



F1 Digest - Spain Free Practice

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest for the Spanish Grand Prix. This show is here to bring you all the action from the weekend, in case you missed it or if you just want a quick reminder. Today we're looking at Free Practice 1 and 2.

Free Practice 1

The temperature going into the first session on Friday was a relatively cool 17 degrees C, with the rain predictions of the week looking less and less likely. There's no real way to sugar coat this session other than to say it was pretty dull.

Installation laps were completed as normal by everyone but the Ferrari's and then that was all the action the many Spanish fans saw for almost twenty minutes.

Journeyer left a note on the Live Comment thread at Sidepodcast.com, saying: "I like it... we're back to civilized session times. Anyhoo, Ferraris have stayed in their garages, oddly enough. No setup laps from them yet." Whilst Dank was direct and to the point: "14 minutes... no action!"

Eventually, Nakajima broke the mould and headed out on to the track to post the first lap time. The Williams was joined by his team mate, both McLaren's, and Trulli. Hamilton set the time to beat.

It wasn't until halfway through the session that Ferrari decided to send out at least one of their drivers. Raikkonen chased down Hamilton's time but ended up third on his first complete lap. He soon managed to jump the McLaren though. Massa joined the fun with just under forty minutes to go, and was obviously struggling with something. He spun on his first lap, ran wide on the second and spun one more time before being called back to the garage. He did manage to post a time in P3 before calling it a day. Alianora posted a comment at Sidepodcast.com: "Oh no, not again! Massa's spun again. I'm glad I'm not going to be him in the debriefing session, because I think he might get a lecture..." and Scott said: "Massa's just not with it today I don't think. Looking at the replay, it looks like he took too much kerb and then just dropped it. Perhaps he's a bit over confident after his Bahrain win."

The Super Aguri boys posted some not-very-impressive lap times, meaning that everyone had completed at least one lap. Most of the action, however, came in the last ten minutes. Alonso was pushing hard, placing his Renault briefly in 5th, and Hamilton was out to regain the top spot.

When the session drew to a close, the fastest five were Raikkonen, Massa, Hamilton, Kubica and Kovalainen.

Free Practice 2

The temperature had warmed slightly for Free Practice 2, and I'm glad to say that the action hotted up as well. There were none of the installation laps as seen in the first session, Davidson, Glock, Hamilton, two BMWs and two Toro Rosso's all hit the tarmac and kept on going. Hamilton ran wide, leaving the top spot open for Kubica, just ahead of team mate Heidfeld.

Then things went a little bit crazy, as Alianora pointed out in the comments: "What precisely is Adrian Sutil doing in 2nd?!?" If you're assuming it was a low-fuel fluke, think again, because moments later Fisichella popped his Force India into 1st place.



Hamilton was consistently quick in the first sector, but couldn't seem to pull a lap together, and his day was summed up by a spin on one of his hot laps. Kovalainen, meanwhile, was sitting out a lot of the session, his car apparently in bits in the garage. Elsewhere, the Ferrari's began to get their names on the board, Massa was 5th, whilst Raikkonen went 2nd. Yes, you heard me right, Raikkonen was behind Fisichella.

Steven Roy had a theory to explain this: "There have been a lot of comments since the start of the season that the F1 looks like the McLaren. You don't think they popped into Woking and picked up a couple of MP4/23s and hoped none of us would notice?"

To top it all off, roughly halfway through the session, Coulthard knocked the Force India off the top spot. Next to take the lead was Rosberg, swiftly followed by Nakajima. Kovalainen, who had just managed to escape from the garage and onto the track, pulled to a stop and climbed out of the car. Alenyaa posted on the live comment thread: "Wow, I think Kovi's pitcrew pushed the car back in at a quicker pace than he managed to drive it!"

The attention wasn't on McLaren for long though, as Alonso posted the fastest time – that really made the crowd happy. Piquet was right behind him, well, actually, right in front of him, as he snatched P1 from the Spaniard's grasp. Eventually, the status quo began to return, and Raikkonen posted the fastest time of the afternoon, and with no other surprises on the horizon, the remaining fastest four were Piquet, Alonso, Nakajima and Massa.

Conclusions

With a crazy session like Free Practice 2 behind us, I think it's worth a quick run through all the teams to see what they were up to and what they are thinking ahead of the weekend. Firstly, Super Aguri, who to be fair are mostly just grateful to be in Barcelona in the first place. They say that they had a difficult couple of sessions, Davidson pointed out a problem he had with his brakes, but mostly, the entire team is just trying to keep their chins up and face their demons head on. They also appear to be clinging on to the fact they got 1 point here last year as some kind of comfort – it's mentioned twice in the post-practice quotes.

BMW confirmed what we suspected, in that they were working on the setup for the race, rather than going for any lap times or headlines. Kubica said he was glad to get some practice in because during the test last week he was working mainly on the 2009 setup, which wouldn't be too helpful for this weekend.

Over at Toyota, Trulli said: "Today was a bit of a struggle for us. It was windy out there and that helped make the car hard to set up. So we will have to go through the data and try to understand where we can improve for tomorrow. My test here last week was disrupted by the weather but overall it looked promising so I'm confident that we can keep moving forwards." Glock also pointed out that the track feels completely different to how it did at the test last week, so whether that's to do with the amount of rubber on the tarmac or the weather conditions we don't quite know yet.

The entire Force India team were masters of understatement. Sutil said: "Today was not bad." Fisichella continued: "It's too early to say definitively but it doesn't look too bad." And Mike Gascoyne said: "Overall, I think we are a lot more competitive than we expected to be." If their pace today is to be relied upon, they may manage the team's number one desire of the moment and get through to Quali 2.

Ferrari were pleased with their day, obviously, having performed well in both sessions. Kimi said he had no problems and got all the data he required, whilst Massa said things were a bit on the limit and it was easy to make mistakes. We saw that, Felipe. However, it's his birthday today, so we shouldn't be too mean to him.

Honda confirmed they had a pretty bad day with Jenson ending the day in 15th and Barrichello in 17th. The consensus of opinion seems to be that they just haven't got the setup right yet, and that hopefully tomorrow they will be



making those giant steps forward again. Barrichello said: "Although there is an improvement in the car here, we still have work to do to achieve our expectations of progressing to the third session of qualifying. It's going to be difficult but not impossible."

Toro Rosso also believe they went the wrong way with setup, with Vettel saying: "We identified various areas to work on and the good thing is that in the afternoon we made progress with that and moved on from the morning, even if from the outside, you cannot see the improvement in terms of pace."

Rosberg is joining the wrong setup brigade as well, writing his morning off to a wrong decision. He says the changes they made in the afternoon made all the difference, but there are still balance issues that need to be sorted out.

The Red Bull boys had a good day, but Coulthard played down his top time: "It doesn't actually matter what you achieve in a test day," he says, "because the track conditions are only relevant to that day - so we're trying to find a balance as always."

Pat Symonds echoed a similar comment for the Renault team, saying that although it is wonderful to see their cars at the top of the timesheets, you have to keep the results in the context of a Friday session. Alonso made no mention of doing well in front of his home crowd, merely saying they still need to improve to do better in qualifying tomorrow.

Finally, McLaren. Hamilton confirmed that they were running heavy fuel loads, and that he was suffering from some understeer. Of course it wasn't as bad a start to the weekend as for poor Heikki, whose first session was cut short by a gearbox problem and in his own words: "In the second practice all of a sudden I lost all power when the engine switched off and was told to pull over, and that was the end of that. We will have a good look at the car overnight to understand what caused the problem in the second session and then start a new day tomorrow. There is still time left and a lot can happen."

A lot certainly can happen, and it will tomorrow when Free Practice 3 and Qualifying take place. As ever, join us at Sidepodcast.com during the sessions for the live commenting and F1 Digest will be back with a full rundown of the action tomorrow night.