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Slim F1 lead for Hamilton in Bahrain

McLaren's Lewis Hamilton heads to the third round of the 2008 Formula 1 season in Bahrain with a narrow three-point title lead after mixed fortunes in Australia and Malaysia.

The 2007 runner-up won the season-opener in Melbourne from pole, but struggled to a fifth-place finish in Malaysia after a qualifying penalty and pitstop problems.

Reigning drivers' champion Kimi Räikkönen had a nightmare start to his season, finishing eighth in Australia after a series of technical problems with his new Ferrari. The Finn bounced back in Malaysia, though, with a dominant win.

Both the Australian and Malaysian races were hotter than expected, with Malaysia offering a new test thanks to an off-season resurfacing. Bridgestone's tyres proved up to the task, though, in the first two races as Official Tyre Supplier to F1.

"In Australia, we had good tyre performance, with both the Potenza compounds performing very well," said Director of Motorsport Tyre Development Hirohide Hamashima. "Malaysia was another hot race, and another where tyre performance was very good. The new surface is more severe, and shows up the balance of the car. For those cars without such an agreeable balance, there was significant graining"



BAHRAIN PROVIDES HOT TEST

Bridgestone will supply the Formula 1 field with the soft and medium tyre compounds for the upcoming Bahrain Grand Prix on April 4-6, rather than the hard and medium used last year.

Although the Bahrain event is one of the hottest races on the F1 calendar – with track temperatures as high as 50C – the hard compound proved less suited to the track and its smooth surface in 2007, with teams preferring the medium in the race.

This is the only tyre choice change from 2007 for the first half of 2008.

"Tyre choice for the first nine races of the 2008 season has been made much easier by the continuity of our tyres," Director of Motorsport Tyre Development Hirohide Hamashima said. "Bahrain is a very interesting test for us, though. With six corners heading onto long straights, good traction is absolutely essential."

"If there is less than optimum traction, then higher heat and wear will occur. Having looked at the data from 2007, we're confident about using softer tyres for 2008."

Bridgestone and FIA aim to 'Make Cars Green'



Bridgestone unveiled an international partnership to 'Make Cars Green' with world motoring organisation and motorsport's governing body, the FIA, at the Australian Grand Prix.

Drivers are encouraged through a 10-point plan to buy environmentally friendly cars and products, offset their CO₂ emissions, plan journeys to avoid disruption, and optimise fuel usage through correct tyre pressures, avoiding excessive use of air conditioning and careful driving.

"Environmental preservation is one of the most critical issues of our time," said Bridgestone Corporation Chairman, CEO and President Shoshi Arakawa. "We've been expanding our eco-conscious activities, and this collaboration is a great opportunity to globalise our initiatives."

Rossi keen for more in Jerez

Five-times MotoGP title winner Valentino Rossi is looking to improve on fifth place in Qatar as he starts his second race on Bridgestone tyres at Jerez in Spain.

"Obviously, Qatar didn't turn out quite as we had hoped," he said. "But we took away a lot of positives. We saw how competitive both our bike and the Bridgestone tyres are, and this is very exciting for the season."

"Jerez is a great track for me. We did some good work at the Jerez test in February, so now I'm looking forward to racing there. We know we have a big job facing us, especially after the result of Qatar."

Stoner looks to shine again after MotoGP Qatar night win

Bridgestone-shod Ducati star Casey Stoner has said he'll have to work hard to defend his 2007 MotoGP title, despite getting his season off to the perfect start by winning MotoGP's first ever night race in Qatar.

The Australian started the after-dark event from fourth on the grid, but decisively passed three rivals in a series of moves on lap eight. From there, he opened up a five-second gap to repeat last year's win.

"It was a fantastic race," he said. "The first few laps were really hectic with guys fighting closely, and I was struggling a bit for grip. I just hung back to stay out of the way, as I wanted things to calm down."

"When the tyres got up to temperature, I got my chance to get through. I took it and from there I just focused on setting my pace. We knew we had a good package, but obviously we couldn't be sure things would go as well as that."

"This win is the perfect start, but it's not everything. The first race doesn't mean you win the championship, but for sure it helps



a lot. There were a lot of people running some good times. The next couple of tracks aren't perfect for our package, but I think we can try to minimise the damage."

MotoGP night race – page 4 →

Firestone to supply IndyCar in '08

Firestone has been chosen as the tyre brand that will supply the re-unified IndyCar Series this year. The US-based championship has been strengthened for 2008 by its combining forces with the formerly-rival Champ Car World Series.

Firestone will also take on a new role as title sponsor of IndyCar's revamped Indy Pro feeder series, which will now be re-named Firestone Indy Lights.

"In light of the unification process, we've been asked to step up and support the sport even more than we've done in the past," says Bridgestone Firestone Executive Director Al Speyer. "Our company has a long tradition of supporting the development of talent in the open-wheel ranks. We believe this agreement further exemplifies Firestone's continued support and belief in the future of open-wheel racing."

Following the joining of forces of IndyCar and Champ Car, a revised 2008 calendar is likely to include the Champ Car events at Long Beach, Surfers Paradise in Australia and Edmonton in Canada, with the Long Beach street race acting as a farewell to Champ Car. Although the event is the same weekend as the oval race in Motegi, Japan, teams entering either will score points.

New-look IndyCar Series – page 5 →

2008 IndyCar calendar

March 29	Homestead (oval/night)
April 6	St Petersburg (street)
April 19	Motegi (oval)
April 20	Long Beach (street)
April 27	Kansas (oval)
May 25	Indianapolis 500 (oval)
June 1	Milwaukee (oval)
June 7	Texas (oval/night)
June 22	Iowa (oval)
June 28	Richmond (oval)
July 6	Watkins Glen (road)
July 12	Nashville (oval/night)
July 20	Mid-Ohio (road)
August 9	Kentucky (oval)
August 24	Infineon (road)
August 31	Belle Isle (street)
September 7	Chicago (oval)
October 26	Surfers Paradise (street)
tbc	Edmonton (street)



IN BRIEF

Bridgestone will mark its Formula 1 extreme wet tyres with a white stripe this year to differentiate them from the standard wet tyre. Typically, the softer of the two dry tyres is also marked with a white stripe to make identification clearer for TV viewers and spectators at the track.

The inaugural GP2 Asia series looks set for a thrilling final two rounds at Bahrain and Dubai. Frenchman Romain Grosjean is the title favourite after three rounds and six races, but Russian Vitaly Petrov and Malaysian driver Fairuz Fauzy are just 11 points and 12 points behind with 40 points still up for grabs.

Bridgestone-shod cars dominated the first round of the Japanese-based Super GT series in Suzuka, Japan on March 17. Reigning Formula Nippon champion Benoit Treluyer and Satoshi Motoyama won the event in their new Xanavi Nismo GT-R.

Shedding light on a new idea

The season-opening MotoGP night race in Qatar posed some interesting challenges for Bridgestone's engineers, as well as for the teams and riders

Racing is always full of unknowns, but no-one knew what to expect for the 2008 MotoGP season-opener in Qatar – the very first night race in MotoGP's 56-year history.

For the Losail circuit owners, there was a huge logistical challenge to light an area the size of 70 football pitches. The power required was 5.4-million watts – enough to light 3000 houses, turning night into day.

There was an even larger technical challenge for Bridgestone. Ducati's Casey Stoner took the first win for a Bridgestone-shod rider at Losail in 2007, but the change to after-dark racing meant Bridgestone couldn't capitalise on that experience in 2008.

Temperatures plunged from a balmy 35C in the day to 15C at night, while humidity rose to 58 per cent. As a



result, conditions at the desert track felt more like a spring race in Europe.

To cope, the tyres chosen for Qatar were softer than those usually used to resist heat build-up at the track.

But – even then – no-one knew how they would fare over a race distance.

Racing after dark did provide some benefits for the teams. The cool air and humidity benefited engines, with riders going 1.5 seconds faster than in 2007, but pre-event testing certainly threw up some surprises.

Although there were mixed results for the Bridgestone-shod riders in the race, now-reigning champion Stoner was able to repeat last year's win and give his title defence a real kick-start.

As Bridgestone's Motorcycle Race Tyre Development Manager Tohru Ubukata explains, it was all part of the steep learning curve for what proved to be a very unusual race.

"Qatar is a unique track, and the added complication of cooler night conditions offered a real challenge," he says. "We were first to admit that we faced difficulties in testing, but we worked well with our teams and riders to improve the package, both in terms of tyre performance and lap times. We knew we faced a tough test for qualifying, but our race tyres performed above expectations."



Bridgestone's e-reporter contest hits a half-decade

It seems hard to believe, but Bridgestone's e-reporter contest celebrates its fifth year in 2008. Since 2004, 33 budding journalists have competed as finalists. The deadline for this year's entrants is on March 31.

All eight of the 2008 finalists will attend the Spanish Grand Prix at Barcelona on April 27, before joining the GP2 paddock at European races to write race reports and interview drivers. The overall winner will attend the MotoGP season-finale in late October as part of a prize designed to help kick-start their writing career.

The e-reporter contest has also gone online for 2008, with budding entrants able to find out more by joining the 'Bridgestone e-reporter' group on facebook.com.

To enter, log on to www.bridgestone.eu/e-reporter



Back together under one awning

After running two rival series for 12 years, IndyCar and Champ Car are re-united in 2008. We examine how that affects Bridgestone Firestone Motorsports

For 12 years, US single-seater racing has sat divided. On one side, the road course-based Champ Car World Series, and, on the other, the predominantly oval-based IndyCar Series.

But – starting this year – teams from both will run again under one banner, as the IndyCar Series creates a unified championship that offers a unique blend of oval and road racing, with Firestone acting as sole tyre supplier.

One thing that will remain constant for the new-look IndyCar is the tyres. For the last 12 years, Bridgestone and Firestone have supplied teams in both series, and – for the last few – have been sole official supplier to both.

Firestone has been picked as the IndyCar's official tyre-supply brand of choice, and will act as title sponsor for the Firestone Indy Lights series, but it will still benefit from Bridgestone's racing work over the past five years.

Together, Firestone and Bridgestone engineers have built tyres that can cope with demands of road racing and



the intense longitudinal loads that occur when racing at 200mph on high-speed ovals. Now they'll combine and pool that experience for the benefit of all.

"From a technical standpoint, one thing we can offer the IndyCar Series participants is consistency in a time of change," says General Manager of

Race Tyre Development Page Mader.

"We've always had a great deal of overlap in our staffing and technology for Champ Car and IndyCar, so teams and drivers will be comfortable with familiar faces and the same consistent, reliable race tyres to which they've become accustomed."

Firestone's US racing heritage

Firestone has a legacy in US racing that extends right back to the very first running of the world-famous Indianapolis 500 in 1911. Ray Harroun dominated the inaugural Indy 500 race on Firestone tyres, and Firestone-shod drivers would go on to win the event 43 times back-to-back from 1920 to 1966.

Firestone-shod drivers also won numerous titles in NASCAR and TransAm, but the company quit racing in 1975 and didn't return to the race track for 20 years.

Bridgestone acquired the Firestone brand in 1988 and was keen to capitalise on its racing heritage in the US market. In 1995, Firestone supported a number of teams in the then-united IndyCar series. Scott Pruett scored the first modern podium for a Firestone-shod driver in the season-opener in Australia; Parker

Johnstone took the first pole at the Michigan oval and Scott Pruett took Firestone's first win the next day.

Following US racing's split in 1996, Bridgestone and Firestone supported teams in both series, becoming sole supplier to Champ Car in 1999, and sole supplier to IndyCar in 2002. (Bridgestone took the sole supply role for Champ Car from 2002 to the end of last year).

To date, Firestone-shod drivers have won the Indy 500 58 times, 65 per cent of the available wins since 1911. From 1994 to 2001 (before Bridgestone took over as sole supplier), Firestone-shod drivers scored a total of 103 Champ Car wins and 104 poles from 128 race starts, while in IndyCar, Firestone-shod drivers have won 133 of the 151 races held to date, and have taken 136 poles. An impressive record by anyone's reckoning.

CHAMPIONSHIP TABLES

Formula One

Driver (Team)	Pts
1 Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)	14
2 Kimi Räikkönen (Ferrari)	11
3 Nick Heidfeld (BMW Sauber)	11
4 Heikki Kovalainen (McLaren)	10
5 Robert Kubica (BMW Sauber)	8
6 Nico Rosberg (Williams)	6
6 April Sakhir, Bahrain	
27 April Barcelona, Spain	

MotoGP

Rider (Team)	Pts
1 Casey Stoner (Ducati Corse)	25
2 Jorge Lorenzo (Fiat Yamaha)	20
3 Dani Pedrosa (Repsol Honda)	16
4 Andrea Dovizioso (JiR Team Scot)	13
5 Valentino Rossi (Fiat Yamaha)	11
6 James Toseland (Tech 3 Yamaha)	10
30 March Jerez, Spain	
13 April Estoril, Portugal	

GP2 ASIA

Driver (Team)	Pts
1 Romain Grosjean (ART GP)	35
2 Vitaly Petrov (Campos)	24
3 Fairuz Fauzy (Super Nova)	23
4 Bruno Senna (iSport)	18
5 Adrian Valles (Fisichella)	15
6 Kamui Kobayashi (Dams)	10
5-6 April Sakhir, Bahrain	
11-12 April Dubai, Dubai	

