



F1 Digest 2009 – Singapore GP

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For yet another race this year, all weather forecasts were incorrect and we were left to our own devices.

The Race

Ahead of the Grand Prix, it emerged that Nick Heidfeld was being demoted to the back of the grid. He had been found underweight after qualifying, and BMW decided to use the opportunity to change his engine and gearbox. That broke into Heidfeld's ninth engine, but as he was already at the back, the penalty could do little damage. They started him from the pitlane.

The lights went out, the first corner was clean and Hamilton streaked away from the very start. Rosberg got ahead of Vettel easily, up into second. The dust was streaming off the circuit, but all the drivers got through the first lap safely.

Alguersuari was up to 14th, and Webber had jumped up to fourth. On only the third lap, Grosjean came into the pitlane and retired with a brake problem. Hamilton's engineer came on the radio to tell his driver that they had a KERS issue, and they were going to have to disable it. A few laps later and they switched it back on again.

Webber had to let Alonso back past him, as the overtaking manoeuvre on the first lap had been way off track. Unfortunately for him, Glock had already overtaken Alonso, and so both cars were allowed past the Red Bull. That cost Webber about 7 seconds.

Sutil was told on his radio that he needed to watch his engine temperature, they were overheating a little. He was chasing after Alguersuari, so not really taking it easy. Behind him, Fisichella was encouraged by Rob Smedley to close up on the Force India in case he started to struggle.

Behind him, Liuzzi closed right up to the Ferrari, and tried to overtake, couldn't make it stick, but attempted on the next straight. They touched wheels, and then Liuzzi was confronted with a yellow flag, which meant he had to back off. It wasn't clear what the yellow flag was for, but a later replay showed that a piece of debris had fallen off Glock's Toyota, and was sitting in the middle of the track. It looked way too dangerous for a marshal to retrieve it, so for the time being, they just kept waving those yellow flags. Eventually, they found the fastest marshal who ran, ran, ran and retrieved the offending item.

Meanwhile, Vettel took his first stop, and came out just behind Barrichello, who had put in a couple of sterling laps. Rosberg also came in from second and had a long, long stop. He made a mistake on the way out, though, got on a dusty part of the exit, and ran way over and across the white line. He was side by side with Barrichello, got ahead for a moment, but the Brawn car regained his place in 4th.

Barrichello took his stop next, and he also seemed to be close to the white line on the way out of the pitlane, however, he kept it under control.

Hamilton took his stop, whilst it was confirmed Rosberg was under investigation, a drive through penalty was handed out for the white line incident. Sutil was trying to overtake Alguersuari again, and they touched. Sutil spun round and as Heidfeld was getting past, the pair of them collided as well. Sutil's nose came off, and Heidfeld stopped. There was debris everywhere, Sutil continued on to the pitlane, whilst Heidfeld pulled off to the escape



road – the end of his consecutive finishes record. The Safety Car came out, which meant a million cars into the pitlane, including Alonso, Kovalainen, Button, Nakajima, Raikkonen and Buemi.

Alguersuari also took his stop, and left the pitlane with the fuel hose still attached. He stopped instantly, with two mechanics knocked down. They were okay, thank goodness. The others scrambled to get him going again, and he was off, leaving his pit box in a right state. Sutil had pitted for a new nose, and returned to the track one lap down. He returned again a few minutes later, though,

Rosberg was told that once the safety car returned to the pitlane, he should follow it to take his drive through penalty. The safety car came in at the end of lap 24, and Rosberg didn't follow it in. Hamilton streaked away again, whilst Vettel closed right up behind Rosberg. Alonso was also hustling Glock for fourth place.

The stewards announced they would be investigating Sutil's incident after the race. Meanwhile, Rosberg finally took his drive through penalty and rejoined all the way down in 15th. That promoted Vettel to second, so he began to chase Hamilton. The gap reduced to about 0.5 seconds. Vettel's wing mirror was wobbling a lot, and it fell off, into the barriers and thankfully off the racing line.

Vettel took his final pit stop and emerged out in seventh. Meanwhile, Buemi came in for the second time in a couple of laps, as he needed more fuel – Alguersuari had clearly messed up the fuelling rigs. Vettel ran way over the kerbs, avoided the wall, but bits of carbon fibre went flying. He then got a drive through penalty handed to him for speeding in the pitlane. He came out ahead of Raikkonen in 9th.

Webber's brakes were spewing black dust, just as he came in for his second stop of the day. When he came back out, it wasn't long before the brakes failed and he spun off, backwards into the barrier. He was on one of the areas with run off, so it was yellow flags. Webber was okay, and the car was recovered.

Both Toro Rosso cars came into the pits at the same time, and both were pushed into the garage, retired. Alonso pitted from P1, handing it back to rightful leader Hamilton. Alonso returned to the track in fourth. Button was in next from second, and he returned to the track ahead of Raikkonen and more importantly, Barrichello.

It looked like it was Button's turn to have brake problems, as plumes of black dust were coming off his car, however, he guided it safely across the line. Hamilton took the win, and somehow Glock had snuck into second, basically by keeping his nose clean.

Results

Hamilton took the win, joined on the podium by Glock and Alonso. Vettel finished 4th, and Button kept ahead of his teammate finishing 5th to Barrichello's 6th. The final two points positions went to Kovalainen and Kubica.

Just missing out, Nakajima, followed by Rosberg, Trulli, Fisichella and Liuzzi, whilst the retirees were Alguersuari, Buemi, Webber, Sutil, Heidfeld and Grosjean.

Championship Standings

Button holds on to his lead at the top of the drivers championship, now with 84 points to Barrichello's 69. Vettel just manages to stay in contention with 59 points, but it's now a three horse race with Webber on 51.5. Raikkonen rounds out the top five with 40 points.

The constructors has Brawn ahead of Red Bull 153 points to 110.5, with Ferrari on 62, McLaren on 59 and Toyota on 46.5.



Team by Team

Brawn actually had quite a good day, considering how Saturday went for them. Button says: "It was a good race for me and I'm happy with fifth position and four more points today. Getting ahead of Kazuki off the line was key and that really made my race." Barrichello adds: "I had a great start to make up two places and everything was going well in the first stint. It's a shame that the safety car didn't play into my hands but I was in a good position. Unfortunately I had a problem on my second pit stop when I couldn't engage neutral and the engine stalled which lost me the crucial time needed to stay ahead of Jensen."

Both Ferrari drivers aren't really that fond of the Singapore circuit. Raikkonen finished 10th and says: "I couldn't do any better. The car was sliding everywhere and I had no grip. In the final part, with the softer tyres, the situation improved a bit, but by then it was too late. I closed up to Nakajima and, a few times, I tried to risk a passing move, but here it's really difficult to overtake unless the guy in front makes a mistake." Fisichella is also looking forward to moving on: "Here, KERS was less of a factor than at Monza: at the start I managed to pass a car and then it was mainly useful to defend my position. Now we go to Suzuka, a real track: given how things have gone this year, with cars being strong in one race and weak the next, it's difficult to make any predictions."

Whilst Ferrari probably achieved less than expected, Toyota had a much better weekend than anyone was anticipating. Glock finished second and said: "It was important to get in front of Fernando (Alonso) on the first lap and I was disappointed I didn't do it at the start. I saw he was fighting with Mark (Webber) and I just dived in and made the pass. It paid off because after that our strategy worked well; it was the key point in my race. I was just concentrating the whole race on my speed and we didn't make any mistakes." Trulli didn't have quite such a good time but is pretty gracious about it: "I wasn't particularly competitive all weekend and I was struggling with traction so we have to take a look at that. But on the positive side Timo's second place is a great result for the team, who really deserve it."

Sutil explains his overtaking manoeuvre on Alguersuari: "He was holding me up a lot and I tried a few times to pass him but I finally saw a chance. I tried and it wasn't enough - I was a little late on the brakes, spun and that's it. Then Nick came around the corner and hit my front wing as I was stuck in the corner. I didn't see him coming as I was on the move already and couldn't react to it, but I'm sorry for it. It was a race incident." Liuzzi finished 14th, and says he struggled with two KERS cars ahead of him and plenty of graining on the tyres.

Over at Red Bull, Vettel isn't sure about his penalty for speeding in the pit lane: "There's a bit of a question mark as to why I got the penalty, I mean I had no reason to push at that point. We knew we couldn't pass Lewis at the pit-stop because he was staying out longer, so I was surprised when I got the call on the radio for it." Meanwhile, teammate Mark Webber thought something might be up during his stop: "We had a suspected brake problem, so when I came in for my pit-stop, the guys made a visual check. It seemed reasonable for me to continue, but then we had the failure and I retired. The guys did everything they could - I think they were seconds away from retiring me when we had the failure, so it's disappointing."

Kubica had a case of bad timing: "This was a very tough race. I was quite unlucky with the safety car period. I lost a couple of positions as I had just refuelled before the safety car went out." Whilst Heidfeld knows where the blame lies: "For me it was clearly Adrian Sutil's fault. Obviously I saw it from the inside and later also on TV. He had spun backwards and then just drove back onto the track and straight into my car. That's something you just can't do. I had no chance to avoid this accident." He adds that even though he wasn't doing particularly well beforehand, a DNF is still annoying.

Toro Rosso had a double DNF, though, so they really aren't happy. Buemi says he had tyre issues, got caught up behind the safety car, had no fuel in his second pit stop, and then retired with a gearbox problem. What a day!



Alguersuari, meanwhile, found the whole thing tough, and was really running his own race until he was stopped by a brake failure.

Another very disappointed driver is Rosberg, but he knows it's his own fault. He says: "I made an unnecessary mistake by braking too late and running over the white line on the pitlane exit. Then the safety car came out at the worst possible moment. It left me with a really horrible feeling, also for the team, knowing that I wouldn't be second when I have served my drive-through penalty and I would have to spend the rest of the race at the back." He says it makes him more determined for Japan, though. Nakajima believes he did the best job he could, and he is disappointed to have finished 10th, missing out on some points.

Renault had one half of the garage celebrating a podium, and the other half suffering an early DNF. Grosjean says: "It was a disappointing weekend for me. The car just wasn't right and we had recurring brake problems which we hoped we had solved before the race. I had a good start and a good first lap when I felt my brakes failing and so the team asked me to retire." Alonso, though, is much happier: "This was a great result for the team allowing us to be positive and put behind us the past few weeks. I had a good start and great pace throughout the race and third place came as a result of a good strategy and a solid race."

Finally, we turn to McLaren, where Heikki can't help but be disappointed: "I had no problems from start to finish and was feeling very comfortable, but I couldn't go quicker. I drove to the pace I could with this car. I struggle a bit to maintain the tyre's performance and the car gets out of shape if I try to increase my pace, so I can't carry more speed through the corners." Hamilton is happy to erase bad memories: "The team did radio me about a small problem with KERS - but I didn't have a problem in the cockpit and was able to just disable it and then re-engage it. It worked fine after that. We came here hoping for a good result – and I wanted to redeem myself after the last lap in Monza – and we got it!"

Quote of the Day

That's all for this race weekend. We immediately turn our attention to Japan, as the race is less than a week away. I'll leave you with this quote from Ross Brawn: "We will go away from Singapore with further valuable points in the championship having done as we intended and recovered well from qualifying."