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GP2 Asia Series – Malaysia



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GP2 Asia meets F1

The inaugural title race heats up as GP2 Asia's stars join Formula 1 at the Malaysian Grand Prix

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Full race report

A busy month for GP2



There may be no rest for the wicked, but the GP2 Series great and good had a very busy March as the new 2008 car made its testing debut

In motorsport, they say that if you slow down, then you're effectively going backwards, such is the pace of development. There was certainly no slowing down for the GP2 teams in March as they finally got their hands on the car that will form the future of the GP2 Series for the next three years – the Dallara-built, Renault V8-powered GP2/08.

Testing times in France and Spain

The 13 teams and 26 drivers who will make up this year's GP2 Series grid spent six days at Barcelona in Spain and Paul Ricard in southern France, accumulating hundreds of laps and thousands of kilometres as they tried out the new car for the very first time. Despite being an all-new design for 2008, the first impressions of the GP2/08's speed and reliability are overwhelmingly positive, while the lap times of the drivers towards the end of the test were blindingly close. Although testing is never a totally accurate form guide as to who will do well in the coming year, one thing's clear – we're looking set for yet another thrilling GP2 Series this year.

Joining Formula 1 in Malaysia

Even as testing was coming to a close (and as half the paddock was hit by a nasty bout of the flu), there was little time to sit back and relax as the inaugural GP2 Asia series resumed in Malaysia. This time out, teams and drivers were back in almost familiar territory as GP2 Asia joined forces with Formula 1 for the first time. The long-term aim of the championship is to partner as many F1 events in the Middle East and Asia as possible, and this debut F1 outing for GP2 Asia hit the right note.

The GP2 Asia title race heats up

As ever, the on-track action was as spectacular and unpredictable as ever, and wins for Vitaly Petrov and Kamui Kobayashi – the latter becoming the first Japanese driver to win a race in GP2. Their wins ensured that GP2 Asia's reputation for showcasing the skill of new drivers field is as strong as the GP2 Series' has been over the last three years. One thing's for sure, title leader Romain Grosjean isn't able to relax as the series moves into its final turns.

5

different race winners from the first six races of GP2 Asia



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FAST NEWS

How the key GP2 Asia title rivals stand



ROMAIN GROSJEAN
(FRA) ART Grand Prix

35
points



VITALY PETROV
(RUS) Barwa Campos Team

24
points



FAIRUZ FAUZY
(MAS) Super Nova Racing

23
points



BRUNO SENNA
(BRA) iSport International

18
points

GP2 ASIA'S MALAYSIAN LOCAL HERO



Fairuz Fauzy Q&A

SUPER NOVA RACING DRIVER; INDONESIA RACE WINNER; MALAYSIA PODIUM FINISHER

Q You've won this season in Indonesia, and now you've scored second place in Malaysia. How did it feel for you to be on the podium on home soil?

A To be honest, it felt absolutely fantastic. I couldn't ask for more. I mean, to finish second in the first GP2 Asia race in my home country is just great. To win is always a bonus, but to finish second was really good, especially from sixth on the grid.

Q Since you were in front of your home crowd – and a Formula 1 crowd – were you nervous?

A It's funny. The team were worried before the race that I looked too cool! But, after my win in Indonesia, my nervousness has gone. Of course, I get nervous at the start. But, having a bit of nerves is good so you don't make mistakes. My mind was clear, I was looking forward to the race, the press has been good to me, so there wasn't too much pressure.

Q You mentioned your win in the sprint race in Indonesia. How did that feel?

A It was fantastic – the first big win in my career. Plus, Indonesia is local for me. It's not far away from Malaysia and we speak a fairly similar language. It was amazing to win in my part of the world. I hoped for the same result today, but it was so close and to finish second in such difficult conditions is good.

Q Tell me about the bling van in the car park, with the big picture of you kissing your trophy...

A It's the first time that GP2 has raced here in Malaysia, so it's good for local TV advertising, especially for the F1 weekend. We've also got a transporter parked near the track with huge pictures of me and the car on the side. Since Alex Yoong, we've been waiting a long time to get a Malaysian to race at this level, so it's great for home support.



Racing drivers are renowned for their fancy footwork in the car, but Jason Tahinci certainly impressed us with his soccer skills in Malaysia. Less impressive were the Turkish BCN Competition driver's disco moves. From the looks of these photos, we suspect a healthy dose of glue from his mechanics might be the secret to his off-track success. No-one can be that good with a ball while looking that cheesy!

GOOD MONTH



VITALY PETROV
The Russian Barwa International Campos Team driver was among the top names in GP2 testing, and laid claim to his stake at the inaugural GP2 Asia crown with his wet-dry feature race win in Malaysia.



KAMUI KOBAYASHI
The Japanese Dams driver may not have had the strongest of starts to his GP2 career in GP2 Asia, but he really came of age in the sprint race in Malaysia with a decisive drive to victory from the front of the pack.



FAIRUZ FAUZY
After his win in Indonesia, the Super Nova Racing ace had high hopes of a repeat performance on home soil in Malaysia. Sadly, it was not to be, but second place puts him in the title hunt.



DAVIDE VALSECCHI
After some consistently quick times in GP2 testing, the ever-improving Italian Durago ace scored a strong pair of fourth-place finishes in GP2 Asia in Malaysia.



BRUNO SENNA
A tough month for the Brazilian (and his iSport team) as poor results in Malaysia leave them trailing in both championships. But don't count out a comeback in Bahrain.

BAD MONTH

FAST NEWS

GP2 SERIES TESTING ROUND-UP

Dams driver Kamui Kobayashi can be sure of his place in the history books even before this year's GP2 Series gets started. The Japanese ace was the first to fire up the engine of the new GP2/08 car at an official test.

For six days at Paul Ricard in southern France and Barcelona in Spain, the 13 GP2 teams and their 26 drivers racked up over 9000 laps and 36,000 kilometres as they got their first taste of the all-new car that will be used for GP2's next three years. Here are the essential facts.

21 the number of drivers within one second of the fastest time at Paul Ricard on the final day of testing

1.362s how much faster the GP2/08 is than the 2007 car at Barcelona

453 laps completed by BCN Competicion's Milos Pavlovic, who racked up the most mileage at the tests

A GREAT START FOR THE GP2/08 CAR



Didier Perrin Q&A

GP2 SERIES TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



Q So, after six days of testing with all the teams, how have things gone?

A Firstly, we're very happy with the performance of the new GP2/08 car. It has come very close to what we wanted to achieve – a car that's still tricky to handle and difficult to drive, but that's quicker than the old car by about 1.5 seconds. That's exactly what we've got. The second thing is how reliable the car was. We had a few little problems, but the main systems – the electronics, the engine and the gearbox – worked perfectly. One car did all six days of testing without a problem, which is unusual for a brand-new car.

Q The teams certainly did a lot of laps

A The good thing about testing with all of the teams is that you can build up a lot of mileage – much more than with just one development car that can only do 400 kilometres a day. Bringing all the teams together is a great way to discover and solve problems. With the few problems we did have, we were able to solve them at the test or we'll be able to solve them for the first race.

Q Some drivers say the car is much harder work in the faster corners.

A It's totally in line with what we want. We want the car to be difficult to handle and tricky to set up, and this is why we've limited the rear wing setup to a maximum of 17 degrees, when it has the potential to go all the way up to 35 degrees. The car can be quicker than it is, but the paradox is that it would be easier to drive. We want a car that allows drivers to show their skills.

Q Obviously the new car is quicker, but what's really interesting is that 21 drivers were within a second of each other at the final test. As GP2 prides itself on equality and close racing, that must be pleasing.

A Because the car was very reliable, all the teams were able to achieve a lot of laps and concentrate on optimising the performance of their cars. The second point is that the driver line-up for the GP2 Series this year is fantastic. It's very pleasing to see them posting times that are so close to each other. It bodes very well for the first race.



DPR's Michael Herck is the lightest driver in this year's GP2 Series pack

61kg? No weigh...

Racing drivers are a pretty vain bunch, always chatting about (or trying to better each other) with the latest gadgets, cars and fashions. But when it comes to weight, they're really competitive. Every gram counts in racing, so the results of the annual pre-season driver weigh-in are pored over closely.

Racing Engineering's Javier Villa was the man to beat from last year, but it was DPR's Michael Herck who came out of the room with the biggest smile, at an almost featherweight-beating 61kg.

At the other end of the scale was BCN Competicion's Milos Pavlovic at 85.5kg. But – when you consider he's 1.80m high and that all drivers were weighed in bulky fireproof overalls, HANS device and helmet – it still leaves us feeling like we desperately need to go down to the gym.

Paul Ricard – 28-29 February 2008 (Track length: 3.853km)

1	Romain Grosjean	(ART Grand Prix)	1m12.031s
2	Pastor Maldonado	(Piquet Sports)	1m12.129s
3	Adrian Valles	(Fisichella Motor Sport)	1m12.155s
4	Javier Villa	(Racing Engineering)	1m12.254s
5	Vitaly Petrov	(Barwa Campos)	1m12.285s
6	Luca Filippi	(ART Grand Prix)	1m12.357s

Barcelona – 4-5 March 2008 (Track length: 4.655km)

1	Giorgio Pantano	(Racing Engineering)	1m26.351s
2	Bruno Senna	(iSport International)	1m26.296s
3	Vitaly Petrov	(Barwa Campos)	1m26.402s
4	Romain Grosjean	(ART Grand Prix)	1m26.455s
5	Luca Filippi	(ART Grand Prix)	1m26.472s
6	Adrian Valles	(Fisichella Motor Sport)	1m26.575s

Paul Ricard – 12-13 March 2008 (Track length: 3.586km)

1	Pastor Maldonado	(Piquet Sports)	1m10.062s
2	Javier Villa	(Racing Engineering)	1m10.079s
3	Giorgio Pantano	(Racing Engineering)	1m10.082s
4	Karun Chandhok	(iSport International)	1m10.210s
5	Luca Filippi	(ART Grand Prix)	1m10.251s
6	Andreas Zuber	(Piquet Sports)	1m10.270s



BCN Competicion's Milos Pavlovic racked up the most laps in the six days of testing

FAST NEWS



Last year's e-reporter finalists pose with GP2 Series title winner Timo Glock

Got the write stuff? Be an e-reporter

If you've ever fancied a career as a motorsport journalist, your deadline is fast approaching. GP2 tyre supplier Bridgestone's e-reporter contest is being held for the fifth time this year, and the cut-off point for entries is March 31.

To enter, you have to be a European student, aged 18-30. Eight finalists will attend GP2 races to write race reports and interview drivers, with the ultimate winner attending the MotoGP finale in October as part of a prize designed to kick-start their writing career. This year, the contest has gone fully online, with entrants able to learn more by joining the 'Bridgestone e-reporter' group on Facebook. To post your entry, log-on to www.bridgestone.eu/e-reporter.



It's nice to be remembered! 2006 GP2 title winner Lewis Hamilton may be setting the world ablaze in Formula 1, but the McLaren ace took time to visit old friends at ART Grand Prix at the Malaysian Grand Prix

Mixed start for F1's GP2 graduates

The GP2 Series' latest Formula 1 graduates had a mixed start to their first full season at the top level. 2007 champion Timo Glock qualified 18th in Australia and 10th in Malaysia for Toyota, was unable to finish either race.

2007 race winner Kazuki Nakajima scored a sixth-place points finish as he started his first full season with Williams in Australia, but was hampered by a puncture in Malaysia. Nelson Piquet was forced to retire after a race start accident in Australia, but improved to finish 11th for Renault in Malaysia.

The GP2 old-guard aren't doing too badly, with 2006 champion Lewis Hamilton and 2005 race winner Heikki Kovalainen sitting pretty in first and fourth places in the drivers' championship standings for McLaren. 2005 title winner Nico Rosberg joined Hamilton for his first trip onto the F1 podium in Australia by finishing third, and now lies sixth in the points standings.

AWAY FROM THE TRACK

Romain Grosjean

SWISS BANKER

Every morning when I'm not racing, I work at the Banque Baring Brothers in my home town of Geneva.

It all came together about 12 months after I left school, in the beginning of 2007. I had been doing nothing for a year apart from focusing on my racing, and I was really missing something else to do.

I knew a friend at the bank and a few other people there knew me from my motorsport, so it made getting the job a little bit easier.

They're really understanding of the fact that my first job is being a racing driver, but for me it's something a little different and I learn a lot, seeing how it works with stocks, shares and everything. It's really good to keep the mind going when I'm away from the track.



GP2 ASIA RACE REPORT MALAYSIA

MALAYSIA (Mar 21-23)

After mixed race conditions and a multitude of winners in the first two rounds of the inaugural GP2 Asia series, things were equally wet, hot and wild as the teams joined Formula 1 at the Malaysian Grand Prix.

Barwa International Campos Team's Vitaly Petrov kicked things off with a cautiously well-judged win in tricky wet-dry conditions in the Saturday feature race. The Russian ace led home local Malaysian hero Fairuz Fauzy in the lead Super Nova Racing entry and Dams' Jerome D'Ambrosio, giving his title hopes a major boost in the process.

Sunday's sprint race was dry, but just as spectacular as Dams' Japanese star Kamui Kobayashi blitzed into the lead at the first corner and held on to take his first GP2 win. The Toyota F1 test driver was followed home by ART Grand Prix's Romain Grosjean, the Frenchman putting the disappointment of stalling on the grid in the feature race and finishing outside the points behind him to keep his title advantage intact at 11 points.

Things weren't so good for two men looking to cut into that lead this weekend. iSport International's Bruno Senna spun out after a series of incidents in the feature race, and could only manage eighth in the sprint, while Fisichella Motor Sport's Adrian Valles retired from the feature race and could only manage 20th place in the sprint.

Feature race (33 laps)

1	Vitaly Petrov	(Campos)
2	Fairuz Fauzy	(Super Nova)
3	Jerome D'Ambrosio	(Dams)
4	Davide Valsecchi	(Durango)
5	Kamui Kobayashi	(Dams)
6	Yelmer Buurman	(Arden)
7	Milos Pavlovic	(BCN)
8	Harald Schlegelmilch	(Trident)

Fastest lap Romain Grosjean
Pole position Romain Grosjean

Sprint race (22 laps)

1	Kamui Kobayashi	(Dams)
2	Romain Grosjean	(ART)
3	Vitaly Petrov	(Campos)
4	Davide Valsecchi	(Durango)
5	Yelmer Buurman	(Arden)
6	Fairuz Fauzy	(Super Nova)
7	Karun Chandhok	(iSport)
8	Bruno Senna	(iSport)

Fastest lap Bruno Senna
Pole position Harald Schlegelmilch



GP2 Asia title leader Romain Grosjean kept his title lead intact as Kamui Kobayashi and Vitaly Petrov shared the victory spoils in Malaysia

Drivers' points

1	Romain Grosjean	35
2	Vitaly Petrov	24
3	Fairuz Fauzy	23
4	Bruno Senna	18
5	Adrian Valles	15
6	Kamui Kobayashi	10
7	Sebastien Buemi	10
8	Davide Valsecchi	9

Teams' points

1	ART Grand Prix	35
2	Barwa Campos Team	30
3	iSport International	24
4	Super Nova Racing	23
5	Dams	16
6	Trust Team Arden	15
7	Fisichella Motor Sport	15
8	Durango	11

GP2 ASIA JOINS THE FORMULA 1 PADDOCK Marco Codello Q&A

GP2 SERIES DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

Q What were the major logistical challenges in bringing GP2 to Asia?

A In Europe, all the teams have their own transportation. They have everything they need. It's straightforward. In Asia, teams are allowed to bring only the essentials, and transporters aren't allowed. There's a 4.5-tonne limit for cars and equipment.

Q How much more complicated are the logistics for Asia, compared to Europe?

A As far as transportation, it's actually fairly straightforward as all the teams' equipment travels together. First we shipped it from Europe to Dubai, then to Indonesia, then Malaysia. From here we'll fly it to Bahrain, and drive it via Saudi to Dubai. We chose DHL Global, as they work with Formula 1, and know the rules and best ways to transport things from country to country.

Q This weekend is the first time that GP2 Asia has supported F1. What difference has that made, particularly as the teams are operating without quite so much of their European kit?

A In contrast to Dubai and Indonesia – where we had access to the pit garages, here in Malaysia they're reserved for F1 – so instead of fixed facilities, everything has to be built from the ground up – tents, air conditioning, internet connections, offices, catering, you name it.

Q Has that been a challenge?

A (Laughs) Yeah, there's a big difference between supplying the essentials and building something that is nice and still has a visual impact and looks professional.

Each team has responsibilities towards their sponsors and then there's also the fact that we are adjacent to the F1 paddock, so we still need to display very high standards, despite being on the move.

Q What other logistical challenges does supporting F1 bring?

A With F1 we are strictly prohibited from staying at the circuit later than 10pm on the Sunday after the race, so everything has to be packed and away by then. In Indonesia and Dubai, we could adjust our needs to suit our schedule, allowing the teams an extra day after the race to service and maintain their cars. They can't do that here, so we'll have to allocate them extra time before the next race in Bahrain.



GP2 ASIA RACE PREVIEW BAHRAIN/DUBAI

BAHRAIN

As March turns to April, the GP2 Asia series returns to the Middle East for a pair of back-to-back races that bring the inaugural championship to a close. Bahrain – the first of the double-header – is a venue well known to the GP2 teams, having hosted the season-opener of the GP2 Series in 2007.

One of the winners that time out was Qi-Meritus Mahara's Luca Filippi, and he rates Bahrain highly. As a traditional stop on the old trade routes, Bahrain has more history than the nearby, modern Dubai. However, it's equally accessible to European tourists thanks to its evolution from an oil-rich state into a tourist mecca, while its relatively liberal reputation makes it an easy introduction to the region.

"There's a really nice atmosphere," Filippi explains. "There are buildings with a European influence, but they are also local to their traditions, which makes for a really interesting mix. Also – compared to other countries, even in Europe – a lot of people in Bahrain speak English. Last time there was my first time in the Middle East, so everything was really new for me. It will be good to go back and appreciate it more."

Bahrain

Dates	April 5-6
Track length	5.412km (3.362 miles)
Race One	33 laps (April 5 15:50pm)
Race Two	22 laps (April 6 11:00pm)
Website	www.bahraingp.com.bh

DUBAI

STAY

You're spoilt for choice in Dubai, but we're tempted by the Grosvenor House (grosvenorhouse.limerdien.com).

DRINK

As it's the end of the season, treat yourself to a quick drink (or two) at the terrace 360 bar at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel (jumeirabeachhotel.com) or Vu's on the 51st floor of the Jumeirah Emirates Towers. Both venues have absolutely fantastic views.

SEE

After nursing a hangover, where better to spend time than in the malls and souks. Beniyas Square is great for electronics. "I went into Dubai last time, and checked it out," says Valles. "It was really nice."

For the season finale of the inaugural GP2 Asia series, the teams travel back to the circuit and country that started their far-east tour – Dubai.

As one of the more modern cities in the Middle East, Dubai still amazes every time you see it – especially as the skyline seems to change radically every time they build new, more lavish and increasingly taller hotels and apartment blocks. In fact, such is the pace of development in the city, don't be surprised to see a few new additions to the horizon – despite the fact that it has only been two and half months since GP2 last landed there.

"It's so surprising to see the city coming out of the desert," says Fisichella Motor Sport's Adrian Valles, who scored a strong points finish in the first race of the season in Dubai. "You'd never imagine that something like that could exist. I really like the country. It's a great place to visit, and it will be good to go back, having been there already this year. It's also good to go back to a circuit we know."

Dubai

Dates	April 11-12
Track length	5.394km (3.356 miles)
Race One	34 laps (April 11 15:30pm)
Race Two	23 laps (April 12 13:00pm)
Website	www.dubaiautodrome.com



STAY

Bustling Manama (which ironically means 'sleeping place') is 45-minutes from the circuit. If your wallet is feeling a bit thick, though, try the Banyan Tree Desert Spa (banyantree.com), near the Sakhr track.

EAT

The Gulf Hotel Bahrain (gulfhotelbahrain.com) has a fantastic selection of restaurants, but Luca Filippi favours Sato. "I love Japanese food," he says. "Every time we went there, we did well, so it's a good luck charm. I'll definitely be going back!"

SEE

Bahrain isn't quite as activity-packed as some of its neighbours, but Luca Filippi has his eye on one extra-curricular activity in the gap between races. "I've heard about sand-boarding," he says. "That sounds interesting." Rather him than us...