



Silver Service

Ferrari and Raikkonen won at a canter, but the talk in Melbourne was all about the simmering silver cars. Adam Cooper analyses the Australian Grand Prix and finds out just who actually had the upper hand at McLaren

By Adam Cooper

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As usual, I watched the Australian GP from the first corner, and there was no escaping the fact that it was not the most exciting race I've viewed from that spot over the last 12 seasons.

A safety car would have helped to liven things up - especially with the random element provided by the new rules - but for once we didn't get one at Albert Park. Nevertheless, it was an intriguing event with which to launch the post-Schumacher era and I would imagine that it came across reasonably well on TV, especially for British viewers who literally woke

up to the fact that we have a genuine superstar on our hands.

Indeed, it says a lot about the impact of Lewis Hamilton (and especially the context provided by his intra-team battle with double world champion Fernando Alonso) that Kimi Raikkonen's first time out Ferrari victory was largely overshadowed by what was happening at McLaren. With due respect to Kimi and his team, I make no apologies for following that trend, because it really was the story of the weekend.

Lewis was on the case from the start, and especially in qualifying - under the most extreme pressure - he really showed what he was made of. Consider that he was fractionally faster than Alonso in Q1, and was again just in front after their first runs in Q2. Lewis never made a second attempt, but curiously, Fernando did.

"We didn't need to, and you could say it was a mistake," said Martin Whitmarsh. "When Fernando was at the time in second place, he went out and did another lap. During Q1 and Q2, you're conscious of making the cut. You go out on a prime tyre in the first run and decide not to run again. Then in Q2 there was an arguably over-cautious decision taken, which was to go and do a time again with Fernando, which used an extra set of tyres. With Lewis, we didn't."



That ensured Fernando set a quicker time and ended up ahead of Hamilton going into the top 10 session.

Did Alonso go out again for any practical reason other than that he was a little rattled by his novice teammate's pace? Of course, it may just be that McLaren operate on the basis that whoever is quickest in Q2 gets first choice of the optimum fuel strategy for final qualifying, and Fernando wanted to guarantee priority...

Anyway, he was to prove quicker in the crucial top 10 session. However, after the race it became apparent that Hamilton was carrying two laps' worth of extra fuel, and that pretty

much accounted for the difference in lap time.

Melbourne may not be the most challenging, technical track, but the bottom line is that on his very first appearance Hamilton bettered or matched Alonso over one lap on equal terms, and even his biggest supporters within the camp hadn't expected that. Nobody, that is, except one man.

"He has believed since testing that he can outpace Fernando," said Lewis' father Anthony after the race. "I'm sure Lewis is going to go back and think OK, I've still got things to learn so I need to keep cool and keep calm, but he's quick, and he knows it."

A brilliant start

Things didn't quite go according to plan for Alonso at the start. Even allowing for his lighter fuel load and soft tyres, Heidfeld got off the line extremely well and came out of the first corner in second. Behind him Hamilton pulled off an amazing move to extricate himself from a blind alley on the inside, and switch to the outside, in so doing squeezing his teammate down to fourth.

"Fernando is very intelligent, very confident in his own ability," said Martin Whitmarsh. "He's a racing driver, and being overtaken by your teammate, who's come from two places back, at the first corner isn't what you want to happen.

"Nick was light and had the option tyre, but he also had good traction off the line. That created a situation, and Lewis was very quick thinking and decided, 'How do I respond to this?'

"He responded by going to his left and going out round the outside, by the time the situation evolved - and I don't think he got anything wrong - Fernando was boxed going into that corner, and that allowed Lewis to come by. He would, at the time, not have been delighted by that..."



It was game over as far as taking the battle to Kimi was concerned, and that was a great shame. BMW might have improved, but even with his lighter fuel load Nick was holding up the McLarens. It didn't look that way because they weren't exactly breathing down his neck, but such is the way of modern F1 and passing so hard in Melbourne that Lewis and Fernando were effectively obliged to hang back, bide their time and wait for the BMW to stop. Back in the McLaren pit, there was some serious frustration.

"I think from an outcome of the race perspective, our race was very much damaged by the Heidfeld strategy, which we just didn't understand," said Ron Dennis. "Twelve laps (it was actually the end of lap 14 when he came in) as the opening part of the race was not the way to go. Once we were boxed in we just lost touch with Kimi.

"All the time you're behind Heidfeld you're struggling in dirty air, and the cars are so sensitive to that. Unless you've got a good one-and-a-half-second advantage you are not going to be able to take them on, or you have to wait for the tyre situation to deteriorate and then attack. We didn't have to wait too long, because Heidfeld was in the pits in 12 laps. Twelve laps versus 22, he was carrying 10 laps less fuel. That's well over a second a lap."

By the time Heidfeld came in on lap 14, Hamilton was 14.4s down on the leader and Alonso was a further 1.6s behind. Only a recurrence of Massa's qualifying gearbox failure could halt Kimi now, but the McLaren fight was just getting interesting, and we eagerly awaited the first stops.

Fernando had cut the gap to a second when he came in at the end of lap 21, and Lewis followed a lap later. Fernando's in and out laps were quicker - this stuff is still new to Hamilton but traffic may also have played a part - but that single extra lap with a light car was enough to ensure he stayed ahead.

Fernando's Mobil Economy Run

There's a little more to that first stop sequence than meets the eye. Intriguingly, Fernando was supposed to stop two laps ahead of Lewis, when traditionally the difference between teammates has been one. The new safety car rules, and the penalty inherent in being caught out when you are about to refuel, caused the team to spread the risk.

"We had already agreed that we would keep them apart," said Whitmarsh. "You don't ordinarily want the drivers on the same lap and in fact with the new safety car regulations having them on successive laps is not a good thing. So we wanted them apart by a couple of laps.



"If you had your cars on broadly the same strategy - i.e. separated by one lap - which often teams did in the past, you would suffer. Let's say you have one on lap 14 and one on lap 15, if on lap 13 the safety car comes out, you then get both of your cars penalised, and it's game over.

"I find that not very palatable. I never liked safety cars because they always randomise the race. Maybe they're good for the show, but I'm not a huge fan of the new regulations personally. Maybe I just react badly to change!"

By having Massa do one stop from the back of the grid Ferrari automatically kept its options open, and the same consideration also played a part in BMW having Heidfeld come in well ahead of Kubica (a short early stint also allowed Nick to have his compulsory run on the unfavoured soft tyres early).

Anyway, as far as McLaren was concerned the race fuel decision was made on the assumption that Fernando would be in front of Lewis from the start. Now that he was behind, the Spaniard knew that he would have very little chance to reverse the situation at the first stops.

He did his best to improve his chances by cutting the fuel deficit from two laps to one by dint of some economical driving and fuel mode knob twiddling - adding that one lap to his original 20 equated to a 5 percent gain.

"Lewis was going to be a couple of laps later," said Whitmarsh. "But we were able to make a bit of fuel on Fernando's car. It's a combination of the driver and the engineers working together.

"Fernando is very intelligent, very confident in his own ability. He knows how long F1 races are, he knows how you win F1 races, and sometimes you've got to have the intelligence to bide your time, conserve tyres, conserve fuel, and do what you have to do. Fernando's got that strength. But Lewis has demonstrated that he's got all those attributes, and he's well able to run his race in a super intelligent way as well."

Fernando stopped on lap 21 only one lap ahead of his teammate, still not enough to get him in front, but worth a try. However, the race was effectively decided by what went in the cars at those stops. Fernando took enough to get himself to lap 45 (with some more economy driving helping out), while Lewis could go only to lap 43. As usual, the last man in had the advantage, and Fernando easily jumped ahead at the second and final stops.

In effect McLaren had decided which of the two drivers was going to finish second, assuming no mistakes by either of them, and Fernando got the nod. It could be argued that this was a 'correction' that made up for Lewis unexpectedly getting ahead at the start, but Dennis insisted that the stops panned out for Alonso simply because they had always been planned that way



"Our strategy was pre-set, we didn't vary from it," he said. "The three or four laps covering the last stops, it was a little like Michael at Silverstone last year, where he was on the tail of Kimi, then the pit stops took place, and he was something like four seconds ahead. Fernando just pushed very aggressively. He conserved his tyres, knew he had a fuel

distance advantage and used it to overtake his teammate.

"You've just got to have a realistic approach. You're not going to close that gap (to Raikkonen) and therefore you're then into engine and tyre conservation. Fernando was sat patiently behind Lewis, dropping back occasionally to ensure that the engine stayed cool. And really the outcome was as good as we could have expected given the circumstances."

Whitmarsh added: "What happens as the race progresses is that you can tune by getting an opinion on what the pace is. You can lean off, and whatever. So we already had an outlined strategy. The race didn't pan out that much differently. We hoped to have got Heidfeld and been closer to Kimi, but we didn't really change that, it was how we wanted to run the race."

Hamilton dropped away from Alonso in the latter part of the race, but he had a huge margin on Heidfeld and nothing to gain by staying right behind Alonso, especially as everyone now has to take their engines to hot and humid Malaysia.

"All three of the lead drivers were leaning off there and taking it easy on their engines, which is sad but true in F1 these days," said Whitmarsh. "After the second stop you start thinking about the next race, which personally isn't something that I enjoy, but that's how it is. Thereafter it was a question of how easy they wanted to be."

There was another reason why Lewis lost a bit of performance relative to Fernando. He had a spare new set of soft tyres left after qualifying, whereas Alonso had used up all of his because of that extra run he'd made in Q2.

So for the last stints, Hamilton took his remaining new set, and Fernando had no choice but to take a set that he'd used on Saturday. As it happened, those scrubbed tyres proved more consistent, so Fernando had an easier final stint. All part of the learning curve for team and drivers as they get used to the Bridgestones.

Whitmarsh explained: "They both had a bit of graining, but the slight difference was that Lewis had a new set of options, because of how qualifying panned out, and it would almost certainly have been better if they had been cured and scrubbed beforehand."

McLaren might not have won the race, but the team leads the constructors' championship, and the driver combination has more than lived up to the promise it showed on paper.



"The unseen things are really that we didn't have a thing go wrong on either car throughout the whole weekend," said Dennis. "That bodes well for our campaign. We have so many things that we are putting in the system to increase the pace of the car, we're at a point now where we have a stable platform and an enormous amount of work to do in Malaysia (testing). Hopefully we will emerge from Malaysia with an advantage, into the Malaysian race, so the outcome is pretty good.

"Our efforts are intense, and we rarely go to a Grand Prix with a car that's not quicker than the previous event. Now the motivation in the team is so intense. The messages coming from the drivers in cool down laps in qualifying and slow down laps after the race, the guys are motivational. They are appreciative of the effort of the team. It just really gets everybody in a different frame of mind, and it's very refreshing.

"We have a clear understanding of what we need to improve and how we can improve the performance, and we'll see how we go in Malaysia and Bahrain."

Even with the evidence of the first race to hand, Ron didn't want to make a judgement on how the team stands *vis a vis* Ferrari.

"It's just too early to know where we are. Clearly they have an advantage, but the progress or lack of progress of Massa through the field just shows you how difficult it is to move forward. You need such a monster advantage. If you find yourself in a position where you are 14-15 seconds behind, you have to say to yourself, 'Is there any realistic prospect of catching him?' Then you think save the engine, save the tyres, and come home a safe second and third."

A last word on Ferrari

The silver cars may well have been in cautious mode, but not too many people believed that Kimi was going flat out on Sunday, especially as he had gearbox conservation very

much in mind.

Given that he didn't have a working radio, these days the equivalent of racing with one hand tied behind your back, it was a faultless performance from the Finn. He did have one embarrassing grass-cutting moment when he allowed his mind to wander - something that his illustrious predecessor was not averse to when on cruise control.

From the outside it appeared that he had cannily let Massa push the envelope in testing and waited until it mattered before stepping up a gear. Of course, Felipe's weekend was ruined by that gearbox problem, and next time out could be a different story.



But Raikkonen already has that crucial momentum, and has staked his claim as the team's title contender - which is of course what he and Jean Todt expected him to be when he first signed up, long before Massa emerged as a 2006 race winner and testing pacesetter.

Full marks too to Luca Baldisierra, for many years Ross Brawn's number two strategy guy, and now with the full weight of responsibility on his shoulders. First time out he took the bold step of putting the engine-penalised Massa on a one-stopper with the soft tyres - which so many were cautious about using - on from the start.

Jean Todt took a lot of persuading that that was the way to go, but 'Baldo' correctly sussed that Felipe would spend the early laps in traffic, and thus the soft tyres wouldn't be particularly stressed.

Using them first meant there would also always be the option of coming in early and taking the mediums if there was a problem, but the back-up plan wasn't needed, and in any case

the boys were utterly confident that the soft tyre would be just fine. A clear indication, if one was needed, that Ferrari is completely at one with the 2007 Bridgestones.

By the way, Massa had that engine change penalty as a result of the gearbox problem that ruined his qualifying session, Ferrari engine boss Gilles Simon noting that the V8 had been subject to 'overrevs'. One assumes of course that it didn't go beyond 19,000rpm....

Natural Born Thriller

Lewis Hamilton has arrived. After 13 years on the lower rungs, carefully guided up the ladder by McLaren boss Ron Dennis, Melbourne was his moment. And he did not disappoint. But can this young sensation continue his rise to superstardom?

By Jonathan Noble

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There is no other way to describe the immediate impact that Lewis Hamilton had on the Formula One community - both on and off the track - at the Australian Grand Prix.

The hype and expectations had been steadily increasing throughout the winter, despite fervent attempts by his boss and mentor Ron Dennis to try and keep a lid on the situation. But as Melbourne got nearer it was hard not to pretend that something special was about to happen.

Even McLaren could not help themselves in the build up to Hamilton's debut - labelling the

youngster 'the most exciting prodigy of his generation' and 'the most successful young driver ever to come into F1' in their official pre-season 'Teamcast'.

So were we going to be disappointed? Was the pressure of the weekend, the very moment that Hamilton had been waiting for since he first stepped into a kart, going to get to him? Was it heck.

Ultra calm, ultra cool and completely under control, Hamilton arrived in F1 as though he were a seasoned veteran. On track he was superb; matching teammate Fernando Alonso move for move all weekend, swooping past him at the first corner, leading the Spaniard until the final stops and grabbing a podium finish on his debut.

It was a performance that left everyone breathless; not least his father who had confessed for much of the weekend to feeling it had a slightly unreal feel to it. Yet from the off, as Hamilton arrived in Melbourne after a few days acclimatising in Australia, the warning signs had been there about just what sort of weekend it was going to be.

"I knew we were going to be in trouble the moment we arrived here this week because Lewis was just so happy," confessed his father Anthony, who has been a rock solid guiding force in his son's career.



"I will just tell you. I have never seen Lewis like this. When I turned up, I just knew he felt good and he didn't even talk to me about it. And I didn't talk to him about it, because over the years I know when he is going to have a good day, or when he is going to have a bad day. And I just knew it was going to be an incredible weekend. I didn't have to say a word to him. It was just brilliant.

"He was happy with the car when he went out in practice, and he was very happy with the car in qualifying obviously. And whenever he is that happy I know there is something

special to come.

"Nothing surprises me with Lewis. As you can imagine, I've always believed in him and always known it was there. And to be honest, Ron is the person who had the foresight many, many years ago and thought 'who is this little kid?'

"I tell you what: he has got a bloody good eye hasn't he?"

But it was not just the on-track performances that left observers thoroughly impressed by Hamilton. If you scratched away at the surface of his tightly controlled public appearances you could see the first signs about just what a formidable force he is going to be.

For a start, he was completely unfazed by all the attention surrounding him. Rookies often complain that the biggest difficulty they face when they first arrive in the paddock is the constant demand on their time; the fans pursuing them for autographs, the media chasing quotes, FIA meetings, Paddock Club talks, sponsor handshakes and engineering briefings. It is often a relief when they actually get strapped into the car to go and do their stuff.

Not once, though, did Hamilton seem put back by the attention; not once did he baulk as a horde of microphones were thrust into his face and he was moved from camera to camera to talk through his experiences.

More impressive though were the first signs of just how fiercely competitive Hamilton remains even though he is the new boy on the scene. It appears that if teammate Fernando Alonso was expecting an easy time alongside a rookie in 2007, he is going to be sadly (for him, not us) disappointed.

For while some of F1's less experienced stars may happily accept they are going to take time getting up to speed and not build themselves up against their teammates for fear of disappointment - but not once did Hamilton say he was aiming only to be second best.

Here he was, on the eve of his first Grand Prix, going up against F1's current benchmark star in identical equipment, and Hamilton was already talking about not being the team's number two.

"Fernando is an extremely talented driver, as a two-time world champion, and I respect him and respect that position," said Hamilton, during a chat with reporters at McLaren-Mercedes' traditional pre-Melbourne event at the Stokehouse restaurant on St.

Kilda beach on Thursday.



"We have to wait and see. I don't look at the team and say: 'I am number two.' We are both there to do a strong job for the team and we are both there to win. So we will see at the end of the day."

It is not Hamilton's style to accept second best; and you just know that inside his head there is a belief that he can not only take on Alonso, but that he can beat him.

Fazed by Alonso? No chance. "I have never been fazed and I am not fazed now," he said. "I am in a great position. I respect Fernando and I realise my position in the team, but at the end of the day I am here to win and I will be working towards that."

As the weekend developed, and as Alonso began to realise just what sort of challenge he was facing from Hamilton, it was fascinating to see how their rivalry unfolded. There is no open confrontation between them, and no suggestion of friction, but just evidence here and there of what a ferociously competitive relationship the pair are going to enjoy.

Take late Saturday afternoon, at McLaren's regular post-qualifying press conference, when Hamilton and Alonso were presented first. Sat side-by-side in front of the 30 or so media present, Alonso appeared distracted; he kept glancing through the glass at the Spanish media waiting for him outside as Hamilton got more than his fair share of attention.

After two years as a world champion, where his own media sessions had been packed to the rafters while poor teammate Giancarlo Fisichella found few wanted to speak to him, it must have been a very different kind of experience for Alonso to no longer be centre stage.

There were occasions when Hamilton thrust the microphone into Alonso's hands to bring him back, saying: 'What do you think?' - and showing he wasn't afraid to take control of the situation.

And most interestingly, Hamilton kept on diverting any suggestions of there being pressure to perform onto his teammate. With Dennis proudly looking on from the back of the room, Hamilton made clear, in that subtle way that intelligent racing drivers do, that it was not him who needed to shine this weekend. No, that honour was bestowed on the man in the other car.

"I don't think the pressure has got to me," said Hamilton. "I am able to control it and filter it in a way that it works maybe to my advantage. But it is intense and it is easy to lose it. I just have to stay relaxed.

"It is something to do with my personality and the fact that at the end of the day Fernando is probably expected to do a lot more than me, so I have got to focus on my job. I have got a lot of respect for Fernando and I know my place and position in the team."

The words came from the heart, yet without any arrogance at all. And they gave all the evidence we needed to show that kind of opponent Hamilton is going to be, both in terms of speed and the psychological mind-games and mindset that are part of being a top-line F1 driver.



Dennis, for one, certainly picked up on those comments. "It makes me smile when he says: 'I know my place.' It is a great line for him, but he has every intention of trying to beat Fernando tomorrow. No question. And it is great to have two racing drivers, two drivers that are really so excellent at racing."

McLaren too noticed the supreme level of confidence that Hamilton brought with him to the cockpit. During the race, with Alonso shadowing him in his mirrors, there were no signs of jitters, nerves or hesitation when he was dealing with his engineers and the crew on the pitwall. Only as he crossed the line, punching the air in delight, did he finally let his guard down.

McLaren F1 CEO Martin Whitmarsh said: "He is a very composed young man and you saw it as he crossed the line. He was dancing around inside the car. We heard and experienced that. He is ecstatic and he knows that the eyes of the world are on him, and he is trying to be composed.

"He will go away from this with even more confidence. He grows in stature a millimetre a day - in width, height and gravitas. And what was amazing was just listening to him on the radio talking to his engineer in a reasonably assertive manner - saying this is what I think, in a very articulate and intelligent manner.

"You would have thought you were listening to someone who is battle-hardened, experienced and with great self-confidence. The fact that he is doing that in his first weekend is incredible."

Perhaps the best compliment that Hamilton could have on his debut was not the praise raining down on him from the media, the team or fellow drivers; but in the way that Alonso cleverly tried to play down what had happened over the weekend.

Alonso is no slouch when it comes to using the media to his own advantage - remember the pre-Japanese Grand Prix press conference last year when he said he felt 'alone' in some races because he felt Renault were not throwing all their weight behind him?

So when asked at the end of the Australian Grand Prix what it was liked being pushed by a teammate for the first time in his F1 career, having seen Hamilton daringly blast past him at the first corner and lead him until his race strategy got him back past, Alonso very subtly referred back to the way that Fisichella and Jarno Trulli had often been quicker at the start of seasons.

"I think I have had difficult moments with Trulli in 2004. At the beginning he won the Monaco race and he had more podiums than me," said Alonso. "Fisichella normally started the season better than me - in 2005 he won the Australian Grand Prix and last year he won in Malaysia as well. So I have more or less similar to what I had today. Hopefully we can keep this level of competition inside the team all through the season."



The message was clear: I may have had a hard time this weekend but don't for a second think that Hamilton is a superstar just yet. Alonso knew exactly what he was saying.

If Hamilton's first race weekend is anything to go by, there is going to be plenty to get excited about this season. There are going to be setbacks on the way, but Hamilton is very much the real deal - and the man himself will be convinced even more of that by his successful debut.

As the sun went down at Albert Park on Sunday night, Anthony Hamilton was enjoying a mixture of both delight and relief - but it was clear he was probably the proudest father in the world at that moment.

Immediately after the race, father and son had briefly embraced in celebration; no words were exchanged, but they did not need to be.

"Lewis didn't say anything. He just laughed," said Anthony about that moment. "And that laugh was: we know we can do it. And that is what it is all about.

"He is a good lad Lewis. He has given 100 percent with everything and he is still a feet on the ground kid, and he will remain that way as long as I've got something to do with it. Hopefully, the press will help him remain that way too.

"I don't want Lewis to lose focus on the job. The job is motor racing. It has taken us 13 years to get here. That is all he will ever think about - nothing else."

Lewis would not want it any other way. And, judging by what everyone saw in Melbourne, neither would we.

SIDEBAR

Q&A with Anthony Hamilton

After a stunning debut by Lewis Hamilton in Australia, *autosport.com* caught up with the young sensation's father Anthony in the heat of the moment...

Q: What were your feelings when you were watching the podium?

Anthony Hamilton: "To be honest, it is very, very difficult because this whole roller coaster ride of coming up through karting, single seaters and then Formula One, you just cannot explain how you feel. It has been a long, long road. And there are not enough superlatives to say, it was this, it was that. It was just the feeling that is incredible."

Q: That first move right at the start of the race when he overtook Fernando Alonso. What did you think of that?



Hamilton: "It was classic Lewis. That is all the years of karting - they paid off in that one corner. It was a good experience."

Q: He seemed completely unfazed by the prospect of having Fernando Alonso behind him for so long in the race?

Hamilton: "The confidence he has in incredible. The car is good, he loves the car."

Q: For a father Anthony though, it must be harder watching your son. You are going to need a holiday aren't you?

Hamilton: "I tell you what, I can't put up with this much longer!"

Q: How will you celebrate this result?

Hamilton: "I think we will celebrate when he comes back after Bahrain. He won't be back home until after Bahrain so we will get together as a family and we will enjoy it there.

"To be honest, he is probably going to chill out and relax tonight and he will have a big smile on his face when he goes to bed. And he will get up tomorrow and he will start training again - and he is going to want to come to Malaysia and do well.

"We never say we are going to win, we never say we are going to get points. As long as you do your best then, that is all that can be asked. And if you can get a result out of it, that is a bonus isn't it?"

Q: Do you consider today as the payback for all the efforts you made for him in his career?

Hamilton: "I suppose so. When you are dreaming as a youngster to become a racing driver, most people aspire to reach Formula One. And it is just another step, another hurdle, in the race to become world champion. And it is a milestone, a fantastic milestone.

"I think the podium came a bit quicker than we expected. I am a fairly pragmatic kind of guy, I think a sixth would have been great - to get points in the first appearance would have been brilliant. Third? Wow."

Q: During the race, did you ever think that he could win it?

Hamilton: "Lewis always believes he can win. And I believe him..."

Q: What did Ron say to you afterwards?

Hamilton: "It's private. But Ron is a very, very happy man. I think this is one of the proudest moments of his life for a long, long time. Well, all credit to him. How do you pick up a 13-year-old kid all those years ago and say: 'I can see something in you.' I could see it because I am his dad. But how did Ron see it? The man has got a superb eye."

Q: Niki Lauda has said that Lewis' was the best debut he has ever seen. What do you think?

Hamilton: "Look, we are just ordinary people. We want to remain as ordinary as possible, although we certainly know things are going to change."

Q: You are not the stereotypical racing dad. How do you see your role?

Hamilton: "I am a father that can see the opportunity a son has been given. And so when Ron called us up and said: 'I am going to help your son' I thought: 'You are going to help us, why?' He could not have done it on his own.

"I just see my role as the wise man and the advisor more than anything, just having a look at the global view and trying to pick the right path for Lewis to take. That is really where I see myself. I don't see myself as his manager, but really as the wise advisor really.

"It is incredible that he still listens to me. He is 22-years of age. At that age I had left home and if my father told me something I would have ignored him!"

An Established Order

The first round of the season has traditionally thrown up a few surprises, yet this year Melbourne seemed to buck that trend. Richard Barnes analyses the 2007 championship kick-off

By Richard Barnes

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So, last Sunday's season-opening Australian Grand Prix didn't enthral fans with a shock result or thrilling racing. But it didn't have to. For fans, starved of action during months of pre-season testing and speculation, simply seeing the cars in full competitive cry again was enough to generate excitement.



For once, testing times provided an accurate summary of what to expect from the early part of the 2007 season. Ferrari and McLaren led the pack as predicted, BMW and Renault were only slightly less competitive than expected, while Toyota and Super Aguri were pleasingly faster than even their fans had hoped.

This initial establishing of the order, more than the notoriously fickle Melbourne weather or the statistical likelihood of the safety car affecting the race outcome as seen in previous season openers, is what defined the Australian event this time around.

The implications of this race extend far beyond the 58 laps of the Melbourne circuit, and become a projection for what the other 16 races on the calendar hold in store. And after

being pushed back to the third GP on the calendar in 2006, it was good to see Melbourne back in this customary role.

In this context, Kimi Raikkonen was the only driver among the championship hopefuls with reason to smile. It wasn't just that he won on his Ferrari debut - a feat that even Michael Schumacher didn't accomplish - it was rather the supremely controlled manner in which the cool Finnish driver dominated.

Every three years or so, Ferrari get it exactly right from the very start of the season, and this manifests itself in a perfect pole, win and fastest lap trifecta in Australia. Michael Schumacher did it in 2001 and again in 2004. And, after another gap of three years, it was Raikkonen's turn to continue the trend.

It is interesting to note that these trifecta years of 2001 and 2004 marked the start of the most dominant seasons of Schumacher's seven championship years. The omens for Raikkonen's 2007 campaign look equally promising.

If the Finn had been pushed to the limit in achieving the 'perfect weekend' it might have given the field hope. But his performance matched Schumacher's for dominance - right down to the momentary lapse of concentration and ensuing off-track excursion late in the race!

Raikkonen had never won or even started from the front row in Australia, yet he has always been quick in race trim around Melbourne. His three previous podium finishes in 2002, 2003 and 2006 were underpinned by fastest laps. On Sunday, he went two better, inking in the missing pole and victory gaps in his CV.

In any other sport, the opening weekend of a 17 event calendar can be dismissed as having minor influence on the end result. Football leagues are not won in the first weekend, golf's major winners rarely lead for all four rounds, and the opening round of a boxing title fight often serves as little more than a cautious 'feeling out' period for the combatants.

In Formula One, the teams don't have the luxury of dismissing early failure in the hope of longer-term success. Quite the contrary, recent history has shown that the opening three rounds of the year often produce the title-deciding difference. In 2005, Fernando Alonso was 19 points ahead of Raikkonen after three rounds. At the end of the year, they were still 19 points apart at the top of the table.

Last season, Alonso again opened up an early lead, this time of 17 points over Michael Schumacher. After the final event in Brazil, 13 points separated the two. Despite the points difference stretching and shrinking over the ebb and flow of the season, the final gap does have an uncanny habit of returning to approximately where it was after the first three races.



Melbourne was only the first of those three critical races, but few would bet against Raikkonen extending the advantage further in Malaysia and Bahrain. The significance of this prospect won't be lost on McLaren's Fernando Alonso. If any driver understands the significance of an early championship lead, it's Alonso. His two championship titles, and indeed his entire approach to racing, have been built on this foundation.

On Sunday, Alonso did what he does best - bring the car home in second when victory is out of sight. He will have drawn mild satisfaction from his ability to outmanoeuvre rookie team-mate Lewis Hamilton so easily into second place. He will also be relieved that Nick Heidfeld's early pace in the BMW was belied later by an early first pit-stop, indicating a very light fuel load.

However, Alonso is not focused on Hamilton or Heidfeld as main championship rivals. He will also be acutely aware that he is being forced out of his comfort zone - which is loosely defined as racing conservatively to defend an early championship lead.

It does, however, raise the truly fascinating prospect of a role-swap later in the year, with Kimi Raikkonen adopting the role of conservative cruiser and Alonso having to resort to 'all or nothing' heroics to reduce a seemingly hopeless deficit.

If Alonso had reason to feel dejected about the clear performance difference between his and Raikkonen's, Felipe Massa at least has the consolation of sharing Raikkonen's mechanical advantage to take away from a disappointing opener - although the Brazilian will still be cursing the timing of the gearbox problem that demoted him to the back of the grid and out of any realistic chance of a podium finish.

Going into the season, Massa's best hope lay in bullet-proof reliability and consistency all season. There are drivers on the grid who can become unsettled if a team-mate gets the better of them early on. Kimi Raikkonen isn't one of those drivers.

Like Alonso, the Finn can shrug off being soundly beaten by his teammate and bounce back with a dominant performance the very next weekend. Massa was never going to undermine Raikkonen's confidence, even if he'd won convincingly in Melbourne, and surrendering seven points to his new teammate was a body blow for the Brazilian's chances.

The other main talking point after Melbourne was the performance of the rookies, in particular McLaren's Lewis Hamilton and Renault's Heikki Kovalainen. Arriving in F1 with equally high expectations, it was impossible to foresee that they would have such contrasting fortunes on debut.

Hamilton exuded calm, control and class; Kovalainen looked out of his depth for much of the race. However, modern F1 has proven that debut performances can be entirely misleading. The first race of the year may reflect an established order among the teams and offer a reasonable projection for the rest of the season. In terms of evaluating the rookies, though, it's little more than a one-off result that will have to be repeated regularly to establish a trend.

That said, Hamilton can be justifiably delighted with his debut F1 effort. If he can repeat the performance at Sepang in three weeks, he will have silenced the doubters. It's early days yet, but McLaren may just end off 2007 with the youngest and most dynamic driver pairing in recent history.

2007 Australian GP Technical Review

The covers are off, and in Melbourne all the teams showed their true colours. So, after the unveiling of launch cars and the covering-up of testing developments in the off-season, Craig Scarborough checks over the 2007 grid trends and finds out what the top teams are doing to get ahead of the pack

By Craig Scarborough

autosport.com's technical writer

When the season opens we get the first chance to see the cars more clearly, unobstructed by the screens and covers used in testing. And this year, with rule changes having little visual effect on the car, the main differences are all in the details.

The single tyre supply has already affected the car design and is now throwing up new options for race strategies on soft tyres, while equally, no season could start without a protest about the aerodynamics of one team or another.

GENERAL TRENDS

Tyre strategy

As result of the new tyre regulations the teams had more than just the new Bridgestone's tyres to contend with this weekend - the requirement for each car to run both the hard and soft option tyres in the race meant the teams had a new variable in their strategy.

Clearly each team wanted to run the soft tyre in qualifying due to its greater grip over one lap, but then each team had to decide when to run the softer tyre in the race.



For most drivers this was a two stop race, thus creating three stints. As the softer tyre will degrade more rapidly over a longer stint and also its longevity would suffer if it was abused early in a stint on heavy fuel, so it is an important decision.

For the majority of the two stopping cars, the choice was to run the soft tyre for the last stint of the race. Two teams - Ferrari and BMW - decided to run the soft tyre for the first stint on one of their cars, surprising many teams. But the two scenarios were for different reasons.

For BMW the decision to put Nick Heidfeld on soft tyres was to create a faster opening stint and, in hindsight, this seems a sensible idea as the first stint for the top-ten qualifiers tends to be shorter because the cars are fuelled a little lighter after qualifying. Additionally, the softer tyre allows a faster start off the line, and while both BMWs were quick off the line the benefit of the tyre was clear in comparison to the neighbouring McLarens.

Ferrari chose to give Massa a soft set for his opening stint, and in this case the reasoning was to allow him to make up places in the early part of the race when he had the most backmarkers to contend with. Running heavy fuel, however, he had to be careful with the tyres and some of the advantage was lost.

Following BMW's strategic success it will be interesting if other teams opt for a fast starting shorter opening stint in Malaysia.

Flexing floors

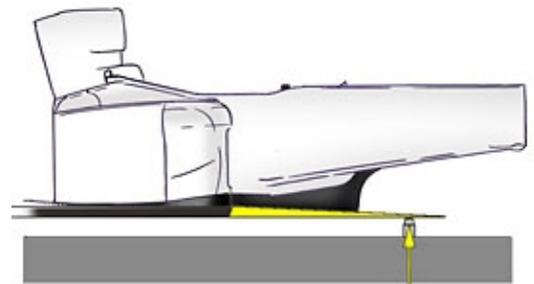
There was controversy following the race that some teams were flexing floors, with suspicion focusing on the method used by Ferrari and BMW Sauber to attach their splitter section to the front of their cars' floors.

Both teams use a sprung device to allow the floor to move upwards should the exposed splitter hit a kerb or obstruction. The suggestion is that this could also be used to allow the floor to move downwards under aerodynamic load to alter the car's aerodynamics. If the splitter were to move, this would disrupt airflow under the floor and lead to the diffuser stalling, and this would have two effects.

Firstly, the downforce the diffuser produced would drop dramatically and any resulting drag it produces would also be cut. Last year we saw teams were employing flexible rear wings to increase straight line speed through stalling the wing and cutting drag. However, the diffuser produces very little drag so any stalling would have a minimal effect on top speed.

One positive effect of reducing downforce at the rear at speed would be to improve the cars aerodynamic balance. The car's centre of pressure is the point about which the downforce is equal front to rear; this is like the centre of gravity is for mass. The two are linked and teams tend to run the centre of pressure a small amount behind the centre of gravity and as the car increases speed the centre of pressure moves backwards as the diffuser's efficiency increases.

Thus, an imbalance of downforce and weight distribution is created and makes the car less balanced. By bleeding some rear downforce at speed, the balance is maintained. Teams already achieve this by more conventional methods, but the possibility of a more easily tunable system from the front floor would be realistic.



To prevent teams making the floor flex, a test dating back to 2000 is still enforced. The FIA scrutineering rig has the facility to test the upwards deflection of the front section of the floor and when the cars are on the rig they are bolted down and a hydraulic ram pushes up on the floor to measure the deflection.

Of course, this test only measures for upwards deflection and, as with rear wings, any deflection that might occur above the FIA test loading is acceptable. Thus it is possible that the floor might be tuned to deflect at higher loadings or indeed droop rather than lift.

But considering the immense weight of the splitter, which is now made from solid Tungsten alloy, it is unlikely the part could be made to be supported in normal use and only deflect at speed. The components weight could see it move from its own inertia from any vertical movement of the car over normal bumps and braking, and this would make the cars handling unpredictable.

Brake ducts

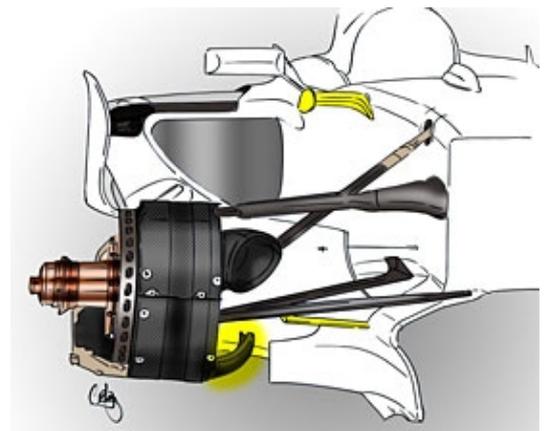
With no aerodynamic rule changes to speak of, the teams are looking for ever smaller gains

from the car's bodywork. This and the freeing up on bodywork around the wheel last year has led to a proliferation of devices fitted around the brake ducts.

Any bodywork around the brake duct area no longer needs to solely be used for brake cooling, so new fins and flicks can be added to improve the passage of air from the front wing endplates around the wheel. And because the front wing and endplate has been higher since 2005, the relationship between the endplate and inner face of the wheel has gained importance.

For some time Renault and McLaren have added fin-like cooling ducts low down on the inner face wheel. Ferrari then sported more blatant winglets above and below the wishbones in 2006, and similar solutions were employed by BMW and Toyota later last year.

This year most teams have extra fins and fillers around the bottom of the front brake ducts. McLaren have an upwards curved vane at the bottom of their brake duct, while BMW have a bulge and fin arrangement similar to that used on rear brake ducts.



At the rear of the cars, bulky complex brake ducts have been exploited for some time. Again, last year teams started to add fins and flicks to augment the duct in managing the flow around the wheel and, just as crucially, over the diffuser.

This year Ferrari have taken a new route with vertical turning vanes added above and below the duct. These appear to turn the flow around the wheel, possibly to keep the untidy wake of the rear wheel away from the more sensitive diffuser.

Lastly, the wheel fairings added to fill in the opening of the rear wheel outer face were run again by Ferrari and Toyota and also by Renault. Ferrari have developed their solution by

extending the wheel nut towards the small opening in the fairing, making it easier to change the wheel in pit stops.

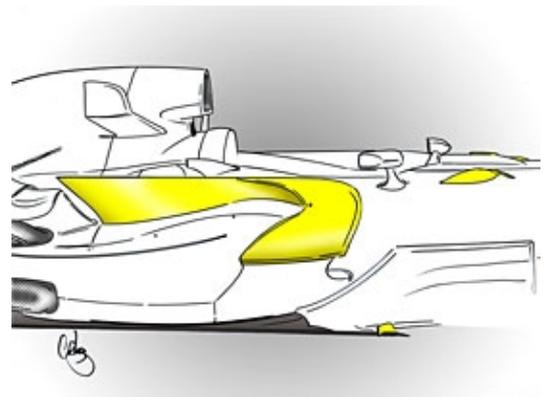
In the race, Ferrari's final stints were run with a fairing that had an array of open slots cut into the face. This is a strange development, as the slots would degrade the aerodynamic benefit of the fairing while making wheel changes no easier.

It is, however, possible that the different fairing may alter the cooling of the rear brakes, allowing the team to tune the cooling requirement based on the telemetry from the car in previous stints. This could be an area other teams will protest as making changes to the car in the race is forbidden.

TEAM BY TEAM

It's tight at the top, and each of the leading teams have been working hard in the build-up to the new season. Detail design has been put to the test and while all teams are developing their cars as fast as they can, last year's key contenders provided many of the talking points when they lined up alongside each other in Melbourne.

McLaren



Melbourne saw a return to form for McLaren and their car was both reliable and fast and, up close, the McLaren is a highly detailed and complex car.

One visible complexity is the unique arrangement of the sidepod fins, which are usually used to separate the dirty wake from the front wheels and prevent it from upsetting the flow along the car to the rear wing. McLaren's solution joins the pod wings to the chimneys, with the forward extension of the chimney meeting the lower rear edge of the pod wing.

This sees the flow towards the top of the pod wing pass inside both, and lower down the flow is routed outside the chimney. How this set up works is confusing, but possibly the split flow off the pod wing is aimed to improve the efficiency of both the sidepod winglet and the rear wing rather than just the rear wing.

The McLaren, like the Williams, has a long strake on the engine cover to meet the minimum cross section. The rules create the so called 'toblerone' cross section of the spine of the cover, and making this thinner improves flow to the rear wing.

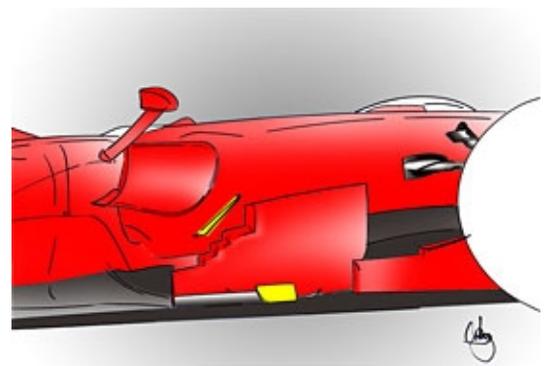
Renault

New aero parts and set-up were tried in the final pre-season tests. These changes were subtle and affected the front and rear wings. Even at the launch Renault were concerned they didn't have enough downforce towards the front and it appears testing the new tyres backed this fear up. The new changes were aimed at improving downforce.

One more visible change was to the sidepod winglet, which now uses a slotted aerofoil. Last year this was only used for the high downforce tracks and it has been run with a complex slotted endplate to improve its efficiency. To reduce drag created at the wing tip, slots have been added to the endplate which extend around to cut into the wing itself.

Ferrari

As expected, the team was more on top of the tyre situation than their rivals and, equally, the Ferrari is rivaled only by McLaren in its aerodynamic complexity. In addition to the complex vanes on the brake ducts and wheel fairings, the team also sported new details on the middle of the car.



One curious detail is a triangular fin fitted to the hip area of the monocoque. Being mounted

at such a vertical angle, its purpose might not solely be aerodynamic.

The monocoque must meet certain cross sectional dimensions near the dash bulkhead and this fin might be akin to those used along the length of the nose before 2000, which were used to meet the minimum widths in the rules of the time. Renault adopts a bulge in a similar position to Ferrari's fin, which would allow the car to be a little slimmer ahead of the sidepod inlets.

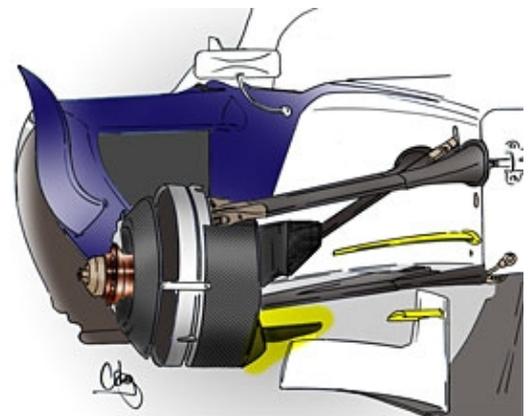
Also, the bargeboards have developed from last year. Previously, they used large flicks on the trailing edge of the board but this year's car uses an aerofoil cross section at floor level, which also employs a small endplate to seal the underside. On the front of the car two small serrated gurney flaps were added to the front wing. These create slightly less drag than normal solid gurney flaps.

Honda

Struggling with pace, the team ran without the complex sidepod winglets seen on the launch car. This is at odds with the belief that the car is struggling for downforce and, like last year, it appears that Honda is having to simplify their original aero concepts to end up with a more simple starting point from which to understand and develop the car.

BMW Sauber

The increasing aerodynamic complexity of the BMW appears to directly relate to how well the car is performing on track and, now eclipsing Renault for pace, the car appeared in Melbourne with all manner of extra parts around the front end.



In addition to the new brake duct bulge and fin, the nose has a wide fin between the

wishbones. This manages the flow off the front and is joined by yet another fin on the forward bargeboard. BMW's keel layout is similar in concept to Ferrari in that the lower wishbone mounts under the chassis, although BMW prefer to leave theirs truncated while Ferrari have blended theirs into the floor of the tub.

While the car's aerodynamics and tyre strategy is working, the mechanical side is still letting the team down. Kubica's race retirement, with the seamless gearbox stuck in fifth gear, is a continuation of transmission problems seen in testing.

Now, to help get to the bottom of this problem, chief designer Jorg Zander has been assigned from the Hinwil factory to the power train department in Munich. Zander has a long background in mechanical design having come from Toyota and Honda's F1 programmes.

The Complete 2007 Australian GP Review

A thorough review of all the events and results from round 1 of the 2007 season

By Matt Beer

autosport.com writer



It seems Ron Dennis was absolutely right. When making his driver selection for 2007, he declared that having already secured Fernando Alonso, and already lost Kimi Raikkonen, the spectacular GP2 champion and long-time McLaren protege Lewis Hamilton was a much better bet than any of the other drivers currently in Formula One.

That belief was utterly vindicated in Melbourne as Raikkonen, Alonso and Hamilton filled the podium at the season-opener, having been a class apart all afternoon.

But Raikkonen and Alonso's performances were totally as expected. Predictably, when handed a fast and reliable car, Raikkonen took a dominant victory. Equally predictably, in a car that wasn't quite the fastest, Alonso focused on maximising his points haul and keeping his likely title rival in sight. Neither seemed particularly fazed by their moves to very different new environments.



No surprises there, then. But even Hamilton's most ardent supporters must have been taken aback by his astounding Formula One debut.

He ran slightly wide on a couple of occasions in the race, and couldn't match Alonso in the final stint. Other than those minuscule glitches, Hamilton's performance was flawless. He was barely any slower than his teammate - who is not only more experienced but widely regarded as the greatest driver of the post-Michael Schumacher generation - and often a touch faster. And he dealt with the marauding BMWs at the start much more effectively than Alonso.

But the most notable element of Hamilton's first F1 weekend was how naturally it all seemed to come to him. So much for the theory that he needed a year as a reserve driver or in a midfield team to acclimatise to F1. Admittedly helped by his intensive winter (and being under McLaren's wing since childhood), Hamilton looked totally comfortable in his surroundings from the first lap of the weekend.

Few F1 debuts have ever been so accomplished - although being in a front-running car certainly helped. Who can say for certain, for example, that Hamilton qualifying a McLaren MP4-22 fourth on the grid was a greater or lesser achievement than Alonso putting his barely-completed Minardi PS01 19th on the grid for his own debut six years ago. Or Michael Schumacher starting seventh at Spa in the Jordan 191 in 1991. But the mere fact that his maiden GP performance was comparable to these modern legends is testament to how big an impact Hamilton has already made on F1.

"Anyone who is here now must know we are at the start of a career that is going to be phenomenal," said McLaren's Martin Whitmarsh.

"He will be a world champion, it is just a question of time now."



Those may be the words of Hamilton's employer, but few outside McLaren would disagree. It has taken the 22-year-old just one race to electrify F1. What happens next will be extremely entertaining to follow.

Before the weekend it seemed like the major story of Melbourne might have been the rather more downbeat customer car row. In the event, Spyker only protested Super Aguri, and the stewards referred their complaints to higher authorities. Both sides in the argument have fair points - having more teams on the pace will be welcomed by the majority of F1 fans, but the sport must remain a contest between constructors, and it is debatable whether all 11 teams now fall into that category.

It is essential to have the discussion, but it is also important that 22 cars start each race and that spectators go home raving about moments of sporting brilliance like Hamilton's debut, rather than perplexed by technical arguments and endless protests.

In Melbourne, the politics were postponed, and everyone could instead enjoy a performance that will surely go down in F1 history. And that is exactly how the 2007 season should have begun.

Practice

After too many years of short-changing Friday crowds with quiet opening days, Grands Prix have become three day weekends again in 2007. The decision to redefine Fridays as test days and uncouple them from the engine restrictions that affect the rest of the event resulted in a genuinely exciting - and relevant - first day in Melbourne.

Whether the same applies at circuits such as Sepang and Sakhir where teams will have recent testing mileage remains to be seen, but in Australia at least, Friday not only provided plenty of on-track action, but a realistic guide to GP form as the race drivers turned up their engines and set meaningful lap times.

And the format change didn't mean that reserve drivers had to lose their opportunities to be part of a GP weekend - as BMW and Williams proved by allowing Sebastian Vettel and Kazuki Nakajima a chance to shine in the opening session.

Despite the weather causing moderate disruption on both Friday and Saturday mornings, the balance of power was fairly clear by the end of practice. Ferrari had the advantage, but McLaren, and possibly BMW and Renault, would be chasing them hard.

By contrast, Honda and Toyota had cause to frown, especially as their small but sensationally fast Japanese counterparts Super Aguri looked set to break into the top ten.

Practice 1 - Friday AM

A morning downpour meant a predominantly wet track during the opening session of 2007, with the quick times only coming in a last minute dash for 'slick' tyres. Fernando Alonso made the best of the scramble to go fastest by 1.493 seconds from Felipe Massa, who was frustrated to hit traffic while trying to respond.



Kimi Raikkonen was only 19th - unable to get a clear run on dry tyres.

Both the participating test drivers impressed. Vettel, in for Robert Kubica at BMW, was fastest for much of the wet running and ended up third, while Williams' Nakajima (replacing Nico Rosberg) looked tentative in the rain but leapt to second for a period on slicks before dropping to a still impressive sixth after being baulked on his final lap.

Practice 2 - Friday PM

Ferrari dominated the afternoon, with Massa beating Raikkonen to the top spot by 0.397 seconds. Impressively it was McLaren rookie Lewis Hamilton who pushed them hardest, overshadowing teammate Alonso on the way to third.

Giancarlo Fisichella took fourth and showed strong pace on a long run before stopping with a fuel pump failure. The same problem had already afflicted teammate Heikki Kovalainen, leaving the Finn 18th. Renault-powered local favourite Mark Webber was also in trouble, a gearbox issue confining him to 17th.

The session was interrupted by a late red flag after Rubens Barrichello spun gently into the barriers at the last corner. Embarrassingly for Honda, both their cars were slower than the Super Aguris, as Anthony Davidson and Takuma Sato took eye-opening 11th and 13th places.

Practice 3 - Saturday AM

Another shower meant a slow start to the session, before Ferrari took charge once the track dried. Raikkonen outpaced Massa for the first time - going quickest in final practice while the Brazilian was only fifth after developing a gearbox gremlin.

Fisichella and Hamilton starred again by taking second and third, while an error on his quickest lap left Alonso seventh.

But Davidson was the indisputable hero of the hour, taking an astounding fourth for Super Aguri, while teammate Sato went ninth fastest.

Aguri's 2006 sparring partners Spyker and Toro Rosso already looked destined for a brief involvement in qualifying, with Christijan Albers particularly troubled after missing most of this session due to a gearbox failure.

Practice round up

Sorted by total laps from all three sessions

Driver	Team	Total laps	Practice 1	Practice 2	Practice 3
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Sutil	Spyker-Ferrari	80	1:34.043	26	1:31.108	35	1:28.678	19
Button	Honda	66	1:31.162	15	1:29.066	30	1:28.119	21
Fisichella	Renault	65	1:32.011	14	1:27.941	33	1:26.454	18
Trulli	Toyota	60	1:44.130	11	1:28.921	33	1:27.897	16
Alonso	McLaren-Mercedes	58	1:29.214	23	1:28.040	25	1:26.786	10
Wurz	Williams-Toyota	58	1:32.194	18	1:27.981	31	1:27.322	9
Heidfeld	BMW Sauber	57	1:37.249	12	1:27.970	27	1:26.753	18
Hamilton	McLaren-Mercedes	55	1:30.878	14	1:27.829	29	1:26.467	12
Raikkonen	Ferrari	54	1:39.242	7	1:27.750	33	1:26.064	14
Massa	Ferrari	53	1:30.707	7	1:27.353	32	1:26.547	14
Davidson	Super Aguri-Honda	51	1:39.221	6	1:28.727	28	1:26.491	17
Albers	Spyker-Ferrari	49	1:35.055	10	1:31.175	32	1:30.547	7
R.Schumacher	Toyota	48	1:39.550	9	1:29.574	26	1:27.887	13
Speed	Toro Rosso-Ferrari	46	1:41.763	9	1:30.383	28	1:28.485	9
Kubica	BMW Sauber	45	No time	0	1:28.281	26	1:27.753	19
Coulthard	Red Bull-Renault	44	1:31.528	9	1:28.495	23	1:28.208	12
Kovalainen	Renault	43	1:31.571	20	1:30.097	10	1:26.937	13
Sato	Super Aguri-Honda	42	1:31.782	7	1:29.009	23	1:27.266	12
Barrichello	Honda	40	1:31.737	12	1:29.542	12	1:28.039	16
Webber	Red Bull-Renault	40	1:31.661	16	1:29.801	11	1:27.390	13
Liuzzi	Toro Rosso-Ferrari	39	1:34.627	8	1:31.693	16	1:28.332	15
Rosberg	Williams-Toyota	34	No time	0	1:28.055	29	1:28.061	5
Vettel	BMW Sauber	22	1:30.857	22	-	-	-	-
Nakajima	Williams-Toyota	21	1:31.401	21	-	-	-	-

Qualifying

Part one

This was arguably the best Q1 session since the introduction of the three-part qualifying format. Super Aguri's progress meant an almost-certain early bath for at least two drivers from the eight major teams, and an enthralling final two minutes saw every car from eighth

to 20th positions throwing on a new set of tyres and trying to salvage respectability.



Both Williams, Toyotas, Hondas and indeed both Super Aguris all looked to be at risk at different moments as the picture changed constantly in the last few seconds. Last gasp improvements rescued first Jenson Button, then Alex Wurz, Jarno Trulli and Ralf Schumacher, leaving Rubens Barrichello and David Coulthard outside the top 16 cut-off.

Barrichello had been the first of the cars 'on the bubble' to go for a final run, and although his lap initially put him seventh, he would tumble ten places in the last 90 seconds of the session. An improvement of just 0.083 seconds would have taken him to Q2, but there was no time to respond and he was destined for 17th.

Meanwhile an error on a dusty track left Coulthard an unhappy 19th.

"There was lot of dirt at the last corner and I got out of the groove and onto the marbles and lost all the time I gained," he said, having been on course for Q2 until that moment.

The Red Bull was between the Toro Rossos - Scott Speed ahead of Vitantonio Liuzzi and both desperate for more testing mileage. Spyker filled the back row, with Christijan Albers out of sorts after missing the morning's dry running and lapping a full 2.593 seconds slower than teammate Adrian Sutil.

At the front, Kimi Raikkonen was fastest, but only by 0.030 seconds from Lewis Hamilton.

Part two

His win in the 2006 finale and his crushing pace in the final pre-season tests may have filled Felipe Massa with confidence as he headed for Melbourne, but all that momentum was worth little to the pre-race favourite when his morning gearbox problem reoccurred before he could set a flying lap in Q2.

That should have left Massa 16th on the grid, but with Ferrari choosing to carry out a precautionary engine change, he would ultimately drop right back to 22nd. It was not what he had expected 24 hours earlier.



Hamilton impressed again in Q2, holding the quickest time until late improvements from Fernando Alonso and Nick Heidfeld pushed him back to third.

But 2007's other high profile rookie was another casualty of the middle segment, as Heikki Kovalainen could only manage 13th place on the grid for his first Grand Prix. Although the fuel pump failure and consequent lack of dry running on Friday had harmed the Finn, he blamed himself for his poor performance.

"It is easy to make it an excuse, but if you are good enough then you should be able to find (the limit) quickly," he said. "Today I wasn't good enough. I didn't push enough and didn't manage to get a quick, clean lap in."

Both Williams departed in Q2 as well, Nico Rosberg only managing 12th in an oversteering car, and Wurz finding the modern qualifying format "fairly brutal" after an error left him 15th.

That was one place behind last year's pole-sitter Button.

"In a way I'm pretty impressed that we got 14th," he said. "It's an improvement on where I thought we were going to qualify... We're so far off."

Testing had suggested that, for all their problems, Honda were at least ahead of Toyota. Not so in Melbourne, where Schumacher and Trulli reached Q3 against all the odds. The latter was lucky not to suffer any damage after departing the pits with the rear jack still attached - an oversight that would earn the team a 2000 Euro fine. He shrugged the incident off and snuck into the top ten on his last lap.

Schumacher's progress was even more remarkable, as a gearbox control problem on his out-lap left him a minute off the pace at first. Superb work by Toyota revived the car in time for him to grab ninth.

Super Aguri had never even reached Q2 before, let alone the top ten session, but their form all weekend suggested that such a result was now on the cards. The only surprise was that it was Takuma Sato who reversed practice form and beat Anthony Davidson to 10th - not that the Englishman was too downcast with his 11th place.

"If someone had told us we'd be close to getting both cars into the last qualifying session, we'd never have believed it," he said. "We're all so chuffed."

Part three



Had Massa survived into Q3, there might just have been a battle for pole position. Instead the Brazilian had to watch his new teammate Raikkonen calmly dismiss all opposition with a first flying lap 0.978 seconds quicker than Alonso's previous provisional pole time.

It didn't matter that Raikkonen failed to improve on his second run - his 1:26.072 mark was unbeatable. The Finn greeted the result with a characteristic shrug.

"I'm not really exactly happy with the car but it was quick enough," he said. "I think that for the race we are much more comfortable. I think it is going to be more easy in the race."

Alonso would join Raikkonen on the front row, albeit 0.421 seconds slower and only after overcoming his 22-year-old novice teammate, who had held a provisional second until making a slight mistake on his last lap.

A late surge from Nick Heidfeld's very competitive BMW then pushed Hamilton back to a still outstanding fourth place for his first F1 start. The GP2 champion's words afterwards

were cool professionalism exemplified, but his ever-present grin confirmed that Hamilton was well aware of the momentous impact he was making on the sport - and indeed his teammate.

"Frankly he put Fernando under quite a lot of pressure in that session, and it was great to see," said McLaren's Martin Whitmarsh.

"It makes me smile when he says: 'I know my place,'" Ron Dennis added. "He has every intention of trying to beat Fernando tomorrow."

Another of the new wave of superstars, Robert Kubica, completed BMW's best qualifying result yet by taking fifth, despite crossing the line a few seconds too late to manage a second new tyre run.

Renault were confident that Giancarlo Fisichella's sixth place did not represent their true race day potential, while seventh-placed Mark Webber had no idea how Red Bull might fare on Sunday - having been very pleasantly surprised to find himself so high up the grid in the still-developing new car.

The Toyotas took eighth and ninth, Trulli ahead, while Sato rightly declared his 10th place a "fantastic team effort" by Super Aguri, whose 2006 qualifying best had been a 17th position.

Qualifying results

Australia qualifying breakdown			Session 1			Session 2			Session 3		
Pos	Driver	Team	Pos	Time	Lap	Pos	Time	Lap	Pos	Time	Lap
1.	Raikkonen	Ferrari	1.	1:26.644	3	4.	1:25.644	3	1.	1:26.072	11
2.	Alonso	McLaren	4.	1:26.697	3	1.	1:25.326	6	2.	1:26.493	10
3.	Heidfeld	BMW Sauber	6.	1:26.895	4	2.	1:25.358	6	3.	1:26.556	11
4.	Hamilton	McLaren	2.	1:26.674	3	3.	1:25.577	3	4.	1:26.755	10
5.	Kubica	BMW Sauber	3.	1:26.696	3	5.	1:25.882	6	5.	1:27.347	10
6.	Fisichella	Renault	10.	1:27.270	4	6.	1:25.944	6	6.	1:27.634	11

7. Webber	Red Bull	7. 1:26.978	6	7. 1:26.623	6	7. 1:27.934	11
8. Trulli	Toyota	9. 1:27.014	6	8. 1:26.688	6	8. 1:28.404	11
9. R.Schumacher	Toyota	11. 1:27.328	7	9. 1:26.739	4	9. 1:28.692	11
10. Sato	Super Aguri	12. 1:27.365	6	10. 1:26.758	6	10. 1:28.871	11
11. Davidson	Super Aguri	8. 1:26.986	6	11. 1:26.909	6		
12. Rosberg	Williams	16. 1:27.596	7	12. 1:26.914	6		
13. Kovalainen	Renault	14. 1:27.529	4	13. 1:26.964	6		
14. Button	Honda	15. 1:27.540	8	14. 1:27.264	6		
15. Wurz	Williams	13. 1:27.479	7	15. 1:27.393	6		
16. Massa	Ferrari	5. 1:26.712	3	16. -	3		
17. Barrichello	Honda	17. 1:27.679	9				
18. Speed	Toro Rosso	18. 1:28.305	7				
19. Coulthard	Red Bull	19. 1:28.579	6				
20. Liuzzi	Toro Rosso	20. 1:29.267	6				
21. Sutil	Spyker	21. 1:29.339	6				
22. Albers	Spyker	22. 1:31.932	7				

The grid

1. Raikkonen Ferrari
2. Alonso McLaren-Mercedes
3. Heidfeld BMW Sauber
4. Hamilton McLaren-Mercedes
5. Kubica BMW Sauber
6. Fisichella Renault
7. Webber Red Bull-Renault
8. Trulli Toyota
9. R.Schumacher Toyota
10. Sato Super Aguri-Honda

11.	Davidson	Super Aguri-Honda	
12.	Rosberg	Williams-Toyota	
13.	Kovalainen	Renault	
14.	Button	Honda	
15.	Wurz	Williams-Toyota	
16.	Barrichello	Honda	
17.	Speed	Toro Rosso-Ferrari	
18.	Coulthard	Red Bull-Renault	
19.	Liuzzi	Toro Rosso-Ferrari	
20.	Sutil	Spyker-Ferrari	
21.	Albers	Spyker-Ferrari	
22.	Massa	Ferrari	*

* Felipe Massa's engine was changed before the race

The Race

While Kimi Raikkonen launched into a clear lead from pole position at the start, both McLarens were pounced on by BMWs - as Nick Heidfeld challenged Fernando Alonso for second and Robert Kubica swept past Lewis Hamilton.

But Hamilton wasn't prepared to start his Grand Prix career by losing a place. He tucked straight into the BMW's slipstream, then switched to the outside and outbraked Kubica into Turn 1, in a move that would carry him not only past the Pole, but ahead of Alonso and into third position!



"I saw Nick Heidfeld coming from the outside, so I was a little bit more concentrated on him than the corner itself," confessed Alonso, whose rather hesitant attempt to challenge the BMW on the dusty inside line made him easy prey for his young teammate.

"There was no way I could stay on the inside so I dived back to the left and managed to outbrake near enough everyone," said Hamilton.

Unfortunately he couldn't quite make it ahead of Heidfeld as well, and the two McLarens would spend the opening 14 laps chasing the BMW - which had started on a light fuel load and soft tyres - while Raikkonen disappeared up the road at between 0.7 and 1.1 seconds per lap.

McLaren regained a little ground by keeping their cars out three (Alonso) and four (Hamilton) laps after Raikkonen's lap 19 pit stop respectively, but only managed to reduce the Finn's lead from 15 to 11 seconds.

Aware that Melbourne tends to see safety car periods and that the new regulations could make pit stops under yellow something of a nightmare, BMW split their strategy in the hope that they wouldn't have to service both cars at once in any caution period.

This worked in Robert Kubica's favour, for Heidfeld's decision to go on an early sprint then two longer stints left him lapping in the 1:28s in seventh place after his first stop, while Kubica was matching the McLarens' mid-1:26 efforts.

The Pole consequently emerged ahead of Heidfeld after he stopped on lap 21, and although the two BMWs were soon running nose to tail, Kubica knew that as he was due to make his final switch onto soft tyres several laps after Heidfeld's last stop, he had his more experienced teammate covered.

Both were well clear of the low-key Giancarlo Fisichella. Apart from almost banging wheels with Jarno Trulli as he rejoined after his first pit stop, the Renault driver would barely see another car for the first 50 laps of the race.

Behind the top six, Mark Webber held seventh initially - the Red Bull not a match for the cars ahead, but able to stay a few seconds clear of Ralf Schumacher and Trulli's Toyotas.

Takuma Sato had vaulted both of them at the start, only for Schumacher to re-pass the Super Aguri into Turn 3 and Trulli to do likewise at Turn 9. Nevertheless, Sato was able to tag along behind the Toyotas in the first stint while fending off Heikki Kovalainen and Nico Rosberg.



Most of the rest of the midfield was lining up to pass the very unhappy Jenson Button - the Honda slowed both by a 27-lap fuel load and a front wing that "wasn't working." His teammate Rubens Barrichello, on a much shorter first stint, finally got past on lap 14, with Felipe Massa following him two laps later.

The one-stopping Massa was making slow progress. He overtook the Toro Rossos, David Coulthard and Alex Wurz's even heavier Williams in the first three laps, but by the time Massa passed Button he was already 70 seconds behind his race-leading teammate.

The precautionary engine change now seemed unwise - for had he started 16th rather than 22nd he would surely have cleared Button sooner and been able to quickly join the battle for the final points positions.

Anthony Davidson was conspicuous by his absence from the upper midfield gaggle. Before the race he had been concerned about the chances of getting caught up in a first corner crash from row six. He needn't have worried - for an anti-stall problem left him sat on the grid at the start. The car woke up in time for him to join the tail of the pack but then a brush of wheels as he passed Adrian Sutil on the outside of Turn 9 sent the Super Aguri flying through the air.

Although Davidson continued, the impact damaged both his back and his car. Despite the pain and loss of downforce, he continued to the end of the race before being hospitalised.

Sutil resumed after a quick spin but would later receive a drive-through penalty for baulking Hamilton - and then another one for crossing the blend line while taking the first...

That was probably not quite as embarrassing as his Spyker teammate Christijan Albers' departure. The Dutchman became the first retirement of 2007 when he crashed at Turn 3 while fiddling with the cable from his earpiece.

At the front, a mid-race charge from Raikkonen - including a fastest lap 1.1 seconds clear of the McLarens' best effort - gave the Ferrari a 19 second lead over Hamilton by the time he made his final pit stop on lap 41.

With Raikkonen clearly out of reach, the focus was now on which McLaren would be second. At times Hamilton seemed to be edging away from Alonso, but the world champion was unconcerned by the fluctuating gap.



"Sometimes I was closer to Lewis, sometimes I left some space so as not to overheat the car and the people who we were lapping were a little bit inconsistent so we were up and down all through the race," said Alonso.

Knowing that he could run two laps further than Hamilton at the final stops, Alonso closed right in on his teammate at the end of the stint. The combination of these extra light fuel laps, Hamilton lapping Sato at just the wrong moment, and a pit stop 1.8 seconds quicker than the rookie's meant that Alonso rejoined comfortably 2.8 seconds clear of Hamilton after his final pit visit on lap 47. The young pretender was back in his place, but Alonso admitted that he was "lucky" to have overcome his sensational teammate.

The inter-team battle for fourth between the BMW Saubers ended rather more anticlimactically, as Kubica became stuck in fifth gear and had to retire on lap 37, handing the place to Heidfeld. Although BMW hadn't shown the Ferrari-threatening pace that they had hinted at in testing, team boss Mario Theissen was more than satisfied with fourth.

"We have clearly been the third fastest team, and that is a good baseline for the next races," he said.

The implication of BMW's rise into the top three was that last year's constructors' champions Renault were now only fourth best. A race that must have given Flavio Briatore and Pat Symonds an ominous reminder of how their Benetton team slumped after Michael Schumacher jumped ship in 1996 saw Fisichella unable to get on terms with Heidfeld and

finishing a minute off the pace in fifth, under pressure from Massa in the closing stages.

The Brazilian's one-stop strategy vaulted him past the upper midfield runners without much overtaking being necessary, but the combination of constant traffic, heavy fuel loads and tyres forced to run 29 lap stints left Massa unable to demonstrate whether he could have been a match for Raikkonen had he qualified smoothly.

Rosberg drove superbly to take a promising seventh for Williams. A long first stint allowed him to get between the Toyotas, and he then closed in on Schumacher before diving past with a bold move at Turn 9 on lap 36. The Toyota-powered Williams subsequently left Toyota's works team standing, pulling 23 seconds clear by the flag.

The large gap was partly due to pneumatic problems that afflicted Schumacher in the closing laps. He hung on to take the final point, seven seconds ahead of teammate Trulli, who successfully resisted Kovalainen and Barrichello despite brake issues.

Kovalainen's debut race was as scruffy as Hamilton's was immaculate. The Finn dropped behind Rosberg when they pitted together on lap 27, but might have re-passed the Williams by staying out five laps longer in the second stint. Instead he made a series of errors - running wide at Turn 12, spinning at Turn 1, and then visiting the Turn 6 gravel. Team boss Briatore was far from impressed.



"It was rubbish," he summarised, bluntly. "Kovalainen had a horrible race. He did almost everything wrong. Before the next race he needs to change his attitude and try to do better, because he has the capability to do it."

Slow pit stops contributed to Sato's slump to 12th in the race, although he was only four seconds behind the Trulli-Kovalainen-Barrichello squabble at the flag, Barrichello having rescued Honda honour by overtaking the Super Aguri just after the final stops.

Wurz and Coulthard should have followed Sato home. Instead Coulthard's over-ambitious dive at Turn 3 on lap 49 saw the Red Bull clambering over the front of the Williams in destructive fashion.

"I was coming too fast for the corner," Coulthard admitted. "I take full responsibility for that one. You have to have a go - it's all part of learning what these tyres are capable of in the braking area..."

The nonplussed Wurz, who hadn't made much progress on a one-stop strategy, could do little but accept Coulthard's apology.

Webber therefore inherited 13th, having plummeted down the order thanks to a slow first pit stop, a lack of pace in the second half of the race, and a spin in the pit lane entry at his final stop. He was only seven seconds ahead of Vitantonio Liuzzi, who narrowly beat Button after the Honda lost further ground due to a pit lane speeding penalty.

With Scott Speed retiring with a puncture at half-distance, the delayed Davidson and Sutil completed the finishers.

All bar the top six were lapped by the flying Raikkonen, whose dominance was such that he even got away with a little snooze at the end of the race, running very wide at Turn 3 with 11 laps to go.



"I was looking at something else, not putting in too much effort," he admitted, having ultimately won by 7.1 seconds from Alonso.

Hamilton dropped 11 seconds behind Alonso in the final stint - but it didn't matter in the slightest. He was on the podium in his first ever Grand Prix, he had all-but-matched his illustrious and experienced teammate, and by pitting later than Raikkonen each time he had even managed to lead four laps on his debut.

"To lead my first Grand Prix was a fantastic feeling," said Hamilton. "It was extremely tough. I had Fernando behind me for a long time, and it's pretty tough when you have the two-time world champion behind you in your first race.

"I think this is probably beyond my dreams. To be in Formula One was obviously a dream, but to come into your first race and have such a smooth start is something you don't expect, but something we had been working towards. I'm loving it..."

Race results

58 laps; 307.574km;

Weather: Sunny.

Classified:

Pos	Driver	Team		Time
1.	Raikkonen	Ferrari	(B)	1h25:28.770
2.	Alonso	McLaren-Mercedes	(B) +	7.242
3.	Hamilton	McLaren-Mercedes	(B) +	18.595
4.	Heidfeld	BMW Sauber	(B) +	38.763
5.	Fisichella	Renault	(B) +	1:06.469
6.	Massa	Ferrari	(B) +	1:06.805
7.	Rosberg	Williams-Toyota	(B) +	1 lap
8.	R.Schumacher	Toyota	(B) +	1 lap
9.	Trulli	Toyota	(B) +	1 lap
10.	Kovalainen	Renault	(B) +	1 lap
11.	Barrichello	Honda	(B) +	1 lap
12.	Sato	Super Aguri-Honda	(B) +	1 lap
13.	Webber	Red Bull-Renault	(B) +	1 lap
14.	Liuzzi	Toro Rosso-Ferrari	(B) +	1 lap
15.	Button	Honda	(B) +	1 lap
16.	Davidson	Super Aguri-Honda	(B) +	2 laps
17.	Sutil	Spyker-Ferrari	(B) +	2 laps

Fastest lap: Raikkonen, 1:25.235

Not classified/retirements:

Driver	Team		On lap
Wurz	Williams-Toyota	(B)	49
Coulthard	Red Bull-Renault	(B)	49
Kubica	BMW Sauber	(B)	39
Speed	Toro Rosso-Ferrari	(B)	29
Albers	Spyker-Ferrari	(B)	11

World Championship standings, round 1:**Drivers:**

1.	Raikkonen	10
2.	Alonso	8
3.	Hamilton	6
4.	Heidfeld	5
5.	Fisichella	4
6.	Massa	3
7.	Rosberg	2
8.	R.Schumacher	1

Constructors:

1.	McLaren-Mercedes	14
2.	Ferrari	13
3.	BMW Sauber	5
4.	Renault	4
5.	Williams-Toyota	2
6.	Toyota	1

Team-by-Team**MCLAREN-MERCEDES**

Hamilton out-paces Alonso for much of practice and qualifying but ultimately it's the world champion who takes second on the grid, with the rookie 0.3 seconds slower in fourth. A bold first corner move then brings Hamilton up to third at the slow-starting Alonso's expense. They pass Heidfeld in the pit stops but cannot catch Raikkonen. Hamilton stays narrowly ahead until the final stops when Alonso manages to jump him. The team are thrilled with second and third places after such a depressing 2006.

RENAULT

Fuel pump failures hobble both cars on Friday but Fisichella sets some promising practice times nevertheless. He can't repeat that form, though, qualifying only sixth and then fending off Massa for a distant fifth in the race. Kovalainen confesses to underperformance after qualifying 13th, then spends too much of Sunday off the road and can only finish 10th.

FERRARI

Raikkonen dominates from Saturday practice onwards, taking a comfortable pole and commanding the race on the way to becoming the first man since Nigel Mansell in 1989 to win on his Ferrari debut. A gearbox failure and then a precautionary engine change put Massa to the back of the grid. He uses a one-stop strategy to recover to sixth, but it's much less than he hoped for from Melbourne.

HONDA



Button and Barrichello struggle to 14th and 17th on the grid. The Brazilian makes more progress in the race, using a short first stint to catch the upper midfielders, passing Sato for 11th in the closing laps and then chasing Trulli and Kovalainen to the flag. Button is penalised for pit lane speeding and can only finish 15th, suspecting a front wing problem.

BMW SAUBER



The team repeat their strong winter testing form, with reserve driver Vettel third in the wet on Friday morning, and Heidfeld and Kubica qualifying third and fifth on divergent strategies. The short-fuelled Heidfeld runs second at first, but ends up behind the late-stopping Kubica in fifth after the first pit sequence. Kubica then retires with gearbox problems, handing fourth to his teammate.

TOYOTA



Not as bad as testing suggested. Trulli and Schumacher qualify eighth and ninth after the latter's gearbox control problem is hurriedly rectified in Q2. They swap places at the start and run fairly close together all afternoon, losing out to the charging Rosberg on the way to eighth and ninth. Both nurse fading cars in the closing stages - Schumacher with a pneumatic problem and Trulli troubled by his brakes.

RED BULL-RENAULT



Despite losing practice time to a gearbox fault, Webber qualifies a surprise seventh while Coulthard runs wide on a patch of dust in Q1 and ends up a frustrated 19th. The home hero holds seventh at first, but a slow pit stop, a severe lack of pace in the middle stint and a spin in the pit entrance leave him 13th at the finish. Webber would have been 15th had Coulthard not dramatically removed himself and Wurz with an ill-conceived move nine laps from the end.

WILLIAMS-TOYOTA



Good practice form, including sixth for test driver Nakajima in the wet first session, means that 12th (Rosberg) and 15th (Wurz) on the grid is a real disappointment. While the one-stopping Wurz struggles to make progress through the traffic on race day, Rosberg surges forwards, securing seventh with a strong move on Schumacher. Wurz is violently taken out of 13th by Coulthard on lap 49.

TORO ROSSO-FERRARI



Still very unfamiliar with their car, Speed and Liuzzi qualify 18th and 20th. They remain at the tail of the field in the race, but as others hit trouble and Liuzzi's pace improves, he advances to 14th, not far behind Webber. Speed is only 19th when a puncture sends him off the road on lap 29.

SPYKER-FERRARI



The team are not surprised to fill the back row, although the 2.5 second gulf between Sutil and Albers, who lost practice time with a gearbox failure, is unexpected. Albers cannot keep up with the Toro Rossos and crashes while distracted by an errant earpiece cable on lap 11. Sutil tangles with Davidson on the first lap, then receives penalties for blocking the leaders and crossing the pit exit line. He finishes a distant 17th.

SUPER AGURI-HONDA



Despite not unveiling their new car until the eve of the race, Super Aguri show tremendous speed all weekend - most notably in third practice, where Davidson is fourth quickest. They are thrilled to qualify 10th and 11th, Sato ahead. His pace isn't so great in the race and slow pit stops contribute to him falling to 12th, albeit only four seconds behind a Toyota, a Renault and a Honda. An anti-stall problem immediately drops Davidson to last, and he injures his back in an aerial tangle with Sutil on lap one. He finishes a pained 16th despite the damage to himself and the car.

Lap-by-Lap

Pre-race: Christijan Albers starts from the pits rather than 21st place on the grid.

Lap 1: pole position qualifier Kimi Raikkonen makes a flying getaway. Fellow front-row starter Fernando Alonso is squeezed by Nick Heidfeld. The German takes second while Alonso drops to fourth, behind rookie team-mate Lewis Hamilton.



Robert Kubica seizes fifth from Giancarlo Fisichella, Mark Webber, Ralf Schumacher, Jarno Trulli, Takuma Sato, Heikki Kovalainen, Nico Rosberg, Jenson Button, Rubens Barrichello, Alexander Wurz, David Coulthard, Scott Speed, Felipe Massa (who qualified 16th but started last after an unscheduled engine change), Vitantonio Liuzzi, Albers, Anthony Davidson (down from 11th after almost stalling at the start) and Adrian Sutil.

Lap 2: Raikkonen leads by 2.0s. Coulthard passes Wurz for 15th. Massa wrests 16th from Speed.

Lap 3: Massa passes Wurz for 16th. Davidson and Sutil tangle. Sutil spins but both continue.

Lap 6: Hamilton runs wide and clips the grass, without losing any places. Massa passes Coulthard. Sutil relegates Davidson to last place.

Lap 7: Raikkonen laps in 1m 27.075s - his best yet - to extends his lead to 5.2s.

Lap 10: Raikkonen posts a 1m 26.577s. His lead grows to 8.1s.

Lap 11: Albers crashes into retirement at Turn Three.

Lap 14: Raikkonen continues to lap comfortably faster than the rest. Heidfeld makes the race's first scheduled stop and drops to seventh. Barrichello passes Button for 13th.

Lap 15: Raikkonen leads Hamilton by 14.9s. The pursuing pack all improve their lap times in the wake of Heidfeld's stop.

Lap 16: Massa passes Button for 14th.



Lap 19: leader Raikkonen pits and rejoins fourth, behind Kubica. Barrichello takes on fuel and tyres, too.

Lap 20: new boy Hamilton leads. Fisichella pits and rejoins between the Toyotas, edging Trulli over the kerbs at Turn One to stay eighth.

Lap 21: Kubica pits.

Lap 22: Alonso pits, as does Webber.

Lap 23: Hamilton pits - but loses time behind Sutil during the lap. The German is penalised for ignoring blue flags and comes straight in for his drive-through. Liuzzi comes in, too.

Lap 24: Sutil earns another penalty - for crossing the blend line at the pit exit. Ralf

Schumacher and Sato pit.

Lap 25: Trulli and Speed pit.

Lap 27: Kovalainen, Rosberg and Button pit.

Lap 28: Coulthard pits.

Lap 29: Massa pits. Button earns a drive-through for speeding in the pits. Davidson peels in for fuel and tyres. Speed skates into retirement at Turn 12.

Lap 30: Button serves his penalty.

Lap 31: Raikkonen leads Hamilton by 17.1s, with Alonso third from Kubica, Heidfeld, Fisichella, Ralf Schumacher, Rosberg, Kovalainen, Massa, Trulli, Wurz, Sato, Webber, Barrichello, Coulthard, Button, Liuzzi, Davidson and Sutil.

Lap 32: Wurz is the last driver to make his first stop.



Lap 34: Coulthard passes Wurz for 15th.

Lap 36: Rosberg passes Ralf Schumacher for seventh.

Lap 37: Kubica slows suddenly and heads for the pits.

Lap 38: new fastest lap to Raikkonen: 1m 26.172s. Heidfeld makes a scheduled BMW stop.

Lap 39: Barrichello pits.

Lap 40: Raikkonen laps in 1m 25.929s. Kovalainen spins at Turn One and loses a place to Massa.

Lap 41: Raikkonen ups his pace to 1m 25.235s. Rosberg pits, as does Sutil.

Lap 42: Raikkonen makes his final scheduled stop. Sato and Webber peel in some time later - the Australian spins on his way in.

Lap 43: Hamilton pits, as does Button.

Lap 44: Fisichella pits.

Lap 45: Alonso pits and cedes the lead to Raikkonen. The Spaniard rejoins second, ahead of Hamilton. Ralf Schumacher, Liuzzi and Davidson all pit.

Lap 46: Kovalainen and Trulli pit.

Lap 47: Raikkonen runs wide at Turn Three, without serious harm. Coulthard pits.



Lap 48: Raikkonen leads Alonso by 14.5s. Only Hamilton, Heidfeld, Fisichella and Massa - the top six - are still on the same lap. Rosberg and Ralf Schumacher run seventh and eighth.

Lap 49: Coulthard tries to pass Wurz for 13th at Turn Three. He flies over the Austrian and lands in the gravel, minus his front left wheel. It's game over for Wurz, too.

Lap 51: Kovalainen runs wide at Turn Seven.

Lap 58: Raikkonen wins his first race for Ferrari, beating Alonso by 7.2s. Hamilton is third on his maiden F1 appearance, from Heidfeld, Fisichella and Massa. The latter two cross the line just 0.3s apart. The lapped Rosberg and Ralf Schumacher complete the scorers.

2007 SuperStats: Australian GP

SuperStats is a method of comparing drivers' and teams' performance over the season, by averaging and totalling various times, positions and other relevant figures. The resulting numbers provide some insight into each driver's ability, including his strengths and weaknesses

By David Wright

autosport.com writer

1. SuperGrid

The SuperGrid compares the average starting position of all drivers over all rounds of the Formula One season. The format now involves three sessions with the top ten drivers battling it out in a 15 minute finale. With the season just beginning, Ferrari debutant Kimi Raikkonen is on top, ahead of double world champion Fernando Alonso. Next up are BMW Sauber's Nick Heidfeld, McLaren rookie Lewis Hamilton and BMW Sauber youngster Robert Kubica. The Super Aguri-Honda duo outqualified the Honda team, but the two Toyotas outqualified the Williams-Toyota. After looking as fast as Raikkonen all weekend, a gearbox problem and an engine change meant that Felipe Massa started at the opposite end of the grid in last position.

The table is sorted in by average starting position in ascending order, then by best starting position in ascending order, then by worst starting position in ascending order.

Driver	Average Starting Position	Best Starting Position	Worst Starting Position	Head To Head
Kimi Raikkonen	1.00	1	1	1-0
Fernando Alonso	2.00	2	2	1-0
Nick Heidfeld	3.00	3	3	1-0
Lewis Hamilton	4.00	4	4	0-1
Robert Kubica	5.00	5	5	0-1

Giancarlo Fisichella	6.00	6	6	1-0
Mark Webber	7.00	7	7	1-0
Jarno Trulli	8.00	8	8	1-0
Ralf Schumacher	9.00	9	9	0-1
Takuma Sato	10.00	10	10	1-0
Anthony Davidson	11.00	11	11	0-1
Nico Rosberg	12.00	12	12	1-0
Heikki Kovalainen	13.00	13	13	0-1
Jenson Button	14.00	14	14	1-0
Alexander Wurz	15.00	15	15	0-1
Rubens Barrichello	16.00	16	16	0-1
Scott Speed	17.00	17	17	1-0
David Coulthard	18.00	18	18	0-1
Vitantonio Liuzzi	19.00	19	19	0-1
Adrian Sutil	20.00	20	20	1-0
Christijan Albers	21.00	21	21	0-1
Felipe Massa	22.00	22	22	0-1

2. SuperRace

The SuperRace compares the average finishing position, and total time and distance completed by all drivers over all rounds of the Formula One season. Kimi Raikkonen also leads the SuperRace, with Fernando Alonso again just behind him, with Alonso's rookie teammate Lewis Hamilton completing the podium. After starting last, Felipe Massa made it up to sixth place just behind Giancarlo Fisichella, who started sixteen places ahead of him. Rubens Barrichello moved up five places from his starting position to finish eleventh, while Mark Webber slipped back six places on his way to a thirteenth place finish.

This table is sorted by average finishing position in ascending order, then total distance covered in descending order.

Driver	Average Finishing	Total Time	Total Distance
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	Position		
Kimi Raikkonen	1.00	1h25m28.770	307.574 km
Fernando Alonso	2.00	1h25m36.012	307.574 km
Lewis Hamilton	3.00	1h25m47.365	307.574 km
Nick Heidfeld	4.00	1h26m07.533	307.574 km
Giancarlo Fisichella	5.00	1h26m35.239	307.574 km
Felipe Massa	6.00	1h26m35.575	307.574 km
Nico Rosberg	7.00	1h25m32.237	302.271 km
Ralf Schumacher	8.00	1h25m55.972	302.271 km
Jarno Trulli	9.00	1h26m03.643	302.271 km
Heikki Kovalainen	10.00	1h26m04.110	302.271 km
Rubens Barrichello	11.00	1h26m05.009	302.271 km
Takuma Sato	12.00	1h26m09.506	302.271 km
Mark Webber	13.00	1h26m39.409	302.271 km
Vitantonio Liuzzi	14.00	1h26m46.364	302.271 km
Jenson Button	15.00	1h26m47.799	302.271 km
Anthony Davidson	16.00	1h25m31.618	296.968 km
Adrian Sutil	17.00	1h26m43.931	296.968 km
Alexander Wurz	18.00	1h12m43.760	254.544 km
David Coulthard	19.00	1h12m44.295	254.544 km
Robert Kubica	20.00	0h53m24.248	190.908 km
Scott Speed	21.00	0h43m01.350	148.484 km
Christijan Albers	22.00	0h15m41.020	53.030 km

3. Driver Totals

The driver totals compare the total laps completed, total distance completed, laps led and distance led by each driver throughout the season. Race winner Kimi Raikkonen, who lead almost the whole race, is on top of this table, with Lewis Hamilton ahead of his teammate Fernando Alonso thanks to leading an extra two laps during the race. High reliability means the rest of the field is closely bunched,

The table is sorted by total distance in descending order, then total laps in descending order, then distance led in descending order.

Driver	Total Laps	Total Distance	Laps Led	Distance Led
Kimi Raikkonen	58	307.574 km	52	275.756 km
Lewis Hamilton	58	307.574 km	4	21.212 km
Fernando Alonso	58	307.574 km	2	10.606 km
Giancarlo Fisichella	58	307.574 km	0	0.000 km
Felipe Massa	58	307.574 km	0	0.000 km
Nick Heidfeld	58	307.574 km	0	0.000 km
Heikki Kovalainen	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Jenson Button	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Rubens Barrichello	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Ralf Schumacher	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Jarno Trulli	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Mark Webber	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Nico Rosberg	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Vitantonio Liuzzi	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Takuma Sato	57	302.271 km	0	0.000 km
Adrian Sutil	56	296.968 km	0	0.000 km
Anthony Davidson	56	296.968 km	0	0.000 km
David Coulthard	48	254.544 km	0	0.000 km
Alexander Wurz	48	254.544 km	0	0.000 km
Robert Kubica	36	190.908 km	0	0.000 km
Scott Speed	28	148.484 km	0	0.000 km
Christijan Albers	10	53.030 km	0	0.000 km

4. Team Totals

The team totals compare the total laps completed, total distance completed, laps led and distance led by each team throughout the season. Ferrari leads the order from McLaren

thanks to Kimi Raikkonen's laps in the lead, with reigning world champions Renault a lap behind, the factory Japanese teams of Honda and Toyota a lap further back, with Super Aguri just one lap behind the factory team! Williams and Red Bull aren't too far behind after one of each of their cars collided with each other. Spyker sit in last with Adrian Sutil the last classified finisher and Christijan Albers the first retirement.

The table is sorted by total distance in descending order, then total laps in descending order, then distance led in descending order.

Team	Total Laps	Total Distance	Laps Led	Distance Led
Ferrari	116	615.148 km	52	275.756 km
McLaren	116	615.148 km	6	31.818 km
Renault	115	609.845 km	0	0.000 km
Honda	114	604.542 km	0	0.000 km
Toyota	114	604.542 km	0	0.000 km
Super Aguri	113	599.239 km	0	0.000 km
Red Bull	105	556.815 km	0	0.000 km
Williams	105	556.815 km	0	0.000 km
BMW Sauber	94	498.482 km	0	0.000 km
Toro Rosso	85	450.755 km	0	0.000 km
Spyker	66	349.998 km	0	0.000 km

5. Average Times

The average times table consists of four columns: the first three are the average of the fastest time recorded by each driver in each practice session over all rounds of the season while the fourth is the average of the fastest lap recorded in the race over all rounds of the season. This table is listed in alphabetical order.

Driver	Friday Free Practice 1 Average	Friday Free Practice 2 Average	Saturday Free Practice Average	Fast Lap Average
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Christijan Albers	1m35.055	1m31.175	1m30.547	1m30.899
Fernando Alonso	1m29.214	1m28.040	1m26.786	1m26.314
Rubens Barrichello	1m31.737	1m29.542	1m28.039	1m28.098
Jenson Button	1m31.162	1m29.066	1m28.119	1m28.387
David Coulthard	1m31.528	1m28.495	1m28.208	1m27.706
Anthony Davidson	1m39.221	1m28.727	1m26.491	1m28.489
Giancarlo Fisichella	1m32.011	1m27.941	1m26.454	1m26.892
Lewis Hamilton	1m30.878	1m27.829	1m26.467	1m26.351
Nick Heidfeld	1m37.249	1m27.970	1m26.753	1m26.722
Heikki Kovalainen	1m31.571	1m30.097	1m26.937	1m27.592
Robert Kubica	-	1m28.281	1m27.753	1m26.642
Vitantonio Liuzzi	1m34.627	1m31.693	1m28.332	1m28.282
Felipe Massa	1m30.707	1m27.353	1m26.547	1m27.044
Kimi Raikkonen	1m39.242	1m27.750	1m26.064	1m25.235
Nico Rosberg	-	1m28.055	1m28.061	1m26.721
Takuma Sato	1m31.782	1m29.009	1m27.266	1m28.487
Ralf Schumacher	1m39.550	1m29.574	1m27.887	1m27.796
Scott Speed	1m41.763	1m30.383	1m28.485	1m28.953
Adrian Sutil	1m34.043	1m31.108	1m28.678	1m28.687
Jarno Trulli	1m44.130	1m28.921	1m27.897	1m28.034
Mark Webber	1m31.661	1m29.801	1m27.390	1m27.501
Alexander Wurz	1m32.194	1m27.981	1m27.322	1m28.303

6. Average Positions

The average positions table consists of five columns: the first three are the average of the positions recorded by each driver in each practice session over all rounds of the season; the fourth is the average of the starting positions over all rounds of the season; and the fifth is the average of the race finishing positions over all rounds of the season. This table is listed in alphabetical order.

Driver	Friday	Friday	Saturday	Starting	Race
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	Free Practice 1 Average	Free Practice 2 Average	Free Practice Average	Grid Average	Average
Christijan Albers	16.00	21.00	22.00	21.00	22.00
Fernando Alonso	1.00	7.00	7.00	2.00	2.00
Rubens Barrichello	10.00	15.00	15.00	16.00	14.00
Jenson Button	5.00	14.00	17.00	14.00	17.00
David Coulthard	7.00	10.00	18.00	18.00	11.00
Anthony Davidson	18.00	11.00	4.00	11.00	19.00
Giancarlo Fisichella	12.00	4.00	2.00	6.00	7.00
Lewis Hamilton	4.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
Nick Heidfeld	17.00	5.00	6.00	3.00	6.00
Heikki Kovalainen	8.00	18.00	8.00	13.00	10.00
Robert Kubica	-	9.00	12.00	5.00	4.00
Vitantonio Liuzzi	15.00	22.00	19.00	19.00	15.00
Felipe Massa	2.00	1.00	5.00	22.00	8.00
Kimi Raikkonen	19.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Nico Rosberg	-	8.00	16.00	12.00	5.00
Takuma Sato	11.00	13.00	9.00	10.00	18.00
Ralf Schumacher	20.00	16.00	13.00	9.00	12.00
Scott Speed	21.00	19.00	20.00	17.00	21.00
Adrian Sutil	14.00	20.00	21.00	20.00	20.00
Jarno Trulli	22.00	12.00	14.00	8.00	13.00
Mark Webber	9.00	17.00	11.00	7.00	9.00
Alexander Wurz	13.00	6.00	10.00	15.00	16.00

7. Weekend Running

The following tables show how many kilometres the various drivers and teams cover each racing weekend, in these days of 'limited' engine life under the one engine per two weekends rule. Which drivers complete the most kilometres, whether those teams that run

third cars complete more kilometres than those that don't or can't and whether a team is conserving the amount of running on its engines can be seen here.

The table is sorted by season km in descending order.

Driver	Season km	Friday km	Saturday km	Sunday km	Weekend km
Giancarlo Fisichella	774	203	177	250	629
Jarno Trulli	774	190	194	246	629
Adrian Sutil	753	263	108	241	612
Nick Heidfeld	727	168	172	250	590
Ralf Schumacher	721	151	190	246	586
Fernando Alonso	716	207	125	250	582
Jenson Button	716	194	142	246	582
Lewis Hamilton	700	185	134	250	569
Kimi Raikkonen	700	172	147	250	569
Mark Webber	668	116	181	246	543
Takuma Sato	668	129	168	246	543
Felipe Massa	642	168	103	250	521
Alexander Wurz	642	211	103	207	521
Anthony Davidson	636	147	129	241	517
Heikki Kovalainen	589	129	103	246	478
Rubens Barrichello	562	103	108	246	457
Nico Rosberg	552	125	78	246	448
Vitantonio Liuzzi	541	103	90	246	440
David Coulthard	520	138	78	207	422
Robert Kubica	371	112	164	26	302
Scott Speed	323	159	69	34	263
Christijan Albers	297	181	60	0	241
Sebastian Vettel	117	95	0	0	95
Kazuki Nakajima	111	90	0	0	90

Team					

	Season	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekend
	km	km	km	km	km
Toyota	1485	419	461	605	1485
McLaren	1432	483	334	615	1432
Renault	1368	408	350	610	1368
Ferrari	1320	419	286	615	1320
Super Aguri	1310	339	371	599	1310
Williams	1294	525	212	557	1294
Honda	1289	366	318	605	1289
BMW Sauber	1246	461	445	339	1246
Red Bull	1188	313	318	557	1188
Spyker	1050	546	207	297	1050
Toro Rosso	864	323	196	345	864

BRUCE THOMSON'S **SEASON STROKES**



The Observer



Melbourne provided some answers to the burning questions of 2007. Damien Smith looks back at the predictions made by the experts preseason, to see who got it right...

By Damien Smith

Autosport magazine editor in chief

In last week's *Autosport* magazine a panel of journalists, drivers and team personnel gave their answers to what we consider the 'big questions' of Formula One, 2007.

After just one race, we already know some of the answers - and Melbourne gave significant indications of the answers we should expect for the others over the rest of the season.

Australia's Albert Park circuit is well known for being a one-off, it's lakeside track offering challenges to cars and drivers not replicated anywhere else. But this year the general form of pre-season testing was carried over into the first race. There were few genuine surprises in Australia.



So to the questions...

Well, the first one was always going to be answered in Melbourne: who was going to win the race!

Everyone on our panel went for Ferrari, the quickest team of winter testing by some margin. But given Felipe Massa's pace and edge over new teammate Kimi Raikkonen, the Brazilian was the tip for most. But *Autosport's* Mark Hughes and Steve Cooper read it right. They backed Kimi to turn it on when it really mattered - which he emphatically did.

Massa will recover from his Aussie disappointment, of course, and he will win races this year. But a championship challenge? I just don't see it - never have. All these predictions that he can string it together for the whole season have nothing to back them up from his past, and when he was up against it on Sunday he hardly pulled out a champion's performance. Michael Schumacher, and Kimi for that matter, would have finished higher than sixth.

In fact, Massa's race resembled the driver he most reminds me of: Giancarlo Fisichella, who looked mediocre on his way to fifth.

Question two was 'What will be the biggest talking point of 2007?' Not so easy to answer after just one race, although I'm not giving up on my optimistic answer from last week - a raging battle for the world championship!

Yes, Ferrari had a big advantage in Melbourne. But that's been seen before at Albert Park - and it's one indicator for the rest of the season that might not be true. McLaren will undoubtedly hit back, as perhaps might BMW and possibly Renault. Let's just hope one of them does it soon - before it's too late.

The third question was one I chickened out from answering! Who will be the first big-name firing of the season? Others were more forthcoming.

Nigel Roebuck and mag editor Andrew van de Burgt went for Fisichella and Honda boss Nick Fry respectively. Given what we saw in Australia, either one could still be proved right.

Uninspired Fisi failed to lift a car that was clearly not the quickest beyond its natural level. His old teammate would have managed it.



As for Fry, his team was severely embarrassed. Jenson Button was as admirably loyal in front of the cameras as ever - but he couldn't hide his depression. His team looked lost. The Japanese paymasters will not accept this situation for long and someone will face the axe if things don't change, fairly or not - as Geoff Willis found out last year.

While we're on the subject, let's rattle through the other Honda-related questions. Firstly, will Honda win a race? I think we'll all stick with our answers given last week on this one. No.

The same goes for the 'more points - Jenson or Lewis' question. Little point in wasting (cyber)space on this one.

As for the livery, it was an irrelevance in Oz. All that mattered when it came to the subject of Honda was that they were slower than the Super Aguris.

Now on to a Brit with something to smile about. Will Lewis Hamilton win a race? Olivier Panis reckoned Lewis would be the first firing - then said he didn't rule him out for a win! Perhaps, as an ex-McLaren tester, his first answer was tongue-in-cheek?

My answer to this one was yes, but not before mid-season. It looks like I might have to revise that opinion. But then again, despite the incredible debut performance for which he deserved every word of praise thrown his way this week, Lewis might still be made to wait for that first win.

Yes, he led Alonso for much of the race. But Fernando showed the advantage of his experience as he bided his time, then pounced at the final stops to take second place.

In any sport, they say that finding the extra nth of performance required to make you a winner is the hardest part. This is certainly true in motor racing, and so it will be for Lewis. He will get there, but outpacing Alonso over a whole race distance is a huge task. And

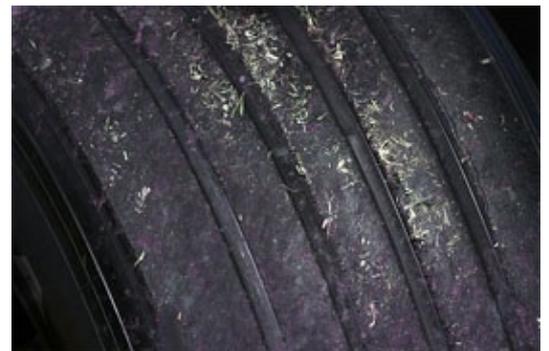
that's without even mentioning Kimi and the Ferrari.

Lower down the field, will Red Bull beat Renault on pure pace at any time? Only Mark Hughes was certain of this last week, and the evidence suggests he was right to be. It will probably happen.

I was hugely impressed by Mark Webber in Melbourne. To qualify seventh after the difficult winter he endured was astonishing, one of the few real surprises of the weekend. OK, he didn't maintain that position in the race, but just as he did at Jaguar and Williams, Webber had already lifted a car beyond where it had any right to be.

But I maintain that Renault is still a top team, with drivers good enough to deliver top results - even if championships are beyond them. And don't forget Heikki Kovalainen is better than his ragged weekend suggested, too. Red Bull will have to work hard to beat Renault at any race - but with Webber, they should do it at least once.

Next question: Anthony Davidson or Takuma Sato? Seven of the 10 panellists whose answers were published on this one went for Anthony, and they might be right to do so, it's still too early to tell. But Sato's performance in Melbourne, specifically in qualifying, confirms what we already knew. This guy will be no pushover.



Now to another rising star: Can Kubica win a race? Well, BMW delivered on what they promised during the winter. They've got top-three pace, but not quite enough to beat Ferrari and McLaren right now - and they're struggling with a weakness in the gearbox.

That Nick Heidfeld made it to the finish in a competitive fourth place was excellent, and Kubica would have been ahead of him. So as was said last week, Robert is certainly good enough to win - he just needs a bit of luck.

The next one is a juicy question: Will the end of the tyre war make the racing more exciting? Based on the evidence produced on Sunday, it has to be an emphatic no! What a processional and dull race - at least on TV.

The variable of changing tyre performance was gone, even with the 'artificial' introduction of a mandatory soft tyre for one stint. I hate to be pessimistic, but the first race of this new era has got me worried. Are they all going to be like this?

Now to politics (no, please keep reading!). Will the customer car debate rumble on? As predicted, it was a major talking point in Melbourne and will certainly continue to be. But as Steve Cooper said last week, the debate will change in complexion as the year goes on, as we get closer to 2008 and the official introduction of customer cars. It's a vital issue for F1 and cannot be ignored.

And the biggest disappointment? Red Bull and Toyota were the popular choices last week, but perhaps van de Burgt was on the money again when he said 'the domination of Ferrari'. I accused him of being a pessimist, while knowing deep down that he could be right. Bloody hope he's not.

That leads us neatly to the obvious question we had to ask last week: who will be world champion?

Kimi did everything on Sunday to prove Vitantonio Liuzzi, Christian Horner, Edd Straw, Steve Cooper and Mark Hughes right. I'll keep saying this until I'm blue in the face - I'm staying optimistic that we are in for a fight for the title - but even I have to admit it's looking a tough call for anyone to beat him. Including Alonso.

But I'm going to end positively. We said Schuey couldn't come back from the deficit he faced to Alonso last year, but he did come back and make a fight of it. Fernando is right up there with Schuey. If anyone - and any team - can do it it's Alonso and McLaren.