



F1 Digest - Bahrain Qualifying

Intro

This is F1 Digest, Sidepodcast's race weekend coverage. This is the third episode of the Bahrain weekend, so far we've previewed the event and looked at two Free Practice sessions. Now it's time for FP3 and Qualifying.

Free Practice 3

Saturday dawned in Bahrain similar to Friday, sunny with a gentle breeze. The track temperature was just over 40 degrees C. Trulli took to the track first, followed by Hamilton. One installation lap later, and he was back in the garage, the McLaren mechanics poring over the car. Clearly there was still plenty left to do after their 4am finish fixing up the thing. As ever, installation laps were completed by all but the Ferraris, Honda and Vettel, with Toyota the team to send both cars out first for a proper lap.

Bourdais continued his fine form from yesterday by posting a lap time straight to the top of the timesheets, even Hamilton, Heidfeld and Kubica couldn't beat it. The times were much slower than yesterday though, and comparison much harder. Williams finally overthrew Bourdais' reign at the top with Rosberg in front of Nakajima. Hamilton then headed out to slot in fourth, just ahead of team mate Kovalainen. On the Live Comment thread on Sidepodcast, Lady Snowcat pointed out: "The Williams seem to have got over their Malaysian flu."

Vettel appeared to be struggling, complaining of a lack of brake temperature, and then wobbling all over the track. Halfway through the session, the Ferrari's deigned to make an appearance, with Massa first from the outset. Raikkonen, however, seemed to have an issue with the second sector, running wide two laps in a row, and throwing his times off.

Comparisons got even harder in the final minutes of the session – different tyre sets and varying fuel loads resulting in some crazy times. Michael Roberts commented: "1 - 14 covered by a second!" Sutil posted the sixth fastest, Button went third, Trulli went first. Rosberg posted the fastest time, followed by Webber in second, who was then bumped down by Massa. Hamilton was down in 18th and Heidfeld in 20th.

An odd way to end a session. The fastest five were: Rosberg, Massa, Webber, Trulli and Coulthard.

Quali 1

Conditions stayed pretty much the same between FP3 and Qualifying. The first session got underway with Nelson Piquet the first driver out on track. He was followed up by Bourdais, Vettel, Davidson and Sato. Piquet went comfortably fastest, but he was soon knocked down when Rosberg finished a banker lap of his own. Trulli then took the lead momentarily before Hamilton pushed them all down the list, to be joined in second by Kovalainen.

Halfway through the session, the Ferrari boys took to the track. At the very end of Massa's first hot lap, he encountered Sato, the Super Aguri driver having spun and brushed his car against the tyre barriers. Sato did manage to drive off the track and out of the way, but the marshals were keen with their yellow flags. In the Live Comment thread, Scott said: "Sato's decided to become Mr Kamikaze all of a sudden after dropping it at the last corner. To be honest I'd expect nothing less from him."



When Massa set the quickest time, the question of his perhaps not slowing down under yellows was raised. Raikkonen just managed to slip into second place, before the session was stopped for Sato's car to be cleared. Steven Roy commented: "Seems a bit over the top stopping the session for a car that is off the track." And Lou picked up on another point, saying: "Oh my goodness, I had not thought! Will Super Aguri be able to afford to fix the car?" Fisichella was the only man not to have set a time yet.

The session restarted with four minutes to go, but no one emerged from the garages for almost a minute. Vettel eventually headed to the tarmac. With everyone, bar the Ferrari's, leaving it to the last minute, it was near impossible to tell the finishing order until after they have all finished.

The fastest three were Massa, Trulli and Raikkonen, and dropping out: Coulthard, Fisichella, Vettel, Sutil, Davidson and Sato.

Quali 2

The second session began quietly, with four long minutes passing before anyone emerged from the pit lane. Eventually, it was Alonso and Piquet who made the break, followed swiftly by Webber. Piquet posted an initial lap time, but he was soon beaten by Trulli, and Rosberg, who were both then superseded by Hamilton.

Scott pointed out on Sidepodcast.com: "This track is situated in a hot climate, therefore it will have more of a degradation effect on the tyres. If the tyres are degrading more, the line rubber is going to increase quicker. That means anyone who waits for a bit in Q2 could and should have a little advantage due to the extra grip."

Ferrari sent out Massa and Raikkonen to take the lead in the timesheets, and Massa did so easily enough, with Raikkonen slipping into third. Heidfeld was the only driver without a time, but as he took to the track he could only manage eighth. Everyone dived into the pits to prepare for their last minute dash for pole, and when they all bundled back on track, the top five remained in their garages.

Similar to the first session, but with less cars, it was a frantic run to the chequered flag, with many drivers still on hot laps after the timer reached zero. Webber managed to take ninth, but he was pushed down by Alonso and then again into the drop out zone by Button. SteveintheUK commented: "Button in to Q3 thats a surprise, Hope Hamilton and Raikkonen can speed up for Q3 otherwise Massa is going to have an easy race, if he doesn't put in it to the wall."

When it was all over the fastest three were – Massa, Kovalainen, and Kubica, with Webber, Barrichello, Glock, Piquet, Bourdais and Nakajima missing out on the final ten.

Quali 3

The final session of qualifying saw the implementation of the new maximum lap time rule, with it being set to 1 minute 39. The slowest times we had seen so far throughout all of the sessions have been a 1:37 so this shouldn't have marked any problems for the drivers.

Rosberg headed down the pit lane first, and set the benchmark time to beat, which Hamilton immediately did. Massa then jumped ahead, despite a small mistake, and Kubica slotted in between the Ferrari and McLaren. Raikkonen posted the fifth fastest time, but after a quick dash to the pits for a change of tyres, he began to set his personal best sector times. Hamilton took the top spot again, but with Kubica and Massa on a mad dash for the line, he couldn't hold it for long.

At the end of the session, the order was: Kubica, Massa, Hamilton, Raikkonen, Kovalainen, Heidfeld, Trulli, Rosberg, Button and Alonso.



On the live comment thread, Felipe Leite said what all the newspapers will say tomorrow: “OMG A pole on pole!!!!” Cory commented: “Stunning lap from Kubica, my money was on Massa all the way. Great to have another team capable of taking pole”

Conclusions

Force India’s main goal for this weekend was to get through to the second session of qualifying, and unfortunately they couldn’t manage to do that. Fisichella is 18th and Sutil is 20th, but they remain steadfastly cheerful despite this. Sutil blamed the red flag and the traffic, but did say the car has never felt better for him, whilst Fisichella is slightly disappointed at how close they were at getting through to the second session, but says this may help the team move forward in the race itself.

Honda are a team that did get through to the second session of qualifying, and Button scraped into the third as well. Although it was assumed he would be tenth, he is actually just ahead of Fernando Alonso on the grid. Button said: “After struggling a little this morning, we were able to resolve the issues before qualifying and the car felt good this afternoon. We can have a strong race from here so I’m excited about the prospects for tomorrow.” Barrichello, meanwhile, mentioned a small gearbox issue which scuppered his qualifying chances, leaving him in 12th.

After a miserable time in Malaysia, Rosberg has confirmed that the team are much happier so far this weekend, feeling that they are back where they should be. He is also confident that Williams have a stronger race car than they do a qualifying car, so a good showing today should translate well to tomorrow. Whilst Rosberg starts in 4th position, Nakajima is way back in 16th, saying that he struggled to get the most out of the tyres. His one hope appears to be that Bahrain has some good overtaking opportunities so places can be made up during the race.

The entire BMW team are clearly very happy with Robert’s and their first pole position. Heidfeld congratulated his team mate, said that he wasn’t particularly satisfied with his sixth position, and pinned it on tyre setup and grip issues. He believes it will be better over the long distance of the race. Mario Theissen said: “This is a fantastic day for Robert and our young team. We really did not expect to be on pole position. We are only in our third season and are at the very top of the grid for the first time. It is another step up the ladder.”

That’s the team conclusions to today’s action, we’ve also had some voicemails with your thoughts. First up, Scott Woodwiss:

“Hi, Scott again. I’d just like to give my thoughts on qualifying. First of all, I’d just like to say congratulations to Robert Kubica getting his first pole position. That’s thoroughly deserved and I’m so happy for him. Hopefully, he can carry it through to the race. Another driver to point out is Jenson Button. I think he did a fantastic job to get through to Q3, even getting ahead of Alonso. Speaking of Alonso, I think he was very lucky, very, very lucky to get through to Q3 and whether he’s gonna stay in the top ten will be interesting. He might move up and get a point, so that will be interesting. Lastly, I’ll just do my race predictions. I’m going to put my neck out and say Massa will get the goods and get the win tomorrow, Raikkonen second and Kubica third.”

And a call from the Southern States:

“This here be Christine’s fan boy from the Southern States of America. I do believe that Mr Hamilton’s gonna win tomorrow and Mr Raikkonen is gonna be nowhere. I do think the pole who’s on pole could be close by. That be my predictions for the entire race.”

If you want to call us, leave a message and be featured on the show, the number you need is 0121 28 TRACK, that’s 0121 28 87225. So, with BMW up front and Ferrari snapping at their heels, I can’t wait to see what happens on the



first lap tomorrow. You can join in the fun at Sidepodcat.com where we will be live commenting the race, and as ever, F1 Digest will be out later tomorrow to cover all the action.

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