



2021 FORMULA 1 SAUDI ARABIAN GRAND PRIX PREVIEW

Shifting Sands

Alpine F1 Team heads to Saudi Arabia for the first ever Grand Prix in the country and the penultimate round of the 2021 FIA Formula 1 World Championship. With a new venue ahead and the season nearing its conclusion, Sporting Director Alan Permane discusses the unique challenges heading to the brand-new Jeddah Corniche Circuit.

The team ended the triple header with a fantastic third place in Qatar. How do you reflect on the weekend and the result for the team?

It was a great way to end a tough triple header and it gives the trackside team and both factories a huge lift at the end of this long season. We executed a strong weekend across the whole team and both drivers were happy with the overall feel of the car. Fernando seemed particularly happy with the car and that showed on Sunday with his fantastic podium finish. It's been a long time coming for him, but thoroughly deserved after his strong comeback so far this year. Esteban also scored his best result since Hungary and his efforts to slow down the Red Bull showed the team spirit that runs through this team. Ultimately, we can go into the final two races full of confidence and ready to score a decent points haul at both events, as we look to finish ahead of Alpha Tauri in fifth place in the constructors' standings.

It's a new circuit and venue in Saudi Arabia. How has the team prepared for racing in Jeddah?

As for any circuit we have been using our simulation tools to optimise the car setup before arriving in Jeddah. Both drivers will be familiar with the track layout having run in our driver-in-the-loop simulator. Qualifying and the race will take place in the evenings, under the lights – so this add another dimension for the engineers as FP1 and FP3 will be during the day (although late in the day) and we will face very different temperatures session to session. We looked quite strong in similar conditions in Qatar, and we aim to pick-up where we left off two weeks ago.

The circuit itself is being touted as the fastest street track in the world. What challenges will this bring?

The layout certainly looks exciting and will be challenging for the drivers. Being a street track there are likely to be walls instead of run-off areas and this of course adds pressure for them. Tyres, as always, will play a large part in the weekend and adapting the cars while learning about the track and its impact on tyres on Friday will be crucial to a successful weekend. Despite a strong weekend for us in Qatar, we have to focus on delivering a consistent weekend and a double points finish, our third in a row, will be the target.



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Keeping focus

Esteban Ocon scored ten points in Qatar last time out to contribute to the team's fantastic performance. The Frenchman is keeping focused for the final two races, beginning with a visit to the streets of Jeddah for this weekend's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

How do you prepare for a new circuit?

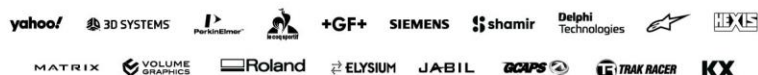
It's going to be interesting to head to Saudi Arabia for the first time and discover another new circuit. It's always an exciting experience to learn a new track, which we also had in Qatar last time out. Hopefully Jeddah will be just as good for us as Losail and we can be competitive. Preparation is the key to getting on the pace at new places. The guys have worked hard in running simulations and understanding everything as best as possible, and we had a good day on the simulator to get dialled in to the circuit so we don't have any surprises when we get there this week. I like these kind of crazy tracks – like Baku for example. It pushes everything to the limit, and I think that will be fun.

What do you know so far about the Jeddah Corniche Circuit?

The circuit looks quite demanding as it's a fast street track with the walls close all the time. It's extremely high speed with a lot of chicanes and fast corners one after the other with little room for rest. With so many corners, it presents a challenge for the engineers to work out how best to set up the car with so many demands. It's a long lap too, so I think it's going to be very physical for us, and it's important we stay focused during the race.

What was the feeling after Qatar with the team's strong performance?

I was very happy to contribute to a very good team performance in Qatar. It was great to see Fernando on the podium too. He's been outstanding this season and it's a pleasure to be his team-mate and work with him for these big team results. One thing is clear, though, and that is the season is not over until the chequered flag drops in Abu Dhabi. We've put ourselves in a strong position to claim fifth in the championship, but we know anything can happen in a race and we will remain ready to seize any opportunity. The team and I are feeling motivated to finish the season with double points across the next two races.





Back to the rostrum

Fernando Alonso arrives in Saudi Arabia having scored his 98th career podium in Formula 1 at the inaugural Qatar Grand Prix two weeks ago. His attention now shifts to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Formula 1's first-ever race weekend in Jeddah.

Now the dust has settled on Qatar, how do you reflect on adding your 98th career podium there?

It was incredible. The team deserved the result and we executed everything as well as we could have from Friday through to Sunday. In the race we started very well and once the positions had settled, we were in a fight with the Red Bull of Sergio Perez. Everyone did their role perfectly, from the pitstops, through to the strategy and Esteban, who fought like a lion on track. We pushed like mad to ensure third position was secured. It was a long wait for me to be on the podium again, Hungary 2014 was the last time, so it was very sweet to be up there again. It's my first with Alpine and hopefully it's something we can use to drive forward into the final two races and next year. It was also very important in the battle for fifth in the Constructors' Championship and while we need to stay on our toes, it was a very strong result for the team.

You've never raced in Jeddah before. What are you expecting from racing there?

It'll be a new experience for everyone up and down the grid. From what I've seen and analysed with the team, it'll be a very fast circuit. I'm not sure we can make comparisons yet, maybe ask me again after Friday when we've done some running. As with any new track you have to prepare for the weekend thoroughly and look into every detail. We've been to a few new circuits already this year so we have an idea what we need to look out for, but a new venue can throw up many surprises. You never know what can happen, let's hope for another strong weekend.

Do you enjoy racing at night in Formula 1?

Yes, it definitely has a special feel to it. I've raced in Le Mans and other categories where it's normal to race at night. But you have to remember there was a time when we didn't have any night races in Formula 1 and losing the light during a Sunday was always something you didn't want to happen as it meant you couldn't keep racing. I said to the team in Qatar that I could have driven there all night and into the morning had they given me enough fuel. We have many races at night now and it's just a part of Formula 1. It would be strange not to have them. It makes you wonder what will be next in ten years or so that we didn't think was probable in the sport. The sport is always evolving not just on the track but off it too, so it'll be exciting to see what is the next innovation that comes into our world.



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Zhou and Piastri begin F2 title climax in Jeddah

Alpine Academy trio Guanyu Zhou, Oscar Piastri and Christian Lundgaard head to Jeddah to begin the climax to the 2021 FIA Formula 2 Championship fight.

With two rounds left of the championship, the title looks set to go to either Oscar or Zhou who both have their futures confirmed in Formula 1 for next year. Meanwhile Christian will look to finish his season strongly with ART Grand Prix before embarking on his maiden campaign in IndyCar next year.

At the last round in Russia, Oscar cemented his lead in the Drivers' Championship by taking victory in the Feature Race. Zhou battled back to finish sixth, after spinning out earlier in the weekend. Christian meanwhile achieved two points finishes from two races in Sochi.

Described by the Alpine Academy drivers as "Silverstone with barriers" and "a faster Monaco", it's over to Zhou or Oscar to conquer the Jeddah Corniche Circuit and in turn place one hand on the Formula 2 title.

Oscar Piastri: *"I'm looking forward to getting back to racing. It's been a long break for us in F2 since Sochi. It'll be nice to get back on track firstly. It's a new track for everybody. It looks very unique, there isn't really a circuit like it. It's a street circuit but extremely high speed with some elements that are reminiscent of Silverstone. It should be an exciting weekend in terms of learning a new track. I think the track will be very difficult. In terms of racing I don't know how good it will be for overtaking. We've got two rounds back-to-back now. I have one goal in mind, which is the championship. Prema and I will make sure that we come out of the gates strong."*

Guanyu Zhou: *"It's been a while since we've had a Formula 2 race weekend so it's very exciting to have back-to-back race weekends to end the season. I've already driven the track in the simulator. It feels to me like a faster Monaco or a Silverstone with barriers. Very cool, especially in qualifying where we can race under the lights. It's a new challenge for everyone"*

Christian Lundgaard: *"I'm looking forward to it. I did a few days in the simulator at home on the F1 game. It's very fast. The track limits that apply to us will be interesting to see as we follow the F1 and the F2 break. There's been a lot of discussion on track limits and close battling. It will be interesting to see how they will tackle that at Jeddah. From my own perspective, considering how the season has gone so far, we have nothing to lose. We have the last two races of the season coming up. My future is secured. What's not to like? I think the track will probably be a bit of a Baku-lookalike, a high-speed city circuit with fast corners. A tricky track for sure. The walls are close which is always exciting. I'm pumped!"*



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Tyres:

Hard, C2 (White)

Esteban – 2
Fernando - 2

Medium, C3 (Yellow)

Esteban – 3
Fernando - 3

Soft, C4 (Red)

Esteban – 8
Fernando – 8

