



F1 Digest 2009 – Turkey Qualifying

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Turkey Qualifying.

The track was clearly causing problems for the vast majority of drivers out there yesterday, so would things be any clearer on Saturday?

Free Practice 3

Ahead of the third practice session of the weekend, Red Bull confirmed that Vettel had changed his engine – which makes sense considering the problems he had yesterday. By the time FP3 was ready to go, the track temperature was up to 38 degrees C and the air temperature at 27 degrees.

Glock was the first man out on track, but all were out setting installation laps. Barrichello was the last to hit the track, whilst Massa was the first to set a laptime. Kovalainen was busy completing his own lap and ran really wide, the first sign that the track was still going to be tricky. The laptimes were pretty standard, and by half time, Piquet was the only one without a time to his name. Rosberg and Barrichello topped Massa's initial benchmark, as did Button and Hamilton, so the Ferrari returned to the track to try and top them all.

Piquet finally came out, just as everyone else was diving in for their midway pitstop, until it was just he, Massa and Glock circling the track. Felipe could only improve to fourth, but with twenty minutes to go, he was back at the top and the first man to get into the 1:27s on the morning. Things went quiet until the last few minutes, when everyone left the pits bar Sutil. There was some shuffling of the order, but no one could beat the Ferrari's time. Glock spun it after finishing a hot lap, but he continued on to the end of the session unharmed.

Results

Massa finished on top with a 1:27.983, and it's worth pointing out that the top 15 were separated by less than a second. Trulli finished second, with Glock just behind him, showing some improved speed from the Toyota. Nakajima ended up 4th, several places ahead of teammate Rosberg in 8th. Between them, Kubica, Barrichello and Button. Raikkonen finished 9th, with Vettel rounding out the top ten.

It was the day for the inter-team battles being turned upside down – Piquet finished 11th, whilst Alonso propped up the wrong end of the timesheets in 19th. Hamilton was up in 12th, Webber 13th followed by Heidfeld, Kovalainen and Sutil. The Toro Rosso boys were just a tenth apart, Bourdais ahead of Buemi, then the aforementioned Alonso, with Fisichella in 20th.

Qualifying

Ahead of qualifying, the air temperature was at 29 degrees, and the track had warmed to 47. Fisichella was the first out for quali 1, followed by teammate Sutil. Once again it was Massa who set the early benchmark, but Rosberg was right behind him ready to pounce. Nico popped up into P1, as did Vettel, then Kimi, then Trulli and then Vettel again.

The times were tumbling. Piquet was the last man out, emerging halfway through the session. By the time he had a laptime under his belt, Sutil was up to 13th whilst Fisichella was second to last. Piquet found himself sliding sideways off the track, but he managed to recover and continue. Three minutes to go and Hamilton was in the drop zone, but working on a lap. He couldn't haul himself out the first time, and... not the second time either. Sutil scraped through to the second session of qualifying, whilst Piquet spun off again, this time getting stuck in the gravel. It looked like a problem with the car, rather than driver error, though.



The fastest three were Vettel, Button and Barrichello, whilst we lost Hamilton, Piquet, Buemi, Fisichella and Bourdais.

For Quali 2, Nakajima was out first, but soon joined by more. Massa set the first serious laptime, whilst the BMWs waited at least five minutes before taking to the track. Nakajima ran wide, but regained the circuit without problems. Heidfeld left the pit lane with just 8 minutes to go, and we watched Button and Vettel pop up to the top of the times, before Nick dragged the BMW up to 6th. Kubica was also faring well, he got up to 4th.

Webber still had to set a time with just three minutes to go but he pulled it out the bag and shot up to third. Kovalainen and Glock were also in the drop zone, and neither could improve on their times. Kovalainen gave up his lap. Alonso dropped out of the top ten but fought his way back and that pushed Heidfeld down, after all his hard work.

The fastest three were Vettel, Trulli and Button, whilst dropping out were Heidfeld, Nakajima, Glock, Kovalainen and Sutil.

The final ten minute dash for pole saw Kimi out first, followed by Trulli and Massa. Everyone set a lap time within the first few minutes but Barrichello. Trulli leapt to the top only to be beaten by Vettel leaving the first order as Vettel, Trulli, Button and Webber. Alonso had a big spin, very similar to Piquet's earlier on, but he continued on. Webber crossed the line in P1, but the pole position was instantly snatched away by Button. Barrichello slipped into second to make a Brawn 1-2, but Vettel was the final man to cross the line and he was even faster!

Results

Vettel completed just 17 laps for pole position, a 1:28.316, with Button just behind him, Barrichello and then Webber. Trulli starts fifth, Raikkonen sixth and Massa seventh. Alonso lines up on the grid eighth, whilst Rosberg and Kubica round out the top ten. Heidfeld has the luxury of choosing his own fuel load from 11th, whilst Nakajima, Glock and Kovalainen line up behind him. Sutil starts from a relatively lofty 15th place. Hamilton must be disappointed with 16th, whilst Piquet, Buemi, Fisichella and Bourdais must be getting used to the back of the grid.

Fuel Loads

The most striking thing from the released fuel loads is that Alonso only managed 8th position, but is the lightest man on the entire grid. Vettel is lighter than the two Brawn boys behind him, and of the two, Button has slightly more fuel on board than Barrichello. The rest of the top ten look mostly similar, with Kubica the heaviest.

Bourdais has the most fuel on board of anyone on the grid, but he only narrowly beats Hamilton who has been fuelled really long. I have to say, I can't see the logic in this. In Monaco, he started from the back fuelled really light, presumably to try and make his way through the field... in Monaco, the track with the least overtaking possibilities in the world. Here in Turkey, where Hamilton – one of the best and bravest passers on the field - made his oh-so-famous GP2 comeback, a track with multiple overtaking spots, they are fuelling him really heavy. I think this is an opportunity missed, especially as Hamilton is going to have to be really watchful of his tyres. Okay, I'm done. Let's move on.

Team by Team

Talking of McLaren, Kovalainen starts 14th and says that as the track temperature increases the car is losing grip which doesn't bode well for the race tomorrow. Hamilton is keeping a cool head, though, not wanting to frantically change things, he says: "We now need to make sure we don't rush into making too many changes to the car for the forthcoming races: we'll take our time, refine things and sort out the problem with our car."



Brawn GP usually come last at the end of these Digest shows, as they're normally on top, but this time Button came in second and Barrichello third. Jenson says: "It's great to be starting on the front row, although of course I would prefer to be on pole, but Sebastian did a great job. It was quite difficult to choose between the tyres today as their performance was quite similar. The prime was a little too twitchy for my liking so I continued to run the option tyre for Q3 which had a more gradual and rolling feel." Rubens adds: "I lost my first two flying laps to traffic but the third lap was really good. I have the advantage of starting from the clean side tomorrow so will be aiming for a good start and take it from there."

For Ferrari, Raikkonen laments starting on the dirty side of the grid, but says even with light fuel, the car just wasn't fast enough. Meanwhile, Massa says: "I'd expected to start higher up the grid, especially as we were pretty competitive in Q1 and Q2. Starting from seventh, it becomes tough to aim for the top, so we have to be realistic. However, we mustn't forget this will be a long race and anything can happen."

Trulli shares similar sentiments in perhaps hoping for a chaotic GP: "We were not far off pole position which is very encouraging and gives us high expectations for the race tomorrow. Obviously it is a long race and it's difficult to predict what will happen, but I will be fighting to finish on the podium." Glock admits it was partly his fault that he didn't make it to the top 10: "We were still competitive and expecting to get into the top 10 but on my final lap of Q2 I made a mistake in the last sector and that was it; I lost time and didn't qualify where I expected. But it's easier to overtake here than in Monaco so I won't give up on the race."

Sutil is chuffed to have got out of the first session again: "It was a really good qualifying session for us and I am very happy with the 15th place and Q2 again for the second race in a row. We didn't expect it as we had a few little issues in the weekend so far but we managed a good lap when it mattered." Fisichella had quite a bit of bad luck today: "I have had a problem with the brakes today and have had some front locking since this morning, but we made some changes between FP3 and qualifying that helped. Then unfortunately on my best lap there was a yellow flag as Piquet had spun and I had to lift off and couldn't get the time back."

Kubica thinks every cloud has a silver lining, saying: "Starting from P10 is definitely better than starting from P18 the way I did in Monaco." Teammate Heidfeld is feeling conflicted about today's action: "On one hand it is annoying to miss the top ten qualifying by such a margin, but on the other I'm happy to see the progress we've made. The car was quick enough for Q3."

Over at Williams, Rosberg says he had some understeer on the car and found it hard to keep the setup balanced between the two tyre compounds. However, he's still hoping for points. Nakajima isn't sure though: "In Q1, I struggled with the option so we selected the prime for Q2, but unfortunately that wasn't much of an improvement and I didn't get the performance I wanted. It's going to be difficult to get into the points, but P12 is ok and I will be fighting hard."

Alonso is another driver with mixed feelings, as he's glad to have scraped into the top ten, but disappointed they couldn't do more with it. Piquet explains some of the issues he had today: "I knew I had a brake problem from the beginning of qualifying and so I was being cautious, but it wasn't easy as the track was so slippery. On the last run the problem got worse and I spun off."

For Toro Rosso, Buemi knows that starting 18th on the grid will make for a really difficult afternoon tomorrow, but he's more worried about the effect it will have on the tyres. Bourdais thinks there's more to it than that though: "We've gone backwards a bit this weekend which is hard to take. In the race, I don't think the difference between the tyres will be that much and in any case, it's not just the tyres that are our problem this weekend."



From one end of the timesheets to the other, Red Bull have pole position at a track that is notable for the pole sitter making it to the chequered flag first. However, Vettel isn't counting on anything: "This is just the half-way point though, the main task comes tomorrow. It's a long race here, very tough and very hot so it won't be easy for the cars or the drivers - but it should be exciting. I'm looking forward to it." And Webber is also in a good mood: "I don't think I could have finished much further up. I'm happy with the performance of the car, it worked well today and I'm aiming for a podium tomorrow. The team did a good job today."

Quote of the Day

We've just one session left to go of this weekend, then, and it's the most important one – the race. If you are around during any of the action, please join us on Sidepodcast.com where we'll be live commenting throughout. I will leave you with this quote from Pascal Vasselon of Toyota who says: "The tyre situation here is extremely interesting and quite unusual, with the hard and soft tyres offering very similar grip characteristics. This makes tyre choice more of a challenge and we are likely to see some different strategies in the race."

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