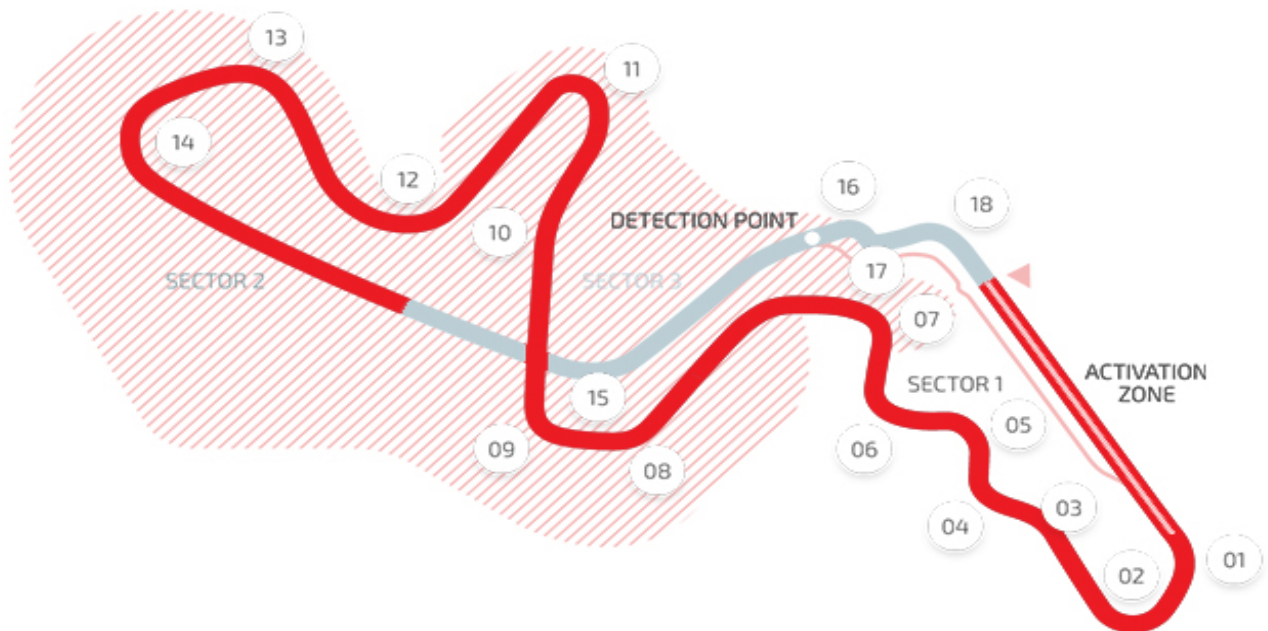




## Japanese GP

SUZUKA CIRCUIT

### PREVIEW



Maranello, 8 October 2019 – This Sunday sees the 35<sup>th</sup> running of the Japanese Grand Prix. It has been held on just two circuits; four times at the Fuji Speedway and the remaining 30 at the Suzuka Circuit. Scuderia Ferrari has won seven times.

**Disappointing start.** The race was first held in 1976 and was the championship title decider. Niki Lauda had returned to racing in record time after his terrible crash at the Nurburgring and he came to Fuji with a three point lead over McLaren's James Hunt. However, that 24 October is remembered for the atrocious weather, with rain falling incessantly and the Austrian decided to stop after just two laps. When he came into the pits, Ferrari team Technical Director, Mauro Forghieri offered to state that the retirement was due to a mechanical failure, but Lauda refused. Hunt had nothing to lose and raced on to finish third, which was enough to give him the title by a

single point.

**Most famous figure-of-eight in the world.** After one more race in Fuji the following year, the Japanese Grand Prix disappeared from the calendar, until its return in 1987, thanks in part to the success of Honda as an engine supplier. The race in the land of the Rising Sun was held at Suzuka, used as a test track by the aforementioned Japanese company and featuring a figure-of-eight. The first event went well for Ferrari, with Gerhard Berger winning in the F1-87.

**The Senna-Prost era.** As from the following year, the Suzuka race often played a pivotal role in the World Championship, featuring the same two drivers, McLaren's Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost. In 1988, Senna got bogged down at the start, but closed on the Frenchman to take his first title. However, the following year, the two McLarens collided at the final chicane and the title went to Prost. The rift between team-mates could not be fixed and Prost switched to Scuderia Ferrari in 1990. That year there were several great head-to-head duels between the two arch rivals, who arrived in Suzuka with the Brazilian heading the classification. To keep the title fight alive, Prost would have to finish ahead of his rival, who would start from pole. The Frenchman got the best start, but the Brazilian speared into Prost at the first corner, as revenge for the previous year, which greatly upset the Ferrari fans.

**Disappointment and the red dawn.** The Scuderia was back to winning ways at Suzuka in the Nineties, mainly down to Michael Schumacher. In 1997, Jacques Villeneuve was disqualified, so Michael won and went into the championship lead, which would be lost at the final round at Jerez de la Frontera. There was more disappointment in 1998 and 1999. In the former, Schumacher needed to make up four points to Finland's Mika Hakkinen in the McLaren. Michael took pole but stalled on the grid and had to start from the back. He fought back to third, but on lap 31 a tyre exploded to put an end to his chances. The following year, Eddie Irvine was in the hunt for the title for the Scuderia, but once again, Hakkinen won. Nevertheless, Scuderia Ferrari could take some satisfaction from winning the Constructors' championship for the first time since 1983. However, the Italian team's moment of glory at Suzuka was only a year away. On 8<sup>th</sup> October it finally clinched the Drivers' crown, something that had eluded it since way back in 1979. Michael Schumacher was champion with one race remaining and ecstatic crowds spilled out onto the streets of Maranello, even though it was just dawn back in Europe. The bells rang out and photos of the celebration were seen all around the world with the scene still remembered to this day as the "red dawn." For the next few years, Suzuka was a happy hunting ground for the Maranello squad, Michael and the team winning in 2001, 2002 and 2004, with the title again decided in Japan in 2003, the fourth for the German as a Ferrari driver on the day when his team-mate Rubens Barrichello won the race.

**Recent years.** The Suzuka idyll ended in 2006 when Schumacher had just overtaken Fernando Alonso in the Renault to take the lead. The pair had arrived in Japan equal on points, with two races to go. Unfortunately, the first engine failure in five years stopped the German in his tracks and ended his aspirations of an eighth title. There was more disappointment for the Scuderia in

2012, when Alonso, now a Ferrari driver collided with Kimi Raikkonen in the Lotus and had to retire. Sebastian Vettel, back then a Red Bull driver, won, thus laying the groundwork for catching up to the Ferrari man. Other than that, in the past few years, there's only been a podium finish in 2015, when Sebastian finished third.

## **FERRARI STATS**

**GP contested** 986

**Seasons in F1** 70

**Debut** Monaco 1950 (Alberto Ascari 2°; Raymond Sommer 4°; Luigi Villorresi rit.)

**Wins** 238 (24,13%)

**Pole positions** 226 (22,92%)

**Fastest laps** 252 (25,55%)

**Podiums** 767 (77,78%)

## **FERRARI STATS JAPANESE GP**

**GP contested** 34

**Debut** 1976 (Clay Regazzoni 5th; Niki Lauda ret.)

**Wins** 7 (20,58%)

**Pole positions** 9 (26,47%)

**Fastest laps** 7 (20,58%)

**Podiums** 22 (64,70%)

## **Charles Leclerc #16**



"Japan is a very special place for us to race, particularly because of the fans. They are so passionate and always show us a lot of support, which makes the experience there so unique.

It was a difficult weekend for me last year, being in Suzuka for the first time since Jules' accident. Obviously, it is a very sad memory that I will always associate with this Grand Prix.

The track itself is very technical and demanding. It is one of the best to drive on in terms of its layout. It features high speed straights mixed with various corner combinations and the hairpin, all of which make it the iconic circuit that it is. It has different characteristics to the last few tracks we have raced on, so we will see how our recent developments will work there, especially in terms of the aerodynamics."

## **Sebastian Vettel #5**

"Suzuka is probably my favourite circuit of the whole season. It is the



only track in the championship that has a figure of eight layout and, in some ways, it reminds me of the sort of tracks we played on when I was a little kid.

Except that there's nothing kid-like about this circuit, given that it features thrilling corners like 130R and that sequence of esses in the first sector.

The other thing that makes the Japanese Grand Prix special is the fans: they're incredible! No matter how early you turn up at the track, they're there before you, waiting for you. And the feeling they have for you is unique and wonderful to experience.

Last but not least, the weather at Suzuka is always unpredictable which means all sorts of things can happen in the race, which makes it particularly complex but also fascinating."

### **Mattia Binotto Team Principal**

“ Our performance level was good in Sochi, which is how we managed to take our fourth straight pole position, but we know that in order to be at the front in Japan, every aspect of our work must be perfect.

That's the way we are going to approach the race in Suzuka, trying to extract all the available performance from the car package. If we can do that, then we hope to be able to be as competitive as we have been in recent races.

Sebastian and Charles both adore this circuit. There is much that is special about it, from the sequence of corners in the first sector, to the incredible reception we get from the fans all weekend long. We hope they will be able to enjoy a thrilling race weekend.”

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# JAPANESE GP



SUZUKA INTERNATIONAL  
RACING COURSE



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