



F1 Advent Calendar 2009 – Day Five

Welcome to the Sidepodcast F1 Advent Calendar 2009, where we are running through all the important moments of 2009 - in an extended mini series. Each day we're opening the advent window on another key topic from the year gone by. Now it's time to find out what story is behind Day Five - Rain Stops Play.

Following Brawn's incredible start to the season and a 1-2 debut win, it was time to move on to the Malaysian Grand Prix. Bernie Ecclestone shifted the start time of the race, to appeal to the European audience - starting at 5pm local time.

All three Free Practice sessions were dry and went without major incident - apart from the bit where Kimi Raikkonen had to pull to a stop in the pitlane and jump out of his car quickly, as a KERS malfunction saw the cockpit fill with smoke. Button was on fine form once again, and took his second consecutive pole position, with Trulli lining up on the grid beside him.

The race began and Button lost his lead at the start, allowing Rosberg, Trulli and Alonso all to get ahead of him, although he did make the places back thanks to some overtaking and some strategy work in the pits. Talk of rain started to emerge, and Raikkonen took the plunge and gambled on a set of wet tyres. It was much too early for that kind of thing.

It wasn't until Lap 19 that it really started to rain, and wet tyres were put on right down the order. Timo Glock remained on intermediates, and whilst the others struggled with tyre wear thanks to little standing water, the Toyota driver moved his way up the field to third. Many drivers took his cue and pitted for intermediates, but then the rain really began to fall and the pack switched back to wets.

Then it was chaos. It was almost impossible to see who was where, what tyres they were on and whether they were even pointing in the right direction. On lap 33, the race was red flagged, and the drivers came to a halt on the grid waiting for further information. After waiting, and waiting, and waiting a little bit more, the time limit expired and the race was over with less than half distance completed.

That meant half points for the top eight drivers, and on countback that gave Button his second consecutive win - and another in unconventional circumstances. He followed a safety car home for the Australian Grand Prix and he won the Malaysian race stopped on the grid. I'm sure he didn't mind either way, though.

This was only the fifth time in Formula 1's history that a race has been stopped midway and half points have been awarded, and I don't mind telling you that filling in the championship tables for the rest of the season was a complete pain.

Post-race, the drivers felt like the right decision had been made to halt the race, even if they would have preferred to be getting the laps in. Hamilton said: "It was impossible to drive out there, it was very, very dangerous. It's the most dangerous conditions I have ever raced in." And Button added: "It was way too wet out there and the decision to call it off was correct. I would obviously love to have the 10 points but this is the best we could have done and realistically it was the right thing to do."

Bernie Ecclestone faced criticism for the change in start time, but defended his position strongly, saying he cannot control the weather.



That's all for this episode of the F1 Advent Calendar 2009. Please join me tomorrow when we'll open another door of our calendar for another season snippet.

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