



## F1 Digest 2009 – Europe Qualifying

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Europe Qualifying.

With Valencia struggling for overtaking opportunities, qualifying is the most important part of the weekend.

### Free Practice 3

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The track was at 35 degrees C and the air at 27 as the third practice session of the weekend got underway. The Force India boys were first out, followed by many others, and it was installation laps all round.

After about fifteen minutes, the drivers headed out to put in their first laptime of the day. Hamilton was the first to cross the line, with a 1:42, Badoer was behind him with a 1:45. Last year's top time in FP3 was a 1:38 so a little way to go yet. Sutil jumped up to third, with Raikkonen slipping into second. He quickly fell down the order as the times were improved, but Hamilton remained on top.

With just over thirty minutes to go, everyone was out on track bar Kovalainen, who still hadn't set a time yet. Heikki left the pitlane, as the other drivers began to return to their garages. Button was up to second, Rosberg third and Alonso fourth, with Hamilton in the pits but still in the lead with a 1:39. Sutil jumped up to P1, just as disaster struck for Red Bull.

Vettel started running really slowly, and cruised to a stop just before he made it back to the pitlane. He stopped in a dangerous position, and had sprayed a line of oil around the track. The session was red flagged. The Red Bull was recovered, and the marshals started sorting out the oil on the racing line. It took a good twenty-five minutes to get started again, and there were just five minutes left. Kubica had already said on the radio that he wouldn't be heading out on track until someone else had cleaned it all up.

The cars queued at the end of the pit lane, and everyone was set up for a low-fuel qualifying prep run. Kovalainen was the first to hit the dust, and a plume of white burst into the air. He kept it under control but ran wide at one of the corners. The times were nowhere near the pre-dust laps to start with but as each car crossed the line, there was less dust flying about. Alonso ran wide at turn 2, taking to the exit road and narrowly missing the wall. Kovalainen went top, with Button behind him, Hamilton had a big lockup and gradually dropped down the order.

Kubica posted P1, then Nakajima, then Sutil took the lead again. Even Anthony Davidson on the 5live commentary said he wasn't sure what was going on, but the session was over.

### Results

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Sutil posted the fastest time at the very end of the session with a 1:39.143, and behind him Nakajima, Kubica, Kovalainen and Rosberg. Fisichella was 5<sup>th</sup> with Button, Hamilton and Trulli following. Grosjean was our top-placed rookie finishing up 10<sup>th</sup>.

Buemi was 11<sup>th</sup> with Barrichello and Heidfeld next, then Raikkonen in 14<sup>th</sup> and Alonso in 15<sup>th</sup>. Glock was ahead of Webber, then Vettel, who obviously didn't complete the entire session. Behind him, Alguersuari and Badoer was last once again.

### Qualifying

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The first session got underway with the track up to 44 degrees C and the air up to 30, hot, hot, hot. Badoer was out first, followed by his teammate Raikkonen, and at least half the pitlane. Sutil set the early benchmark ahead of



teammate Fisichella, but he was pushed down by Nakajima. After just six minutes, all the drivers had hit the track except Alonso.

Hamilton ran straight on, missing one of the corners – it's impossible to tell which one! – but he just spun it round and continued onwards. Alonso finally emerged halfway through, and with ten minutes to go Rosberg was leading the way, with Kovalainen and Vettel behind him.

Fisichella jumped up to second, and Alonso's first lap saw him last. Hamilton took the lead and Barrichello slotted in behind him. Alonso's second lap saw him up to 8<sup>th</sup>, leaving Badoer last. Grosjean, though, popped up to 4<sup>th</sup> ahead of his teammate.

Nakajima pulled to a stop at the side of the track, his session over. He was in 13<sup>th</sup> at the time, and likely to fall as the others improved. Badoer couldn't improve though, posting a time four seconds off the pace of his own last place lap. With just one minute to go, Button was still in the bottom five, but he improved up to fourth. Everyone was out on track for their last lap bar Hamilton on top and Grosjean in 13<sup>th</sup>. Sutil scraped through into tenth, whilst his teammate couldn't get out of the drop out zone.

The fastest three were Button (who popped up there at the last moment), Hamilton and Kubica (how did he manage that?). We lost Fisichella, Nakajima, Trulli, Alguersuari and Badoer, and sadly, it's worth pointing out that Luca was almost two seconds off the pace.

The second session got underway with the BMW boys and Raikkonen out first. After just four minutes, everyone was out bar the two Renaults. Kimi crossed the line first, but was knocked down by both Brawn cars, Button ahead of Barrichello. Next time round, Rubens got on top, with Rosberg and Kovalainen separating him from Button. Hamilton then jumped them all.

The Renault's came out, and Grosjean was doing well to start with, but the end of his lap had a few mistakes in and he didn't improve on his 14<sup>th</sup> position. Alonso was next, and slotted in 11<sup>th</sup>, with Grosjean improving to 12<sup>th</sup> behind him. With just over a minute to go, Hamilton was still in P1, but had returned to the pitlane. The rest were out on track, scrapping for a place in the top ten.

The bottom five featured both Renaults, and Glock. The Toyota couldn't improve, Alonso jumped up to 8<sup>th</sup>, Grosjean did not. When it was all over, the fastest three were Barrichello, Hamilton and Kovalainen, and dropping out were Heidfeld, Sutil, Glock, Grosjean and Buemi.

The third session got underway and everyone was out after a minute and a half, no hanging around and leaving it to the last minute. Kubica made a small error, and there were momentary yellow flags, but he was soon on his way again. Hamilton set the early benchmark, ahead of Button and Raikkonen. Barrichello went back to the pitlane without setting a time. In fact, with just four minutes remaining, neither Barrichello nor both Red Bulls had set a lap time.

Two minutes to go and Hamilton was the only guy in the pitlane. He headed straight back onto track, as Barrichello was setting his first lap. He was fastest in the first sector, but by the time he got to the finish, he was just slower and slotted into second. Kovalainen jumped straight above him, though, making it a temporary McLaren 1-2. The final run for pole, and Heikki put in a stunning lap, but messed it up right on the last corner and couldn't improve on his second place.

## Results



Hamilton took his first pole position for 2009 with a 1:39.498, and Kovalainen made it a confirmed McLaren 1-2. Barrichello was 3rd, with Vettel, Button and Raikkonen behind him. Rosberg will start 7<sup>th</sup> on the grid, with Alonso behind him – no low fuel run for Renault this week, then. Webber starts 9<sup>th</sup> and Kubica 10<sup>th</sup>.

The rest of the grid, in order, then, Heidfeld and Stuil, Glock, then Grosjean, Buemi and Fisichella. Nakajima starts 17<sup>th</sup>, followed by Trulli, Alguersuari and Badoer.

### Fuel Loads

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Hamilton is the lightest man out on track, although Vettel is close behind him in terms of weight, but fourth on the grid. Kovalainen has slightly more from second, but Barrichello has the most fuel of the top six, and starts third. Rosberg is the heaviest of the top ten, whilst Alonso was running relatively light and could only manage eighth.

Outside of the top ten, Trulli is stacked full of fuel, with Nakajima and Glock also fuelled long. Sutil is the lightest man of the bottom half, starting from 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Team by Team

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Toyota had a poor day, and Trulli isn't at all happy, he says: "I was expecting qualifying to be a bit difficult but not as bad as that. This morning the car felt reasonable even if we were a little short of grip. But it was much worse in qualifying." Glock adds: "I was having trouble in first qualifying but in the second session the car wasn't too bad until the final corners when the rear tyres dropped off quite a lot. I was pushing to the maximum but the tyres didn't really survive."

For Brawn GP, things are looking up after a tough couple of races. Barrichello starts from third and says: "I went for a slightly different strategy to Jenson with just one new tyre run over two laps in Q3. The second lap was perhaps a bit too much for the tyres which started overheating and unfortunately I lost the car on turn eight." He is happy to be back on pace, though. Button adds that there was more potential than for fifth place, but it's not bad at all.

Sutil is Force India's best placed driver in 12<sup>th</sup>, and he says: "I'm really happy about the upgrades we've put on the car, the team is going a great job. We've made a big step forward in the last couple of months and I'm really enjoying every session now." Fisichella certainly didn't enjoy Q1, he says he got stuck in traffic and lost time, and he doesn't think he'll enjoy the race much more either.

Over at BMW, Heidfeld is ruing what might have been... on several occasions: "It is the sixth time this year I have just missed the top ten qualifying and come 11<sup>th</sup> by fractions of a second. Of course I'm a little bit disappointed, but on the other side it means we have freedom regarding the fuel we carry and I hope for a good race." Kubica simply tells it like it is: "If lately you have been starting from the rear of the grid, you cannot be disappointed with tenth in qualifying." That might be my favourite Kubica quote of the year.

For Renault, Alonso is disappointed with his performance, saying he would have liked a better grid position for the fans. Grosjean is happy though: "I am pleased to have made it into Q2 for my first qualifying session, especially as that was the objective I set myself yesterday. I want to thank the whole team who have been working with me and Fernando for all his helpful advice."

Toro Rosso had one driver into Q2, but Buemi says he is still disappointed in that because he didn't manage his tyres very well in the second session. Alguersuari, meanwhile, is biding his time: "I know what I am capable of and with this being only my second F1 qualifying session, I have to be patient. I am happy that even though this track is longer than at my first race in Hungary, the gap to the drivers ahead of me is getting smaller."



Badoer didn't really impress today, and perhaps he's going into this weekend with the wrong motivation, he says: "As I've said before, this weekend is a sort of test for me and the team and that is how we are tackling it." Except, it really isn't a test, it's a race and Ferrari are trying to hold on to third in the championship. Kimi is doing his bit by starting 6<sup>th</sup>, he adds: "Honestly, this was one of the best qualifying sessions of the season, even if we are not as quick as those on the front row. Our final result will depend basically on how the start goes."

Rosberg is feeling quietly confident about the race, saying: "Qualifying was generally okay. I'm in P7 with quite a lot of fuel, possibly more than anybody else around me, so I have a strong strategy for the race." Meanwhile, Nakajima's session was over before it had begun: "We had a failure on my car which caused the engine to cut out during Q1 so I didn't have a chance to show what we could do. It's a shame because I think we were strong enough to have been in the top ten today."

Vettel also had a tough day in terms of reliability but it worked out okay in the end, he says: "I would like to be further forward on tomorrow's grid, but I think the most we could have hoped for, so I'm quite happy - especially after not doing many laps this morning." Webber isn't so happy: "We thought we would be in the top six or top eight, so it's not been the best day for us. It's one of our worst qualifying sessions for a long time, but let's see how we go from here."

Kovalainen hides his disappointment on missing out on pole by toeing the corporate line: "I was sure our car would be competitive, so I decided to really go for it today. As a result, I pushed just a little too hard - but it was a calculated risk and I lost only one place - and, even better, I lost it to Lewis. So we nailed the front row anyway." Hamilton adds simply: "We haven't seen this level of performance for a long time."

### Quote of the Day

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest, I'll be back with coverage of the race tomorrow, so until then I'll leave you with this quote from BMW's Mario Theissen: "We are satisfied with the qualifying result... With Robert we have got one car into the top ten and Nick in 11<sup>th</sup> is just behind... Congratulations to McLaren-Mercedes for having both cars on the front row. This proves how quickly things can change."