



F1 Digest 2009 – Britain Qualifying

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Britain Qualifying.

With free practice out the way, and some overnight rain to contend with, Saturday was going to be a challenge.

Free Practice 3

The track was damp, with a low temperature of 15 degrees C, and the air was even lower at 13. It was a really quiet session, with Force India leading the installation laps as soon as the lights went green. Over twenty minutes passed before we saw our first lap time, courtesy of Piquet, who shaved three seconds off his own time, and then another two. Heidfeld headed out as well, and then the others began to join in. Nakajima put in a quick time, to be pushed down by Bourdais and Rosberg.

The times began to fall as the track cleared up, Glock popped up into P1, followed by Massa, Nakajima and Webber. The two Red Bulls were running different noses, and Vettel's first time with a new design saw him down in 16th, however he improved to third and then quickest.

It was a furious few minutes to the end of the session, and Nakajima led the way for only a moment before Free Practice specialist Rosberg took P1.

Results

Rosberg claimed yet another fastest time with a 1:18.899. He was the only man into the 1:18s, and he and Heidfeld completed the most laps through the morning as well. Second was Nakajima, with Trulli third and Vettel fourth.

Massa was 5th with teammate Raikkonen just behind him in 6th. Glock was only one hundredth of a second off the Ferrari's time, with Alonso, Webber and Barrichello rounding out the top ten. Rubens was the first to drop into the 1:20s, followed by Hamilton, Button and Piquet. Bourdais was 14th, with the two Force Indias next, Sutil ahead of Fisichella. Kovalainen finished up 17th, Heidfeld 18th and then Buemi second to last with Kubica in 20th, both of them posting in the 1:21s.

Qualifying

By the time qualifying was underway, things were warming up slightly. The air temperature was 16 degrees, and the track much improved at 25.

Kubica and Fisichella headed out first for Quali 1, and the BMW appeared to be four seconds off the pace. After five minutes, everyone was out of the pitlane bar Hamilton, Alonso and both Red Bulls. Bourdais set the early benchmark, but was pushed down by two Toyotas, Trulli ahead of Glock. Webber jumped into second then moved up to first next time round.

Hamilton had a major wobble trying to complete his lap, and ran wide across the grass.

Vettel slotted into second, whilst Heidfeld copied Hamilton and bounced his way over the grass in an attempt to find some speed.

We were watching the drop out zone with Raikkonen, Heidfeld, Massa and Kovalainen all big names ready to miss out. Massa jumped up to 10th, whilst Kovalainen could only improve to 18th on his first attempt, but then rose to 15th. He was on the cusp of dropping down, as Hamilton did, Lewis sitting in 17th.



With 24 seconds to go, Sutil had a massive crash, running straight on at a corner and slamming into the barriers. It was a high impact incident, but Sutil climbed from the car okay. He went to the medical centre and was cleared as perfectly fine. However, the session had been red flagged, and when it restarted, with just those 24 seconds to go, no one would be able to put in a lap time, so Quali 1 was effectively over. Buemi did decide to head out for a lap though, but it was too late.

The fastest three were Nakajima, Webber and Vettel, whilst dropping out Fisichella Bourdais, Sutil, Hamilton and Buemi.

Vettel headed out first for the second session, and the Red Bulls were seriously fast. Webber jumped up to P1 whilst the others emerged from the pitlane. With 10 minutes to go, everyone was out on track. Button could only manage 10th fastest, whilst Rosberg couldn't seem to beat his teammate, Nakajima was sitting in 4th. With just a few minutes to go, Webber returned to the garage from 1st, and Alonso also didn't return to the track, sitting in 7th.

At the end of the session the fastest three were Vettel, Webber and Trulli whilst we lost Massa, Kubica, Kovalainen, Piquet and Heidfeld.

The final ten minutes to determine pole position got underway with everyone out in under a minute except for Alonso. Barrichello, then Vettel, then Webber topped the times, but when it came down to it, Vettel had the edge. Webber had to navigate past a slow Raikkonen and as the time ran out, he ended up third.

Results

The final top ten for the British Grand Prix was headed up by Vettel, with Barrichello, Webber, and Trulli behind him. Nakajima secured his best ever F1 qualifying position in fifth, and notably two places ahead of teammate Rosberg with Button between them. Glock, Raikkonen and Alonso rounded out the top ten. The rest of the grid in order was Massa, Kubica, Kovalainen, Piquet and Heidfeld, Fisichella, Bourdais, Sutil, Hamilton – his third consecutive race where he has not managed to get out of the first session of qualifying – and finally Buemi.

Fuel Loads

Vettel was staggeringly fast out there, having the most fuel on board than anyone in the top ten and still finishing on top. Barrichello and Button have very similar strategies, so it seems as though Rubens has the advantage in terms of performance so far this weekend. Notably, of the top ten, Nakajima is the lightest, coming in maybe four laps ahead of Rosberg, which could explain the positions.

Of the rest of the grid, the heaviest man is Kovalainen, with Hamilton once again being fuelled light from the back of the grid to try and make some progress.

Team by Team

Bourdais is still feeling comfortable within the car, so perhaps his reputation for being a bit of an old moaner will start to fade now? He says: "Our car is much nicer to drive and a bit quicker. I felt comfortable inside the cockpit and I think I had the pace to make it into Q2, but the red flag came at just the wrong time for me." Buemi is having another bad weekend so far but had specific problems: "It is disappointing that I couldn't use the quick-shift on the gearbox in qualifying, which cost me at least three tenths and that is a big difference here."

Another team starting towards the back, Force India, also had problems. Sutil explains his accident: "I had a brake problem and then had no brakes going into the complex. I pushed on the pedal but there wasn't anything. I tried to avoid a big accident but it was impossible so I crashed really hard. I'm completely OK, I was just taken to the medical centre for some checks as it was a big crash." Fisichella was a little bit screwed by Sutil's accident: "I was looking at a



top 12 start so it's a shame, but it's just too bad this time. Tomorrow I want to get to the end of the race and it would be nice to score a point but it will be difficult."

Nakajima is pleased with his progress, saying: "Fifth is the best qualifying result I've had so far so I'm really happy. After yesterday's practice, I thought we could be quite strong today because the car is working really well here. We seem to have taken a step forward so many thanks to the team as they've brought a really good upgrade package to this race." Rosberg agrees that the car is looking competitive, but says he had a tough day because he didn't get the best out of it.

Over at Toyota, Trulli is pleased that the aerodynamic upgrades they have made for this race are working out, and starting 4th is a good result. Glock isn't quite so happy: "I have been struggling a bit with the car and compared to Jarno I haven't been able to achieve the same lap times. The problem for me has been getting temperature into the tyres and that has caused me to struggle for grip at times."

Kubica's car just isn't working with him this weekend: "During the three free practice sessions I had maybe ten laps without any problems, which was simply not enough to do the necessary work. No surprise that the set-up of the car was not very good in qualifying. P12 was the maximum I could achieve under the circumstances." Heidfeld isn't happy with his 15th grid slot either, but says he didn't have massive expectations anyway.

For Renault, Alonso explains their strategy: "Today we were carrying quite a bit of fuel as we decided it was better to do this than start light and lose track position by having to pit early. I think points could be possible in the race, but we have to hope that the strategy will come to us around the time of the pitstops." Piquet had a little bit of trouble with his car, suggesting that something was wrong with the rear and he had to abort a lap in Q2 that might have seen him higher up the grid than 14th.

Kovalainen admits that he's disappointed with qualifying today, and says it's a shame that Hamilton didn't get the opportunity to improve on his time due to the red flagged session. Hamilton, though, says that the lap he was on wasn't a particularly special one, even though he's getting the most out of the car he possibly can.

What a difference a day makes, as the fortunes at Brawn GP have turned completely around. Barrichello says: "I'm really happy to be starting from the front row of the grid tomorrow on a track that I love and feels like home to me. After some hard work overnight we changed the car a little and my engineers did a great job to get the set-up to my liking ready for qualifying." Button, meanwhile, isn't so happy: "Whilst qualifying in sixth is by no means a bad result of course I'm hugely disappointed not to be starting my home Grand Prix from further up the grid. We knew that we would find it difficult here as our car doesn't work so well at low temperatures and I really struggled to get the tyres into their working range." Ross Brawn also admits that a miscommunication with the pitwall meant Jenson came in a lap early and that may have cost him a place.

Massa admits that he made a mistake in Quali 2, which does happen when you are pushing to the limit, and that's why he missed out on the top ten. He says the car has good balance but still doesn't feel quick. Raikkonen points out that especially with fuel on board, the car really doesn't have the pace to match the others.

Finally, we turn to Red Bull and Webber thinks Kimi might have been asleep out there: "It's been a good weekend for us so far. I would have liked a slightly cleaner lap on my last run, but Kimi was dreaming or something – I don't know. He was on the racing line, which wrecked my rhythm into Stowe so I was tight into there." Vettel is supremely happy with his top grid slot though: "It's been a fantastic weekend, we haven't had a single problem. We brought new parts here, which seem to work very well and we've made a good step forward. There's always tension in qualifying and you try to do your best." Today his best was good enough.



Quote of the Day

That's it for now. Join me on the next F1 Digest where we will find out how the qualifying performance we discussed today panned out for the race. I'll leave you with thoughts from Dominic Harlow of Force India: "The cars were clearly fast enough for top 15 and unfortunately both traffic and Adrian's shunt meant we were denied our deserved starting positions. We can however look forward to a competitive race were we will try to convert our improvement in pace to points."

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