



## ING Renault F1 Team kicks off 2008 with Paris launch

The ING Renault F1 Team today officially launched its 2008 season as it revealed the brand new Renault F1 R28 and its driver line-up at Renault's communications headquarters in Boulogne-Billancourt, on the banks of the Seine in south-west Paris.

The ceremony was attended by Renault President and CEO Carlos Ghosn, along with 500 media and VIP guests from around the world, including Michel Tilmant, Chairman of the Executive Board of ING Group, the team announced its determination to return to the front of the F1 field in 2008, thanks to a combination of aggressive design concepts in the new car, and the talents of the sport's only active double world champion, Fernando Alonso, allied to rookie Nelson Piquet.

ING Renault F1 Team President Bernard Rey explained that the team had set itself demanding targets for the new season. "We expect to see the team back in its normal place, fighting at the front of the field," explained Rey. "This is the target the team has set for the new car. On the technical side, everybody has worked hard to overcome the problems encountered last year. On the driver front, Fernando Alonso's return was an important boost. There is optimism inside the team and within Renault."

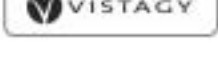
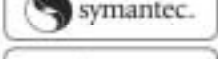
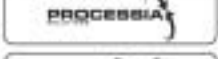
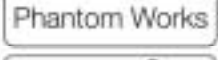
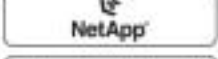
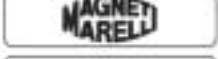
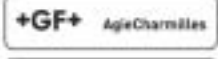
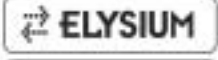
Rey also reinforced the value of the Formula 1 programme to the Renault Group, as a pillar of the company's global sales and marketing strategies. "Formula 1 is a powerful tool for building brand awareness in non-traditional markets, and Renault's sales outside Western Europe grew by 16.5% in 2007" he concluded. "Our status as a leading team demonstrates Renault can build vehicles that deliver performance, reliability and high technology. From an overall perspective, Formula 1 is a meaningful and profitable investment for Renault."

*R28: blending new solutions and proven technology*

The ING Renault F1 Team's hopes for the 2008 season rest on the all-new Renault F1 R28. The car ran for the first time last week in Valencia, on Monday 21 January. During the four-day test, the car completed over 1500 km, indicating strong early reliability in spite of numerous changes to the 2008 technical regulations, including the introduction of the Standard ECU and long-life gearboxes. The team also made encouraging progress with set-up and performance development, allowing the car's debut to be judged as promising.

The new car represents a shift in design philosophy from its predecessor, in order to extract optimum performance from the Bridgestone tyres that all competitors have used since the start of 2007. The new car features revised weight distribution and a new aerodynamic concept to match, which has been enabled by the introduction of a "zero-keel" front suspension mounting. The monocoque and bodywork to improve the packaging of the car's mechanical systems while under the skin, the SECU and new gearbox represent the biggest changes. As with all new designs, the team has worked hard to improve stiffness and remove weight throughout the car, to provide maximum set-up adjustability from circuit to circuit.

Technical Director Bob Bell labelled the car "much less evolutionary" than its predecessor, continuing: "2007 was a very poor year by our standards. For 2008, there are high expectations inside and outside the team, and it is down to us to give the drivers





a competitive car. We have put the problems from 2007 behind us and in terms of the car design, we have looked at the problem afresh. The team pushed very hard in all areas, and particularly on the aerodynamics. The front end of the car has come in for special attention with a brand new front wing and the front suspension. The rear end has also been heavily reworked, and we haven't neglected the basics. The car ran reliably in its first test, and we made encouraging progress on performance development last week. We are confident that the advances we have seen in the wind tunnel will be reflected on track."

The car will once again be powered by the RS27 V8 engine, which remains substantially the same as last year's unit, given the engine homologation rules currently in force. Engine ancillaries must be homologated by the first race of the year, while the team has also had a heavy workload adapting to the demands of the SECU.

"The transition to the SECU was a big workload, and remains so," explained Deputy Managing Director (Engines), Rob White. "The unit itself is the most obvious change for the new season, but there are many new software tools and programmes that accompany it. We have had to adapt to them all, and learn how to get the most from them. While we are not allowed to develop the engine itself, there remains much to do to assure its reliability in-car performance. These V8's remain complicated and sophisticated, and we must be vigilant about component supply and quality, and concerning changes in the way the engine is used in the car. We are determined to return to the front, and we have worked tirelessly towards this goal for many months."

#### *Back to the future*

The ING Renault F1 Team's race drivers for 2008 will be double world champion Fernando Alonso and rookie Nelson Piquet. Alonso returns 'home' to the team where he won his two world titles after a sabbatical season with rivals McLaren-Mercedes, and has already reacclimatised to life at Renault. He has tested twice with the team this month, setting fastest time at the recent Jerez test with the old R27, before beginning the initial on-track development of the R28 last week in Valencia. The Spaniard scored 15 of his 19 career wins with Renault, and is the only man to have finished in the world championship top three over the past three seasons.

"The entire team is absolutely determined to get back to the top, they are pushing very hard and that is a big motivation for me," commented the 26 year old Spaniard. "First and foremost, I am a racer, and I obviously want to win. I will do my maximum to make that happen, and I know that is what is expected from me. Some people have suggested that I have unfinished business from 2007, but that's not the way I look at it. I am preparing for this season the same way I always have done: by concentrating on my job. My first feeling with the car was good and the team is working incredibly hard. It looks encouraging at the moment."

Nelson Piquet will partner Alonso in his debut Formula 1 season, as another famous name returns to the sport. While Nelsinho may carry a famous name, he is determined to make his own mark in F1, and to build on the experience he gained last year as test driver for the ING Renault F1 Team. The 2006 GP2 series runner-up was also the youngest ever British F3 champion during his junior career, and the 22 year old Brazilian will now look to confirm his potential at the highest level.





"Melbourne still seems a long way off to me," commented Nelsinho. "We have a lot of work to do beforehand, and I am focused on the next test sessions and our development programme. That will help me improve my physical condition too, because driving is always the best preparation; and I can continue learning to make sure I am ready for my first Grand Prix. My aim this year is to get the maximum out of the package, and to do a good job for the team. There will be a lot to learn and I not underestimating the challenge of Formula 1."

The race driver pairing will be aided in their test and development work by third driver Lucas di Grassi, runner-up in the 2007 GP2 series championship, and test driver Romain Grosjean, who will also compete in the 2008 GP2 series with ART Grand Prix. 23 year old Brazilian di Grassi will conduct the majority of the team's development work alongside Fernando and Nelsinho, while Grosjean will get his first taste of F1 at a number of tests during the year. The 21 year old Swiss-born Frenchman has already made a flying start to his season in GP2, taking a double victory in the opening rounds of the GP2 Asia championship last weekend.

#### *A stronger team at every level*

The ING Renault F1 Team enters the 2008 season in rude health, following substantial technology investments by Renault SA during 2007 and the acquisition of new commercial partners for 2008. The CFD centre of excellence is currently under construction at Enstone, and will be operational by the second half of 2008. The facility will provide cutting-edge development resources for the team and also for the development of more efficient road cars in future Renault ranges. Coupled to a stable technical team with a proven track record, the outlook for the new season is positive.

"We have the strength in depth to overcome our disappointments," concluded Managing Director Flavio Briatore. "Renault has invested for the future at Enstone, especially with the new CFD Centre, which gives us the stability we need to move forward. The new car is a change in direction for the team, and we have been aggressive with the concept. When you add in Fernando's ability to lead the team on the track, it is a powerful combination. Remember, in 2007 we finished third in the championship with a bad car, that we did not develop for half of the season. For 2008, we have a good car – and a world champion driver. The situation looks promising."

- Details of the team's new commercial partners can be found in a separate press release.
- A full media pack from the R28 launch is available to download from the team's media website at <http://www.ing-renaultf1.com/en/media/index.php>.
- High-resolution studio photos of the new R28, and of the launch ceremony, can be found on the team's photo download site, accessible via the media site.
- An official ING Renault F1 Team Podcast, including interviews with Flavio Briatore, Fernando Alonso, Nelson Piquet and a round table technical discussion with Bob Bell and Pat Symonds, will be available for download this afternoon.

