



F1 Digest 2009 – Germany Free Practice

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Germany Free Practice.

With the possibility of rain throughout the weekend, plus the eagerness of all to return to the racing, what would Friday have in store?

Free Practice 1

Friday was damp and overcast, with showers overnight keeping conditions fresh. The track temperature was about 14 degrees C, and the air was much lower at just 10. The track was dry... to start with.

Vettel left the pit lane first, but was followed by all the rest, as installation laps were the order of the day. They were all done after about ten minutes, with just Glock and Hamilton the guys opting to remain in the garage.

Soon enough, it was action stations, as Buemi put in the first official lap time of the weekend. It was a slow one, naturally, and Fisichella beat it by almost three seconds. He continued on for a couple of laps but that's when the rain started, so there was a pause in the action.

Once the rain had cleared up, with an hour to go, the cars headed out again, Hamilton finally putting in his installation laps. Trulli put in the early benchmark and was battling by himself and improving his own times for a few laps.

Finally, Webber managed to knock the Toyota off the top, with Rosberg slipping into second and pushing Trulli down to third. At the second corner, Sutil pulled to a stop at the edge of the track, and was out of the car. The marshals pushed the Force India off to one side, just in time for Vettel to come to a halt at exactly the same spot. Sutil's problem appeared to be gearbox related, whilst Vettel had electrical issues.

Whilst one Force India was stuck at the side of the track, Fisichella pulled the other car up to second. It didn't last long, of course, but the Force India wasn't knocked down too far. Towards the end of the session, Vettel was back in the car, his Red Bull having been fixed up and ready to go. He managed to pull himself up into the top ten, but couldn't match his teammate Webber who posted the fastest time, and wasn't beaten.

Results

Webber finished the morning on top, then, with a 1:33.082 after 19 laps. Button was four tenths behind, with Massa a further three tenths. Trulli and Fisichella followed with Raikkonen in sixth and Rosberg seventh. Vettel was 8th with Nakajima 9th, and Alonso in 10th, he was the first to drop in to the 1:34s. Heidfeld finished the morning 11th, with Barrichello, Hamilton and Kubica behind him. Piquet was 15th, and behind him two Toro Rosso cars just five hundredths of a second apart – Bourdais ahead of Buemi. Kovalainen finished up 18th, with Glock 19th and Sutil right at the back.

Free Practice 2

The second session got underway with the track temperature up to 20 degrees C and the air around 12. The clouds still looked pretty dark though. Vettel hit the track first, but was soon followed by many others as they started to set lap times. Nakajima ran wide into the gravel, Vettel and Bourdais almost collided and Fisichella spun off into the barriers. What a start!



Sadly, the rain came, which meant things quietened down for a few minutes, but then the BMWs were out for a run, and it all began again. Vettel was fastest with Rosberg behind, until Kovalainen topped them both. With thirty minutes under our belts, there were still six drivers yet to set a time, but those who were setting times saw them drop very quickly. Heidfeld jumped up to P1, dropped down by Webber, and the pair did the exact same thing again on the next lap.

Trulli spun it, but carried on and later improved to second. Button finally stamped his mark on proceedings by taking the fastest time, whilst Nakajima was in fourth to be pushed down by Sutil in third. Something going right for the Force India boys for a change!

Hamilton jumped up to second, pushed down to third when Vettel took P1. Lewis then spun it at Turn 2 and continued on to post the fastest time on his next lap. In the last few minutes, Vettel looked like he would beat the McLaren's time, but he couldn't quite manage it.

On his way back to the pits, Piquet pulled his car to one side of the track, clearly suffering with a problem.

Results

Hamilton was fastest with a 1:32.149, followed by Vettel, Button and Webber. Trulli was in fifth, with an unexpected Sutil in sixth. Barrichello was 7th, just three tenths of his teammates pace. Alonso finished eighth, having completed 24 laps, followed by Nakajima, and Piquet. Heidfeld was the first to drop into the 1:33s, despite completing the most laps – 36. He was followed by Massa, Rosberg and Kubica. Glock was 15th, Raikkonen 16th and Kovalainen 17th – a long way off the pace of his teammate in P1. Finally, the two Toro Rossos just one tenth apart, Buemi ahead of Bourdais, and Fisichella rounded out the field.

Team by Team

Let's start with Toro Rosso, who spent a lot of the day at the back of the pack. Buemi doesn't think that is representative of their work though, he says: "Even though our times don't look great, we did a good job today in terms of testing everything we wanted to try and so we have a clear picture of what the car is doing and why. Depending on whether it is wet or not tomorrow, we will go in a different direction to try and be more competitive." Meanwhile, Bourdais complains about the low temperatures, the lack of grip, the ride height, the wind, braking stability, and various other setup adjustments. Nothing changes, eh?

At Brawn GP, Button believes they are lacking in a couple of areas on the car, but the cold weather is their real problem as the car does better in the warmer conditions. Barrichello adds: "It looks like this will be another cold race weekend but the car and tyres have a different feeling here from the last race at Silverstone. The harder tyre is really quite tricky and it was difficult to maintain its working range today. However the softer option tyre performed a lot better which is encouraging."

Williams had a pretty quiet day today, with Nico suggesting the weather was really quite tough, but that they aren't looking to make headlines anymore. He says: "We have changed the way we approach Friday practice, so we do not expect to be top of the time sheets. On the long run side, we did however make some very clear progress for the race." Nakajima joins Piquet as the two drivers running Formula 1 cars at the Nurburgring for the first time, and says although the track wasn't easy, he did find it "interesting and enjoyable."

Red Bull were pretty strong today, although Vettel's issue in the morning lost him some running. He confirms that the engine simply cut off. Webber confirms that although the weather was tough, you have to expect changeable conditions at the Nurburgring, and it's not a surprise.



Heidfeld is truly baffled by his position at the end of the day in 11th. He says: "For me the outcome of the second session is somewhat difficult to understand. After the track dried out I was quite pleased with the performance. I had traffic on what eventually turned out to be my fastest lap and lost about four tenths behind a Ferrari. Because of this I had high expectations for the final run on another set of new tyres and on an improved track. But then I wasn't quicker than on my blocked lap earlier in the session. This is really strange and has to be analysed." Kubica simply says that the weather conditions and rain in both sessions made getting the best out of the tyres very difficult.

Over at Ferrari, Massa isn't paying too much attention to his 12th position, saying: "In the afternoon, we had a heavy fuel load, so as to be as well prepared as possible for Sunday's race, so we're not particularly bothered about our position in the classification." Raikkonen doesn't think the team have moved forward too much. "I think we are more or less where we were at Silverstone. We are still struggling a bit to find the best balance on the car, but I am sure that we will find a way of fixing that."

For Toyota, Glock is enjoying racing in Germany: "It's my home race so it was nice to already see quite a few fans in the grandstands and it's a good feeling to be driving in front of them." He adds that the day was quite tricky though, but they worked hard and made progress throughout the second session. Trulli adds that the home race thing is quite important: "Generally I am pretty happy and still quite optimistic for the weekend when you see the results at the end of each session. This is one of the home races for the team so I would be very pleased to do well for all the people who are here supporting us."

Force India had a mixed day, with Sutil up in 6th and Fisichella down in 20th. The top ten man, Sutil says: "It was a good Friday for us that showed some real improvement from previous weekends. Sixth was a good effort from the team and it felt quite good. I think it will be difficult to get into the top 10 tomorrow but I do feel a good Q2 performance would be realistic." Fisichella explains his problems today: "The first session for me was quite good with a promising position, but it was quite disappointing in the afternoon. I caught a kerb that was still wet and just spun into the barriers. I think I could have done well in the second session, but it looks encouraging for tomorrow for another Q2."

For Renault, Piquet is feeling somewhat optimistic: "We still have a lot of data to go over this evening as I was running a different programme to Fernando so that the team could learn as much as possible. It feels like we are more competitive than we were at Silverstone, but it's never easy to tell much on Friday." Alonso says it's hard to tell partly because it's Friday but also because they lost track time thanks to the rain.

Finally, McLaren showed some regained form, for one side of the garage at least. Heikki finished down in 17th and says: "Clearly, there were differences between the two cars today as we pushed hard to bring the new parts to the track as quickly as possible. Without the upgrades, we didn't have a good basic package and had some trouble getting heat into the tyres. But the lack of parts is simply an indication on how hard we are working – and, of course, I understand that." Hmm. Can't be very happy about it though. Hamilton finished the day on top and says: "It's still early days, and we shouldn't get ahead of ourselves, but I'm hopeful of being able to get into Q3 tomorrow and look at scoring a couple of points on Sunday afternoon." He also gives props to the guy, back at the factory, who worked a 36 hour shift non-stop. Crazy times!

Quote of the Day

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest. We've covered all things Friday, and tomorrow we'll take a closer look at the action from Free Practice 3 and Qualifying. I'll leave you with this quote from Toyota Chief Engineer Dieter Gass – "The times were very tight with only a second covering the top 16 in the afternoon. It was pretty cold out there today with track temperatures more like a winter test than a Grand Prix in July..."