi	1



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)*

Marlboro Ferrari (Red with Marlboro signs) With two races to go there seems little more for Ferrari to prove this season. Development has frozen on the F2004 and the team are busy working on next year's car. The team have won the constructor's title and Michael Schumacher and Rubens Barrichello have been confirmed as first and second in the driver's standings. The team would be forgiven for going a little off the boil in the final two races this year. The season is more or less over and there is nothing they can still do which they haven't done before. After China (Michael Schumacher's worst ever race in Formula 1) Ross Brawn claimed that Michael Schumacher only ever tends to make these mistakes when it doesn't really matter and these days that seems right. Ferrari tire supplier Bridgestone will be looking for a decent result, however, and the team will be pressing hard for them more than anyone in order to secure a triumph.

M. Schumacher

Schuey's performance in China was execrable by most standards. His spin in qualifying seemed odd to say the least but most observers forgot that Schumacher had problems with his software during Friday practice. What seems most likely (to my mind) is that Schumi had a problem with engine power blipping due to the software problem and as a result spun off. The team later confirmed that the problem looked to be more with driver than with car and this would look right according to the telemetry. That said, it is far more likely that Schumi just couldn't get his head around the first corner tightening up. Schumi still likes his cars to be looser at the rear than the front (though has tempered this over time) so as the rear stepped out the tightening nature of the corner meant he couldn't save the car without running out of room anyway. Odd he

didn't do that once in any of the other sessions though!

Barrichello

Like last year Rubens is increasingly looking like the stronger driver going into the final few races of the season. Rubens dominated the Japanese race last year and he may well do the same again this year. Rubens is clear of Button in second place and it is the next race in Brazil that he is determined to win, not this race in Japan. That said there is no better way to prepare for a win than with a win and it is clear that Rubens would love to sign off the end of the season with a hat trick of wins — particularly as the Japanese Grand Prix is tire supplier Bridgestone's home race. A strong performance seems likely though his team mate is likely to be motivated and hungry for victory so Rubens will find himself under pressure.

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

With both drivers leaving the team developments of this year's FW26 seem to have wound down a touch. BMW are still trying to ramp up the power but it is clear that they are planning a new engine for next season and are not about to give too many details of it to Toyota and McLaren respectively. Unfortunately for this season it does mean that Williams are starting on the back foot with regard to challenging McLaren or fourth place in the constructor's championship. BMW is now some way behind Ferrari and Honda in terms of horsepower and it seems unlikely that this will change until Mark Webber's first test in Barcelona in November. For Japan the combination of dispirited drivers, little development and increasingly secretive engineers are sure to lead to a team swimming against the tide to achieve points.

R. Schumacher

The one thing you should never ever do during a race is park a healthy Formula 1 car (ever!). To the team and pitlane this shows that you are not committed whilst to the team this shows that you don't care about them and deprives them of testing time and the chance of a consolation point or two. When Ralf Schumacher complained of suspension problems following his puncture the car was looked over thoroughly in the garage and the given the all clear. Ralf was then asked to rejoin the race which he refused. Not surprisingly (given the immediate reaction from the team) it was widely thought that Ralf had driven his last race for the team with everyone in Williams and BMW rounding on Ralf to criticize his decision not to continue. Eventually it was decided to let Ralf race in Japan and Brazil but it is understood that the decision was a close one. Another stunt like that and Toyota may have another new driver on board in Brazil.

Montoya

A really ordinary race for Juan Pablo has pretty much shown JPM in a relatively poor light in the second half of this season. Despite occasionally flourishes (normally only over the course of a couple of laps) JPM has under performed. He was closely matched by reserve driver Antonio Pizzonia in Belgium and Italy and clearly slower than a rested Ralf Schumacher in China. His battles with Michael Schumacher and Jacques Villeneuve were fun to watch but this was for places in the midfield and way out of the points. JPM can't wait to leave Williams. Ralf's return has confirmed in his mind that the favoritism he has alluded to for the last few seasons is rife in the team and he cannot wait to get into the more competitive McLaren. Whether JPM will find that the grass really is greener on the other side of the fence is another matter.

West McLaren Mercedes (*Grey with West graphics*)

Some feisty driving from Kimi Raikkonen and another relatively duff performance from David Coulthard seems to highlight just how the fortunes of the team seem to be splitting between the drivers. There is no doubt that McLaren can't wait to get Montoya in a set of silver overalls and in one of their cars and Kimi is fighting hard to beat Williams (and therefore Montoya) and therefore help McLaren in their fight for fourth in the constructor's championship. The engine department at Ilmor seem to have benefited tremendously from the increased integration with Mercedes and this has produced an increase in performance that has got the team looking stronger than it has at any stage since 2000. The McLaren design concept is still young and it seems abundantly clear that it works. With two fighting drivers on board and

clever tactics, reliability and luck McLaren seem to be waking up to the realities of beating Ferrari.

Coulthard

A dispirited finish out of the points is not what Coulthard needed to convince potential employers of his credentials. Some poor performances combined with a certain naiveté when dealing with the team bosses means that Coulthard is rapidly running out of options. Something he himself admits. Had DC performed better in the second half of the season then he was looking good for the BAR or Williams drive (depending upon where Jenson Button ended up) but this lack of pace has meant that Williams are now looking at reuniting Pizzonia and Webber whilst BAR are being increasingly pressured to take on someone younger, more dynamic or faster. Retirement is something DC will be fighting to avoid but, unless teams are forced to run three cars next season, it is looking very much on the cards.

Raikkonen

A decent drive from Kimi nearly saw him snatch an improbable victory. Pressuring Barrichello's Ferrari throughout the early stages of the race was certainly not expected to be in the script yet Kimi kept in close touch with the scarlet charger until their stops. Although he was passed by Jenson Button (thanks in part to BAR's clever two stopping strategy) he was still close enough to Button at the end to really hassle him in the last few laps. All in all Kimi drove a brilliant race. It seemed strange that Kimi did not show Rubens the nose of his car a little more yet this is the sort of thing that Kimi rarely does. He is harsh but fair and would not have felt the need to waste time and speed in mounting an overtaking move he felt was not attainable. A good race here last year (again pressuring a winning Rubens Barrichello) makes Kimi a good bet for a win (he still has only won two races!) and a great bet for a podium.

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

Flavio Briatore is being widely mooted as a possible buyer for engine supplier Cosworth currently. Briatore has said that he will be retiring from Renault at the end of 2005 and he has been linked with assuming a similar role to that he had with Renault/Meccachrome after Renault withdrew from the sport in 1997. Should this not materialize it is possible that Flavio will in some way be linked to Dallara's return to Formula 1 as a new team which will be announced over the Grand Prix weekend. It is understood that a consortium of Russian backers are bankrolling this effort and Briatore has been in contact with these gentlemen in relation to buying Minardi, Jordan and, most recently, Jaguar. Whether Briatore become the new head of whatever Jaguar will be renamed as or whether he takes over Jordan or Cosworth one thing seems certain. Flavio Briatore's departure from Renault will not signal his departure from Formula 1.

Villeneuve

A circumspect debut from Villeneuve showed just how much the Canadian former World Champion still has to learn about his car, team and driving. Villeneuve clearly is not at home with the RS24. His driving tended to require bites at a corner with a healthy dose of opposite lock as he accelerated away. This was a world away from the familiar shots of Villeneuve in the Williams in 1996 and 1997 using the smooth approach he had learnt on the ovals of America to eek out a little more speed through the faster corners. The fact that Jacques had a great ding-dong battle with Michael Schumacher shows that he has lost none of his competitive spirit and being only half a second off Alonso is great for a first outing but the team will be expecting more in Japan, a track Villeneuve does not have a great record at.

Alonso

Fernando's demon start once again had him fighting for the lead. Unfortunately for Renault and their battle for second place in the constructor's championship it was at this point that things started going wrong! Fernando is a great fighter but it is abundantly clear that this year's car is reaching the end of its development life and further aerodynamic aids seem to be unbalancing a fine design. The departure of more design staff to Jordan is not helping matters and it is clear that if Renault are to beat BAR in the final

two races a rethink is necessary regarding the development of this year's car. Unfortunately Fernando is not experienced enough to demand this while Jacques Villeneuve is too new to the team and will be out at the end of the season anyway. On current form it is difficult to see them beating BAR other than through reliability.

BAR Honda *(White with Red Lucky Strike roundels)*

With the Japanese race coming up BAR have decided to confirm what I reported on three races ago, namely that the team have taken their option up on Takuma Sato. BAR can go to Suzuka for their centenary race on a high. Jenson Button's second place in China has given them a little margin in their battle for second place against Renault. Added to this Honda (whose home race it is and who own Suzuka) always bring a slightly more powerful engine to their home race. This year the engine is said to be 8 bhp more powerful and 20 kilos lighter. The only weak point in the team's armory is likely to be the tires. Michelin are getting a lot closer to Bridgestone but there is no doubt that the Japanese tires still have the edge and their grip and consistency may give Ferrari the edge for a victory on Sunday.

Button

Another storming race from the young Brit produced his eighth podium of the season in China. Jenson is now secure in third place in the driver's standings and it seems incredible to think that he had never stood on the podium in Formula 1 prior to this season. A race win is the next logical step and Jenson must be gunning for one in Japan. Jenson likes Japan and he stayed at the Honda factory after last year's race for a morale boosting exercise. This year the final race being in Brazil means that Jenson won't be able to repeat this exercise but the message seems clear from the young Brit "Give me the package and I can win this".

Sato

At ease within the team and at a circuit he always does well at Takuma Sato has a lot of reasons to be feeling pretty optimistic approaching this weekend. Sato is unquestionably the best driver Japan has ever produced (considering his rivals for the title are Aguri Suzuki and Satoru Nakajima this isn't saying much!). Even so Sato has become something of a superstar in Japan. The Japanese love their motorsport and currently Formula 1 is reaching the levels of popularity not seen since Senna and Prost were winning everything in sight in the McLaren Hondas in the late 80s. Sato is one of the main reasons for this and Honda are aiming to capitalize on this popularity with a good result at home. The engine failures that blighted Sato's early-mid season seem to be securely in the past and Sato can look forward to another season in a team where he should be challenging for wins.

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

Probably the biggest surprise of the year Sauber have been regular points scorers throughout the second half of the season. Massa's fourth on the grid in China showed just how competitive the car has become as the new wind tunnel (said to be the best in Formula 1) continues to provide tweaks for the C23 to further hone its handling. Being in close cooperation with Ferrari and on Bridgestone tires clearly helps and also illustrates just what sort of advantage the Japanese rubber can give. Most points seem likely for Sunday and it is of particular note to compare the relative performances of the customer teams. Sauber, who have always been the quiet and methodical types, are still competitive and financially healthy while Eddie Jordan, who was a front runner only three short years ago, seems to be at sea and ready to sell to the first serious bidder.

Fisichella

At his penultimate race before he moves into a team with a shout of the championship Fisichella will be looking to overtake David Coulthard in the driver's points table. Apart from being embarrassing to DC it would be a great boon to Sauber to bear a McLaren driver (the team are now effectively stuck in 6th in the constructor's championship as there is a gap of over 20 points to teams above and below them). Suzuka has never been

a great Fisicella circuit yet, if there is one thing that Giancarlo's drives have shown this season it is that he is transcending his traditional good track/bad track routine and is becoming a credible threat on every track.

Massa

Fourth on the grid and a good start saw Felipe Massa running ahead of Button's BAR in the early stages of the race in China. Massa was hard in his driving but very fair and it was good to see that he seems to have adapted his wayward style into something a little more consistent of late. Felipe's career will be at a crossroads next season. Like Jenson Button last year Massa will be facing a clear struggle for survival on the F1 grid against Jacques Villeneuve. If Jacques manages to "outpsych" and outperform Massa from early on then it seems likely that Massa will be dropped at the end of 2005. If the reverse happens then Sauber seems likely to terminate Villeneuve's contract after one of the two years they have agreed upon. Before Villeneuve joins the team Massa must therefore keep banging in the results he is capable of and prove to the mechanics that his qualifying in China was no fluke.

Jaguar *(Green with HSBC graphics)*

Penultimate race for Jaguar and the potential buyers seem to be lining up. The same Russian consortium that were aiming to bid for Jordan look to be investigating the possibility of buying Jaguar and running the nearly finished R6. There is no doubt that whoever does end up with the team will have quite a decent car to race next season (as long as Cosworth are bought up and supply their development engine). The team are certainly not acting as if they are just about to be scrapped and this is in marked contrast to Prost and Arrows - both of whom were virtually dead in the water before they were mercifully put out of their misery. It would be great to see Jaguar be allowed to become everything they could be and there is no doubt that the team had really turned things around before Ford's high handed dumping of the program. Lets hope they sort their future soon.

Webber

The most major development for Mark Webber for Japan will be a new lightweight chassis. Webber is determined to get some serious points for the team before he leaves them and, unlike Klein who has been noticeably reticent over the sale of Jaguar, Webber seems to really care for the teams he drives for. "The guys at the factory in Milton Keynes and the team up at Cosworth Racing in Northampton have all really pulled together over these last couple of weeks and I would like to reward them with points before the season ends. I will be racing this weekend in our new chassis, the R5b-06."

Klein

Some fantastic argey bargey between Michael Schumacher and Christian Klein in China showed that the Austrian does have what it takes to race world champions - even if they have to be at the back of the grid to begin with! In fairness to Klein he produced some beautiful driving to stay ahead of Schumacher prior to their coming together on lap 12 in China and there is no doubt that the Austrian has a great deal of driving talent and is not the usual inept pay driver that have blighted many of the struggling teams. Unlike many of the other drivers expected to qualify around him Klein has not driven at Suzuka before and as a result will probably struggle more than most. An interesting point to consider is how Justin Wilson would have gone in the car if Jaguar had kept him on this season?

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

Marketing pressures and some decent runs in testing has meant that Jarno Trulli has been drafted into the team instead of Riccardo Zonta in Japan and Olivier Panis in Brazil. The logic of replacing Panis in Brazil is purely due to marketing considerations. This rationale behind running a racing team has always seemed incongruous and Toyota's dowdy season this year further suggests that playing musical chairs with drivers is a result of poor management and corporate techniques being applied to a racing team. If there is one arena where traditional business models do not apply it is in motor racing and Formula 1 in particular. The experiences of BAR in theory early years and more recently Jaguar make

this abundantly clear yet Toyota are still keen to continue throwing money at the project whilst employing the wrong people to run it. Mike Gascoigne and Gustav Brunner should be put in charge and the Japanese middle management got rid of. Unfortunately this is not about to happen so next season is likely to be similar to this year.

Panis

After 157 races and one win for Ligier (at Monaco in 1996) Olivier Panis will be bowing out of his final race this weekend. Panis started with Ligier back in 1994 and raced with them until 1997. Olivier was in with a shout at the championship in the powerful Mugen powered car when he suffered a major crash in the Canadian Grand Prix and broke both his legs, giving Jarno Trulli, ironically the person who is replacing him at Toyota, his big break in Formula 1. Two season testing with McLaren followed until he made his grand prix return partnering Jacques Villeneuve at BAR in 2000. Two seasons at Toyota then followed and Oliver will stay at Toyota as third driver next season. Speaking about the race and his upcoming retirement from racing Olivier said I love Suzuka. It is a very fast, high-speed circuit and one of my favorites on the calendar, I always enjoy racing in front of the Japanese Toyota fans, but this year's event will also be quite emotional for me because it will be my final Formula 1 race. Although I will miss the excitement of racing, I will have the chance to give a big input in Toyota's future in my new role as third driver. In that respect, having Jarno on board will be very helpful in setting ourselves up for next season. He has been a good friend of mine since our time as teammates and I know we will work very well together. All I am hoping for this weekend is to finish my racing career with points."

Trulli

Making his debut for Toyota will be Jarno Trulli in Japan. It is clear that Jarno has taken personally the criticism that has been ladled on him by the Renault team since his split with them. "It will be a big challenge for me to join Toyota for the final two races of this season in Japan and Brazil, but I am more motivated than ever before," he said. "I have had four days testing over the last three weeks, working mainly on making myself comfortable in the car and settling into my new team. I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to make my race debut for Toyota at the company's home grand prix in Suzuka this weekend. We will certainly gain a useful time advantage in preparation for next year, as we can iron out any potential problems before we really get down to concentrating on the 2005 season. Japan is also a very special race for me personally, as I have a lot of loyal supporters, who always give me a warm welcome." I just hope Alonso or Villeneuve don't lap him!

Jordan (*Yellow with BandH graphics*)

After one of the most troubled years in Jordan's history the team can at least look forward to some respite in the off season. Citibank were a sponsor of Jordan's during the race in China and it is understood that this is to pave the way for increased sponsorship of the team next season. The likelihood of the team being sold in the near future seems to have rescinded yet it is still a clear possibility for the off season. Ideally the team should be sold to someone who will keep the factory where it is and allow for increased investment in the team yet neither Arden boss Christian Horner nor the Makhtoum family seem willing or able to meet these preconditions. For the race itself the probability of a wet race is a good thing. Bridgestone produce much better wet tires and the team could use the boost in relative performance that this would provide. Whether it will be enough is another matter.

Heidfeld

Nich Heidfeld will be hoping like crazy that it is chucking it down all weekend. Heidfeld is a great wet weather driver (I particularly remember him racing in Formula 3000 at Hockenheim in the pouring rain and passing the leading car on the last lap by taking to the grass at 160 mph!). Nick has had an uncanny amount of skill and, were he even vaguely memorable as a face or personality, there is little doubt that he would be in a far more prominent team than is currently the case. That said Nick knows Suzuka well and often performs well here. Heidfeld is a technical driver and Suzuka is one of the most technical tracks on the calendar. Add in wet weather and Heidfeld could well be in for some unlikely points.

Glock

Although Timo could not repeat his feat of two points on his first outing, he did at least produce a decent enough performance to justify his replacing Giorgio Pantano. The awful weather predicted for this weekend may well determine whether Glock's F1 career sinks or swims (literally!). Timo will not have it easy though he has had some experience in racing in Japan. Even so the sportscars he did race are an age away from what he will be driving on Sunday. The lack of power of the Cosworth engine seems likely to be offset by the conditions so Timo has to see this as his opportunity to shine.

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

Back at the bottom of the grid life continues on for F1's perennial strugglers. Paul Stoddart has already raised the possibility of his having to start the season with this year's car and chassis. Stoddart is still basing next year's car around an evolution of this year's design and fully intends to be supplied by Cosworth, even if the team have to look after and develop the engines themselves. For Japan the lack of balance and turn in is sure to stymie the team. It seems too much to expect the team even to challenge Jordan let alone the rest of the grid and neither driver will be able to match the drivers ahead of them in terms of pace. At least they are still going!

Bruni

Out after 38 laps in China Bruni will really be having his last bite of the F1 cherry in Japan. A poor season by all accounts and a lack of determination to do the best for the team has harmed Bruni's reputation — particularly considering the team's hand to mouth existence at the best of times. Some clever wheeling and dealing by Paul Stoddart has led to the team being in a better state than it has been for some time but even so Bruni's parking healthy cars has not been received well. Italy was the exception to the rule however. Although Bruni could have continued after the pitlane fire he had ingested fumes and suffered internal burns to his lungs. Even so could do better has to be his report card for the season going into the last two races.

Baumgartner

A much better performance from Baumgartner this season has led to many believing that the Hunarian deserves his drive — even if he hasn't got the talent to earn it buy any means other than his Hungarian nationality! Baumgartner again got to the end of the race in China and even turned in some halfway decent lap times. He was two laps down on the next car but no one ever claimed that Zsolt was any good! His backing is very useful to the team and he will probably stay with them next season (as long as he has the money to pay them for his drive).

Alex's 2004 Spanish Grand Prix Predictions

Qualifying

1. Rubens Barrichello
2. Jenson Button
3. Juan Pablo Montoya

Race

1. Jenson Button
2. Rubens Barrichello
3. Takuma Sato



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