



F1 Digest 2009 – Brazil Free Practice

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Brazil Free Practice.

The battle starts here then, with all eyes on Brawn and Red Bull as the penultimate weekend of 2009 got underway.

Free Practice 1

Free Practice began with the rain holding off to begin with. The air temperature was at 19 degrees C and the track at 21. Raikkonen led a stream of cars out on track for their installation laps, with Button completing a handful of laps without setting a time.

Alguersuari set the first lap time, although he was soon beaten by his teammate by almost exactly two seconds. They both set about improving their time, and after fifteen minutes, Kovi and Raikkonen joined them. Buemi held them off, and the others who hit the track, but when he came into the pits with ten laps under his belt, Raikkonen jumped to the top spot.

Half an hour gone, and everyone had a time on the board bar Grosjean. The Renault had attempted to complete a lap but slid off over the grass, and returned to the pitlane. Meanwhile at the top, Hamilton led Webber, with Raikkonen third, although the Ferrari was back in the pitlane.

Webber was completing a fast lap and had to jink out the way of Nakajima, who looked as though he was sitting off the racing line, but suddenly turned in to the corner. He still improved to second again, though, having been pushed down by a couple of Brawn cars and his teammate.

Button and Barrichello posted the exact same time down to the thousandth of a second, but then Barrichello jumped up to P1, leaving Button down in 5th. All of a sudden, it started pouring down with rain, and all the cars headed back to the pitlane.

After a brief period of inaction, Alguersuari was the first back out on track again, with intermediate tyres on. It was just an installation lap for the Toro Rosso though. Another ten minutes or so later, and the rain had stopped. Kovalainen headed out, no wet tyres in sight. Grosjean also headed out, and was slipping his way round the track. He ran wide and ploughed straight through a polystyrene brake marker, which exploded into a million pieces. He returned to the pitlane, leaving debris all over the track.

The session was red flagged, Hamilton was stuck at the end about to go out, but he was pushed back into his garage. With just over twenty minutes to go, the session was green again, and Heidfeld was out first, although there was a queue of cars eager to get out there.

At the top, Vettel led Barrichello and Hamilton, whilst at the back Liuzzi, Kobayashi and Grosjean propped up the timesheets. Everyone was out bar Kovalainen and Sutil to try and improve their times, and soon, even they joined in the congestion. Vettel was the first to drop into the 1:12s soon topped by Webber.

Barrichello had a spin, turning 360, and waiting for a Renault to pass before he carried on unscathed. Meanwhile, Buemi spun himself into a barrier, trashing the rear right. He was out of the car but the session continued under yellow flags.



With just a few minutes to go, Barrichello improved to 2nd, splitting the two Red Bulls. Liuzzi was struggling to keep the car on track, he ran wide and returned right in front of Button, who was then stuck behind him. Button continued on for another lap but couldn't improve on seventh, and the session drew to a close.

Results

Webber finished the morning on top, then, with a 1:12.463, after 29 laps. Barrichello was close behind with Vettel and Kovalainen the only other drivers into the 1:12s. Hamilton finished fifth, with Nakajima, Button and Rosberg behind him. Sutil and Raikkonen rounded out the top ten.

Trulli finished up 11th, followed by Heidfeld, Buemi, and Kubica. Fisichella was 15th but just three tenths off his teammate in 10th. Alonso and Liuzzi were next, the last two in the 1:13s, with Kobayashi, Alguersuari and Grosjean in the 1:14s.

Free Practice 2

Ahead of FP2, the track temperature was up to 23 degrees C, whilst the air was at 18 degrees. It was threatening rain almost immediately the lights went green, and the drivers headed out on track to get in some dry running before it started.

Vettel led the way and set the early benchmark, with a 1:12.9 but he was pushed down by Buemi with a time two tenths of a second faster. Slightly unexpected as Alguersuari in the other Toro Rosso was all the way at the bottom of the timesheets.

Trulli looked to be on a good lap, fastest in the first two sectors, but he couldn't keep the momentum through the last and finished up third.

Button was on the radio complaining about his car, but soon improved to first. Trulli had another go at a lap, but made a mistake at the first turn and slipped off over the grass. Buemi wasn't having any of it though, and put in another flying lap to regain the top spot.

An hour into the session, and the rain began to fall.

Fisichella came to a halt at the end of the pitlane, having stalled. He waved a Toyota through from behind him and climbed out of the car. After a moment of confusion, he got back in the car whilst the stewards pushed him out the way. With this and the rain, most drivers returned to the pitlane.

Vettel headed out on track by himself, but as the session began to draw to a close, the traffic started to build up. With three minutes to go, everyone bar Fisi was out on track to try and improve their times,. For a moment, it looked like Buemi would have his moment of glory, but Alonso posted the fastest time in the last few minutes. Barrichello also looked to be on a flyer but it didn't work out and he finished up third.

Results

Alonso ended the day on top with a 1:12.312 with 27 laps. Buemi was behind him but had completed 45 laps to finish in second. Barrichello, Webber and Button followed with Trulli, Vettel and Rosberg next. Sutil finished 9th, with Hamilton 10th.

Grosjean was just outside the top ten, with Kubica and Kobayashi behind, less than a tenth apart from each other. Nakajima finished the day 14th, followed by Heidfeld, Liuzzi, Kovalainen and Raikkonen. Alguersuari and Fisichella rounded out the timesheets.



Team by Team

We'll start with Williams who had a mixed day. Nakajima says: "We worked through quite a lot of things and we know in which direction we want to head for tomorrow now. Whenever I was out on my new tyres, it started to drizzle so I didn't get to record a good lap time today." Meanwhile Rosberg adds: "We also spent time looking at our downforce level but it's always difficult and sometimes you need to compromise because, on the one hand, you want to find the quickest lap possible, but on the other, you need to be careful that people are not able to overtake you on the straight."

Hamilton says: "We had a good Friday. We're not the fastest, but our long runs appear to be quite consistent. We're not as quick as the Red Bulls, but for Brazil - where we haven't traditionally been quick - we're quite happy with the pace we have." Kovalainen is also feeling confident: "Our pace on both tyres appears to be very good and we suffered very limited degradation, so I think our race pace will be good."

Over at Brawn GP, Barrichello says: "It's great to finally get the track action underway today and I'm pleased with our progress and happy to be starting my home Grand Prix weekend at the top end of the field." Championship leader Button is finding things tough: "I'm struggling a little with the balance on the option tyre over one timed lap so hopefully we can resolve that overnight to be ready for qualifying."

Force India are keeping an eye on the conditions, Liuzzi says: "With this unpredictable weather it's important to be out at exactly the right time to get the best of the track so perhaps the final classifications are not truly representative of the real order right now." Sutil says: "The weather was a bit crazy and actually I think everyone expected more rain, but it was quite light. In FP2 in particular the track was wet in some places and dry in others so getting the right timing was important."

For Toyota, Kobayashi made his debut. He said: "It was a nice experience to be starting a weekend as a Grand Prix driver for the first time. It was also my first time driving in Brazil. I found that the track is good fun for a driver and also very challenging." Trulli is an old hand at this now and he says: "Everything went well today and we did our usual Friday testing work. We had some rain in both sessions which makes things a bit harder than normal and particularly in the morning there wasn't much grip."

Ferrari finished way down the order with Fisichella saying: "18th and 20th places in FP2 is not a result we can be happy about but, to use a footballing expression, it's all looking very tight, as it has been in fact for much of the year." Raikkonen agrees, saying it only takes a small step forward to climb back up the order, but he's not entirely convinced that will happen.

Red Bull were looking good today and Vettel is looking ahead to the rest of the weekend: "Weather-wise, I think today was the day they predicted rain and it didn't rain much, so maybe that means rain for Sunday? We will see." Webber is also looking ahead: "It's one of the more encouraging Friday's that we've had for a long time, so it was good. I hope it carries on tomorrow. We've seen that things can change day to day with this Championship, so I'm looking forward to qualifying - it should be good for us."

For BMW, Kubica says very little and is sure their results aren't reliable due to the conditions, whilst Heidfeld adds: "We changed the car a lot after the first session when it really wasn't good at all. The changes definitely meant an improvement but the balance isn't yet as I would like it to be."

Buemi finished the day second and he is pleased: "I am happy that we seemed quite competitive in the afternoon, after the mechanics did a very good job to rebuild the car after my accident this morning." Alguersuari was at the other end of the timesheets but isn't too worried. "I enjoyed my first day at this circuit, which has a nice mix of high



speed and slower corners that make it fun to drive and overall, practice went quite well, even though it was tricky when the track was a bit damp.”

Finally, Renault ended the day on top, with Alonso posting the fastest time. He says: “I think that the weather will be the key to this weekend so we need to react quickly to any changes and be flexible.” Grosjean is happy just to keep on going, he says: “Tomorrow I need to continue learning the track as well as completing my preparations for qualifying and the race on Sunday.”

Quote of the Day

That’s all for this episode of F1 Digest. We’ll be back with all the action from FP3 and Qualifying in the next show, but for now I’ll leave you with this quote from Willy Rampf at BMW: “As far as the track conditions are concerned, this was a mixed Friday for all teams. Again and again light rain falling made the set-up work difficult.”

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