

Doctors try bringing Schumacher out of coma (Update)

January 30 2014, by Daniel Abelous

French doctors have started trying to bring Formula One legend Michael Schumacher out of the induced coma he was placed in after a near-fatal ski accident in December.

The drugs used to keep Schumacher, 45, unconscious have begun to be reduced, though it may be some time yet before he comes to, his spokeswoman, Sabine Kehm, said in a statement released on Thursday.

"Michael's sedation is being reduced in order to allow the start of the waking up process which may take a long time," the statement read.

"For the protection of the family, it was originally agreed by the interested parties to communicate this information only once this process was consolidated. Please note that no further updates will be given."

It was unclear when the waking-up process actually began or when it was scheduled to be completed. The first report that it was underway came on Sunday in France's *Journal du Dimanche* and a subsequent flurry of similar media reports prompted the family to make a statement.

Schumacher has been in intensive care in Grenoble University Hospital since being flown there by helicopter following his December 29 accident in the Alpine resort of Meribel.

The German fell and hit his head against a rock after venturing on to a small off-piste section while skiing with his son and a group of friends.

The impact of the collision was sufficiently powerful to split the helmet he was wearing and cause severe head injuries.

Surgeons said he suffered bleeding and bruising on his brain and a scan showed "widespread lesions". After the surgery he was placed in a medically induced coma and his body temperature was cooled to reduce the risk of further damage.

Another surgery was carried out on December 30 to reduce bleeding.

There has been no indication as to whether Schumacher has a chance of making a full recovery.

Experts have underlined that it is rare to keep a patient in an artificial coma for more than three weeks and have stressed that the next phase of his recovery is likely to be complicated and fraught with the risk of setbacks.

Schumacher's fellow driver and compatriot Sebastian Vettel said earlier this week that he was praying for a miracle which would allow his friend to come through his ordeal unscathed.

"We still don't know what shape he will be in when he wakes up, which is awful for his family and friends," Vettel said.

Bernard Vigue of the University Hospital Centre at Bicetre near Paris said Schumacher could have months, if not years, of therapy ahead of him.

"Recovery can be a very long road. In some case, patients improve between a year and three years later," said Vigue.

Schumacher dominated Formula One, winning the driver's

championship, the biggest prize in motorsport, seven times and notching up 91 race victories.

As a driver, he was a daring overtaker with nerves of steel and an unrivalled feel for the sweet spot between risk-taking and recklessness.

That inevitably led to suggestions he could have been careless on the ski slopes. But it seems that he was just unlucky. On the fateful day at Meribel he was reportedly skiing well within his capabilities. It is unclear why he went off-piste but when he did, he seems to have skied over a partially covered rock, which resulted in him losing his balance and hitting his head.

Investigators have ruled out faulty skis, inadequate signage or excessive speed as possible causes of the accident.

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