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GP2 SERIES Hockenheim//Hungaroring



Nelson Piquet

Nelson's thoughts on GP2's flying rookies and balancing team ownership with an F1 seat

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Brazilians Di Grassi and Senna close on Pantano at the top of the table

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Piquet's opinion

Runner-up to Lewis Hamilton in the 2006 GP2 season, Nelson Piquet graduated to a full time F1 race seat this season with the Renault team. He is also team owner of Piquet Sports and here offers up his candid views on the GP2 season so far.

As a fan, a competitor and now a team owner with Piquet Sports, the great thing about GP2 is that there is much more emphasis on driver skill than the type of car you drive. Because of that I guess it is no surprise that most of the drivers who did well last year, and have already spent some time in GP2, are up there again.

GP2 is not easy, especially for rookies because you have so little time in free practice and qualifying. So aside from Giorgio Pantano, the guys that have really impressed are Alvaro Parente who won his first ever GP2 Series race, and Romain Grosjean who is mixing it with Pantano and Bruno Senna at the top of the standings. He is proving that his GP2 Asia championship was no fluke.

I struggled myself in my first year and it was not until my second season that I was consistently running at the front. One of the biggest lessons I learnt in that time was to go into qualifying and always bag a good lap on your first set of tyres. Get one in the bank, then push like hell on the second set.

At the sharp end

As well as a new batch of drivers, the new car has mixed things up a bit, especially at the beginning of the season. Having eight different race winners in the first nine races showed how competitive this series is, but now that things have settled down, there are trends appearing. After being very strong last year, ART and iSport are reasserting themselves at the sharp end and have been joined by an impressive performance by Racing Engineering. Pantano's experience has greatly helped the team put together

a fast, consistent car and that consistency has in turn helped him to the top of the overall standings.

Team talking

Because I have to concentrate so much time on my F1 seat, as a team owner I'm not very hands-on. The last thing my drivers need is for me to transfer any of my own stresses onto them! But when I have time, especially in the evenings, I enjoy popping over to the GP2 paddock. It's got a great atmosphere.

I don't know my drivers that well personally, but both Andreas Zuber and Pastor Maldonado are quick. They're lying in sixth and ninth at the moment and I just think they have been making some simple mistakes that will be sorted out by more time in the car. Starts seem to be the biggest problem. Poor starts are usually 90% down to the driver, not the team, so perhaps we need to help them a little bit more in this area. Andi has put in a couple of great performances recently, but if the guys had been finishing close to their qualifying positions earlier this year we would be much higher in the championship.

GP2 is all about young drivers and we all make mistakes; that's the beauty of the series. I lost the championship because of silly mistakes. The only one that is consistent at the moment is Giorgio and it's no coincidence that he is also the most experienced. But the beauty of the Series is you can never be sure what is coming next.



Piquet Sports owner Nelson Piquet



GP2 drivers get first taste of Valencia

The all-new Valencia street circuit saw its first action last month during a weekend of GT and F3 racing. With GP2 visiting the circuit for the first time at the end of August, a handful of Series drivers took the opportunity to try out the circuit and report back from Europe's newest racing venue.



Giorgio Pantano:

"There are three or four overtaking places on the new circuit. The first is at corner two which is a tight right. You arrive flat from turn one, brake hard into the right and then go straight into a more open left hander. That section into the first chicane should make for exciting starts to the GP2 races."



Luca Filippi:

"The bridge section is very cool. The braking point for the right hander is about 100m after you turn in then its flat out over the bridge. There's a bump in the road then the right after the bridge is off-camber which unbalances the car and causes oversteer. You also can't see the exit as you turn in because of a high wall."



Vitaly Petrov:

"The most interesting part of the circuit is the quick left/right/right after the bottom hairpin. We'll go from second gear to fifth by the time we exit the second right. Some people might then be foolish enough to try and overtake going into the final hairpin but I'd be surprised if it works, the run-off is good but is too narrow to pass."



Ho-Pin Tung:

"After hitting around 300km/h down the straight, the next chicane is slow with a big, forgiving run-off area. It provides a good opportunity to make a move under some really hard braking. With another right coming quickly afterwards there's also a chance to re-pass after the chicane."



GOOD MONTH



ISPORT

Karun Chandhok's first win of the season, combined with podiums at Hockenheim and Hungaroring for Bruno Senna put the British-based team 18 points clear at the top of the team standings. Senna, meanwhile is also still in contention for the drivers' title.



GIORGIO PANTANO

Pantano is rapidly becoming the dominant force of the 2008 GP2 Series. His feature race win at Hockenheim was his fourth of the season and his third on the spin. Despite scoring just two points in Hungary he still leads the driver standings by seven points.



ANDREAS ZUBER

The Piquet Sports driver was one of the early season pace-setters, coming third in the first two feature races before a string of midfield finishes. But, his breathtaking charges to second in the Hockenheim sprint race and Hungarian feature reminded us just how much ability he has.



ROMAIN GROSJEAN

A 25 second penalty in Germany denied Grosjean his first feature race win before a 10 place grid penalty at the Hungaroring cost him third place in the drivers' championship. The Frenchman will be hoping these things don't come in threes...



MICHAEL HERCK

It's been a tough year for the DPR man. After breaking his wrist during GP2 Asia he missed the first six races of the Series season. Despite battling hard, he has failed to score any points since his return and finished only two of this month's four races.

BAD MONTH

Q&A KARUN CHANDHOK

Karun's performances this year have helped put his iSport outfit at the top of the team standings, and following his first win of the season in Hockenheim, the 24-year-old is being linked with an F1 seat.

How does it feel to get your first win?
It's more a relief rather than anything else! My race pace was really strong in Silverstone and since then we've made a few tweaks to the car, so in Hockenheim the car was really quick.

What are your goals for the rest of the year?
Bruno [Senna] is perhaps too far away in second, but I'm only eight points off third at the moment so it's not impossible for me to finish the season in the top three.

What's making iSport so quick right now?
It's just a very good team - by far the best I've worked for. It helps that Bruno and I get along so well, we try different setups in free practice, then pool the information.

And what about the rumours linking you to Force India next year? It's not rocket science is it? There's an Indian team and an Indian driver running near the front of F1's feeder series. I have a very good personal relationship with the team's owner, Vijay Mallya, we've been family friends for twenty years, so have conversations about motorsport all the time. But, at the moment there is no agreement with Force India.



British-based Karun Chandhok is nicknamed Brakley's fastest Indian by his team-mates

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

F1 test shows GP2/08 pace

The GP2 car is closer than ever to the machinery being used in Formula 1 according to Trust Team Arden driver Sébastien Buemi.

The Hungaroring sprint race winner spent a day testing with the Red Bull F1 team in Jerez recently, his third F1 test of the year.

"It was a very good test," said Buemi. "It's always fun to be back in an F1 car. It's actually not that different to a GP2 car. For the neck it's more difficult because you get more Gs but for the arms it's easier because you have power steering. But, when you have the chance to drive both cars you see just how close a GP2 car is getting to F1 at the moment."

Also in action at Jerez were Romain Grosjean, who spent two days in the Renault R28, and Dams' Kamui Kobayashi - the Toyota F1 team's regular test driver.

The Jerez test was only Grosjean's second outing in an F1 car, and the Frenchman's first time on the Spanish circuit.

Speaking after the test, Grosjean said: "At first it was difficult because it was my first time at Jerez and it was really hot. The first morning was spent learning the circuit and in the afternoon the track was a lot slower.

"The second day I ended fourth fastest, and could have been third, but there was a red flag on my last set of new tyres. In all though I was very pleased and the team was happy."

While lap times from the Hungarian round of the GP2 Series show that the GP2/08 is closer to F1 performance - GP2 lap times were within three seconds of the F1 grid - according to Grosjean driving an F1 car is still a very different prospect.

"The biggest difference is the strength, the power of the car, and the lateral G loads. Everything is more. It doesn't seem that much when you view it from outside the car, but when you drive you really notice the difference especially in the fast corners and the acceleration out of the bends."



Dams' Kamui Kobayashi is also the Toyota F1 team's regular third driver

GP2 graduates shining in F1

GP2's position as F1's strongest feeder series was underlined this month when ex-GP2 drivers finished first and second at both the German and Hungarian rounds of the Formula 1 Championship.

With a blistering drive at Hockenheim, former ART hotshoe Lewis Hamilton won the German GP, going four points clear at the top of the driver standings.

The McLaren ace led home Renault F1 rookie Nelson Piquet who admitted that he was lucky to land his first F1 podium.

Piquet ran a one-stop strategy and profited when the safety car was brought out.

"I think that if you had the normal finish of a race I probably wouldn't be here [in second] after starting from 17th on the grid," said Piquet. "It was a bit lucky."

Fortune also favoured McLaren's Heikki Kovalainen, who inherited first three laps from the end of the Hungarian GP when Felipe Massa's Ferrari engine failed.

The former Arden driver



Timo Glock (left) and Heikki Kovalainen celebrate on the Hungarian podium

went on to secure his first F1 win ahead of Timo Glock in the Toyota.

Since winning last year's GP2 title with iSport, Glock's best F1 finish had been fourth place in Canada. Having started in 11th, the German held off reigning world champion Kimi Räikkönen in the closing stages of the race.

"Soon I had Kimi behind me," said Glock. "But I knew from racing here in GP2, how hard it is to pass. So when I saw him in the mirrors I knew that I couldn't afford to make any mistakes."



FROM THE
GP2SERIES.COM
BLOG

"I'm running out of ways to ask if you're happy with qualifying in third Andi: you need to do something different in qualify in Hungary."

"I'm doing everything I can!" Andi laughed, "at the moment I'm giving everything: I'm driving with my arse!"

"Maybe that's the problem: you need to drive with your balls..."

"Yeah! Maybe then I'll beat Giorgio to pole!"

We had another press dinner later that night for selected British journalists this time with Conway, Pantano and Karun Chandhok in attendance, the latter joining us after hitting the buffet and coming back with some comically large carrots lying on top of the rest of his dinner: when asked what they were for he laughed and stated "I'm so far back on the grid tomorrow I need to do something to improve my sight to see the bloody start lights!"

See blog.gp2series.caradisiac.com for more

Paddock Pass GP2 News You Can't Get Anywhere Else



Despite still chasing that illusive first podium of the season, the DPR team truck is currently sporting this optimistic personalised number plate.

However, it was team transport that made the Hungaroring particularly challenging for DPR after a minibus carrying three of the team mechanics was involved in an accident early on Saturday.

The team members were thankfully left with only minor injuries after their minibus was hit by another car on the way to the circuit. However, all three were taken to hospital as a precaution, leaving the DPR pit crew short-handed for Saturday's race. Paddock Pass wishes all those involved a speedy recovery.



Although Nelson Piquet professes to be "hands-off" when it comes to his role as Piquet Sports team owner, the Renault F1 driver was spotted keeping an eye on things from the pit wall during Saturday's race in Hungary. Unfortunately team budget doesn't appear to stretch to a chair for the main-man though...



Seperated at birth?
Sean Bean and
Giorgio Pantano

Should Giorgio Pantano get tired of dominating the GP2 Series, then there's a career waiting for him

as a look-a-like for British actor Sean Bean. How's that Sheffield accent coming on Giorgio?



FMS driver Marko Asmer may not have scored any points in Hungary, but at least the Estonian's lid looked fast. This slick new helmet design is one of only a handful created this season by Uffe Tägström – the same man who paints Kimi Räikkönen's helmets. So if racing is all in the mind, Marko is now sharing headspace with a world champion!

AWAY FROM THE TRACK

PASTOR MALDONADO, SURF DUDE

"I learnt to surf growing up in Venezuela. I'm no pro, but like a lot of Venezuelans I do okay. I have a good Quiksilver board which is very quick on the waves, very colourful and great fun to ride pipes on. The sea has always been a really important aspect of my life and I've always lived close to the beach, so when I started racing in Europe, I moved to Viareggio which is a small city on the Tuscan coast in Northern Italy. It is near to my sports medicine specialist, Riccardo Ceccarelli, but the other great

advantage is that it's close to the beach and we get a lot of great waves in that part of Italy.

The beach is full of surfers and whenever I have a free weekend, that's how I relax. I've made quite a few new friends through the sport. They call me whenever the sea is good and together with my trainer we head over to the sand. When the waves are good, that's where I'll be.

I really enjoy the sport, and when I can I watch as many pro competitions as possible."

So is Pastor tempted to swap his racesuit for a wetsuit and switch sports?

"For me, it's purely the way I relax on my free weekends. But I know Lucas di Grassi also used to be quite good. I'm not sure if he's still keeping up with it - maybe I should challenge him to a surf-off..."



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

RACE REPORTS

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Campos driver Lucas di Grassi leads a pack at the Hockenheim circuit

GERMANY

HOCKENHEIM (JULY 19-20)



Heartbreak for Grosjean as Pantano tightens title hold and Chandhok lands first race win

ART rookie Romain Grosjean was denied his first feature race victory of the season when he was handed a 25 second penalty after taking the chequered flag in race one.

The 22-year-old started second on the grid behind championship pace-setter Giorgio Pantano, and tracked the Italian for 35 laps before making a decisive pass as rain began to fall at the Mercedes Arena. Pulling out a 10 second lead in just four laps, Grosjean picked up a comfortable win before race officials penalised him for lapping Marko Asmer under yellow flags, relegating the Frenchman to second.

Behind Grosjean and Pantano, Alvaro Parente picked up his third podium of the season after Sébastien Buemi and Javier Villa both crashed out while running in third.

iSport's Karun Chandhok made the most of his race two pole, briefly dropping into second behind di Grassi, before taking control back on lap three. Chandhok then held off a super quick Andi Zuber who came from 11th on the grid to finish second ahead of Chandhok's team mate Bruno Senna.

Feature race (41 laps)

1	Giorgio Pantano	(Racing Eng.)
2	Romain Grosjean	(ART)
3	Alvaro Parente	(Super Nova)
4	Bruno Senna	(iSport)
5	Lucas di Grassi	(Campos)
6	Pastor Maldonado	(Piquet)
7	Andy Soucek	(Super Nova)
8	Karun Chandhok	(iSport)

Fastest lap Giorgio Pantano
Pole position Giorgio Pantano

Sprint race (28 laps)

1	Karun Chandhok	(iSport)
2	Andreas Zuber	(Piquet)
3	Bruno Senna	(iSport)
4	Romain Grosjean	(ART)
5	Javier Villa	(Racing Eng.)
6	Alvaro Parente	(Super Nova)
7	Ho-Pin Tung	(Trident)
8	Sébastien Buemi	(Arden)

Fastest lap Kamui Kobayashi
Pole position Karun Chandhok

HUNGARY

HUNGARORING (AUGUST 1-2)



Double podium for Senna trims Pantano's championship lead while di Grassi continues his blistering comeback

Lucas di Grassi led from turn one of the Hungarian feature race to take his first win of the season, despite race-long pressure from Andreas Zuber who finished just 0.7s behind the Renault development driver. Bruno Senna completed the podium after championship leader Giorgio Pantano span on lap four and finished in 14th.

Senna went on to make it a double podium, finishing third again in the sprint race, behind Sébastien Buemi and Super Nova's Andy Soucek. Starting from pole, Soucek led Buemi's Arden car for the first 12 laps before a mistake under braking let the Swiss through. Behind the pair, Pastor Maldonado of Piquet Sports was forced to retire while running in third allowing Senna through to finish just 0.1s behind Soucek.

Feature race (42 laps)

1	Lucas di Grassi	(Campos)
2	Andreas Zuber	(Piquet)
3	Bruno Senna	(iSport)
4	Karun Chandhok	(iSport)
5	Pastor Maldonado	(Piquet)
6	Mike Conway	(Trident)
7	Sébastien Buemi	(Arden)
8	Andy Soucek	(Super Nova)

Fastest lap Romain Grosjean
Pole position Romain Grosjean

Sprint race (28 laps)

1	Sébastien Buemi	(Arden)
2	Andy Soucek	(Super Nova)
3	Bruno Senna	(iSport)
4	Sakon Yamamoto	(ART)
5	Giorgio Pantano	(Racing Eng.)
6	Javier Villa	(Racing Eng.)
7	Andreas Zuber	(Piquet)
8	Kamui Kobayashi	(Dams)

Fastest lap Lucas di Grassi
Pole position Andy Soucek

CLICK HERE FOR RACE IMAGES



Sébastien Buemi celebrates his second win of the season

Drivers' points

1	Giorgio Pantano	65
2	Bruno Senna	58
3	Lucas di Grassi	39
4	Romain Grosjean	36
5	Sébastien Buemi	34
6	Andreas Zuber	32
7	Karun Chandhok	31
8	Alvaro Parente	26

Teams' points

1	iSport International	89
2	Racing Engineering	71
3	Barwa Int. Campos	60
4	Piquet Sports	58
5	ART Grand Prix	44
6	Trust Team Arden	39
7	Super Nova Racing	34
8	Trident Racing	25

RACE PREVIEWS

VALENCIA, SPAIN

Valencia is GP2's newest venue and for FMS' Roldan Rodriguez it is a chance to race in his favourite Spanish city

Later this month, the GP2 Series steps into the unknown with its inaugural race weekend at Valencia's new street circuit. Twenty-five turns are packed into the three and a half miles of



Dates	23-24 August
Track length	5.44km (3.38 miles)
Race One	34 laps (23 Aug 4:00pm)
Race Two	23 laps (24 Aug 10:30am)
Website	www.valenciastreetcircuit.com

public roads that make up a lap, much of which is centred around the city's harbour district. The area is well known to FMS driver Roldan Rodriguez, who is looking forward to giving the asphalt its GP2 Christening.

"The circuit will be around the port where the Americas Cup was held and I'm told it will be bigger and wider than Monaco, more like Melbourne. The asphalt will be newly laid and they've taking out all of the drains and manhole covers so hopefully there will be no bumps. There should be at least two places where we'll be hitting around 300km/h."

The circuit layout maybe new to the 23-year-old, but Rodriguez is no stranger to Valencia, with its mix of winding medieval streets and striking, modern harbour side architecture.

"I treat Valencia as my second home," explains Rodriguez. "I started racing single seaters there and drove thousands of kilometres at the old circuit. "For me, it is one of Spain's nicest cities."

EAT

If your passions happen to be street racing and seafood you're in luck! Valencia is brimming with fresh fish and experts chefs. Try El Plat for a fairly priced, perfect paella

STAY

Even if you can't afford five star prices, it is worth stopping at the wonderfully ornate Westin Valencia hotel with its century-old facade and striking interior.

SEE

On August 27, take part in one of Spain's more bizarre traditions as thousands gather in the Bunyol region and hurl tomatoes at each other until the streets run red.



Much of the street circuit is focussed around the city's ultra-modern port complex

SPA, BELGIUM

Local lad Jérôme D'Ambrosio is eagerly anticipating the challenge of GP2 at one of Europe's top circuits



Dates	6-7 September
Track length	7.004km (4.352 miles)
Race One	26 laps (6 Sept 4:00pm)
Race Two	18 laps (7 Sept 10:30am)
Website	www.spagrandprix.com

EAT

The nearby villages are awash with eateries, but the restaurant at the Hotel Le Roannay, half a mile from the track, is particularly good. It even has its own helipad...

STAY

The Boutique Hotel Dufays in Stavelot is a perfect antidote to Novotels and Dorints. If one of the six cosy rooms don't win you over the monumental breakfast will.

SEE

The GP museum in Stavelot will entertain serious race fans with several historic cars and a comprehensive history of the Spa circuit.

In terms of its motorsport heritage, the Spa-Francorchamps circuit is up there with Monaco, Le Mans and Silverstone and has remained a favourite with drivers and spectators since its inception in 1924.

"Spa always produces good races," explains Jérôme D'Ambrosio. "There are always opportunities to overtake, and the weather is guaranteed to change during the weekend."

"This is my home race and I have to stay focussed and treat it like any other event, but it's really a great track, one of the best on this year's calendar and I'm really looking forward to taking a GP2 car around there. It's got all sorts of corners and is very, very demanding."

"The Bruxelles hairpin for example is like nothing else, and always tricky. As you round a full 180 degrees downhill it's all too easy to overcook it on the way in, hit the brakes late and go into the gravel. Blanchimont and Les Combes will be interesting, and then there is always the famous Eau Rouge bend. In a GP2 car it is going to be very tough, but the first time I do it flat is bound to bring a big smile to my face!

"I've raced Formula Renaults at Spa and in those types of cars, Eau Rouge is really not that demanding. But, watching the GP2s last year

I know it's going to be an altogether different experience.

"My last time racing here was in a two litre Formula Renault in 2005, but the track has changed since then, especially the last chicane, where they've put asphalt run offs in a couple of places. Such changes always alter the configuration of the lap. But, that's normal with most circuits these days."



There is no shortage of bars and restaurants around Spa

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