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12 December 2008

GP2 ASIA SERIES Dubai

Asia's rising son

An exclusive interview
with Kobayashi as he
tops the standings

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MONTEIRO Q&A
HIS FIRST AS A TEAM OWNER

GROSJEAN
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From the top

Reigning GP2 Asia champion Romain Grosjean gives us an exclusive insight into his thoughts on the current GP2 Asia drivers and his plans for '09.

It may seem like the start of the 2009 season is a long way away, but I can't wait to get going. It looks like I will be racing in the GP2 Series again next season but at the moment I can't confirm who that will be with. Whatever car I end up in though the ambition will be the same and that is to make it into Formula 1 as soon as I can.

There's no quick or easy way of doing it, getting into F1 is hard work. In some ways, you feel like a deal is close, but, at the same time it can feel far away. GP2 is now well-recognised as the series below F1, and all the teams are the other side of the GP2 paddock as we share the same races. But, at the same time, the closer you get to F1, the harder the competition gets.

The numbers game

There are only 20 seats in F1, and there are just 26 in GP2, where you have the best young drivers from all around the world coming to race. You have to do enough just to get a seat in GP2, and I will have to win the GP2 championship to be sure of a race seat in F1. There is another season, and 10 more races, to win before I can look at stepping up.

Of course, the more experienced you are before GP2, the faster you will be, so having the GP2 Asia series is very useful – especially if you can win it.

There's a lot to think about in GP2 – the long races, the power of the car, the changing weight of fuel over the race, and the rate of tyre degradation. And, for most drivers, GP2 is the first

time they'll experience a race with a pitstop. You need to get the pitlane entry right, and get used to the fact that the car feels very different when you go in, compared to when you come out.

All this is particularly tough when you consider that the rookies have such little free practice on circuits that they may never have raced on before. They tend to improve a lot over a race weekend because they build up their feeling for the track.

Standing out

Looking at GP2 Asia right now, Sakon Yamamoto and Davide Valsecchi are both doing a good job, but Kamui Kobayashi is the one who has been outstanding. I'm not surprised, though. We were team-mates in Formula 3, so I know him well. Last year he was fast and, when he has a good car underneath him, he can be very fast.

If he can push in the GP2 Series as well, then that will put him in a very strong position. As you can see from Bruno Senna, Sébastien Buemi and Lucas di Grassi in 2008, the leaders in GP2 tend to get a shot in F1.



Grosjean on his way to the GP2 Asia title

Q&A TIAGO MONTEIRO

New GP2 Series and GP2 Asia team Ocean Racing made its debut in Dubai. Ex-Formula 1 driver, current WTCC star and now team boss Tiago Monteiro talks about his new venture

Why did you choose to go after this spot in the GP2 Series?

It chose me! I always wanted to be involved in a racing team later on in my career. I just didn't think it would come so early. But I am always up for new challenges, so, when this opportunity came along, I took it!



Are you setting any particular goals or timescales for the team's development at the moment?

It's a bit difficult, but basically we want to learn as much as possible in the GP2 Asia series, and test some young drivers. We want to be in a position to start right at the front when the GP2 Series comes around! But still we need to be realistic and it will be hard fight.

Are you planning to be hands on with the drivers at each race weekend?

Although my main job is racing and will be for some time, I am involved 100 per cent on this. I will be in the WTCC again next year, fighting for victories. With Ocean Racing, I'm specially involved with the drivers, as this is where I have the experience that can help us win races.

How long do you think it will take before the team is competitive at the sharp end?

This first weekend for us in Dubai showed that we can be there pretty quickly. But let's not forget how competitive this championship is. We need to work a lot, and learn as a team.

Q&A ERIC BOULLIER

The Dams team currently sits on top of the team and driver standings. Technical director Eric Boullier explains how its success is the result of continuity rarely found in the fast-paced world of GP2.

You must be very pleased with your GP2 Asia campaign so far.

Definitely. The first race in Shanghai was a bit frustrating. We could have won it with Kamui Kobayashi, but, after Dubai everything is looking better. Kamui won the feature race and Jérôme d'Ambrosio looked very quick.

What do you put Kobayashi's recent improvement down to?

GP2 takes a bit of getting used to for the driver, so I would mainly put his pace down to continuity. It is very important to build a good relationship between the driver and the team. After one year with us, he has learnt the circuits and the cars and the way that the team works. So his improvement is really a logical consequence of all of that.

He's one of the few drivers to have raced in both GP2 Asia and the GP2 Series. Has that helped?

Sure. This was one of the reasons why we signed with both drivers for the long term. It's one of the keys to success to have this continuity, and for the drivers to have so much GP2 experience. As well as being an important competition, GP2 Asia is also a chance to get more mileage in the car.

And will they be staying for 2009?

Yes. There is no reason why they won't be with us next year.

Boullier is pleased with how his drivers are developing



GOOD MONTH



DAMS

Kamui Kobayashi took maximum points in Dubai, winning the feature race from pole and notching up the fastest lap on the way. That was enough to put him on top of the drivers' standings, while Jérôme d'Ambrosio's dash to seventh in the Dubai feature race ensured Dams ends 2008 on top of the teams' classification.



DAVIDE VALSECCHI

After a challenging GP2 Series in 2008 that was punctuated by injury, Valsecchi is starting to show what he is capable of. Another podium in Dubai put him third in the championship, while some impressive times during testing the GP2 Series car bode well for 2009.



OCEAN RACING

For a team that had only been in existence for a week come the Dubai event, Ocean Racing made a very solid start to its GP2 existence. Yelmer Buurman managed sixth on the grid, while Fabrizio Crestani made up nine places during the feature race.



TRIDENT

Dubai proved to be a tricky hunting ground for the Italian outfit. Chris van der Drift was unable to follow up a promising performance in Shanghai, retiring on lap 13 of Dubai feature race, while the experienced Alberto Valerio could only race to 16th. Expect improvements in '09.



ANDREAS ZUBER

The GP2 veteran's title challenge in GP2 Asia is stuck in neutral. After qualifying 11th in Dubai, he finished the feature race dead last – four laps down on the leaders and 10 spots shy of his grid place.

BAD MONTH

CLICK HERE
DAMS' PROFILE

Rivals fill Dubai podium

GP2 Asia has now had three different winners in as many races and as the Dubai podium illustrated, the main title rivals are beginning to emerge.

All three of Kamui Kobayashi (centre), Roldan Rodriguez (right) and Davide Valsecchi (left) have won races this season and now sit first, second and third in the overall standings.

Following his feature race win and fastest lap in Dubai, Dams' Kobayashi became the first Asian driver to take the lead in the GP2 Asia series. He leads Rodriguez by just three points and Valsecchi by seven.



GP2 SERIES DRIVERS STEP UP TO FORMULA 1

Three GP2 Series graduates have been testing in Formula 1 this month, and are all in contention for race seats in 2009.

Bruno Senna, Lucas di Grassi and Sébastien Buemi took part in last month's F1 tests in Barcelona – Senna and di Grassi joining the Honda Racing team, and Buemi working with the Scuderia Toro Rosso outfit.

Buemi posted impressive times in what was essentially a three-way shootout with STR incumbent Sébastien Bourdais and former Super Aguri F1 driver Takuma Sato.

Although STR's 2009 line-up is yet to be announced, Mateschitz has admitted that one of the drivers will "very likely be Buemi".

The picture for Senna and di Grassi is less clear. The pair had been fighting for the seat alongside Button at Honda, but the team has been put up for sale. Senna remains hopeful of an F1 drive for next year.

"It was a great chance to show what I can do in an F1 car," he said. "We haven't given up on racing in F1 next year, though, and we're working hard on opportunities."



GP2 TEAMS PREPARE FOR '09 SEASON

Dams driver Kamui Kobayashi and Roldan Rodriguez of Piquet GP topped two days of GP2 Series testing at Paul Ricard in November, while GP2 Series hopeful Will Bratt posted an eye-catching performance for DPR.

The young Briton put in 48 laps on day one – more than any other driver – and finished the day second-fastest just 0.3 seconds behind current GP2 Asia leader Kamui Kobayashi.

Bratt has yet to sign a race contract for 2009, but DPR co-owner David Price admitted that his impressive pace makes him an attractive proposition.

"When you consider he's got no real track record behind him, and has been in Spanish F3 this year,

he surprised us all with his speed," said Price. "He's very bright, and he's well worth us looking at him for next year."

It was Rodriguez who set the pace on a wet second day of testing, though, as a number of red flags interrupted the session.

Also in action at Paul Ricard was reigning GP2 Series champion Giorgio Pantano. The Italian was testing with GP2's technical staff as part of the car's winter development programme.

Speaking after the test, Pantano said: "I am really grateful to have been given the opportunity to help develop the car: The GP2 Series will always be a very important part of my career, and I am glad to be able to help them."

ART FINALISES ITS LINE-UP

ART Grand Prix has confirmed its driver lineup for the 2009 GP2 Series, pairing GP2 race winner Pastor Maldonado with 21-year-old German, Nico Hülkenberg (right).

Maldonado joined his new team in Dubai, retiring on lap 30 of the feature and missing out on the chance to race in the rain-hit sprint.

Commenting on his new signing, ART team principle Frederic Vasseur said: "Pastor had an exceptional end to the 2008 season, scoring more points than any other driver.



"With his raw speed, his experience of the series and knowledge of the tracks, it will make him one of the favourites for the 2009 championship."

The Venezuelan's GP2 Series stablemate in '09 will

be reigning Formula 3 Euroseries champion Nico Hülkenberg, who won the title at a canter with ART.

Hülkenberg commented: "Next year will be a tough one because GP2 is extremely competitive, with great teams and great drivers. But I think that we have a good package ourselves, and we have to set our target high."

KOBAYASHI'S 12 OF THE BEST

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

Dams' Kamui Kobayashi has completed a season-and-a-half of GP2 Asia and a season of the GP2 Series in 2008. He looks back on his hectic year. Kobayashi has more GP2 experience than most, having taken part in an astounding 33 GP2 races this season, in both GP2 Asia and the GP2 Series.

We talked with the 22-year-old Japanese ace in Dubai to hear his thoughts on a packed season, and his Formula 1 ambitions with Toyota's Young Driver programme.

"Toyota decide what I'm going to do every year, so I knew my programme at the start of 2008," he says. "But, for me, this is good.

"I need support from Toyota to do

not a lot of running, so it's difficult to win when you first join. I think we improved during the year."

SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

"When it came to the main GP2 Series though I had really bad luck in 2008. I was often fast, but I had problems. Barcelona was good, because I got a win right at the start of the season. That was good for the points – I like to see a result.

"Silverstone was probably the highlight for me, though, because we had a fast car, and I had good pace – recovering from 25th place to finish seventh in the sprint event. But, in the end, we weren't quite competitive enough in the championship.

"I have to be in F1 in 2010 or I will have missed my chance"

GP2. It would be impossible for me to do it without them. They do reassess you every year, though, so I need to keep getting good results. If not, that's bad for me!"

A combination of this pressure, and Kobayashi's own ability behind the wheel, meant his GP2 learning curve was steep. He failed to score in his first two GP2 Asia races, but quickly got on the pace, finishing the Asia series in sixth place overall.

"GP2 is not easy," he says. "There's



AWAY FROM THE TRACK

ALEX YOONG, PUTTING SOMETHING BACK

Alex Yoong is unusual. He is, so far, the only Malaysian driver to make it to Formula 1. After that he also made the rare move from F1 to the GP2 Asia series by joining leading Asian squad My Qi-Meritus.Mahara.

And, being 32-years-old, Yoong is more seasoned than many of his up-and-coming rivals. That means the differences continue away from the track.

"I work when I'm not driving," he says. "I have a touring car team in the summer so that keeps me busy."

His Proton Axle Racing team has scored successes in Asia, but that is far from the end of Yoong's commitment to putting something back into the sport.

He knows that he is unique in Malaysian motorsport and is using that status to find the next star.

"I'm also a director on the Motorsports Association of Malaysia," he says. "I do a lot of work planning for the future and helping with promotion – helping the industry. I do enjoy it, but there's also no-one else to do it – it's not like in Europe, where there is a saturation of drivers."

Beyond that, Yoong is a family man. He doesn't chase another dangerous pursuit or a have specific hobby as many of his peers do.

"I get such a kick out of driving that I don't get the urge to do anything else," he asserts. "I do play football socially. It's quite serious – we train twice a week and play at weekends. But I often miss matches. In general, I find there aren't enough hours in the day!"

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

DUBAI REPORT

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Dubai (December 4-6)

Kamui Kobayashi gives Dams a great end to 2008 before rain stops play in the sprint

After narrowly missing victory in the GP2 Asia season-opener in Shanghai, Dams' Kamui Kobayashi made a strong statement of intent for the rest of the championship with pole position, a fastest lap and a feature race victory in Dubai.

The Japanese driver easily led from pole until the pitstops, when he lost places to Vitaly Petrov (Campos) and title rival Roldan Rodriguez (Piquet GP).

"I just didn't expect Petrov to come that quickly and I was just going in a normal pace," Kobayashi explained. "That's how I lost the lead, and it's why Rodriguez also passed me."

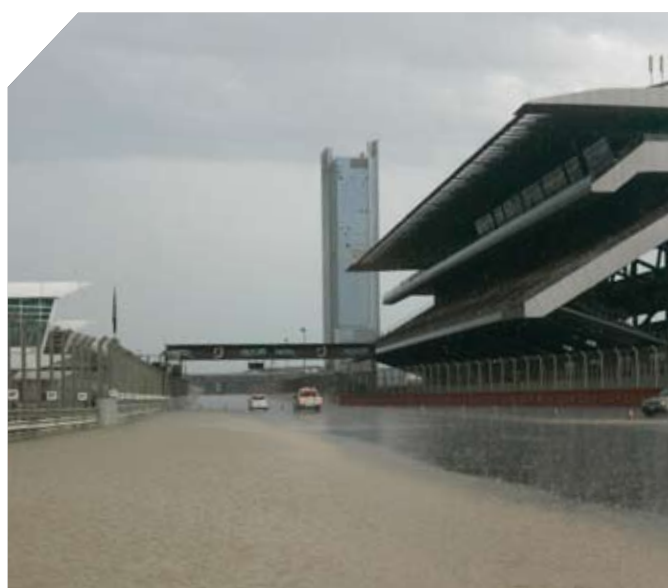
His response on the track

was immediate, though, passing Rodriguez and then Petrov at the same spot on consecutive laps. Both men lost places again to Durango's Davide Valsecchi, before Rodriguez leapfrogged Petrov in the closing stages for third.

As the Russian's tyres faded, Giedo Van der Garde of iSport also passed Petrov for fourth.

Having started from second place on the grid, ART's Sakon Yamamoto recovered from a first-lap spin, racing to eighth and pole position for the sprint. Heavy storms on Friday night flooded the Dubai track, though, forcing Saturday's racing to be cancelled.

CLICK HERE FOR RACE IMAGES



The cancellation of Saturday's sprint event was the first time that event organisers have ever had to call off a GP2 Series race since the championship started, back in 2005.

As GP2 press officer Alexa Quintin explained, it was not a

decision that was taken lightly. "It was a strange feeling to have to cancel a race, but we had no other option," she said. "The water was 15cm deep in places. We just had to hold our hands up and say we had been beaten by the elements."



Vitaly Petrov slipped from first to finish fifth in Dubai

Feature race (34 laps)

1 Kamui Kobayashi	(Dams)
2 Davide Valsecchi	(Durango)
3 Roldan Rodriguez	(Piquet)
4 G. Van Der Garde	(iSport)
5 Vitaly Petrov	(Campos)
6 Sergio Perez	(Campos)
7 Jérôme d'Ambrosio	(Dams)
8 Sakon Yamamoto	(ART)

Fastest lap Kamui Kobayashi
Pole position Kamui Kobayashi

BAHRAIN PREVIEW



Dates January 22-24
Track length 5.411km (3.370 miles)
Website www.bahraingp.com.bh



Bahrain's striking skyline

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Drivers' points

1 Kamui Kobayashi	22
2 Roldán Rodríguez	19
3 Davide Valsecchi	15
4 Javier Villa	10
5 Earl Bamber	8
6 Vitaly Petrov	8
7 Sakon Yamamoto	7
8 Chris van der Drift	5

Teams' points

1 Dams	26
2 Piquet GP	19
3 Durango	15
4 Campos	11
5 Super Nova	10
6 My Qi-Meritus Mahara	8
7 ART	7
8 Trident	5

iSport's Hamad Al Fardan explains what teams and fans can expect as GP2 Asia heads to his home race in the deserts of Bahrain

GFH Team iSport racer Hamad Al Fardan is looking forward to the next GP2 Asia event. He should be – it's in his native Bahrain. Who better then, to look ahead to round three of the 2008 GP2 Asia series?

Al Fardan's experience of the Bahrain International circuit (that also hosts the Formula 1 Grand Prix event) means he has a good idea of what to expect, when the GP2 Asia drivers travel there come the end of January.

"I did Formula BMW at Bahrain, and other small races," he says. "I know the track well and it will be good to be back home in front of my own people. It will be a really great event. Racing at home does put extra pressure on me, but there is always pressure in racing."

"It's not a very hard circuit to negotiate, but there is always dust on the track from the desert, so the grip levels are low, which can cause problems. I like the track, but one of the best things about Bahrain is the facilities you get around the circuit."

As well as the F1-level facilities, the venue should also provide some good, close racing.

"The first corner will be the main overtaking place because it's after a really long straight, so you can get a tow, and it's a really big stop," Al Fardan says.

"Maybe passing at turn eight will also be possible in GP2 cars. There is a long straight that leads into a very technical section and in my experience you can overtake on the inside or the outside."

"Because of the dust it's also easy to make a mistake. If you're chasing someone down you can afford to wait for an overtaking opportunity."

Like many circuits, Bahrain also offers an experience away from the track, though Fardan won't be drawn on his favourites! "The main thing you can do in Bahrain is to go shopping," he says. "There are really good, cheap, shopping malls. And there are lots of things for entertainment apart from the track, including clubs."

STAY

The extraordinary Banyan Tree Desert Spa Resort is certainly not for the faint of wallet. But, perfect if you don't mind being 45 minutes from the circuit, and want to experience the finest of Bahrain's famous opulence. (www.banyantree.com)

EAT

The world famous Trader Vics has a restaurant in Manama, serving a contemporary Asian fusion menu. For a taste of Europe, the Cafe Italia comes highly recommended. It offers the standard pizza and pasta fare that you would find in a European venue, but cooked more authentically that you might expect in such an exotic locale.

SEE

Bahrain is not quite as rich in tourist attractions as some of its neighbours. What Bahrain does have though is a lot of sand, just begging to be boarded on, 4x4ed through and dune buggied over. Take a helmet and a sense of adventure and there's plenty of entertainment.

Take a tip from a pro.
Check your tyres before you drive.

F1TM driver Lewis Hamilton is an expert on motor vehicle behaviour. That's why he insists on checking his tyres before he drives. Every year, traffic accidents take the lives of an estimated 1.2 million people. Bridgestone recognizes the seriousness of this situation and is responding through its worldwide Tyre Safety Project. Part of this initiative is the THINK BEFORE YOU DRIVE campaign promoted by Bridgestone in collaboration with the FIA Foundation. Learn how you can make a difference by checking your tyres and taking other simple safety precautions before you drive. Visit www.thinkbeforeyoudrive.com today.

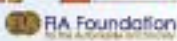
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