



F1 Digest 2009 – Singapore Free Practice

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Singapore Free Practice.

With the cars starting out in the daylight and ending up in darkness, things were new for a lot of the drivers.

Free Practice 1

Ahead of FP1, the two important temperatures were very similar with air at 31 degrees C and track at 33. The circuit was also really, really dusty. It was the usual start to the day with installation laps all round, Grosjean out first. He was obviously feeling a little better, after the concerns yesterday that he might not be fit to drive. With installation laps the order of the day, it was then a long wait for the action to get underway properly.

The Toro Rosso boys were the first to get a time on the board with Buemi slightly ahead. Fisichella headed out in the Ferrari, and issued an epic display of sparks as he got to grips with the bumpy surface. He and others gradually started to post times, and it was Mark Webber who set the benchmark.

Heikki was the first victim of the dusty track, spinning a complete 360. He continued onwards unscathed though. Just a few minutes later, it was Grosjean's turn for a quick spin, and boy oh boy, did he choose the place to do it. The sight of a Renault spinning at Piquet's corner was... quite something to behold. He hit the wall, bringing out a red flag while the car was recovered. In typical Singapore marshal fashion, this took quite a while.

Once they were good to go again, with about 40 minutes left, it was action all the way. It was getting darker at this point, actually that horrible twilight moment when it's not quite dark enough for lights not to work yet. Button headed straight to the top of the timesheets, whilst Sutil struggled round the dusty track. Times were improving all over the place, as Kovalainen jumped up to P1, whilst Hamilton, Barrichello, and Vettel were all wrestling their way to the sharp end as well.

With the final ten minutes upon us, it was time for a last ditch effort for a good time. Fisichella seemed to be struggling a little, way down in 18th, with Raikkonen up in 10th, but the attention had to be on the fight for P1. Barrichello and Webber were followed each other to P1 and P2 respectively, whilst Button backed off a little after wobbling round one of the corners. Last thing he needs is a bashed up car. Webber looked like he was going to attempt a go at P1, but he slip-slided his way round a corner, and that was it, his chance was missed.

Results

Barrichello ended the morning, erm, evening, I don't know, ended the first session on top with a 1:50.179. Button was close behind making it a Brawn 1-2 and pushing Webber down to 3rd. Alonso proved that not all Renaults will crash at that one corner by posting the fourth fastest time.

Vettel was 5th with Kovalainen, Hamilton and Kubica behind him. Raikkonen was the last man in the 1:50s before Nakajima, Rosberg, Sutil, Buemi and Heidfeld dropped into the 1:51s. Notably, Buemi completed the most laps with 28, and I believe Sutil completed the least with 14. They both ended up just one tenth of a second apart. Finally, Glock finished up 15th, followed by Trulli, Fisichella, Liuzzi, and Alguersuari, with Grosjean last and only 9 laps completed before his crash.

Free Practice 2

There was a shorter gap to FP2, with the temperatures dropping a little, as you would expect heading towards night-time. Both track and air temperature were at 30 degrees C, and humidity was at 65%.



Rosberg was the first man out, and he set the first time of the day, but wasn't alone out on track. There was no waiting around for the second session, it was straight to work for everyone, with Kubica and Grosjean the last to hit the tarmac. Heidfeld actually put in the early benchmark. Sutil got his practice off to a good start with another spin, but he carried on. Surprisingly, Heidfeld held on to the top spot, even when Red Bull and McLaren started putting their foot down. Vettel slipped into second, whilst Webber was third before returning to the pitlane.

Still no sign of Kubica or Grosjean. Presumably the Renault was still recovering from the incident in FP1, whilst Kubica's car was being worked on due to some kind of sensor failure.

Meanwhile, Sutil jumped up to P2, as half the field returned to the pitlane. The Force India made its way up to the top spot, but it didn't last long as Webber and Barrichello moved ahead when they returned to the track. Vettel soon made it a potential Red Bull 1-2, slipping into second, whilst further back, Kubica finally emerged from the pit lane. Whilst improving on his own P1 time, Webber crashed into the wall, ruining the front end of his car. The session was red flagged as the marshals got to work once again. Practice got going again with just over 45 minutes to go. This time, everyone came out, even Grosjean emerged from the garage to have a go at a lap. He set a time and then returned to the pitlane. Meanwhile, it was Heidfeld who made his way back to the top of the timesheets, followed by Button in second. Vettel jumped up to second to push Button down to third.

With ten minutes to go, it was starting to look as though no one could know the BMW off the top, until Kovalainen shot up to P1, breaking into the 1:48s for the first time of the day. Vettel topped it, then it was Hamilton's turn. He couldn't quite match the Red Bull's pace and had to settle for eighth. In the dying moments of the session, Alonso jumped up to second, leaving Vettel on top.

Results

Vettel completed 31 laps to take the top spot – a 1:48.650. Alonso was just three tenths behind him, with Kovalainen just three hundredths behind that in third. Heidfeld finished 4th, followed by Button and Webber, despite the Red Bull only completing 14 laps. Next up, Rosberg, Glock in 8th, Hamilton 9th and Kubica 10th.

Barrichello headed up the second half of the field, followed by Sutil, Trulli and Raikkonen. Nakajima was the first man to drop into the 1:50s, with Fisichella, Buemi, Liuzzi and Grosjean behind. Alguersuari was last on the timesheets with a 1:51.423.

Team by Team

We will start with Toyota, where both drivers seem to be quite happy with the job they did today. Glock says: "The first practice session was a bit difficult to really analyse the car and I don't think the track conditions helped. The car didn't feel bad but the lap time just didn't seem to be there. But in second practice it was much better overall." Meanwhile, Trulli says the dusty surface made the car a little oversteery but he's hopeful it will get better as the track improves throughout the weekend.

Over at Renault, the team were trying to keep their head down, but it was not to be. Grosjean says: "Today was my first experience of the Singapore circuit. Unfortunately I made a small error in the first session which cost me a lot of time." As well as raised a lot of eyebrows, eh Romain? Alonso adds that they completed their programme, made the most of the track time and he thinks they are in good shape.

Nakajima was finding it tricky: "It is physically very tough out there and they were two very hard sessions today. However, I believe I have prepared well and the conditions should not be too much of a problem." Rosberg, though, seems to have had a better experience out there: "Although we knew we'd be back on the pace here, by the end of



the day we had concluded a good tyre test and found some improved performance from set-up changes, so I am pleased that we had a good day.”

Over at Force India, Liuzzi is getting to grips – pun intended – with the new circuit: “It was quite OK today. The most important thing for me was to learn the circuit and get used to the track, the bumps and the kerbs and I think we are going in the right direction.” Sutil has great aims for the weekend: “I think we can do much better and get a bit closer to the front. I feel I could definitely have done a quicker laptime as the traffic was really bad and I always lost my first and second laps. I still believe we can get into the points and we would still like to be in the top 10 in qualifying.”

The Toro Rosso boys put in a lot of laps between them during the day, and they reaped the rewards of doing so. Alguersuari says: “Today was doubly difficult for me, as this is a street circuit and it is also new to me... Every run I get a bit better, so I hope I can make good progress before the race. As for it being my first time driving under floodlights, it was no problem.” Buemi offers his analysis of the circuit: “The track is more like Monaco than Valencia, with some bumps and tight corners. It is a difficult circuit, made more complicated by the heat. The track offered very little grip today, but it will improve as it rubbers in.”

For McLaren, Kovalainen finished up 3rd and is happy with his day but still quite wary: “The other teams are also looking quick here, so it’s not going to be easy. The main difference to the track this year is the change to the Turn 10 chicane. It’s slower and tighter, and the kerbs are bigger so you cannot attack there because you can’t afford to risk damaging the car.” Hamilton says his problems are all pace related though: “I’m still lacking some speed in certain areas, so I need to work on that. The sessions were a little up and down for me today – I didn’t have any major problems, but I wasn’t as fast as I’d hoped to be.”

Button is preparing himself for a busy weekend: “This venue is a tough one with the heat and humidity to contend with and the nature of the circuit and the closeness of the barriers demand your total concentration. The key is achieving consistently quick laps and that’s what we’ve been working on today. The car feels reasonable and with some more work later tonight, we should be ready for a good weekend.” On the other side of the garage, Barrichello is ready to race: “We’ve been focusing on our pace for Sunday and that’s the most important consideration as we need the car well balanced to be quick in the race. I’m feeling positive and we should be able to achieve the right set-up ready for the weekend.”

Heidfeld and Kubica finished the day 4th and 10th respectively, which is an improvement for the BMW. Heidfeld says: “I really enjoy the track, it’s great fun driving here, although it is still bumpy and was extremely dusty.” Both drivers mention gearbox problems, which is slightly worrying, as both of them had engine problems at the last race, within seconds of each other.

Now, let’s turn to our penultimate team, and Ferrari had a mixed day. Raikkonen said it was nothing out of the ordinary, and the only notable thing was the softer tyres degrading more than expected. He thinks that will change as the track gets more rubber on it. Meanwhile, Fisichella says: “It was a rather difficult day. The car is very nervous, and I have yet to find the ideal set-up. Now, I must sit down with the team to try and prepare as well as possible for qualifying and the race.”

Webber explains his incident: “I was pushing a little bit too hard in the second practice, it was a bit slippery off line and I went off in the last corner and into the pit wall, which ended my session. The car was going well up until then, I was quick and both Sebastian and I had pretty good practice sessions.” Vettel himself says: “It’s a challenging track – quite stop and go – you don’t experience as much G-force here as on other circuits, but there are a lot of bumps, which don’t make your life easy, but I like the circuit a lot. Overall, it was a good day for us and we look better here than we did in Monza.”



Quote of the Day

That's all for today's F1 Digest. I hope you can join us on Sidepodcast.com tomorrow for live commenting Free Practice 3 and all of qualifying. I'll leave you with this quote from Patrick Head of Williams: "Tomorrow we will be focusing on speed for qualifying. The car is behaving as we would have expected but it's too early to say where we are. We'll get a better idea tomorrow."

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