

# It's anyone's race 'down under'

Ferrari, Red Bull, McLaren and Mercedes are all in with a chance at Melbourne.

FERNANDO Alonso, Felipe Massa, Sebastian Vettel, Mark Webber, Lewis Hamilton, Jenson Button, Michael Schumacher and Nico Rosberg are all capable of cutting it in Australia on Sunday.

Much however will depend on conditions and tyres, so let's hope we can see a race where strategy and tactics play a more important part than in Bahrain.

Softer tyres could do the trick, with wear rates being more critical. I hope Bridgestone is less conservative and allows this to happen.

This will give us the chance to see how the different strategies of long versus short runs on harder versus softer tyres and the tactical benefit of smoother driving shake out.

Button and Schumacher are particularly good at this and we could then be in for some interesting racing. Some cars are designed to be inherently kinder to their tyres and this allows a clever driver to exploit the advantage.

On the technical front, another loophole has been closed in that the hole for the portable starter, feeding through the rear diffuser, is now carefully defined. It was being used for further aerodynamic gain.

McLaren's front air flaps, which blow air onto

the back wing, will no doubt be copied as this has been declared legal.

The device makes the wing 'stall' at high speed, reducing drag and increasing top speed.

Such is progress made in team wind tunnels that many 'bolt on' bits will be added to the cars for practice in Australia in order to gain that vital 10th of a second.

In particular, the followers will be trying to catch up with the leaders, having seen the top cars in action in the first race of the season and the clever individual ideas which have been applied.

Cars will develop gradually over the course of the season to suit the individual taste of drivers.

For example, Schumi prefers a car with more turn in and hence more oversteer.

This could even necessitate as great a change as a shorter wheelbase as the cars continue to evolve to suit driver preferences.

**TV times:** Friday practice 1 at 3.20am on SS2; practice 2 at 7.20am on SS2 with highlights at 7.30pm on SS5.

On Saturday, practice 3 is at 4.50am on SS5 and qualifying at 7.50am, also on SS5 with the race on Sunday at 8am on SS5.



Melbourne F1 track