

F1: Valencia test under way - first look at new cars in action



The new Williams FW35 gets its first run out in the hands of Rubens Barrichello at the first official F1 test at Valencia, Spain, yesterday.

It was a big day for Formula One: it was the day that everyone was supposed to roll out their new cars for the first time, all together.

But that didn't happen and several cars were released in advance.

On track, Massa's Ferrari was quickest and he did more than 100 laps, checking out himself as much as checking out the car. Michael Schumacher, on the other hand, who had told reporters recently that he had been doing extra exercises to make sure his neck was able to sustain the forces in an F1 car over a race distance, did just 40 laps. His team-mate, Rosberg, did even less at 39. He was the first to drive the spectacular Mercedes car out of the garage, the only time he was ahead of his team-mate all day.

Barrichello was, as always, Mr Good News: his fastest time got him up to sixth - his former team, even with less running, were 3rd and 4th fastest - with Schumacher being third, a full half-second faster than his team-mate. Barrichello, however, was undaunted "You can't predict anything from the times today; and probably won't be able to for the remainder of the tests because of the fuel loads people will run with such big tanks. It probably won't be until Bahrain qualifying that we will see where everyone is."

That, however, is what everyone said last year when Button and Barrichello himself took a brand new car that had never turned a wheel with an engine it has not been, originally, designed for and went faster than anyone else - and faster than anyone expected.

And if one has to say anything about this year's Mercedes, designed of course, as a Brawn it is this: there's an old adage in engineering: if it looks right, it probably is right. As the covers came off the Mercedes, anyone with that saying in mind must have felt their heart sink: it is probably the most "right" looking car in recent F1 history. There are a couple of boards that spoil the visual line but, presumably, improve the air flow. Thinking back, it's hard to think of a more "right" looking design since the Lotus 72.

McLaren were testing the car not the driver - Gary Paffett ran the MP4-25. De La Rosa, having left his test role at McLaren, ran the BMW Sauber (same name, different owner) second fastest.

The new Toro Rosso had a problem with its gearbox and slowest of the eight cars that turned out for the first day of testing was Robert Kubica in his Renault.

None of the new teams have put in an appearance.