



F1 Digest 2009 – Britain Free Practice

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Britain Free Practice.

Many teams and drivers are looking forward to a home race at Silverstone, so who would make the best start?

Free Practice 1

The first practice of the British weekend was surprisingly dry and somewhat sunny, although warm would be pushing it. The air temperature was 14 degrees C, and the track at 23.

Force India sent their cars out on track first but they were soon joined by others for installation laps. Before ten minutes was up, we'd seen everyone out on track at least once. However, it was a while before anyone came out to set a laptime. Thankfully, Buemi headed out to provide some entertainment for the crowds, joined by Hamilton and Glock, with Buemi setting the time to beat at a 1:24.7.

With a third of the session gone, the cars really started to head out. Trulli popped up to P1, with Kimi slipping into second, and teammate Massa settling for fifth.

Piquet was the first man to spin, surprise, surprise, but he continued on after a quick trip off track. Massa improved to put in the fastest lap, knocked down by Webber and Rosberg.

Whilst Webber and Vettel were enjoying an inter-team battle at the top, trading the fastest lap, BMW were not having such a good time. Kubica was stuck right at the bottom of the timesheets, almost 2 seconds off the next place time.

Towards the end of the session, Glock had a spin, Kovalainen came to an abrupt stop in the pitlane, and Vettel encountered traffic on his attempt at a fast lap. However, he had another go and this time it all went right for the Red Bull.

Results

Vettel topped the timesheets with a 1:19.400, with teammate Webber just behind, only about three tenths slower. The two Brawn cars were next, Button ahead of Barrichello, then Alonso in fifth and Massa in sixth. Trulli posted the seventh fastest time, with Hamilton, Rosberg and Fisichella rounding out the top ten. A good showing by the Force India team saw Sutil behind Fisi in 11th, followed by Kovalainen, Heidfeld and Raikkonen.

Bourdais finished 15th with a 1:23.384, Glock behind just two thousandths of a second behind him. Nakajima was 17th, Piquet 18th, and Buemi 19th. Kubica was last, his final time just over two seconds slower than the Toro Rosso.

Free Practice 2

Although the air temperature was up a little at 16 degrees C ahead of Free Practice 2, the wind had got up considerably making it feel cooler than it was. The Track temperature was at 32.

Bourdais was the first man out, and it was not installation lap central anymore. The lap times came thick and fast, well, not so fast in the case of Bourdais and Piquet. Webber was the first time of note, setting a 1:21.1 and beating it himself with a 1:20.4.



Kubica had a quick run around the track, and then returned to his garage. The mechanics swarmed around the car and performed a super-quick engine change. It took just 35 minutes.

Meanwhile, Sutil was up to second, to be demoted by Vettel, both of whom were testing out the soft tyres. Kovalainen had a big moment, running off track and over plenty of grass, before finally finding the right direction again. Vettel did a similar trick, perhaps covering less grass, but managed to recover to put in the fastest lap next time round.

When Kubica did get out on track, a new engine neatly installed in his BMW, he popped up into 11th. During the dying moments of the session, Webber's Red Bull failed him and he pulled to a stop at the side of the track. This allowed his teammate to pop up into P1 for the second session in a row.

Results

Vettel and Webber were the only drivers into the 1:19s, with Vettel ahead. Sutil ended up 3rd, with Nakajima in 4th and Alonso in 5th. An unusual top 5, I'm sure you'll agree. Barrichello finished up 6th, with Hamilton behind him in 7th, followed by Trulli, Rosberg and Piquet.

Just missing out on the top ten, but impressive considering his engine problems, Kubica finished ahead of Kovalainen, Glock and Button. Heidfeld was 15th, Bourdais 16th and then the two Ferraris, Massa ahead of Raikkonen. Finally, Fisichella finished 19th just ahead of Buemi, rounding out the pack.

Team by Team

Kubica always tends to have an opinion on the setup of the car, and it's usually negative. Today he saw quite a few more problems though: "It was a difficult day for me. In the morning I had electronic problems on the car which prevented me from doing one single proper outing. Then, in the early stages of the second free practice the engine lost power." He does thank his mechanics for being super-fast, though. Meanwhile, Heidfeld had a more run of the mill day and completed his programme, despite complaining that the track was dirtier than usual.

For Toro Rosso, Bourdais was testing out various options: "We ran the two cars with very different settings: I was fairly happy with mine and when I tried Buemi's I didn't like it all, so we went back to our first choice and it was better again, so that gives us a clear indication of which direction we should go in." It doesn't look like Buemi liked his setup either, though: "I didn't have such a good day and that was because I did not really find my way with the car set-up on this circuit and the whole thing didn't really come together for me." He thinks he'll go with Bourdais' choice.

Jarno Trulli was happy with his car, but not with the weather: "The car feels pretty good but as usual here at Silverstone it was very windy. This makes it quite difficult to set-up the car and it's not ideal when it comes to evaluating different set-ups because the conditions change from lap to lap." Glock says that they have no serious problems, but there's still a bit of work to do on the balance.

Over at Renault, Alonso simply says that it was a normal day, and things went according to plan but they think qualifying will be a tough fight. Piquet adds: "It was a busy day and we managed to get a lot done, including the usual set-up work and tyre evaluation. As always at Silverstone it was quite windy, but it didn't cause too many problems and we managed to improve the car quite a bit, especially in the afternoon."

For Ferrari, Massa says he is not happy with today, but isn't sure whether it was the car or the conditions. Perhaps both? Raikkonen adds: "The tyres are the same as in Turkey, but of course it is much cooler here: on the first lap, the performance between the two types is quite different, but then over a longer run, they tend to be similar."



Button was struggling with his setup today, he says: "We tried a few different evaluations with the aero today and initially struggled as I had no grip in either the high or low speed corners. The wind also really affected the car's performance." He says improvements were forthcoming in the afternoon, though. Barrichello is slightly worried about their rivals: "There is a lot of work ahead for us tonight and the pace of our closest competitors was impressive which we need to have a look at."

Sutil was happy with his progress today: "I don't think it's realistic to expect us to be third for qualifying, but everything is working really well and I am quite confident about making it through to Q2 again. If we can do this again we'd be quite satisfied." Fisichella can't quite make up his mind what the problem is: "This afternoon I was suffering with oversteer and we made some small changes, but in the end with the new tyres I was suffering with understeer."

Hamilton is enjoying being at his home race, but says the car is taking a while to get used to: "It feels a little different from what we've been running in previous races. Generally, I'm very happy with the balance but, with a revised car and on a high-speed circuit like this, it takes a bit longer than usual to find the limit." Heikki adds: "As Lewis is running without KERS this weekend, we now have to analyse the balance of both cars and see what we'll do for the rest of the weekend."

For Williams, Nakajima's fourth place by the end of the day isn't phasing him, as he says they tried several setups and will now go away to decide which one to go with. Meanwhile Rosberg says the wind messed up some of their running today, but they have established that the option tyre is the better of the two.

Finally, Red Bull had a good day, with Vettel 1st and Webber 2nd. The Australian says: "It's been a pretty good day for us; we've tried a few new bits here, which seem to be going pretty well. My second session ended a little early as I hit a kerb on Turn five, which caused the car's electronics to stop." Oops. Vettel adds that the new parts worked well, and adds a corporate slant on things: "I think we've made a step forward though and, just like our team slogan Red Bull Gives You Wings, I think they helped us today for our performance on track."

Quote of the Day

That's all for today. Tomorrow is the important one, setting up the grid for the race, and I will be back with another F1 Digest to cover all the action from Free Practice 3 and Qualifying. I'll leave you with this quote from Mario Theissen: "In terms of tyres, these are the same compounds we had in Turkey. We don't seem to have a major worry with them for the rest of the weekend and that is good news because sometimes this year there have been occasions when it was a bit of a challenge."