



F1 Digest 2009 – Europe Free Practice

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Europe Free Practice.

A couple of new drivers need some practice, the teams need to test out their new parts, Friday has never been more important.

Free Practice 1

The temperature as FP1 kicked off was at 25 degrees C, with the track at 29. It was expected to be a pretty hot day, and the humidity was at 58%. Vettel and Kubica led the way, with plenty of others following him. Both Badoer and Grosjean headed out straight away. Installation laps were the order of the day, and after ten minutes, just Trulli and Barrichello had yet to leave the pitlane.

Alguersuari was the first to go for a full lap after 15 minutes, put in quite a slow one – a 1:50, with his teammate Buemi shaving four seconds off his time. Romain Grosjean also added his name to the timesheets, slotting in last as the Toro Rosso boys improved their times.

Glock had a spin out on track but continued on, no harm done. There were just six times on the board, as most drivers were concerned about the dust out on track. However, with just under an hour to go, we started to see more lap times. Rosberg put in the benchmark, with Glock behind him and Raikkonen fourth.

Alonso ran wide, and Rosberg had a bit of a wobble, but they both carried on, Alonso went on to post the fastest time on his next lap. Alguersuari also ran a bit wide at the corner, whilst Badoer lost control for a moment as well. The lack of grip was obvious.

With 40 minutes left to go, Webber popped up to P1, and there was just Vettel and Kovalainen left without a time on the board. Vettel came out and with just half an hour left, Kovalainen left the pitlane, meaning all the drivers had finally hit the track. A really slow start to the day. Vettel beat his teammate to P1, and was then pushed down to second by Button. They were still circulating at about three seconds off the expected pace, though, with last year's FP1 time at 1:40.

Kovalainen showed that practice doesn't necessarily make perfect as he shot straight up to the top of the timesheets, breaking into the 1:42s for the first time. Meanwhile, all the new boys were at the back, Buemi, Grosjean, Badoer and Alguersuari in that order.

Hamilton topped his teammate and jumped to P1, but he was soon pushed down by Barrichello. It looked like the times were about to fall, but they didn't. Barrichello continued to lead until the end. In the last few minutes, he got stuck in gear and had to return to the pitlane, but his work was already done.

Results

Barrichello ended on top with a 1:42.460, two seconds off last years pace, and after 19 laps. Kovalainen was second, ahead of Hamilton, Button and Vettel. Sutil was up to 6th, a good start for the Force India, with Nakajima behind him in 7th. Webber was 8th, ahead of Alonso, Raikkonen and Buemi – who along with Alguersuari, completed the most laps with 30 each.

Kubica was 12th, with Alguersuari behind him, then Rosberg, Heidfeld and Fisichella. New boy Grosjean finished 17th, with two Toyotas behind him, Trulli ahead of Glock. Badoer finished up last.



Free Practice 2

Ahead of the second session, the track temperature was way up to 43 degrees C, whilst the air was up to 29. Buemi was out first, followed by Rosberg and many others. As per the norm, it was an installation lap straight into a full lap, with Buemi setting a 1:43. Hamilton spun it, narrowly missed the wall and ended up facing the wrong way on track. It took a few seconds to spin himself round and continue on.

Alonso jumped up to P1, followed by Kovalainen and Sutil, and Hamilton was fourth despite his spin. He returned to the pitlane. Rosberg jumped up to second, and Barrichello to third, having had to pass a slow moving rookie along the way.

There was little in the way of action, the cars gradually started to improve their times. Hamilton still hadn't returned to the track after his three lap stint. It was confirmed that he had broken the front wing hanger, rather than the brand new wing itself. He must have hit the wall after all. They didn't have any parts to fix it, so Hamilton had to sit the rest of the session out.

Elsewhere, Sutil ran wide over a couple of successive corners and Webber ran over a plastic carrier bag that was littered on the track.

Rosberg jumped to the top of the times, with his teammate behind him in second. They both returned to the pitlane, whilst Vettel jumped up to second, slotting between the two. Badoer started to look a bit ragged, although he was gradually improving. Still last, but now under two seconds off the pace of the new fastest time set by Button. Barrichello then topped his teammate, but Alonso grabbed P1 again.

With just over 15 minutes to go, Alonso locked up heavily around a corner, and ran straight into the side of Nick Heidfeld, lifting the BMW into the air slightly. Both of them headed into the pitlane, the Renault minus one front wing.

Meanwhile, at the front, the Brawn cars began to make use of the hot and rubbered in track, with Barrichello posting the fastest lap, with Button behind him in second. In the last few minutes of the session, Alonso took P1 again.

Results

Alonso was the only man to drop below the 1:40s, posting a 1:39.404, having completed 33 laps. Button and Barrichello were behind him, followed by Rosberg, Nakajima, and Sutil again running quite high in his Force India. Kubica was 7th, with Fisichella behind him then Vettel and Kovalainen.

Raikkonen started the second half of the timesheets in 11th, followed by Trulli, and Grosjean. Webber was down in 14th, just two tenths off his teammates pace that equated to five places.

Glock was 15th, with Buemi behind him the first to drop into the 1:41s. Heidfeld was 17th, Badoer didn't finish last, with Alguersuari behind him, and Hamilton 20th, as he only completed the three laps.

Team by Team

Rosberg starts the ball rolling by letting us know the tyres really are a problem, he said: "I had a difficult start in the morning because the tyres grained straightaway. I was then left with a grained set for the remainder of the session, which meant I didn't learn much at all. The afternoon was much better as we managed a good tyre test so we now have much more information for Sunday." Nakajima thinks it was a good day, and once the track was a little less green, they were doing well on both short and long runs.



At one point, Buemi was heard on the radio complaining to his team that his right foot was burning. He doesn't mention that in his quotes, but does say: "It was really hot today in the cockpit, especially as we were doing long runs in preparation for the race." Alguersuari also struggled with the temperatures: "The heat was an important factor for me today, as I have not had that much time in a Formula 1 car yet and the high temperatures made things worse from that point of view."

Barrichello finished the morning on top but was down to third by the end of the day. He says: "It feels great to be back to what seems to be a competitive level of pace. The two practice sessions today went well with a lot of work achieved on both sides of the garage." Button will agree with this, and adds: "The focus of our programme was on set-up checks and back-to-back evaluations to confirm that the work done back at the factory after our shutdown was in the right direction."

Over at Ferrari, the team are reasonably happy despite low finishes at the end of the day. Raikkonen says: "I am happy with the handling of the car and the performance of both types of tyre we have here from Bridgestone. There's no point in looking at the time sheet, because as usually on a Friday, it doesn't tell us much." Badoer is also pleased: "I am happy with the way things went today. I expected a difficult day and so it was. It was vital that I did not make any serious mistakes so that I could get through the programme we had established."

Toyota had a reasonable day, and Trulli seems quite relaxed, saying: "First of all it is very nice to be back in the car after a long summer break. I am also pleased to be here in the good weather and at a nice track. Basically today was a normal Friday for us without any exceptional situations." Glock was kept busy today: "We planned a lot of work today but there were no technical issues and the guys all did a good job so now we have a lot of data to look at overnight."

Heidfeld isn't impressed with his accident with the Renault: "When Fernando Alonso crashed into me I had an early end to the session. Such a crash is really unnecessary during Free Practice. I saw him in the rear view mirror locking up his wheels and tried to open the door for him, but he went straight into me and I almost rolled." Kubica had a quieter session though, and says although they had no problems today, they still have the fundamental issues with the car that they've had all season.

Force India had a relatively good day with Fisichella 8th and Sutil 6th. Fisi says: "We made a few changes for the afternoon and I'm confident we are going in the right direction. I can feel the package is a step forward but it's quite tight for positions at the moment so we'll see for tomorrow." Sutil adds: "We had a few small niggles on the car so we couldn't run as much as we would have liked in the two sessions, but ultimately the balance was good."

Hamilton is slightly repentant over his incident, he says: "I touched the wall, but didn't even really feel the impact. I only grazed the front wing but, unfortunately, it couldn't be repaired as we didn't have a spare one. Hopefully, we can get a new one for tomorrow, or else we'll have to make some changes. We don't have lots of these wings available." Kovalainen adds that already he is having a better weekend than he did in Hungary and he's hoping to continue his form throughout.

The Red Bull boys don't have much to say. Vettel is eyeing up the competition: "I think we are more or less in the pack, but Fernando was very quick towards the end of the second session, which was a surprise." Webber dispels the myth that Valencia is like Monaco by saying: "We've got some work to do this evening – this track is a little like Bahrain with walls!"

Finally at Renault, the day was all good, if you don't count Alonso's tangle with Heidfeld. The Spaniard dismisses it as a normal racing incident, and believes they are in good shape for the rest of the weekend. Grosjean says: "Your first



time in a new car is always tricky, but I did my best and having Fernando next to me meant I could see how he approached the sessions and that helped me a lot.”

Quote of the Day

That’s all for today, I hope you will join us both on Sidepodcast.com for the live comments tomorrow, and later on in the day for the F1 Digest roundup of the final Free Practice session and Qualifying for the European Grand Prix. I’ll leave you with this quote from Dieter Gass of Toyota: “Even though the circuit continued to evolve, the tyres behaved a lot better than in first practice because there was more rubber on the track. We seem to be in a situation where both compounds will be workable for the race without major problems.”

