



F1 Digest 2009 – Italy Free Practice

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Italy Free Practice.

It's time to see which teams can adapt to the fast-flowing circuit at Monza.

Free Practice 1

With the cars ready to hit the track, the temperature on the ground was about 28 degrees C, whilst the air was just a bit lower at 25. It was nice and sunny, a calm start to the morning.

Buemi and Heidfeld hit the track first, but there was soon a stream of cars heading out for their installation laps. Both Williams drivers completed two installation laps, but it soon fell quiet as we waited for the first laptime of the day. Notably, as Fisichella returned to the pitlane, there was a media scrum around his car. With ten minutes gone, just Grosjean had yet to complete an installation lap, but he was soon out getting that lap under his belt.

Buemi was the first to set a lap time, with teammate Alguersuari close behind him and initially a couple of seconds of Sebastien's pace. The pair continued to circle by themselves, with Alguersuari closing up the gap to just over a second. Finally, Webber and Hamilton joined in the fun to set their first times of the weekend. Hamilton went top, whilst Webber was fourth fastest.

Kovalainen, Heidfeld and Fisichella were out next, but Hamilton retained his place at the top. Kovi jumped up to second behind his teammate, and Fisichella will probably be happy to note that his initial lap time was faster than Raikkonen's. Kimi soon jumped above him, though.

With half the session gone, Hamilton was still on top, and only Vettel plus the two Renault's had yet to set a time. The Toro Rosso boys were working hard with 13 laps each, whilst the Toyota cars were together at the bottom of the timesheets. Liuzzi looked to be having a good morning, a couple of cars behind him, but then Sutil jumped up to third fastest.

Button popped up in P2, but it was still Hamilton at the top. Everyone had a time bar Vettel, who has already admitted to reduced Friday running thanks to the possibility of an engine penalty. Things quietened down throughout the rest of the field, as everyone returned to the garage, leaving just Kovalainen, Heidfeld and Grosjean remained out on track.

Both Brawn cars were into the top 5, as the field returned to work. Half an hour to go and Glock spun it. He made some contact with those new higher kerbs but continued on, returning to the pits. Vettel came out with just over ten minutes to go, and his first lap saw him last, which was no doubt expected. He soon jumped Glock, who was in the pits, and gradually set about improving his time. A few minutes left, everyone was out on track, although Vettel headed back in, protecting the engine. When the session drew to a close, Sutil was still up there in fourth, whilst Fisichella improved to finish the morning above Raikkonen. Hamilton, though, could not be beaten.

Results

Lewis finished on top with a 1:23.936, after 26 laps. Behind him, Kovalainen and then Sutil, with Alonso fourth and Heidfeld 5th. Buemi was up there in 6th, just seven tenths off the pace, and one hundredth of a second faster than Jenson Button. Fisichella finished 8th, three hundredths faster than Raikkonen with Webber between them.



Kubica ended the morning 11th, followed by Barrichello and Rosberg. Nakajima was the first man to fall a second off Hamilton's time, with Grosjean, Liuzzi and Alguersuari behind him. Vettel finished 18th having completed just 8 lap, but behind him two Toyotas – Trulli ahead of Glock.

Free Practice 2

Between sessions, Renault launched legal proceedings against the Piquets, as you do, however our attention returns to practice. The track temperature was up to 37 degrees C, and the air at 28. Once again it was Toro Rosso out first with both cars hitting the track as soon as the lights went green.

Fisichella looked like he had a problem, stopped out on track, but he was soon away, practicing his start took a little longer than expected. There was no big gap before the times started flying in, Kovalainen put in the early benchmark, and with just five minutes gone, only the Brawn cars, Vettel and Sutil remained in the garage.

Glock returned to the pitlane without setting a time. Meanwhile, the times were tumbling with Liuzzi's momentarily taking the top spot, but Kovi grabbing it back again. After fifteen minutes, it was just Sutil left without a lap time, Glock had returned to the track and even Vettel had completed four laps already. The Brawn cars were showing well again, with Barrichello up in second behind Heikki, and Button behind his teammate.

From first in FP1, Hamilton was last, however, he had only completed three laps, and remained in the garage. When he emerged, he improved a place, and then shot up to seventh. Meanwhile, Sutil was having his engine changed, explaining his lack of presence out on track. He was out after thirty minutes though. There didn't seem to be any adverse effects to this engine change as soon, Heidfeld was in P1, with Sutil behind and Hamilton third. Raikkonen was up in fourth, whilst Fisichella was only four tenths off his teammates time.

In a change of form, Trulli dragged his Toyota up to 3rd, whilst Glock was way down in 15th. Nakajima ran wide, through the gravel, causing brief yellow flags. He regained the track, with very dusty tyres. Kubica jumped above his teammate Heidfeld, and then Sutil posted the fastest time of the session.

The final half hour or so continued without major incident. Sutil and Kubica continued to lead, whilst Vettel and Fisichella were at the bottom of the timesheets. The entire field was split by only 1.2 seconds, though. With seven minutes to go, things started hotting up again – Kovalainen jumped up to second, and Grosjean looked as though he might top the lot, but settled for third. On his next lap though, he managed to jump Sutil for P1. Alonso flew up the timesheets to second, making it a temporary Renault 1-2, until Sutil split them. In the last few moments, the Force India jumped from second to first, taking Grosjean's glory.

Results

Sutil finished on top – the only man in the 1:23s – having completed 28 laps. Behind him, Grosjean, Alonso, Kovalainen and Kubica. Glock finished the day 5th, with Heidfeld and Raikkonen following. Nakajima was 9th and Buemi 10th.

Hamilton ended up 11th, Liuzzi in 12th, with Trulli and Webber behind. Alguersuari dropped into the 1:25s, followed by Barrichello, Rosberg, Vettel, Button, and Fisichella rounded out the field.

Team by Team

Red Bull were probably hoping for a better day, and Webber finished 14th after a troubled session: "We had an electrical problem in P2, which probably cost us about a run and a half, so it was a good recovery from the guys to get the car turned back around." Vettel adds: "It's quite a surprise today to look at the lap times and see who is on



top and who's in the midfield." He finished the day 18th, but says they used their limited running the best way they could.

Fisichella had his first day in action behind the wheel of a Ferrari and said: "I feel satisfied with this first day, which was particularly tough from a driving point of view. The major difficulties are in adapting to the different positions of the buttons and gaining confidence with the KERS." Raikkonen says he is reasonably pleased with his days work: "There is still room to improve the handling of the car, which we hope to do in tomorrow morning's free practice. The new kerbs don't allow you to cut them with impunity, which is not a bad thing given the difficulty we have experienced in this area in the past."

Over at Williams, Rosberg says: "We were very slow on the straights this morning, so we looked at this and we have found a good solution. Tyres are just as important and we have completed a good test, from my point of view the direction is pretty clear." Nakajima simply adds: "Certainly compared to Spa, I think I will be more competitive here, although it is perhaps too early to say how we will go in qualifying."

For Toyota, Glock says: "If we can find the right balance I think we will be okay here. The new kerbs are fine; they are different to last year but still acceptable. The weather was also quite a bit different to last year's rain and that was definitely an improvement." Meanwhile, Trulli weighs in on the new additions to the circuit: "Today we also experienced the new kerbs at the chicanes for the first time and these seem to be okay; I had no problem with them. It's nice to be back in Italy, driving in front of my home fans, and I just hope I can do a good race on Sunday."

Brawn GP had a quiet day, and ended up towards the back of the timesheets, but they are not too downhearted. Barrichello says: "We have some work to do on the balance but overall a good start to the weekend although today's running doesn't really give us an indication of how qualifying will play out tomorrow." On the other side of the garage, Button says: "We did a lot of set-up work today with the car in the low downforce configuration although we had a couple of issues which meant that I couldn't do the long runs that we had planned so that was a bit frustrating. Everything was sorted out by the end of the day which is good but we have a lot of work ahead of us."

For Toro Rosso, Alguersuari is still on a steep learning curve: "I found it quite tough driving today for the first time, with this low downforce package, as I had no experience of that so far in F1. But that's a good thing, as it is all part of my learning experience." Buemi likes it though, he says: "It's nice to drive at such a high speed track, because it gives you a different feeling, hitting speeds you never see anywhere else."

Hamilton started the day well, and isn't too worried about the afternoon drop, saying: "KERS certainly helps around here – we can expect it to be worth nearly four tenths in qualifying tomorrow – but we also made some good progress with our overall package. This afternoon was spent on heavier fuel-loads, so you can't read too much into the times, but I'm encouraged by where we are." Kovalainen finished the day 4th and seems quite enamoured with the sport today: "It's funny: the teams have all adopted different technical solutions but the lap times are still very close together – that's the beauty of Formula 1."

Renault don't say very much, I guess they had quite a tough day overall. Alonso simply says that it was a normal couple of sessions for them, whilst Grosjean spent time learning the track but feels like they are in good shape for qualifying.

Over at BMW, Kubica had a bad start to the day, he says: "We lost quite a lot of time in the morning session due to a problem with the brakes. Fortunately we were able to change the brakes in time and I completed a baseline run at the end of the session." Things improved in the afternoon and he finished the day 5th overall. Heidfeld was 7th and he adds: "The lap times are not bad, especially when you take into account I did my fastest lap in the second session quite early on and even had some traffic."



Finally, Liuzzi had his first day back in action and says: “Today was much better than the straight line testing! It’s a completely different approach as you get used to the rhythm, the braking points and I think it’s a great challenge.” Sutil is already trying to play down his day, saying: “It was a very, very good time that came as a result of some good work, a great set-up and getting the tyres to work well. We didn’t try specifically to go fastest but if you are on top of your game and the car is working well there’s no reason why you couldn’t be P1 at the end of the session.”

Quote of the Day

That’s all for this F1 Digest, but I will be back tomorrow with all the action from qualifying. If you can join us, we would love to see you on Sidepodcast.com for some live commenting. Meanwhile, I’ll leave you with this quote from Willy Rampf of BMW: “On the one hand it’s crucial here not to lose too much time riding the kerbs, while on the other hand braking stability is even more important here than on other tracks.”

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