

RENAULT BRIDGESTONE

THE GP2 INSIDER



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ONE TO REMEMBER

Reflections on a stunning 2009 GP2 season

VIRGIN BERTHS
GP2 DRIVERS SIGN UP

FIVE YEARS OF GP2
BRUNO MICHEL

10 THINGS WE'VE LEARNED FROM GP2

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Q&A

FIVE YEARS ON: BRUNO MICHEL

Five GP2 seasons have now been run and won. The series has produced some titanic rivalries, plenty of fantastic racing, and added 12 (and counting!) new drivers to the Formula 1 grid. *GP2 Insider* grabbed a few moments with Series Organiser Bruno Michel to look back upon the first five years, and get a sneak peek at the future...

Q: Have you had time to reflect on the fifth season of GP2?

A: We had a very good season. First, the winner of the series, Nico Hülkenberg, is an incredibly bright and promising young driver. And he was a rookie, which is always good for his career.

Q: Especially against such an experienced field...

A: Exactly! I think Hülkenberg will show the same level as a rookie in F1 that we saw from Lewis Hamilton or Nico Rosberg, and that's very good for GP2. He was strong and consistent, which was very satisfying to see.

As we know, GP2 is here to help prepare drivers for Formula 1.

From this year's GP2 grid there were two drivers in F1 even before the end of the season – Romain Grosjean and Kamui Kobayashi – which was remarkable. A number of former GP2 drivers are already signed for F1 next year, such as Hülkenberg and Bruno Senna, so as usual, F1 is looking toward GP2 to get the drivers of tomorrow.

Q: What's on GP2's horizon?

A: Next year is going to be very interesting. We have GP3 starting, and we're very excited about it. All the teams that have been accepted are excited about it.

We had the official GP3 launch a few weeks ago at Paul Ricard with Mark Webber driving the car, and everybody was very impressed. It's fast, it's reliable, it will be difficult to drive like a GP2 car and it will also need the same driving style.

We're looking forward to getting young drivers into GP3, and putting them on a natural path that consists of GP3, then GP2, and then Formula 1. For 2010 we have a great many rookies arriving, so it's going to be very interesting.

Q: Are you happy with the level the series has reached?

A: I think it would be difficult not to be. Every year there are more drivers wanting to come to GP2 than there are seats available, and all the other categories wait for GP2 to be settled before they can sign drivers.

So I think our position is very strong, and the level is strong. We had some really excellent racing last year, some of it was very dramatic, and that's exactly what we want. With a car like a GP2 it's possible to attract the attention of the F1 team principals, and I think it has been working well.



VIRGIN BERTHS FOR GP2 STARS

GP2 was thrust into the world spotlight at the launch of the new Virgin Racing F1 team in London, with four current and former drivers from the series being chosen to represent the team in its first season of grand prix racing.

Timo Glock, the 2007 GP2 champion, had already been signed as Virgin's lead driver, but the launch marked confirmation of long-time series frontrunner Lucas Di Grassi as his team-mate. The Brazilian has come close to landing an F1 seat in the past, and said that he was thrilled to finally be joining motorsport's top tier.

"This is a dream come true," he said. "Formula 1 is a big step up, but after all

the testing I have done, and everything I've learned from racing in GP2, I feel ready."

Long-time GP2 fans will no doubt take a special interest in the Glock/Di Grassi line-up after the tense title battle between the pair two seasons ago, which Glock secured in the final race of the season at Valencia.

Virgin has also looked to GP2 to find its test and reserve driver – and took the unusual step of signing two. Alvaro Parente, who won at Spa this year for Ocean Racing, and Luiz Razia, who took victory in the Monza sprint race with Coloni, will share the role. Both are expected to dovetail their Virgin duties with the 2010 GP2 Series, although neither has a confirmed team.

"This is really exciting for everybody," Razia said. "It's difficult to be part of an F1 team nowadays, so I'm delighted that this has happened. It will be a big boost for me in GP2 next year, too."

Parente echoed the Brazilian's sentiments. "My dream has always been F1," he said, "and this is another step. I'll be doing GP2 and F1 and that's an ideal situation to be in."

Virgin is the first team to have four GP2 drivers on its books at one time, but it won't be the first team to put two GP2 drivers onto the F1 grid together. McLaren did it in 2008 and 2009 with Hamilton and Kovalainen, and Williams did it over the same period with Rosberg and Nakajima.

NEW FOR 2010

Keeping in touch with GP2 will soon become even easier, with a new official website set for launch in the new year. Work on the site is underway, and it is scheduled to go live in time for the start of the 2010 season. In the meantime, you might notice a few cosmetic changes on the site as we make the transition, but

we'll do our best to ensure everything happens as smoothly as possible. Access to all the regular information will continue as normal, and live timing will still be available for the Asia Series rounds. So look forward to some exciting new treats in the new year, and in the meantime, all of us at GP2 wish you a very happy Christmas!



LATEST NEWS

BIRD SIGNS WITH ART

Seats for next year's GP2 Series are continuing to fill fast, with the two teams that fought head-to-head during 2009 – ART Grand Prix and Barwa Addax – both completing their driver line-ups for the new season. ART will set out to defend its



championship with an all-rookie line-up, having signed British up-and-comer Sam Bird (left) to slot in alongside Jules Bianchi.

"This is a big opportunity," Bird told the *GP2 Insider*. "ART is a great team, and I'll be aiming to fight for points and wins from the first moment that I get into the car."

There will be a little more experience in the Barwa Addax camp, where it has been confirmed that Sergio Perez will move across from Arden to join Giedo van der Garde. Both drivers showed signs of promise during their rookie seasons, and Perez has already declared that he has his sights on the championship.

OCEAN LINE-UP FINALISED

Ocean Racing Technology has wasted no time in getting its driver line-up finalised. The Portuguese squad had both its seats filled before Christmas, announcing an all-rookie line-up of Fabio Leimer (below) and Max Chilton.

Leimer is the reigning Formula Master champion, and has prepared for his step up with outings in tests and the opening Asia Series round in Abu Dhabi. "I am delighted," said the 20-year-old Swiss driver. "I was determined to run with one of the best teams and Ocean has excellent engineers with a very professional structure." Chilton, meanwhile, has squeezed a lot into his 18 years, including fourth in the British Formula 3 championship. "It's a big step, but I am motivated," Chilton said.



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10 THINGS WE LEARNED FROM GP2 IN 2009

From Romain Grosjean's extraordinary start to the year through to Nico Hulkenberg's commanding finish, the 2009 GP2 season was not only eventful, it was enlightening

120 TOTAL NUMBER OF LAPS LED BY VITALY PETROV DURING 2009

592 TOTAL NUMBER OF RACING LAPS IN 2009

22 NUMBER OF DRIVERS WHO SCORED POINTS DURING THE SEASON

2945KM RACING DISTANCE COVERED IN 2009

01 EXPERIENCE IS OVERRATED



No previous GP2 season could hold a candle to the 2009 GP2 field in terms of experience. Not only that, but many of the most highly-rated, well-seasoned drivers were with proven race-winning teams.

The likes of Lucas Di Grassi, Vitaly Petov, Luca Filippi, Javier Villa and Andi Zuber had been in the series since 2006, Pastor Maldonado and Karun Chandhok since 2007. Looking at it that way, pre-

season favourite Romain Grosjean – a second-year driver – seemed relatively green.

So for Nico Hulkenberg to come along as a rookie and beat them all was quite an achievement. "I had to learn quicker and work harder," was his explanation, although the German's extraordinary natural ability behind the wheel didn't hurt either.

But it wasn't just Hulkenberg who put the veterans to shame – Edoardo Mortara got a win for Arden on his debut at Barcelona, and fellow rookie Giedo van der Garde had three victories under his belt by the end of the season.

Rookie team Ocean Racing Technology came close to victory in only its second race weekend when Karun Chandhok led the sprint at Monaco. Another opportunity came at Spa when Alvaro Parente put his car on pole, and the Portuguese driver followed it up with a feature race win the next day.

02 TALENT IS EVERYWHERE

One of the great injustices of motorsport is that your position – whether it be on the grid, in the race classification, or in the championship standings – is not necessarily a fair representation of your ability. Racing is subject to all sorts of external factors ranging from choice of team to driving style, which is why there's never a shortage of dark horses.

The flipside to that is that there is always the potential for a pleasant surprise, and by far the biggest one this year was Kamui Kobayashi's performance in F1. The Japanese driver's year started well when he claimed the 2008/9 Asia Series title for DAMS, but he struggled to carry that kind of form over into the main series –

as evidenced by the fact that team-mate Jerome d'Ambrosio scored two-thirds of DAMS' points. But an injury to another GP2 graduate, Timo Glock, created a sudden opening for Kobayashi at Toyota F1, and he responded with two great drives that culminated in points at Abu Dhabi and a chorus of platitudes.

Closer to home was Alberto Valerio's win at in the feature race at Silverstone. While the 2009 season might have been a bit testing for Piquet GP at times, this was a definite highlight – the Brazilian qualified on the front row and then passed Romain Grosjean to take the lead. Valerio's a good driver, but we'd still like to know what odds you'd have got on that prior to the weekend...

03 RIVALS CAN BE FRIENDS



The relationship between team-mates is a strange one. On paper, the team-mate is the first person that a driver needs to beat – with theoretically equal equipment and the same team management steering the ship, the person on the other side of the garage is always the first person you'll be measured against.

But as much as you need to beat your team-mate, you also need to work with them. It's much

easier to find a few tenths if you have two sets of data to look at instead of one.

One thing team-mates can never be is friends. At least, that's the conventional wisdom. But no-one told this year's GP2 grid. Most inseparable were Trident duo Davide Rigon and Ricardo Teixeira, who shared a car to the track each day (usually with Rigon driving), ate together... they even shared the same bit of track during qualifying at Silverstone.

Honourable mentions should also go to iSport pair Giedo van der Garde and Diego Nunes and Racing Engineering's Lucas di Grassi and Dani Clos, both of which would delight in regaling you with stories about their 2009 team-mates that we probably couldn't print here.

04 IS IT POSSIBLE

...to overtake at Les Combes without crashing. It's just that no-one managed to do it. At least, no-one until Piquet GP's Alberto Valerio came along. Not only did the permanently-

smiling Brazilian manage to make his move stick, he also found time to wave at Durango's Nelson Panciatici as he was driving past him.

Now *that's* class.



05 GP2 CARS ARE BUILT STRONG



Just ask Romain Grosjean, who misjudged an overtaking attempt on Andreas Zuber at Tabac during the sprint race at Monaco and found himself heading towards the barriers approximately 10 feet in the air.

"The car was completely destroyed," Grosjean told the *GP2 Insider* at the time. "When the car started flying I closed my eyes and crossed my arms – I had time to say, 'this is going to be a big one' – and then... bang!"

Despite the tremendous damage to the car, Grosjean was completely unharmed – dramatic proof, if any were needed, of how safe the GP2/08 chassis is.

Barwa Addax demonstrated the strength of the cars in final race of the year, when Vitaly Petrov stalled on the line and was hit at high speed by DPR's Michael Herck. A terrifying accident, but both drivers escaped without injury.



10 THINGS WE LEARNED FROM GP2 IN 2009

06

ANYONE CAN BE SURPRISED



Race Director Charlie Whiting probably thought he'd seen most of what motor racing can dish up during three decades in the sport – but that was before he crossed paths with Sergio Pérez.

The Mexican rookie proved his talent frequently with Arden during 2009, but many people will forever remember his season for the startled look on Whiting's face as Pérez jumped the start at Valencia and cruised past race control at low speed.

But for all the consternation that it caused at the time, it's only fair to point out that the indiscretion wasn't Pérez's fault – his clutch had failed, and because he had already selected a gear, the car began rolling forward. Still, if you're going to retire with a mechanical problem, you might as well do it in style ...

07

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL IT'S OVER

You have to feel for Racing Engineering. The team had high hopes going into the 2009 season, and with good reason: it was the reigning champion, having taken Giorgio Pantano to the 2008 title, it had a strong driver in Lucas Di Grassi and Dani Clos and a brand new sponsor in Fat Burner.

It became clear within the first few races that the championship would go elsewhere, so Racing Engineering reset

its sights on third in the championship. And it achieved that target – for a few minutes at least.

Racing Engineering's main rival for third spot was Super Nova, and while the latter had a strong weekend at the season finale in Portugal, fourth for Clos was enough to keep Racing Engineering ahead in the team standings.

But then Arden's Sergio Pérez, who'd previously set the fastest lap,

was bumped down to 11th place after passing the safety car during the race, meaning the fastest lap of the top ten finishers was set by Luca Filippi, earning an extra point for Super Nova.

A welcome stroke of luck for the British team, then, but desperately bad news for Fat Burner Racing Engineering, as that solitary point was enough to move their rivals back into third in the final team standings.



08

ART LOVES ROOKIES



ART Grand Prix now has three GP2 drivers' titles to its credit, with Nico Hülkenberg joining Nico Rosberg (2005) and Lewis Hamilton (2006). What did they all have in common? All three won their championships as GP2 rookies. If there is a secret knack to getting new

drivers quickly up to speed with a GP2 car, then ART clearly has it nailed – which is ominous news for its 2010 rivals, given that it has signed an all-rookie line-up of Jules Bianchi and Sam Bird. What are the odds of the team producing its fourth debutant champion next season?

10

THERE'S NO SUCH THING...



...as a team name that's too long. Fat Burner is reportedly a great weight-loss aid. Racing Engineering is undoubtedly a great team. Put them together and you get a fantastic red and yellow colour scheme, but you also get a team with a four-word moniker. But while 'Fat Burner Racing Engineering' took some getting used to, Paolo Coloni swatted it over the fence when he renamed his squad PartyPokerRacing.com Scuderia Coloni. There are already signs that the trend could be reversed in 2010 though, with the former Piquet GP team having taken the short and snappy approach in renaming itself 'Rapax'.

09

YOU CAN WIN EARLY AFTER ALL

GP2 entered uncharted territory in 2009 when it went into the final round with the drivers' championship already sown up, thanks to Nico Hülkenberg's extraordinary performance over the second half of the year. Nico Rosberg had to win the final race of the 2005 season in Bahrain to beat Heikki Kovalainen, Lewis Hamilton won the 2006 title over Nelson Piquet Jr in that year's feature race at Monza, Timo Glock capitalised on Lucas Di Grassi's bad weekend at Valencia to win in 2007, and Giorgio Pantano sealed his 2008 crown at Monza despite earning a penalty.

But while Hülkenberg sealed the deal in 2009 with a round to spare, there was still the team championship to fight for at the Algarve finale – or at least, there was until Hülkenberg put it beyond reach for ART Grand Prix with his feature race win.

100

NICO HÜLKENBERG'S POINTS HAUL

26.454s

BIGGEST WINNING MARGIN OF THE YEAR (NICO HÜLKENBERG, GERMANY SPRINT RACE)

0.385s

NARROWEST WINNING MARGIN OF THE YEAR (GIEDO VAN DER GARDE, HUNGARY SPRINT RACE)

5

NUMBER OF TIMES THAT POLE WAS DECIDED BY LESS THAN 0.1s

0.009s

CLOSEST POLE POSITION MARGIN (ROMAIN GROSJEAN, SPAIN)



THE FIRST ROUND OF THE GP2 ASIA SERIES TOOK PLACE ON 31 OCTOBER AND 1 NOVEMBER IN ABU DHABI

ISPORT LEAD THE WAY WITH 23 POINTS

YAS MARINA ABU DHABI (5-6 FEBRUARY)

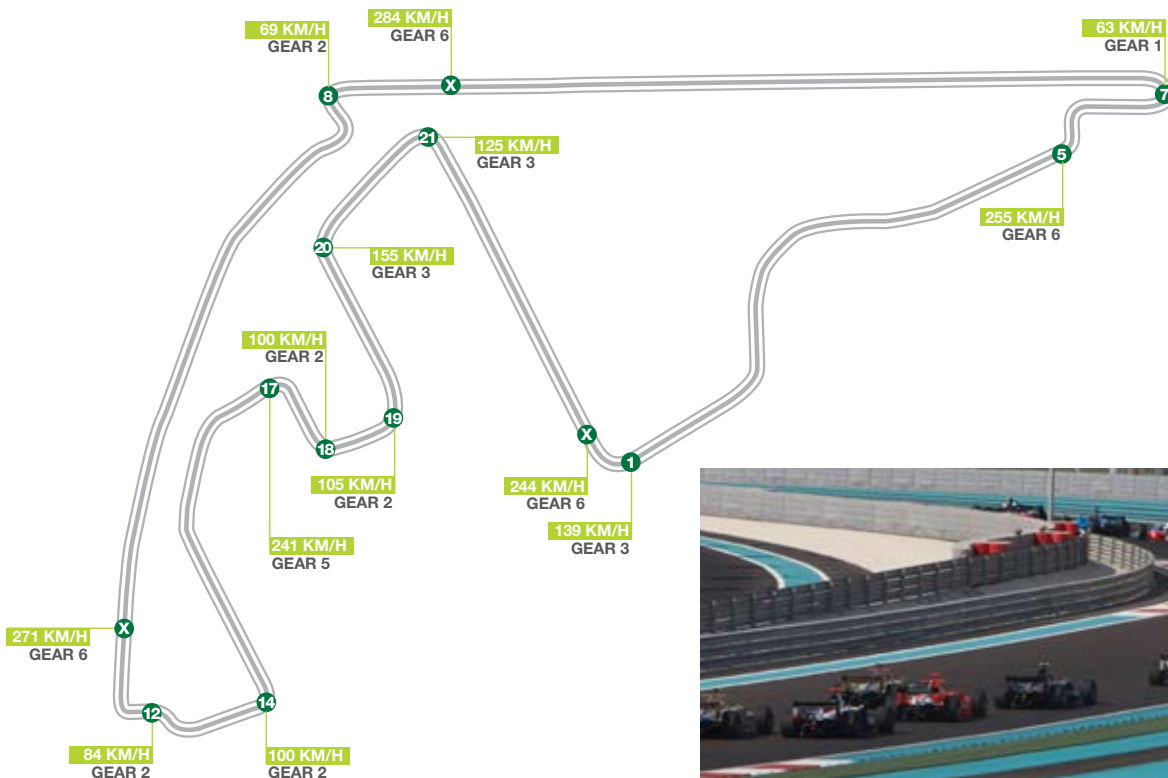
TRACK LENGTH
5.555KM

2009 FEATURE RACE WINNER
DAVIDE VALSECCHI

2009 SPRINT RACE WINNER
CHRISTIAN VIOTORIS

2009 track temp
37°

2009 race weather
31°



DRIVER'S EYE VIEW

SAM BIRD
ART GRAND PRIX



"If you're going to be quick at Abu Dhabi, the main area that you need to get right is sector two and sector three – the tight and twisty area near the hotel.

That's extremely important, as there's a lot of time to be gained in all those little corners. It's a very technical section, and it's also very easy to lose time there. So in order to be quick, you need to be tidy through all of those corners – you can't afford any small mistakes, because they can really punish you.

You can overtake at Yas Marina, too. Although you didn't see much in the F1 race, I think there will be a lot more in the GP2 race. There's a long, long back

straight at the end of sector one, and there's an opportunity to overtake going into the braking zone. It requires a lot of guts to try it, because everybody at the front of the pack is already braking quite late there. But it is possible.

One big talking point before our first race there was the pit exit tunnel, but to be honest it wasn't as big an issue as I thought it would be.

When I was walking the track I thought 'Oh my gosh, this is going to be challenging', and to be honest I did give it too much respect last time I was there. But I can assure you that I'll be pushing hard there next time!"

9 THE POINTS GAP BETWEEN ISPORT AND SUPER NOVA AFTER THE FIRST ROUND

TOTAL POINTS SCORED BY DAVIDE VALSECCHI DURING THE WEEKEND **19**

178.578km/h AVERAGE SPEED OF DAVIDE VALSECCHI'S POLE LAP



CLICK HERE FOR BIRD'S PROFILE