



## F1 Digest 2009 – Japan GP

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This is F1 Digest 2009 – Japan GP.

Now it's time to try and see what the chaos in qualifying meant for the race.

### The Race

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The FIA finally released the grid for the morning, with the main point of note that Button starts down in 10<sup>th</sup>, with Barrichello starting ahead of him in 6<sup>th</sup>. It was also confirmed that Glock wouldn't be racing. He had stitches in the back of his leg, and some bruises on his back, but the problem was more mobility due to the leg injury.

Down on the grid, the track temperature was at 41 degrees C, whilst the air was about 25. The lights went out, the cars were away, and Kubica got ahead of Jenson. The front runners were away cleanly, Vettel streaking ahead, whilst Buemi didn't pull away off the grid. Webber started from the pit lane, and returned after just one lap for a change of tyres.

Towards the back, Alonso and Grosjean both pulled out to try and get past Liuzzi, but only Alonso made it stick. On the second lap, Webber came into the pits again, this time his head rest had worked loose, so the mechanics were hurrying to secure it and send him out again.

Button got back past Kubica, with a fabulous overtaking move, so he was back in his starting position of 10<sup>th</sup>. Sutil started closing up on Kovalainen, with the Force India on a lot less fuel on board.

On lap 11, Buemi headed into the pits and his garage, his race over. Sutil went to overtake Kovalainen at last, they touched through the corner and Sutil spun. Kovalainen managed to drive round him and continue, and Button, Kubica and Fisichella all got past before Sutil could right himself and carry onwards. Button now up to 8<sup>th</sup>.

Hamilton was the first man to pit for his official stop, followed by Sutil and Trulli. All good, clean stops. The top four then all came in to the pits, and Vettel returned to the lead. Kubica put his foot down before pitting, but even with a quick stop couldn't get back ahead of Button.

Romain ran very wide but avoided the gravel and continued onwards. He pitted on the next lap, anyway. On lap 33, Raikkonen put in the fastest lap of the race so far. When Heidfeld came in for his stop, he came out behind the Ferrari and ahead of his teammate. The two BMWs were really close but Heidfeld managed to keep the position. Kubica wasn't giving up easily, putting the pressure on his teammate.

Trulli came in for a stop and he managed to return to the track in front of Hamilton, promoting him to a legitimate second place. Kovalainen and Fisichella stopped at the same time, and the Ferrari was let out directly in front of the McLaren. At the exit, Kovalainen pulled alongside and muscled his way past Fisichella, putting some distance between the two of them.

Vettel's stop from the lead saw a little bit of confusion over the front tyres, but he was out within a reasonable time and he retained his lead.

Nine laps to go, Alguersuari had a big crash, hitting a brake marker, and the barrier, and ending up halfway across the track. The safety car came out whilst Alguersuari climbed out of the car and the marshals got to work. He seemed fine, but was stretchered into the ambulance, just in case.



Hamilton's radio was played, confirming that the McLaren was having an issue with their KERS. That would make Toyota very happy, as Trulli must have been nervous for the restart. Webber came into the pits for the fifth time, and for a new front wing.

The Safety Car came in with four laps to go, Vettel bunched the pack up quite considerably, and easily retained his lead on the restart. Grosjean was in second but a lap down, slightly odd that he hadn't been allowed to unlap himself under the safety car. He very quickly had to bow down to blue flags for the entire field. Nightmare.

Kubica was so close to Button, at each corner it was nailbiting stuff. Webber, two laps down and five pit stops under his belt, set the fastest lap of the race. Kubica hustled Button to the very last corner, but couldn't make it stick, and we watched Vettel take the chequered flag.

## Results

Vettel converted his pole position into a win, and was joined on the podium by Trulli and Hamilton. Raikkonen finished 4<sup>th</sup> with Rosberg behind him, and Heidfeld, Barrichello and Button picked up the rest of the points. Kubica just missed out in 9<sup>th</sup>, with Alonso 10<sup>th</sup> and Kovalainen in 11<sup>th</sup>. Fisichella finished 12<sup>th</sup>, with Sutil and Liuzzi behind him. Nakajima was the last to finish on the lead lap, with Grosjean one lap down, and Webber two.

The retirees were Alguersuari and Buemi, and of course Glock did not start.

## Championship Standings

Button needed five points over his teammate to secure the championship but he only scored one point to Barrichello's two. That means he is now on 85 points, with Rubens on 71. Vettel has closed up the gap considerably, keeping himself in contention for the title with 69 points. Webber has 51.5 and Raikkonen rounds out the top five with 45 points.

Brawn still lead the constructors championship, but again, just missed out on securing the title this weekend. They have 156 points to Red Bull's 120.5. Ferrari have 67, McLaren are hunting them down for third place on 65, with Toyota further back on 54.5 points.

## Team by Team

Today we'll start with McLaren, and Hamilton knows exactly where he lost time: "As I exited the pits after my second stop, I lost time with a gearbox problem, which meant I coasted about 100 metres down the pitlane – that cost me about a second. To be honest, it wasn't a surprise to be jumped by Jarno at the final stops – we needed every tenth to make the gap up to three seconds and we couldn't quite make it." Kovalainen isn't particularly apologetic over his incident with Sutil: "I pushed from the start to the finish – Adrian tried to make a move but only went halfway, so I was able to stay beside him. When he tried to turn in, I was already on the kerb and I had no more room to avoid him, so I had to lean on him and that was more a problem for him."

For Renault, Alonso says qualifying saw an end to any competitiveness this weekend and he is already turning his attention to the final two races. Grosjean says: "Overall it was a tough afternoon for me. The car was very heavy on fuel and was difficult to drive as I had a lot of understeer. The Suzuka circuit was also a new experience for me this weekend, but I did my best to complete the race without any problems."

Button sounds more optimistic than he has in a while: "Today was about picking up points after our eventful qualifying session yesterday and that's exactly what I did. Starting from tenth on the grid was always going to make for a tough race but my pace was really good in the race and I was very happy with the performance of the car."



Barrichello has still got his eye on the title though: "We would have finished in sixth place without the safety car and that's the best that I could have hoped for today. It's frustrating but that's the way racing goes and the most important thing is that I gained a point on Jenson this weekend."

BMW finished 6th and 9th today, with Kubica just missing out on the points. He puts it down to luck, the bad kind: "The entire weekend was unlucky for me. Yesterday I wasn't able to show my good pace due to the red and yellow flags. Today I was stuck in traffic a couple of times." Heidfeld had problems in the pit lane: "Fourth place was within reach but several things went wrong today, especially at the second pit stop when the rear right wheel nut got stuck. But certainly I don't want to complain. These things can happen and normally we have very good pit stops."

Over at Force India, Sutil isn't happy: "It was a really disappointing race. The start was OK and I could keep my position but then I fell back to ninth and was caught behind Kovalainen. I got past him at the chicane but then he cut back across and I spun and lost a lot of time. That was really the end of the race for me." Liuzzi though, is more content: "Overall I think it was not a bad race. Starting from that position it was always going to be difficult to score points but we showed a strong pace in the race and never gave up."

Toro Rosso had a double DNF with Alguersuari sorry for his crash, but also a little confused: "My accident came on the lap after my second pit stop, when I fitted the soft tyres. At turn 15, which you take flat, I lost the rear end of the car and crashed into the wall, but I'm not sure why, as it was inexplicable and I would like to see the data, in case there might have been something wrong with the pressure of the rear tyres or a puncture." Buemi explains his retirement: I had a problem with the clutch, right from the start of the parade lap, when I couldn't get off the grid. We tried to fix the problem by adjusting the clutch map, but again for the real start, it didn't work. Then, after a few laps the clutch failed and I had to retire in the pits."

The Williams boys don't have a lot to say. Rosberg sums up his 5th place: "The car wasn't as quick as we wanted it to be but we got the best out of it. I had a really good strategy which helped deliver this result. It was a tough race so overall I'm pleased." Nakajima was ten places further back and he says: "Obviously it was a difficult race for me. I was on a one stop strategy which was working up to a point but then there was just too much traffic and the safety car came out so it didn't work out the way we had hoped. It's a disappointing result at my home Grand Prix." As expected, Trulli has someone to dedicate his podium finish to: "Standing on the podium in the team's home Grand Prix is a fantastic feeling and this great result is down to the whole team; the engineers, mechanics and everyone, including Timo. We work really well together as part of a great team and it's a pity he wasn't able to race today."

For Ferrari, Raikkonen says: "Today the car wasn't bad, but it was not quick enough to fight for the podium. This fourth place is useful in terms of keeping the team in third place in the Constructors' Championship, but it will be hard to hang onto it over the final two races. I will definitely do everything I can though." Fisichella is starting to feel more positive and confident within the car: "Towards the end, I had to fight off Sutil who was very quick and was on the soft tyre, while I was on the hard: at this point the KERS came in handy. Now I am looking forward to Interlagos in a more confident mood: it will be important to get a slightly better start position to try and finally make it into the points."

Finally, Red Bull had a mixed day, propping up both ends of the grid. Webber says: "I had to make two pit stops on the first two laps, so it was all over from there. On the first lap, the headrest came loose in the car, so I had to come in and get that fixed. I went back out, but the same thing happened so I had to come in again in order for the guys to tape it down. We tested some things today, and tried some other items for future races. That's all we could really do from there." Meanwhile, Vettel is super happy: "I was screaming with happiness on the radio at the end of the race. The last couple of races have been a bit up and down, sometimes we had pace and sometimes not, but finally we



made it. It's good to be back in first position on Sunday. A huge thanks to all the team and everyone at Red Bull for this."

### Quote of the Day

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That's all for this week. We have a break now before the next and penultimate race at Brazil, but stay tuned to Sidepodcast.com for plenty of F1 news and discussion until then. I'll leave you with this quote from Ross Brawn: "The next two races at Interlagos and Abu Dhabi should suit the characteristics of our car much better so we can look forward to a very exciting conclusion to the season."

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