



F1 Digest 2009 – Brazil Qualifying

Welcome to F1 Digest - Brazil Qualifying.

After the chaos of qualifying in Japan, Brazil was bound to be less eventful, wasn't it?

Free Practice 3

The rain we were expecting yesterday hit today, with torrential storms delaying the start. The medical helicopter couldn't take off so they had to hold off until things cleared up a little. Some of the drivers were in the garage, some of them weren't. A couple of them were in the car but the action wasn't about to start any time soon.

Heidfeld passed some of the time by sweeping up, whilst Kubica and Buemi grabbed hold of cameras and started messing about with them.

Eventually, things began to brighten a little, and the session was due to run after a 45 minute delay.

Fisichella was out first, followed by plenty of other drivers, but it was just an installation lap for the Ferrari. The spray was enormous, as Heikki set the first laptime of the day, swiftly beaten by Rosberg, but the times were slow, down in the 1:30s compared to yesterday's 1:12s in the dry.

The times improved slightly, Rosberg jumped into the 1:24s and then it began to rain again. Grosjean spun off onto the grass at Turn 1, and had to wait for a car to pass before continuing on his way. A minute or so later Alonso was also off travelling across the grass to regain the track. Then it was Grosjean's turn again. He aquaplaned off, hit a bump and was airborne for a moment, hit the barriers and spun round and round, through some puddles before coming to a halt on the grass. The session was red flagged. Grosjean climbed out the car, he was unharmed, although he did have to splash about in the mud to get to his lift back to the pitlane.

There were only a few minutes left, so the session was effectively over.

Results

Rosberg led the way then, after essentially 13 minutes of practice. His fastest time was a 1:23.182 and he completed 9 laps. Nakajima was second, followed by Button, Alonso and Sutil. Then Grosjean, who's car needs a lot of work before qualifying. Trulli and Heidfeld round out the top 10.

Raikkonen and Kovalainen finished 11th and 12th, followed by Alguersuari, Barrichello and Vettel. Liuzzi was 16th then Hamilton, Fisichella and finally Kubica and Kobayashi in the 1:30s.

Qualifying

Ahead of Q1, the track and air temperature were both at 17 degrees C, with humidity up to 97%, meaning, yes, it was actually raining.

All the drivers headed out on track as soon as the session was underway, and everyone was ready to put a time on the board straight away. Vettel put in the benchmark, whilst Fisichella spun on the racing line. He had stalled the car and couldn't continue, so the session was red flagged, just four minutes in. The marshals pushed the car over to the crane, then lifted it up to be recovered.



There were just seven drivers with a lap time, and we were waiting for the session to restart, but race control said it wouldn't begin again until the conditions improved.

Hamilton was waiting at the end of the pitlane when it was time to go again, but he was followed out by pretty much everyone.

Soon, Vettel's time had been beaten by quite a lot of people, with Hamilton putting a new benchmark in with Barrichello close behind him. The laps had improved by at least ten seconds, as Rosberg jumped to P1, and Vettel improved to 8th.

With five minutes to go, the Williams were doing really well with Rosberg remaining on top. Meanwhile, the drivers looking to avoid the bottom five were Vettel, Heidfeld and two McLarens. Fisichella was obviously last and not taking part in the rest of the session.

Rosberg came into the pits, presumably happy with his time, whilst Hamilton came in to change his tyres and headed back out to try and improve his time. He didn't, though, he spun off onto the grass, managing to continue onwards. He returned to the pitlane, and was pushed back into the garage, giving up his session. Vettel was on his own flying lap, but had a bit of a wobble and also gave it up.

The fastest three were Rosberg, Raikkonen and Kubica, whilst we lost Vettel, Kovalainen, Hamilton, Heidfeld and Fisichella.

When he returned to the garage, Vettel threw his steering wheel out the car and stomped off in a huff.

The second session got underway after a massive delay to again wait for the conditions to improve. The drivers were lining up to get out of the pitlane first, and it was Rosberg who managed it first.

After just a couple of minutes, Liuzzi crashed off into a concrete barrier. The wheels were knocked off, and he spun round a few times. The session was red flagged. He climbed out of the car, okay. On the replay we also saw a Williams spinning as well, so clearly the conditions weren't that great.

The red flag covered conditions as well as clearing the track of debris, so there was a lot more waiting. I'm talking... an hour and fifteen minutes.

Still, it did get going again, with Rosberg heading out first again. There were about 12 minutes of the session to run, so everyone headed out except Liuzzi who's car was trashed and Alonso. Rosberg came in for the intermediate tyres with just over six minutes to go. It seemed like a brave move and his lap times weren't quite up there with the others. He didn't improve on his third position. With three minutes to go, Button was in the bottom five, and needed to improve. He was on the extreme wets and looked like he might head in for a tyre change, but stayed out for another lap. He still couldn't improve, his tyres were burnt out.

The fastest three were Rosberg, Nakajima and Trulli, whilst we lost Kobayashi, Alguersuari, Grosjean, Button and of course, Liuzzi.

Qualifying three got underway with everyone out straight away bar Adrian Sutil, but the Force India joined in as well. Halfway through the session Barrichello jumped up to the top, then Trulli, then Rosberg, then Barrichello again. A minute and a half to go and it was Webber on top. But it was Barrichello who put the lap time in when it mattered.

Results



Barrichello took pole position at his home race, pleasing the crowd with a 1:19.576. Webber was second, and Sutil starts a very impressive third. Trulli was 4th with Raikkonen 5th, and Buemi also impressive starts from 6th. Next up, Rosberg, Kubica, Nakajima, and Alonso qualified tenth, almost a second behind Kazuki,

The rest of the order, Kobayashi, Alguersuari, Grosjean and Button. Then Liuzzi, Vettel, Kovalainen, Hamilton, Heidfeld and Fisichella.

Fuel Loads

Barrichello is quite light, as is Raikkonen in 5th and Alonso back in 10th. A very poor qualifying from Alonso then, slow and light at the same time. Both Trulli and Buemi have a good stock of fuel on board, but it is Nakajima who is the heaviest of the top ten.

Further back, Heidfeld has a similar fuel load to Barrichello, but is started from 19th, whilst Fisichella is right at the back and very heavy. Vettel has also loaded up with fuel, starting from 16th.

Team by Team

Red Bull had a driver through to Q3 and one out in Q1, and Vettel isn't happy at all. "It's not the best position to start from - we were targeting much higher, but that's life and we have to accept it. There wasn't really anything missing from our side today, it wasn't about our pace, it was just a case of timing." Webber starts 2nd and says: "I would have liked to have had another crack at being on pole, but I made a mistake. I think it wasn't easy to knit six perfect laps together in those conditions, but I'm very happy with how I drove and the guys in the garage did a great job."

Ferrari were another team with drivers split over the grid. Fisichella says: "When qualifying started the conditions were almost impossible. I ended up spinning even though I wasn't going that quickly, but I was at a point where the track was flooded. As I turned the wheel, I hit the engine cut-out switch and that was my qualifying over with." Raikkonen's at the higher end of the grid and says: "Overall, I'm pleased with this result. On the extreme wet tyres, we were very competitive and I actually think that if the conditions had stayed bad enough for these tyres, I could have done better than fifth place."

Over at BMW, Kubica wasn't impressed with the conditions: "At one point there was so much water on the track that the car was almost undriveable. Fortunately, after the break, the conditions were a little better. We are running relatively low downforce, which was obviously delicate in these conditions." Heidfeld is also way down the order and not happy: "Of course it is very annoying to be out in Q1, but I simply had no chance. We certainly knew it would rain in qualifying and we put our ride height up, but it wasn't enough given the amount of water on the track."

Alonso is looking ahead to the race: "If we get changeable weather tomorrow, it will impact on the race and if we can react to the conditions at the right times then we can make up some places. We will certainly try our best to do that." Grosjean feels quite comfortable with his performance: "It was the same for all the drivers and I did well in these conditions. Unfortunately in Q2 the track was drying, but we didn't have time to fit the intermediate tyres and so I did the whole session with the same wet tyres."

For Toyota, Kobayashi had a tough first qualifying session. "The conditions were really hard because from lap to lap the situation changed and there was a lot of aquaplaning. I have never drive this track in those conditions before so it was certainly not easy but the car felt good." Trulli lines up fourth on the grid and says: "I enjoyed it because we were putting in some quick lap times on the right tyres and it's good to be on the second row. It would be nice to repeat the Japanese Grand Prix podium and I will be fighting hard."

Sutil is also on the second row and says: "I'm really happy, it feels good to be back here at the front. I like this circuit although it hasn't been the greatest for us for results in previous years. I'm hoping for a good race tomorrow - I'm



just going to give it my best.” Liuzzi isn’t at all happy though: “I am really disappointed and frustrated that the qualifying ended in the way it did as I was pretty convinced I could have got into Q3 and done well.” He apologises to the team but says he couldn’t have done anything to avoid the accident, there were just too many puddles.

Kovalainen agrees with everyone that it was pretty bad out there: “These were some of the worst conditions I’ve ever experienced in a race weekend. I like driving in wet conditions, but today there was so much aquaplaning that it was extremely difficult to keep the car on the track. Plus, there was very bad visibility when you were travelling in the spray of another car.” Hamilton adds: “It was a disappointing performance, but we did the best we could - I even had a small ‘off’ trying to push at the end and the car just let loose on me. We were running with a dry set-up so it’s a lot stiffer than you’d probably want in the wet...”

For Toro Rosso, Buemi is happy with his best ever qualifying, saying: “It was a difficult session and I just stayed in the car, trying to remain focused. Our goal for tomorrow is to score some points but with this kind of weather anything can happen.” Alguersuari adds: “That was not bad and I’m happy with the result. There was a lot of water and it was easy to crash, so my priority was to stay on the track, making no mistakes.”

Our penultimate team is Williams with Rosberg blaming the tyres. “It was good to see that we were fastest on the wets throughout qualifying. Unfortunately, however, I think we just weren’t quick enough on the intermediates.” Meanwhile, Nakajima wanted a different outcome: “It would probably have been better if it had continued raining because the car was very competitive in the wet, but we still managed to get a good position.”

Finally, Brawn GP, and Button is trying to keep his spirits up: “By the third lap, the rear tyres started to go away, leaving me with no rear grip, and I just couldn’t improve my time. It’s going to make the race very tough tomorrow as I will be right in the middle of the pack but I’ll make the most of it and any opportunities to make progress.” Barrichello says: “I’m so happy to have qualified on pole for my home Grand Prix today particularly after such an unusual qualifying session... I’m very proud of what we achieved today.”

Quote of the Day

That’s it for this episode of F1 Digest. We’ve got one more show for this weekend covering all the action from the race, but until then I’ll leave you with this short but sweet quote from Fabrice Lom, Renault track support for Red Bull: “That was the longest qualifying session of my career - what a session!”