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29 October 2008

GP2 ASIA SERIES Shanghai



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RODRIGUEZ Q&A
ROLDAN'S FIRST GP2 WIN

DRIVER DIARY
THE INSIDE LINE ON GP2

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Bruno Michel

Despite having one of the busiest months ever in GP2, series organiser Bruno Michel still found time to give us the inside line on an expanded Asian calendar and the new season.

We had barely cleared away the empty champagne bottles from the GP2 Series prize giving on September 14 before the bubbly was flying again on the first podium of this new GP2 Asia season.

It was a big challenge for us to get everything ready for a mid-October start in Shanghai, to squeeze two days of testing in and for the teams to complete their driver lineups, but everyone has done a good job pulling things together, and we were rewarded with two great races at one of Asia's biggest F1 events.

And those driver lineups that the teams have come up with feature some interesting names. They include quite a lot of Asian drivers, eight in total, which is one of the key purposes of the series. It's too early in the season to make any predictions, but what is clear from what we've seen so far, is that Kamui Kobayashi is right on the pace, and some of the more experienced racers like Davide Valsecchi and Vitaly Petrov are also going to be up there.

New blood

In addition to these guys who have some GP2 experience, we also have some rookies like Earl Bamber, Chris van der Garde and Yuhi Sekiguchi who look like they'll be quick. But overall it is just a very strong field, and one that lets emerging Asian drivers mix it with more established European guys.

And that's what this series is all about. We've got a calendar that combines stand alone events with F1 support races to make sure that we give the drivers maximum exposure - the title will probably be decided in front of F1 teams in Malaysia or Bahrain.

Being close to the top

It is always important to be close to F1 for as many races as possible - that's another one of the purposes of GP2 - and the drivers have to be seen by the team principals in F1. For our part I think we bring some fresh air to the F1 events. We bring an exciting show and everyone in F1 is always very happy to watch the GP2 races. I've been told that when there's a GP2 race it's more difficult for the F1 teams to work because everybody is watching our champagne moments!



Kamui Kobayashi passes the famous Shanghai grandstand

Q&A PETER THOMPSON

GP2 Asia specialists My Qi-Meritus.Mahara spent the summer gearing up for an assault on the Asian titles. We caught up with manager Peter Thompson for the lowdown

It's Meritus' second year of GP2 Asia, have you been looking forward to it?

Very much so. It came around so quickly this time, but it looks like we are okay. We got hold of the car in June and have been working on it in our European base in Monza since then. In fact we've put so much time in that we missed our shipping date and had to air freight our cars out to Shanghai!



the feature race - we could have grabbed the team championship in our first year. Competing in GP2 Asia for us is all about success and winning.

Are there any areas in particular where you think you can make that last step to become a championship winning team?

Absolutely. We have a very experienced team. Jianfranco our

team principal has 42 years of motorsport experience and has won at nearly every level. The engineers and the mechanics are some of the best in Europe, and very experienced. Shanghai was a difficult place for us to go because we had no back up data to refer to but we still walked away fifth in the team standings, with Earl Bamber having finished second in the sprint race. So we will build as we get onto circuits we are more familiar with and from the second race we'll be even better.

Some people were quite surprised by how well you did last year as the only rookie team in the GP2 Asia Series.

Well we're very serious about what we do, and this is a very important championship for us. We've been racing in Asia now for 12 or 13 years and we've won every year, so this year we are aiming to win the GP2 Asia championship. I really believe that last year if we hadn't had that small mistake in Indonesia - where Luca Filippi was excluded after winning

Q&A ROLDAN RODRIGUEZ

Piquet Sports driver Roldan Rodriguez collected the first GP2 win of his career in Shanghai after pipping Dams' Kamui Kobayashi to pole position and the bonus points in the final moments of qualifying.

How does it feel to get off to such a strong start in GP2 Asia?

Getting the feature race win and the extra points for pole position was a perfect start for us, and getting my first GP2 win felt fantastic, brilliant. But the object is to win the championship, not only to win one race. Piquet Sports is ready to win a

title and things are perfect in the team so I'll do my best to make sure we achieve that aim. This was the start of that but this is just a start and we must keep pushing.

You hadn't topped the time sheets before qualifying, where did the extra half a second come from?

Everywhere. On my final qualifying lap I just pushed hard everywhere. I could see from the data afterwards that I was finding time all around the circuit. With low fuel at the end of the session, and the rear tyres wearing a bit the car was balancing out and I could go quicker in the corners.

How was it holding off Kamui Kobayashi in the closing stages of the race?

I just tried to push on every lap and not think about how far was left. The car had the same feeling as when I put in my quick qualifying lap so I knew that I was fast enough to stay clear of him and that as long as I didn't make a mistake he wouldn't be able to pass me. Sure, he was quick, but so was I.

Rodriguez celebrates his Chinese victory



[CLICK HERE FOR ROLDAN'S PROFILE](#)

GOOD MONTH

ROLDAN RODRIGUEZ

A superb start to the season included a last gasp pole, the Spaniard's first GP2 feature race win and a points finish in the sprint. Heading for Dubai he sits three points clear of second at the top of the standings

DAVIDE VALSECCHI

The young Italian is making up for lost time. After missing much of the GP2 Series through injury he finished off the season with a sprint race win in Italy, before repeating the feat at Shanghai

EARL BAMBER

The Meritus driver left China as the highest ranked GP2 rookie. Starting from ninth and finishing sixth in race one, the Kiwi went on to steer clear of trouble in the sprint race, where a composed drive took him to second on an unfamiliar circuit.

ARDEN

British outfit Trust Team Arden came second overall in the inaugural GP2 Asia team championship, but if they are to scale those heights again, they need to be sure not to have too many weekends like China. Mika Maki's tenth in race two was their only finish as Luca Razia failed to go the distance in either outing.

FMS

Frustrating stuff from the off. Andreas Zuber could have rightly expected to be mixing it at the front in China, but an engine failure in qualifying meant last place on the grid. He and team mate Kevin Nai Chai Chen failed to finish the feature, before technical problems in the sprint left Zuber stranded on the start line.

BAD MONTH

For all the latest news log on to: WWW.GP2SERIES.COM

GP2 hall of fame



In a celebration of GP2's success as Formula 1's strongest feeder series, gp2series.com has launched its drivers hall of fame.

The GP2 Series completed its fourth season on September 14 this year in Monza but as the hall of fame shows eight GP2 graduates have already made it to full time F1 race seats, even before the 2009 driver line-ups have been announced.

The hall of fame can be accessed through the GP2 Series website and features full GP2 and F1 records for Nico Rosberg, Lewis Hamilton, Timo Glock, Giorgio Pantano, Heikki Kovalainen, Nelson Piquet, Kazuki Nakajima and Scott Speed.

"It's a great way for us to show off how successful GP2 has been as preparing drivers for the pinnacle of single seat racing in F1, there are some seriously quick guys in that lineup," explained Alexa Quintin of GP2.

"And as we head for the fifth season of GP2 Series racing it's also good to take a bit of a look backwards and bring together all our past champions in one place. We'll also be making a few improvements to the hall of fame in the coming months, so keep an eye out."

TRIO MAKING TITLE CLAIM

Experienced GP2 campaigners, Kamui Kobayashi, Roldan Rodriguez and Davide Valsecchi are promising a fierce title battle.

Rodriguez, who is three points clear in the standings, told the GP2 e-zine that his goal is winning the championship with a Piquet GP team that he believes is "ready to win titles".

If Rodriguez is to come good on his title claim though he will have to overcome Kobayashi, who proved fast in China and is being tipped by his Dams team boss. "He is getting stronger," said Eric Boullier. "He will be ready to fight for the title in both series and I'm expecting him to be a front runner." Valsecchi meanwhile has promised to stay in the top five following his sprint race in China



GP3 SERIES TO LAUNCH IN 2010

Head of Formula One Management Bernie Ecclestone has given the new GP3 Series his backing after it was announced that the new stepping-stone to GP2 will be launched during the 2010 season.

Ecclestone said: "After the tremendous success of the GP2 Series, I believe this GP3 Series will be an opportunity for drivers, engineers and mechanics who are making their way to Formula One. I wish good luck to this Series."

The GP3 races will take place during GP2 weekends and will feature a two litre, 250BHP engine, while the chassis will incorporate the latest single seater design features. Suppliers for the engine,

chassis and tyres are yet to be decided, but the series organisers are currently in discussion with a number of manufacturers.

GP2 Series organiser Bruno Michel added: "The philosophy behind GP3 Series will be very similar to what we did in GP2 regarding the performance of the car, the control of the costs, the show, the safety and the training to access to the following category, but adjusted to the level of this new Series.

"We will make sure that this Series will be as successful as GP2 in revealing young drivers able to jump to the next step. We are looking forward to 2010!"

FROM THE GP2SERIES.COM BLOG



"And then, finally, it was time for everyone to let their hair down at the end of year party, a chance to finally unwind and enjoy themselves with everyone else in the paddock. Unless you had to organise everything, that is: poor Alexa didn't seem to breathe until the awards were handed out and Sakon

Yamamoto started DJing inside. As usual the party was a huge success: despite the constant battle on track everyone gets on well with everyone else in the paddock, a large moving family which spends its life fighting with itself only to throw its arms around everyone else when the pressure is finally off."

DRIVER DIARY YUHI SEKIGUCHI - DPR

YUHI SEKIGUCHI TALKS US THROUGH HIS FIRST EVER GP2 RACE WEEKEND



FRIDAY

I came here for the test last week, but qualifying will be the first time that I have ever driven competitively on the Shanghai

circuit so it feels different today, really exciting. As I arrive, the first thing I see is those famous discs above the main grandstand. That gives me a real buzz. It's a big, famous F1 circuit and the biggest event that I've been involved in.

Qualifying starts at around 11 and all the GP2 teams are allocated a pit box in front of one of the F1 garages. Ours is outside McLaren-Mercedes and as I sit in the car, I look across and can just glimpse two F1 cars that are being raced by guys who had been driving in this series only a few years ago.

The session doesn't go so well for me

though and after yellow flags cut two of my flying laps short there's a big crash.

Qualifying is stopped early and I'm in P17. My sector times on the laps that were yellow flagged show I could have gone into P8 or P9 and I'm sure my pace will show tomorrow once the race starts.

SATURDAY

I'm at the circuit talking setup with my engineers by 10, then we run through pit stops. GP2 is the first series I've raced that has them, but it's not a problem and I head off for food and to relax before the race.

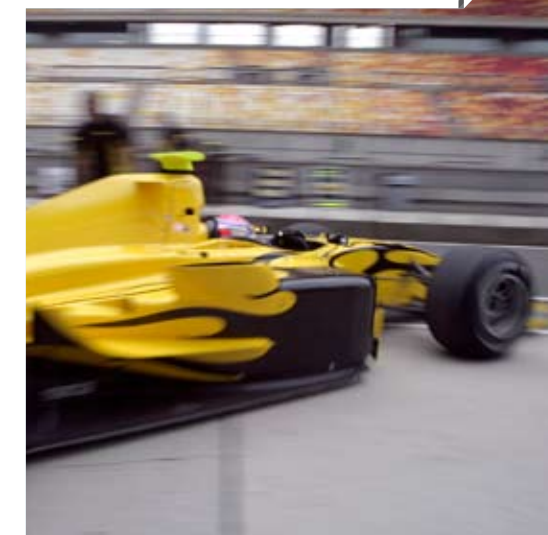
Four o'clock comes around and I'm about to start racing in front of F1 teams. Being in F1 is something I've wanted since I was a six and racing karts, but I'm realistic. I'm in P17 and still have a way to go before I get to be in those pit garages.

I show some good pace in the race, passing people up to ninth. As Luca Filippi and I approach turns one and two I see him go wide but wasn't going to try a pass. Then he seems to lose some traction and I take my normal line on the inside before realising too late that Luca takes a wide line into those corners and is turning in. I try to get out of the way but the car is understeering - Arrrgh! There is nothing I can do and we collide, putting us both out of the race. It's disappointing because the setup felt great, and worse still I find out that I've been given a five place grid penalty for race two tomorrow.

SUNDAY

I start the 11:30 sprint race back in 23rd, soon realising the setup that felt so good yesterday isn't as good in today's heat.

I don't have the same pace as in race one, but still manage to move up the field and before long I'm behind Filippi again. We're approaching the same spot where we hit each other yesterday, but this time we know exactly what is going on! I back off and leave him space and he also stays a little wider to give me a gap on the inside. We stay apart but Luca's race finishes soon after on lap 10 and I race to 14th overall.

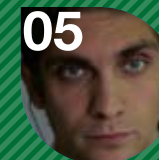


THE ASIAN DRIVERS



Sakon Yamamoto

TEAM: ART GRAND PRIX
LICENSE: JAPANESE
BIRTH: 09/07/1982
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



Vitaly Petrov

TEAM: BARWA INTERNATIONAL CAMPOS TEAM
LICENSE: RUSSIAN
BIRTH: 08/09/1984
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



Kamui Kobayashi

TEAM: DAMS
LICENSE: JAPANESE
BIRTH: 13/09/1986
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



Hamad Al Fardan

TEAM: GFH TEAM ISPORT
LICENSE: BAHRAINI
BIRTH: 29/06/1987
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



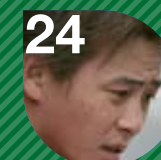
Alex Yoong

TEAM: MY QI-MERITUS.MAHARA
LICENSE: MALAYSIAN
BIRTH: 20/07/1976
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



Yuhi Sekiguchi

TEAM: DPR
LICENSE: JAPANESE
BIRTH: 29/12/1987
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



Hiroki Yoshimoto

TEAM: BCN COMPETICION
LICENSE: JAPANESE
BIRTH: 02/10/1980
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)



Andreas Zuber

TEAM: FMS INTERNATIONAL
LICENSE: UAE
BIRTH: 09/10/1983
[gp2series.com profile](http://gp2series.com/profile)

RACE REPORT

CLICK HERE FOR RACE IMAGES

CHINA

Shanghai (October 18-19)



GP2 Asia's first Chinese event got the season off to an incident packed start on the Shanghai circuit



Kobayashi passes Rodriguez for the lead on Saturday

Feature race (34 laps)

- 1 Roldan Rodriguez (Piquet)
- 2 Kamui Kobayashi (Dams)
- 3 Sakon Yamamoto (ART)
- 4 Javier Villa (Super Nova)
- 5 Vitaly Petrov (Campos)
- 6 Earl Bamber (Qi-Meritus)
- 7 Chris van der Drift (Trident)
- 8 Davide Valsecchi (Durango)

Fastest lap Kamui Kobayashi
Pole position Roldan Rodriguez

Sprint race (23 laps)

- 1 Davide Valsecchi (Durango)
- 2 Earl Bamber (Qi-Meritus)
- 3 Javier Villa (Super Nova)
- 4 Chris van der Drift (Trident)
- 5 Jérôme D'Ambrosio (Dams)
- 6 Roldan Rodriguez (Piquet)
- 7 Sergio Perez (Campos)
- 8 Hiroki Yoshimoto (BCN)

Fastest lap Sakon Yamamoto
Pole position Davide Valsecchi

A stunning last lap effort in qualifying put Piquet Sports' Roldan Rodriguez in pole position for Saturday's feature race, pilfering the extra points from Kamui Kobayashi after the Dams driver had been fastest in every test and practice session prior to qualifying.

Once the lights had gone out though the Toyota F1 test driver soon re-asserted himself, taking the lead back from Rodriguez during the first lap. Kobayashi settled into an unerring rhythm even as numerous incidents behind the pair brought out the safety car.

Its final appearance came ten laps from the end of the race, and soon afterwards, with the lead pair still bunched up, Kobayashi made a mistake at turn two, running wide and letting Rodriguez through for the win. ART's

Sakon Yamamoto came in third putting two Japanese drivers on the Asia Series' first podium, while Kiwi's Chris van der Drift and Earl Bamber were the highest ranked rookies in sixth and seventh.

A victory in Sunday's sprint race meant that Durango's Davide Valsecchi, who won race two at Monza last month, started GP2 Asia as he finished the GP2 Series season.

Starting from pole, the Italian withstood constant pressure from My Qi-Meritus.Mahara rookie Earl Bamber during the first 15 laps before pulling out a comfortable two second lead for the win. Bamber and Super Nova's Javier Villa made up the top three, while Rodriguez's sixth place was enough to keep him at the top of the driver standing's ahead of the Dubai race next month.

DUBAI PREVIEW



Dates 5-6 December
Track length 4.290km (2.666 miles)
Website www.dso.ae

Dubai's harbour area is shadowed by the ever-changing skyline



After Shanghai's curtain-raiser, next stop for GP2 Asia is Dubai and the first of two events at the Dubai Autodrome. Vitaly Petrov fills us in.

Last season, events in Dubai book-ended the inaugural GP2 Asia Series, and as a result the 3.4 mile circuit is a familiar hunting ground for Barwa Campos International Team's Vitaly Petrov. The 24-year-old Russian finished third in the first season of GP2 Asia and is looking forward to capitalising on his experience in Dubai.

"The Dubai circuit feels good in a GP2 car, and it's in quite an amazing city. The first time you see those huge towers when you arrive is a real surprise," explains Petrov, who also took part in a pre-season test at the track back in January. "You need quite a long time to learn the circuit and also to find the setup. It's technical and quite difficult in places, so it's very important to find the line, but we have some good setup information from there that we managed to get last season."

In addition to the team's stock of technical data from

last season, Petrov believes that his time behind the wheel will also pay dividends.

"I've had four races in Dubai, and anyone who has experience there should be at an advantage. It will be very different for us than racing in China on the first weekend where we've had very little experience and when we arrived, no data to use as a starting point.

"There are a couple of areas on the circuit in particular where a bit of knowledge puts you in a good position. For example, turns one and two flow into each other, and after the first corner there is a very fast line if you can avoid going down hill in the braking zone. Similarly, before the long straight you have a long left corner with lots of bumps and reverse camber, which makes it very interesting - But I'm not going to give away all my secrets now!"

DUBAI - CITY PROFILE

Dubai is one of the fastest growing and progressive places in the United Arab Emirates. Hugely multi-cultural, it is famed for its perpetual construction and the constantly changing

skyline hosts scores of huge hotel buildings and apartments. It's über-rich reputation is well earned, but bargain hunters can still find a lot that is affordable in the modern malls and more

traditional souks. The latter also offers up well-priced local food and drink if the international glass and marble restaurants are not to your taste or budget.

Driver standings

- 1 Roldan Rodriguez 13 pts
- 2 Javier Villa 10 pts
- 3 Kamui Kobayashi 9 pts
- 4 Earl Bamber 8 pts
- 5 Vitaly Petrov 7 pts
- 6 Sakon Yamamoto 6 pts
- 7 Chris van der Drift 5 pts
- 8 Vitaly Petrov 4 pts

Team standings

- 1 Piquet GP 13 pts
- 2 Dams 11 pts
- 3 Super Nova 10 pts
- 4 My Qi-Meritus.Mahara 8 pts
- 5 Durango 7 pts
- 6 ART Grand Prix 6 pts
- 7 Trident Racing 5 pts
- 8 Barwa Int. Campos 4 pts



STAY

Dubai and understated. The two words are about as incongruous as GP2 and boring, so if the bank account allows throw cash and self-consciousness to the wind and head for the iconic seven star Burj Al Arab hotel (www.burj-al-arab.com). The 321 metre high building holds no fewer than eight eateries as well as tennis courts, a health club and indoor and outdoor pools.

EAT

It is no surprise that in a city developed in the main as an international playground cuisines from around the world have converged on Dubai. The Legends Steakhouse in the Dubai Creek Golf Club offers... well...legendary steaks and epic ocean views. Less western fare can be found at Tagine in the Royal Mirage (oneandonlyresorts.com) which offers up Moroccan food in sumptuous surrounds.

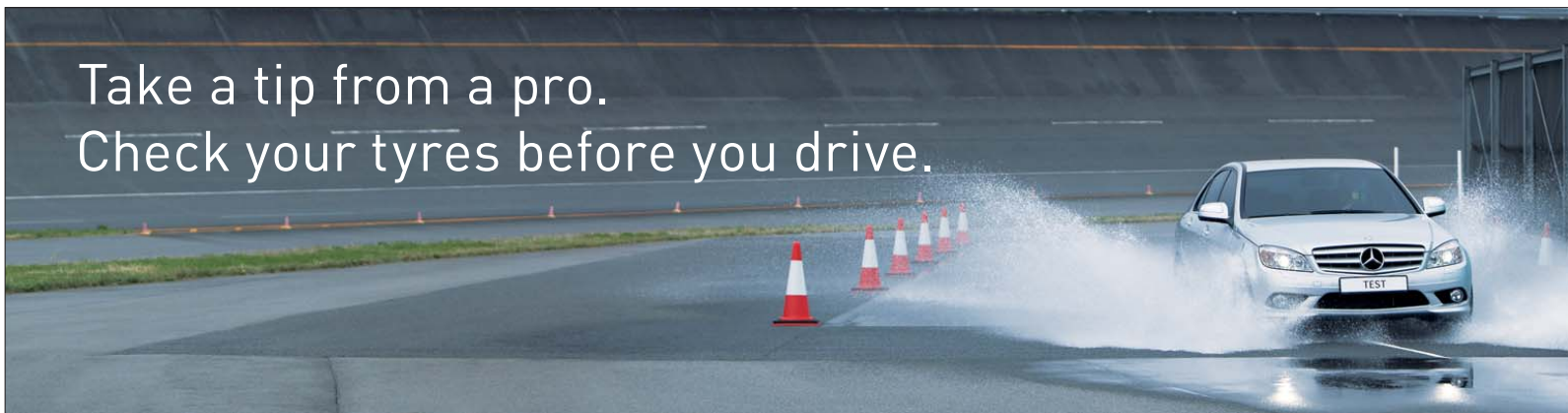
SEE

If you have any time left after exploring whichever superhotel you're bedded down in why not head for one of Dubai's more surreal experiences - a giant snowdome in the heart of the desert city. The Dubai Ski Centre (skidubai.com) is the world's biggest indoor slope, boasting fake snow, alpine themed restaurants - the lot!

GP2 Asia calendar

- Oct 18/19 - Shanghai
- Dec 5/6 - Dubai
- Jan 23/24 - Bahrain
- Feb 27/28 - Dubai
- Apr 4/5 - Sepang
- Apr 18/19 - Bahrain

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