



## F1 Digest 2009 – Belgium Qualifying

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Belgium Qualifying.

There was a possibility of rain, but either way, things were about to get confusing.

### Free Practice 3

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First thing, the track temperature was 22 degrees C and the air at 13. Luca Badoer was out of the garage first, and the others all joined in for their installation laps. Raikkonen and Barrichello didn't join in the initial run. As Badoer made his way back to the pit lane, he looked like he was in two minds whether he was going in or not, made a bit of a mess of it. Kimi and Rubens headed out next, when the track was nice and empty. They also returned to the garage.

Fisichella hit the track after ten minutes, followed by his teammate Sutil. As the others joined the action, we discovered some of Badoer's lack of pace, as he lifted through Eau Rouge, whereas everyone else was taking it flat. Estimates suggest he loses half a second by doing that. Sutil set the early benchmark with a 1:47, quickly knocked down by Hamilton.

With twenty minutes gone, just the Red Bull drivers had yet to return to the track to set a lap time. Vettel emerged but Webber didn't look even close to getting in the car. Hamilton continued to improve on his own time at the top, whilst further back, Kimi ran wide and bounced over the gravel. He returned to the garage.

Fisichella was in his garage, and his engineers told him that a small animal had run in front of his car, damaging the front wing. He would have to run with a Valencia style wing whilst they repaired the last one. His teammate was still running, but only with Kovalainen, as the others took a half time moment to evaluate things back in the pitlane. Webber finally emerged from his garage.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Sutil jumped up to P1, shaving four tenths off next place Kovalainen. All the other drivers piled back out on to track, to improve on their times. Webber returned to the garage without setting a laptime. He was on the radio complaining about the sound of the engine.

With 15 minutes to go, we started to see the soft tyres emerge, as Rosberg bolted them on for a lap. Williams were down in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, even behind Badoer. In fact, Luca wasn't last but 15<sup>th</sup>. Ten minutes left, and Webber was out of the car, session over, no time set. Everyone else hit the track for a final attempt at a flying lap. Grosjean ran really wide, had a quick trip across the grass, but continued onwards. Heidfeld jumped up to P1, and Trulli pushed Sutil down another place, slipping into second. The session came to an end, and the cars lined up on the grid for a practice start again.

### Results

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Heidfeld topped the session with a 1:45.388, Trulli was just seven hundredths of a second behind him in second, with Sutil a further two tenths down in third. Grosjean was 4<sup>th</sup>, with Glock, Kubica and Rosberg behind him. Fisichella finished the morning 8<sup>th</sup>, with Hamilton, Button and Raikkonen behind. Buemi was 12<sup>th</sup>, four tenths faster than his teammate Alguersuari, with Kovalainen and Vettel between them. Barrichello was 16<sup>th</sup>, Alonso 17<sup>th</sup>, and Badoer didn't finish last! Nakajima was behind him, and Webber, of course, didn't set a time.

### Qualifying

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The track temperature was up to 27 degrees C, and the air had risen slightly to 15. Installation laps led straight into laptimes, with Glock and Trulli setting the early benchmarks, dipping into the 1:46s. Just Kubica remained in the garage, waiting for the optimum time. He was out after about eight minutes, but attention turned to the front, where Trulli jumped up to P1, whilst the Brawn cars slipped into 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, Barrichello ahead.

Buemi bolted on some soft tyres and slipped into P1, whilst Webber on the harder tyres could only manage 11<sup>th</sup>. Barrichello ran wide, over the grass, whilst at the top, times were tumbling. Sutil posted the fastest time, pushed down by Heidfeld. Barrichello recovered his composure and popped into P2.

We followed Badoer on a lap, and this time, he managed to go through Eau Rouge flat – we are making progress! Five minutes left to go and drivers started to head out for their final flying laps. Those looking to improve and get out of the bottom five – Grosjean, Rosberg, Nakajima, Alguersuari and Badoer.

Heidfeld remained in the garage for the last few minutes, which meant he was pushed out of P1 by Trulli. Rosberg managed to pull himself out of the bottom five which dropped Webber in, but the Red Bull jumped way up to second. Not a problem for him. Alonso also dropped into the bottom five, having run wide on his previous lap. Fisichella popped up to P1, as the chequered flag fell. Badoer spun it and got stuck in the gravel, causing yellow flags. However, Alonso still managed to pull himself out of the bottom five. Hamilton was in P15, a little too close for comfort, but the yellow flags saved him from any further fast laps.

The fastest three were Fisichella, Trulli and Barrichello, whilst dropping out Buemi, Alguersuari, Nakajima, Grosjean, and of course, Badoer.

Twelve drivers hit the track as soon as the second session was underway, with just Kovalainen, Alonso and Rosberg waiting a few minutes. Kubica set the first time, but it was Trulli who set the goal. Kubica and Raikkonen were close behind him, until Webber came and popped up into second.

Rosberg still wasn't out, and didn't grace us with his presence until there were just seven minutes to go. He was in the bottom five, obviously without a time, and joined by Sutil, Alonso, Kovalainen and Heidfeld. Most drivers returned to the pitlane to prepare for their flying lap. With three minutes to go, all fifteen cars returned to the track. Rosberg had not improved on 15<sup>th</sup> place with his initial laptime, whilst Trulli remained on top. Glock jumped up to 2<sup>nd</sup>.

From 8<sup>th</sup> place, Raikkonen pitted, whilst Fisichella once again put in the fastest lap. Trulli took it back again, as Button couldn't improve on 13<sup>th</sup> place, and Hamilton also couldn't drag himself out of the bottom five.

The fastest three at the end of Q2 were Trulli, Kubica and Vettel, whilst we lost Sutil, Hamilton, Alonso, Button, Kovalainen.

Raikkonen was eager to get started for the third and final session, he headed out, followed about a minute later by Heidfeld. Raikkonen set the first time, and whilst we were expecting more times to follow quickly, a lot of the drivers came in to change to the harder tyres before going for a flying lap. Rosberg, Heidfeld and Barrichello got times on the board and with two minutes to go, there were still six without.

Heidfeld improved to P1, beaten by Kubica, and then Trulli topped them all. Fisichella jumped up to P1, and the drivers had just one more lap to go as the chequered flag fell. No one could beat the Force India though, and Fisichella took pole!

## Results



Fisichella on pole then, with a 1:46.308, with Trulli just nine hundredths of a second behind. Heidfeld starts third, with Barrichello and Kubica behind. Raikkonen qualified sixth, Glock seventh, then the two Red Bulls Vettel and Webber. Rosberg rounded out the top ten.

The rest line up as Sutil, Hamilton, Alonso, then Button, Kovalainen, Buemi, Alguersuari, Nakajima, Grosjean and Badoer.

### Fuel Loads

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Fisichella isn't the lightest on the grid, which is a big surprise. Barrichello has a much lighter fuel load, whilst Kubica and Glock are on similar strategies. Behind Fisi, Trulli and Heidfeld both have reasonable loads though, so it might be tricky for the Force India to stay ahead. The heaviest of the top ten is Rosberg starting tenth.

The heaviest of the entire field is Nakajima, down in 18<sup>th</sup>, whilst the lightest of the rest is Alonso, starting 13<sup>th</sup>. Sutil has quite a good fuel load, so is one to watch from 11<sup>th</sup>.

### Team by Team

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Let's start with Red Bull who had a better day than yesterday, but still not what they wanted. Webber says: "That was a strange session – we expected to be more competitive than that. Fisi on pole! A great day for them, but we were surprised by that." Vettel explains why his qualifying didn't go well: "Unfortunately I made a mistake on my last flying lap in Q3. I lost the rear going into Turn 14, which leads on to the back straight and lost all the speed, so there was no point in completing the lap."

Another team who expected more was McLaren, and Kovalainen says: "This morning, we started to become a little surprised by the pace of the some of the other cars. We were struggling in the high-speed corners a little more than in either Hungary or Valencia, where the circuit configurations are slower." Hamilton adds: "I'm not too disappointed – this year has been a rollercoaster ride for everyone, but I'm enjoying it still and I love driving this track. My plan for tomorrow is a points finish."

The Brawn drivers are split over their opinions of the day. Barrichello says: "I'm extremely happy with our qualifying performance today and the second row of the grid is a great starting position for the race." Button had a few more problems: "The car hasn't felt quite right all weekend and unfortunately I wasn't able to get any more out of it today. Rubens and I are usually very closely matched but he was quick on the option and I wasn't, so we need to look into the reasons for that."

Over at Toro Rosso, Alguersuari is concentrating on the good stuff: "The main thing for me is that I am making progress: in Hungary I was last on the grid, then Valencia 19<sup>th</sup> and today I am 17<sup>th</sup>, so it's getting better. Hopefully I can work my way up to pole day!" Bless him! Buemi said that finding the right set-up is tough, and they're going to need to analyse the tyre strategy carefully as both seem to be working well.

Trulli has put Toyota on the front row again, and he says it was only a matter of time: "We have always known that when things go right we have a very competitive car and all weekend we have looked extremely strong." Glock starts seventh and says: "My lap was pretty tidy so overall I am happy with it; we have worked hard on improving the qualifying pace and we got our reward today. The team brought a new aero package to this race and it seems to be working well."

Renault had a relatively poor day, and Alonso says: "Today we just weren't competitive enough and we struggled in both Q1 and Q2 where I did my maximum but still missed out. However, it was an unusual session today as we had big competitors knocked out in Q2." Grosjean says his final lap was ruined by the Badoer yellow flag, but he will give his all to gain more experience.



For Williams, Rosberg admits they've been finding it tough so far: "We have really struggled all weekend but we managed to get the best out of Q2 and finishing 10<sup>th</sup> was possibly the best we could achieve carrying quite a lot of fuel." Nakajima adds: "We struggled here yesterday in practice but Nico managed to either drive very well or find a set-up direction that I didn't."

Now we come to a team who did a lot better than expected, BMW line up on the grid 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. Heidfeld is ahead and says: "I think the fact that the 2009 cars are run on a medium downforce level here for the first time this year might be the reason for the grid being very different to previous races." He also says he still wouldn't mind a wet race, despite the fact they haven't taken it into account in their fuel strategy. Kubica feels a bit unlucky because he had an engine change first thing and then felt like he was losing speed on the straights. They didn't have time to solve it before qualifying but he still managed 5<sup>th</sup>! If they solve it overnight, anything could happen.

Badoer starts last which will come as no surprise to anyone, he says: "I'm not happy because this morning, at the end of free practice, I had hoped to make it through to Q2. Unfortunately, partly because of traffic and partly because of a few small problems, I didn't manage to put together a perfect lap." Raikkonen starts sixth and says he would have preferred to be further up the grid but adds: "We knew it would be hard to be at the front, but all the same, this is a good position, especially as the gaps between the front runners are pretty tight."

Finally, Force India! I never thought this would happen when I started Digests this year. Sutil starts 11<sup>th</sup>, and says congratulations to the whole team, although he is a little disappointed. He thinks points are still possible though. Pole sitter Fisichella says: "I didn't expect to be on pole! It feels just great, like a dream... What a result. I am now not only looking for points, but for more. We've got this far, we need to finish the job!"

### Quote of the Day

That's all for this madcap day. Hopefully you can join us live for the race on Sidepodcast.com, we'll be commenting whatever crazy events happen there, and I'll be back tomorrow to sum it all up for you. I'll leave you with this quote from Martin Whitmarsh of McLaren: "Giancarlo Fisichella's pole wasn't the only unexpected element of today's grid – far from it, in fact – and I think it's fair to say that very few people would have successfully forecast today's top three."