

# F1: Sergio Perez fastest, Fernando Alonso shines in Bahrain Grand Prix practice

Sergio Perez topped the times for Red Bull ahead of Fernando Alonso, debuting for Aston Martin, as the defending champion team set the pace in Friday's opening practice session at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix.

The 33-year-old Mexican, who was fastest on the final day of pre-season testing at the same venue, clocked a best lap in one minute and 32.758 seconds in very warm conditions, AFP reported.

Alonso confirmed his promising pace from testing with a lap in 1:33.196 to split the two Red Bulls and push two-time defending world champion Max Verstappen down to third, six-tenths of a second off his team-mate's time.

Lando Norris was fourth for McLaren, a further eight-tenths adrift, ahead of Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and Lance Stroll, back after recovering from a double wrist injury, in the second Aston Martin.

Kevin Magnussen was seventh for Haas ahead of Zhou Guanyu and his Alfa Romeo team-mate Valtteri Bottas with seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finishing 10th for Mercedes.



Red Bull's Sergio Perez at Bahrain Grand Prix practice  
● YAHOO NEWS

The new season began in earnest at the Bahrain International Circuit at Sakhir, a former camel farm in the desert.

Two-time champion Alonso, recruited from Alpine, to replace retired four-time champion Sebastian

Vettel, set an early marker in 1:35.048.

That lap confirmed the level of high confidence in the Silverstone-based team this year, following a strong showing in last week's three-day test.

He was soon overhauled,

after 14 minutes of the opening hour's free practice, by Perez clocking 1:34.343 on medium tyres, lifting him half a second clear at the top.

'Disfigurement' Hamilton, reprising his use of a rainbow-colored

helmet in recognition of the Progress Pride flag to support diversity and the LGBTQ+ community, slotted in third behind Alonso. Hamilton on Thursday told reporters he would continue to speak out on all issues despite a revision

of the ruling body's sporting code requiring written permission to comment on political, religious and personal interests.

"I have always felt a responsibility and if the sport is going to these countries, we are duty bound to raise awareness and try to leave a positive impact," he said.

The Mercedes driver was granted an exemption before practice from the FIA's 'bling ban' after doctors' examinations supported a fear of 'disfigurement' if he was forced to remove his nose stud frequently.

Stroll's progress -- he hoped to make up for lost time when missing the testing session -- was restricted by an ignition problem to only two laps, but swift repairs returned him to the track.

After half an hour, he was back in the groove as most teams switched to soft tyres, Perez trimming his time to 1:32.758 ahead of Verstappen in 1:33.375.

Behind the two Red Bulls, Bottas was third for Alfa Romeo, but adrift by 1.3 seconds -- an ominous gap even so early in the new campaign, though Ferrari and Mercedes were still on mediums.

## Djokovic finds positives in the first loss of the season



● BBC

### Sports Desk

Novak Djokovic's first loss of the season at the 2023 Dubai Championships was a tough pill to swallow, especially after coming back from injury. However, the world No.1 found positives in his performance, despite the defeat. Djokovic's resilience and determination were on full display throughout the tournament, and he showcased his incredible skill despite fighting an injury only recently.

The Serbian superstar had been sidelined with a hamstring tear after winning the Australian Open, but he proved that he is still a top-class player by reaching the semi-finals in Dubai. Djokovic fought hard against Daniil Medvedev, who is currently ranked World No.7, but ultimately fell short in straight sets.

"Oh, lots of positives. The way I felt throughout the entire week makes me really satisfied with the current state of my body, not knowing how I'm going to react with the comeback after an injury. I'm really glad," the Serbian superstar said.

# Eccentric billionaire to clear out Blues

After splashing the cash like there was no tomorrow in January, brace yourself for the Todd Boehly mega-sale at Chelsea this summer, where all players on two-year deals or less must go.

Boehly has racked up an unprecedented transfer bill in his first full season at Stamford Bridge, spending £250million last summer before forking out a mind-blowing £300million on new recruits in January, as reported by Daily Mail

As a result, the Blues owner will likely need to balance the books when the transfer window reopens in July, and The Telegraph claim he is determined to move on any players who won't commit themselves to the club beyond two years.

Enforcing this strategy would leave several first-team stars vulnerable at the end of the season... so who may be shown the door?

Sportsmail has run the rule over every Chelsea player in the final two years of their contract and assessed whether they should stay or go this summer.

### N'Golo Kante (Expires this summer)

Kante is understood to be on the verge of



● REUTERS

signing a new three-year contract, and despite missing most of the season through injury that will be music to Chelsea fans' ears.

It may be a risk given his fitness problems and the fact he turns 32 this month, yet when fit and firing there is no better box-

to-box midfielder in world football, so this is a risk worth taking.

VERDICT: KEEP

### Mateo Kovacic (Expires next year)

With just over a year to run on his latest deal, the Croatian midfielder has a tough

decision to make this summer as he eyes what could be the final long-term contract of his career ahead of his 29th birthday in May.

Reports suggest Pep Guardiola and Manchester City are interested in prising him away from the Blues, which says it all about how brilliant a player he is on his day. Boehly should do everything possible to keep Kovacic at Stamford Bridge.

VERDICT: KEEP

### Christian Pulisic (Expires next year)

There were once high hopes for Pulisic when he arrived from Borussia Dortmund in 2019 and quickly showed flashes of the breath-taking quality he possesses. Some, including this writer, felt he could even go on and emulate the much-revered Eden Hazard.

However, a series of injury problems over the past three years have prevented the American from unlocking this early potential, with inconsistency and a lack of end product blighting his game in recent seasons. It may suit all parties to go their separate ways this summer.

VERDICT: SELL

## PSG defender Achraf Hakimi charged following rape allegations



● REUTERS

Paris Saint-Germain defender Achraf Hakimi has been charged and questioned by prosecutors following allegations of rape made against him.

AFP reported that the 24-year-old Morocco international was quizzed by the Hauts-de-Seine Territorial Security on Thursday and has subsequently been charged.

Accusations of sexual assault from a 24-year-old woman were made on February 26.

The incident in question is alleged to have taken place on February 25 at Hakimi's home in the Boulogne area of Paris.

Hakimi's lawyer, Fanny Colin, told Le Parisien in a statement released on Tuesday that the player had done nothing wrong, saying: "The accusations are false. He is calm and is at the disposal of justice."

Hakimi attended the FIFA Best Awards ceremony in Paris on Monday and formed part of PSG's training session on Friday morning ahead of their Ligue 1 fixture with Nantes on Saturday.



● DAILY MAIL



● REUTERS



● BBC