



F1 Digest - Bahrain Free Practice

Intro

Welcome to the second edition of F1 Digest for the Bahrain Grand Prix. Yesterday we previewed the upcoming race and today we're going to look at the action as it kicked off with Free Practice.

Free Practice 1

Going into the weekend, it was thought the weather would turn out windy and this could have an effect on the sessions. Thankfully as Free Practice 1 got underway, the sun was out and there was only a moderate breeze – track temperature was just over 30 degrees C.

Vettel, Bourdais and Glock took to the track but it wasn't long before everyone had done an installation lap. Ten minutes in and Sutil was the first man to try his hand at a complete lap. Vettel, Fisichella and Bourdais joined him, with Bourdais taking the top spot temporarily.

The second wave of drivers included Trulli and Rosberg, with the Toyota's appearing to be on top form for this session at least. Massa and Kovalainen joined the traffic together, swiftly followed by Hamilton. Massa posted the fastest time but Hamilton eclipsed him by three tenths of a second. Massa improved on his next time round the track, but still not enough to regain the top spot. As some of the drivers began to struggle with their cars and run wide, Raikkonen took to the track, posting the fastest time on his second go. Over at Sidepodcast.com, Scott posted on the live comment thread: "Super Aguri's up on jacks with the tyre warmers on as Glock goes wide. Seems to be that last corner that's catching everyone out, that must be the place that is the dustiest part of the track."

The Honda boys emerged from the garage leaving only the two Super Aguri cars without a lap time. Button and Barrichello probably wished they hadn't bothered, though, posting lap times in 17th and 18th respectively. The Super Aguri's finally got going with 6 minutes remaining. As with Honda, their lap times were not particularly noteworthy.

In the dying moments, Nakajima threw his Williams into 5th, only to be shown up by Rosberg in 3rd. The difference between the two was the tyres with Nakajima on softs and Rosberg on hards. Hard tyres were in the majority during this first practice.

At the end of the session, the top five fastest were Massa, Raikkonen, Rosberg, Hamilton and Kovalainen. SteveintheUK picked up on an interesting statistic: "I wonder if the McLaren boys were just practicing one sector at a time as the fastest sector times are not always on the same lap."

Voicemail

"Hi there, this is Scott Woodwiss. Just thought I'd like to share some of my views on what happened to some of the teams. First of all, I think Ferrari are very quick, mainly because I think it was due to that winter testing in Bahrain. And it seemed to have much of an advantage because if you look at the times, you've got Massa and Raikkonen, you've got Rosberg who was just under two tenths, but then the next one's Hamilton and he's nearly half a second slower. Williams had a very good session, I think. Rosberg and Nakajima did pretty good. Rosberg got up to third, that's pretty impressive. Looking at Toro Rosso, they did pretty good. I have to say Bourdais and Vettel, there was a bit near the end of the session where it looked like they were playing with each other, sort of brake testing each other and going quite slowly. Sort of, one going across to the other, which I found quite funny. And the Toyota's, 8th and 11th, I would have thought they'd have made that little bit more of an impact but I think they did a pretty good job."



Free Practice 2

Ahead of the second session, the wind had picked up and the temperature had also risen slightly. Familiar faces took to the track, Trulli, Glock, Bourdais and Vettel. Glock immediately ran wide and we saw Alonso sliding his way around the track soon afterwards. Bourdais posted an early fastest time and a pretty fast time at that. As in FP1, all the drivers took to the track to post an installation lap before heading back to their garages to mull over their options.

Whereas the first sessions was dominated by hard tyres, this second session was all about the softs. Massa and Raikkonen jostled their way to the top of the timesheets with Raikkonen taking the top spot, but both were soon knocked down by Hamilton on his soft tyres.

Whether because of the tyre choice or the change in conditions, a lot of the drivers seemed to be struggling. Despite posting a top time, Bourdais complained that his car was all over the place, Coulthard was happily telling his engineers how difficult the car was to handle and Raikkonen couldn't get past Piquet. The Ferrari is notorious for not following other cars well, but Piquet wasn't exactly flying around the track.

Over on Sidepodcast.com, Dank commented: "Trulli having a lot of problems with the wind in Bahrain. Kubica saying the same as well. It changed direction 180 degrees. Bourdais is saying that the track is in terrible condition and can't give STR an idea when it comes to balance."

Problems aside, Coulthard posted the 5th fastest time, and Bourdais and Raikkonen battled each other for third. An impressive showing from the Toro Rosso car. At the lower end of the timesheets, Vettel was struggling in 20th, and Alonso couldn't seem to improve on 17th, despite Piquet popping up into 7th place. Lou pointed out on the live comment thread: "Wow, there is about 4-5 seconds difference between the fastest and slowest times."

The times seemed to drop off somewhat towards the end of the session, the drivers clearly evaluating the setup rather than pushing for fast lap times. Scott in the comments was just saying: "To be honest, this has been kind of a dull day of practice, there hasn't been any stoppages or incidents of any kind. I'd like to see something a little more lively." And just then, Lewis Hamilton flew off the track and into the barrier, trashing his car.

He jumped out and made his way back to the pitlane, and thanks to the enormous run off areas in Bahrain, the session continued for the last ten minutes. When the timer hit zero, the fastest five were Massa, Raikkonen, Kovalainen, Hamilton and Kubica.

Voicemail

"Hi there, it's Scott Woodwiss again. I have to say Massa's lap was absolutely stunning. The nearest guys of the two McLaren's was Kovalainen, and he was 1.3 seconds slower than Massa, so you really have to think, is there anyone who is going to stop Ferrari this weekend? And that's going to be pretty interesting. Hamilton's accident, well, I have to say, that's not normally something you would see Lewis do. Maybe he was under pressure to try and get a quick lap in. Also towards the end, just after the yellow flag went, Alonso and Sutil decided to have a bit of a get together in turn 1. I think, to be honest, looking at it, I think that might have just been a racing incident, or practice incident, or whatever you want to call it. Because it looked like both were on laps, Alonso was trying to get past, Sutil probably didn't see him, and they both just collided. Anyway, I'd like to do my predictions for qualifying, if I may. I think it will be a Ferrari front row, because as I said they've just been dominating Free Practice. And I think with the speed Massa's shown, I think he'll grab the pole ahead of Raikkonen. You've got Hamilton and Kovalainen, and also Kubica and Rosberg up there, and I reckon they'll be fighting for the second and third rows. I think you might see Hamilton and Kubica on the second row, and Kovalainen and Rosberg on the third row."

Conclusions



The McLaren crew don't seem too worried about Hamilton's excursion off the track and into the barrier. Lewis, himself, said it was a shame to end such a productive day like that but he's unharmed and looking forward to the rest of the weekend. Tyres were mentioned several times in the post-practice press release, with Hamilton admitting he flat-spotted the odd one or two and Kovalainen bemoaning the lack of grip. Overall though, they seem quite upbeat heading in to tomorrow's practice session, despite the long night of fixing up car 23 [*should be 22*] ahead of them.

Sebastien Bourdais played down his performance in the practice sessions, saying he just got into a bit of a groove. It's his first time at the track, so he's grateful that he finally got plenty of Friday running in after previous weekends have been quite frustrating for the Toro Rosso team. Vettel had a tough day, blaming a lot of it on the lack of grip, but also saying: "Honestly, I am not sure which way to go to improve, but I am sure the situation will change after we study all the data before starting again tomorrow morning."

Alonso was surprisingly slow today, but said that was because Renault were concentrating on race setup rather than lap times. He said: "We were not especially quick and it was not easy to get good traction on the circuit today and this is something we need to focus on for tomorrow." Pat Symonds weighed in saying they still have a lot of work to do on the balance of the cars.

And finally, a quote from Rosberg summing up his day: "Over the two sessions, we made some very big setup changes, and I think we've gone into the right direction. It's getting very close with a lot of people in the mid-field but I think we have a good chance to do well this weekend. It was also productive to be reliable today with plenty of track time.

It looks like tyres are going to be the key defining factor this weekend, but we will see what happens in qualifying tomorrow. Don't forget to join us at Sidepodcast.com for the live comment thread, during Free Practice 3 and all three qualifying sessions. Say something interesting and it could be read out on this show. I'll be back tomorrow with all the action from Saturday in Bahrain.