



## F1 Digest 2009 – Singapore Qualifying

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Singapore Qualifying.

The lights were shining bright in Singapore, but who were they shining on the most?

### Free Practice 3

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FP3 got underway with the track temperature at 35 degrees C, and the air at 31. It was installation laps all round, and then ten minutes of peace before Fisichella hit the track. The Ferrari put the first lap time of the day in, whilst Alguersuari got stuck at the end of the pitlane. It took the marshals a minute or so to figure out the neutral button to allow the Toro Rosso to be pushed back to his garage.

The track was still really dusty as drivers began to filter out. Grosjean had a bit of a wobble as he came to the end of his first lap, but he held it well to cross the line. Kubica set an early time to beat, breaking into the 1:49s.

Raikkonen came to a halt at Turn 18, the one that goes under the grandstands. He managed to avoid the wall, and reversed just enough to continue onwards. He returned straight to the pitlane.

With just over half an hour to go, Hamilton jumped up to P1, dropping the times into the 1:48s. Meanwhile, at the back, Webber emerged for the first time since his installation lap. Barrichello and Kovalainen posted the second and third fastest times respectively, whilst Trulli was out of the car and sitting on the pit wall. Helmet on, but not looking ready to get to work yet, as his car had an exhaust problem. He was last on the timesheets.

Vettel ran off track, and did a little pirouette to spin round and carry on in the right direction. Brief yellow flags were waved, but no major hassle. A couple of other drivers were struggling on the dusty surface as well, Sutil ran exceptionally close to the wall, but got away with it.

Kovalainen improved to second, and Glock up to third. Trulli finally hit the track with 15 minutes to go, still last but improving up to sixth. Vettel posted the fastest time of the day, a 1:47.9, whilst with five minutes to go, everyone hit the track bar Heidfeld. He soon joined the fun though to make it a manic last few minutes.

Hamilton ran off track and pulled to a stop on the escape road. He reversed back on to the track, navigating the oncoming traffic. On his next lap, he managed to regain the top spot, and no one could beat him. Barrichello was on a flyer, but was held up by Grosjean. He passed the Renault, gesturing at the rookie, and the pair of them pretty much touched wheels, before returning to the pitlane.

### Results

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Hamilton finished on top, then, with a 1:47.632, followed by Vettel and Rosberg. Kovalainen was 4<sup>th</sup>, then Kubica, Heidfeld and Barrichello. Glock was 8<sup>th</sup>, with Buemi and Trulli behind him. Nakajima headed up the second half of the timesheets, ahead of Raikkonen, Webber and Button. Alonso was the first to fall into the 1:49s, followed by Liuzzi, Sutil and Alguersuari. Grosjean finished 19<sup>th</sup>, with Fisichella last and in the 1:50s.

### Qualifying

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Ahead of qualifying, Rubens Barrichello had a gearbox change, which meant wherever he finished, he would face a five place drop on the grid. The track and air temperature were the same, both on 30 degrees C, and the humidity was up to 75%.



Plenty of cars headed out straight away as the session began, and almost immediately Grosjean locked up and ran off track, avoiding the barriers this time. With five minutes gone, Hamilton was the only man to remain in the garage. Button easily took the first fastest time of the session, but soon beaten by teammate Barrichello. The times were dropping very quickly, with Hamilton, Vettel and Rosberg all up there as well.

With half the session gone, the bottom five were Buemi, Fisichella, Grosjean, Alguersuari and Liuzzi. Fisi improved a little, and closed to within a tenth of Raikkonen's time, but they were 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile, at the front, Hamilton dropped into the 1:46s and the times were still falling.

Five minutes left of the first session, Sutil, Trulli and Heidfeld had all dropped into the bottom five. Hamilton and Vettel remained in the garage, thinking their positions within the top four were safe. Raikkonen jumped up to 2<sup>nd</sup>, whilst Fisichella dropped back into the bottom five. All eyes were on Barrichello, who was in 15<sup>th</sup>, on the cusp of dropping out, with a bit of a wobble on his final lap. He improved to sixth though.

The fastest three were Hamilton, Button and Raikkonen, whilst we lost Sutil, Alguersuari, Fisichella, Grosjean and Liuzzi.

The second session began with Vettel out first, but soon joined by everyone else. Each driver crossing the line seemed to go faster than the next, with Webber in P1, knocked down by Rosberg. The McLarens split Rosberg and Webber, though, with Hamilton ahead of Kovalainen. Alonso was the last to hit the track, coming out with just eight minutes to go.

He and Heidfeld remained out as everyone else pitted to prepare for their last flying lap attempt. Those in the bottom five included Button and Raikkonen, so we were expecting some improvements. Everyone hit the track again, except Rosberg, who was still clinging on to his P1 position. Raikkonen made a mistake on his lap and couldn't improve on 13<sup>th</sup>, whilst Button also couldn't improve into the top ten. Kubica jumped up to 6<sup>th</sup>, which pushed the other Brawn down, but Barrichello managed to claw his way up to 7<sup>th</sup>.

The fastest three at the end of Q2 were Rosberg, Webber and Vettel. Dropping out: Nakajima, Button, Raikkonen, Buemi and Trulli.

The final session of the day got started with Rosberg out first, with Hamilton the last to leave the garage, everyone out within two minutes.

Vettel put in the first provisional pole time, with Rosberg, Webber and Barrichello lining up behind him. Hamilton easily jumped it though, about four tenths of a second faster. During the pit stops before the final flying lap, Barrichello's mechanics had a bit of a scramble to get the tyre warmer off one of the rear tyres, but it was only a few second delay.

Vettel was on a charge but suddenly, Barrichello hit the wall, his left front wheel hanging off the Brawn car. The red flag came out with 26 seconds left to run, meaning effectively, the session was over. A complete anti-climax, and we'll never know if Vettel could have done it.

## Results

Hamilton takes pole position with a 1:47.891, Vettel lines up next to him on the grid with Rosberg 3<sup>rd</sup> and the other Red Bull, Webber, in 4<sup>th</sup>. Behind them, Barrichello qualified fifth but takes a five place grid drop, Alonso, Glock, Heidfeld, Kubica and Kovalainen all move up a place, but remain in that order.

The rest – Nakajima, Button, Raikkonen, Buemi, then Trulli, Sutil, Alguersuari, Fisichella, Grosjean and Liuzzi.



## Fuel Loads

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Hamilton has loads of fuel on board, whilst Vettel went really light, so he must be very disappointed his final run was ruined. Heidfeld is also light, whilst Kovalainen is the heaviest of the top ten.

Further back, Sutil and Trulli are both fuelled really long, but Button in 12<sup>th</sup> is the heaviest of the title contenders. Liuzzi, right at the back of the grid, has top ten levels of fuel, which is a very bizarre strategy.

## Team by Team

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We'll start with Ferrari, who are further back than they would have hoped. Fisichella, particularly, starts 18<sup>th</sup> and says: "Obviously, I am disappointed with this result. I really wanted to do well, but I still haven't managed to find the right level of confidence in this car: it's almost as if it's driving me rather than the other way round." Raikkonen doesn't have that problem, of course, saying they just weren't quick enough today. He adds: "Tomorrow, we can expect a tough race as it is very difficult to overtake here, so getting into the points will be very difficult."

For BMW, Heidfeld is surprisingly underwhelmed by their performance today: "Although it might appear nice to be in the top ten again, as we have had worse results this season, I'm really disappointed. The car had improved and it all looked good in Q1 and in Q2. But in Q3 I could not use the advantage of the softer tyres because of the red flag." Kubica confirms this was their main problem, but that a lot of the drivers were in a similar situation, because of Barrichello's accident.

Williams had a mixed day with Nakajima saying: "It was frustrating to be P11 and just miss out making it into Q3. The car had more potential if I had been able to find more from the tyre on warm up, but I had quite a few different points on the lap where I was struggling." Rosberg though, starts from 3<sup>rd</sup> on the grid, so he is very happy: "I think we are seeing the benefit of a lot of development work that has gone into the car and I am really pleased for the whole team..."

Over at Toro Rosso, Buemi starts 14<sup>th</sup> and says: "I am quite happy, as the session went smoothly without any mistakes. I got the most I could out of the car and am pleased to have got ahead of Trulli. I'm glad to finally be back in Q2, as it's been a long time." Alguersuari is feeling a bit more positive than previously: "We did quite well and we're getting faster."

For Renault, Grosjean must be disappointed with 19<sup>th</sup>s, and he says he doesn't think it shows the true pace of the car. Clearly it doesn't, as Alonso starts on the grid 5<sup>th</sup>. He says: "Our race pace was not fantastic during practice so we need to improve that a little bit for tomorrow, otherwise we might have a defensive race as I will be determined to defend this fifth place."

Barrichello had a terrible day but is actually feeling okay about things: "It was an eventful qualifying session for me today but I'm still feeling positive with starting from tenth position on the grid. Considering everything that happened, I feel that it's a pretty good result." Button is not quite so cheerful: "It was a frustrating qualifying session for us today. The car felt pretty good in Q1 and I was the second quickest which was positive. We had a bit of understeer so we made some changes for Q2 but unfortunately it made the car very difficult under braking..."

Force India seem to have fallen way down the order and Sutil narrows it down to the type of track they are on: "As we can see, we are still very quick on the straights and on the high speed circuits such as Spa and Monza, but here it is all about downforce. It's a very similar configuration to Monte Carlo, but about twice as long with twice as many corners and that's why we lost so much over one lap." Liuzzi agrees and adds: "With more fuel on board we are quite competitive but from this point on the grid it will be tough." Does he know that he doesn't actually have that much more fuel on board?



For Toyota, Glock says: “I am happy to be back in the top 10 again. I like this track and I feel confident in the car set-up here.” On the other side of the garage, though, Trulli was struggling: “The main problem for me was a lack of grip. The track conditions seem like they have improved but we couldn’t improve our lap times enough from yesterday. I am not sure why because Timo looked strong but I just had no grip at all.”

On to Red Bull, and Vettel is ruining what could have been: “Unfortunately when the red flag came out it was my first run on new tyres. I had previously been on used tyres, so my flying lap wasn’t as easy or relaxed as it might have been. But, at the end of the day, it’s great to be back qualifying near the front, especially on a street circuit.” Webber adds: “You never think your first run is going to be for the grid, so I think everyone always leaves a little bit of a margin. I was on scrubbed tyres and was banking on a big lap in my second run. I’m not sure who was on new tyres, but we’re fourth so let’s see – it could have been a lot worse.”

Finally we turn to McLaren, with Heikki starting 9<sup>th</sup>, he says: “This is a very disappointing result for me. In the first two sessions, things went smoothly – although my lap times weren’t as competitive as I was expecting. For Q3, I didn’t get a good enough lap in during my first run as I’d been running the harder tyre, which wasn’t quick enough.” Of course, Hamilton is much happier than his teammate: “It’s an absolutely fantastic result. We came here with several technical upgrades, and we didn’t know if we’d be up there – particularly after Friday practice, which wasn’t spectacular for me. My pole lap was very relaxed: the car has just got better and better as the track has evolved, and I think I would have gone faster on my final lap if the session hadn’t been aborted.”

### Quote of the Day

That’s all for today, it was a great qualifying, so let’s hope the race is just as good. If you can, join us on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting. I’ll see you there and I’ll leave you with this from Christian Horner: “Both drivers drove very well throughout all the sessions and second and fourth are good starting places for tomorrow’s race, which will be long and tough. The spectacle of seeing the cars driving under the lights again here is fantastic.”