



## F1 Digest 2009 – Abu Dhabi Free Practice

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Abu Dhabi Free Practice.

The final practice Friday of the year saw the first laps on a brand new track.

### Free Practice 1

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The track temperature ahead of the session was a scorching 46 degrees C, with the air at 34. There was no hanging about as the drivers hit the circuit for an exploratory installation lap. Webber had the honour of being the first out, whilst Barrichello was the last to test out the new surface.

Then it was a matter of waiting. Alguersuari broke ranks and posted the first lap time of the day, a 1:49. With thirty minutes on the clock, only five drivers had set a time, with Buemi only knocking a second off Alguersuari's initial lap.

The times did start dropping a little, and Williams put their mark on proceedings with Rosberg and Nakajima making it a brief 1-2. Rosberg's time was now a 1:46.1. Meanwhile, both drivers for Force India, Brawn and McLaren still had yet to cross the line. With 45 minutes left, it was just the Force India boys yet to make an appearance but Liuzzi left the pitlane heading for a laptime.

Meanwhile, at the top Red Bull had improved with Vettel leading the way, and Kovalainen just pipping Webber to deny them a 1-2. Hamilton pipped them all, dropping his time into the 1:44s.

Button had a quick spin but continued, and Kobayashi found himself facing the wrong way as well. Barrichello struggled with the same corner of the circuit as his teammate. With so much run off area, though, it never really seemed to be a problem.

With just under half an hour to go, Sutil had still not hit the track, stuck in the garage with an unspecified brake problem. The team had fixed him up though, and he was soon on his way. As the session began to wind down, he had pulled his time up to seventh fastest, which is pretty good considering he had limited running.

The Brawn boys had improved, Button was second with Rubens just behind. Hamilton was still ahead though, the only man to make it into the 1:43s.

### Results

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Hamilton completed 18 laps to get his final time of 1:43.939, with Button and Vettel close behind him. Barrichello was fourth, and Heidfeld fifth, with Buemi showing very well in 6th. Sutil, Webber, Alguersuari and Trulli completed the top ten.

Kubica was 11th, whilst Kovalainen in 12th was the first man to fall into the 1:45s. Rosberg, Nakajima, Raikkonen and Alonso joined him. Liuzzi in 16th posted a 1:46.239 with Fisichella, Kobayashi and Grosjean rounding out the order.

### Free Practice 2

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The track temperature dropped to 34 degrees ahead of FP2, with the air down to 31. The humidity was way up to 43%.

No installation laps for the drivers this time round, as within five minutes there were over ten times on the board, and Button was leading them all.



Sutil was the first driver to spin underneath the grandstand, which was kinda cool, if a little scary. He told his team over the radio that he still had brake problems, continuing on from FP1, so he returned to the pitlane. Meanwhile, Hamilton knocked Button from the top, which wasn't exactly a surprise.

Buemi jumped into the lead, and Button popped into second, until Hamilton regained the top spot, bringing the benchmark time further down. Grosjean spun it, again, something which wasn't exactly a surprise.

Kubica suddenly had to bring his BMW to a halt out on track after his engine started spewing out smoke - it was an old, old engine though.

About halfway through the session, it was really quite dark, but the lighting seemed to be doing its job. McLaren continued to dominate, with Hamilton on top, but in the dying moments of the session Kovalainen jumped his teammate to take the glory.

## Results

Kovalainen and Hamilton made it a McLaren 1-2 with Heikki ahead by two tenths of a second. Button was third, with Vettel behind and Kobayashi impressively up in 5th, with Buemi continuing to show well. Webber was 7th, with Barrichello, Rosberg and Raikkonen rounding out the top ten.

Sutil finished the day 11th, followed by Nakajima, Heidfeld and Trulli. Liuzzi was 15th, Alonso 16th and Fisichella 17th. The final three drivers were down in the 1:43s, Grosjean, Alguersuari and Kubica.

## Team by Team

Let's start with Brawn today, and Button says: "The Yas Marina circuit is certainly an interesting one. When you look at the layout, it doesn't seem that exciting but when you actually drive it, it's fantastic." Barrichello adds: "The car felt good here over the two sessions and we were able to make several improvements over the course of the day. I'm quite happy with the balance and looking forward to tomorrow."

Over at Toyota, Trulli enjoyed his day on track today: "The first laps were difficult because there was just no grip, but that is normal for a new circuit like this and as the day went on the situation improved. Driving during twilight was a new experience for me and the view does change, a little, with some shadows." Kobayashi prefers the conditions in Abu Dhabi: "It will be helpful to have a completely dry weekend so I can really become familiar with the car and tyres on this track; that didn't happen in Brazil but I am confident it will this weekend!"

For Ferrari, Raikkonen isn't particularly impressed with how things are going: "The car is not too bad to drive, but it is simply slow and lacks grip, as in fact has been the case very often this year. It's not as though there is a specific reason why it's not going well, but most of all, it's down to our choice to stop development of the F60." Fisichella gives his analysis of the circuit: "As for the track, I can say the nicest part is the first section with the quick corners. I think there is some chance of overtaking on the long straights, while the pit lane exit is a bit dangerous, but there is nothing that can be done to change it."

Sutil is glad that the issues with his car weren't too bad: "We lost a little time with a brake problem in the morning but it didn't affect our programme too much as the grip was not really there at the start. At the end of the first I was still able to do 25 mins and two runs and got a good position in FP1, and could follow it up in the second practice too." Liuzzi thinks they still have further to go, though: "We still need to work a lot on the low fuel conditions as we are not spot on but I think we are going in the right direction with the car and can be happy with the progress we made today."



Over at Williams, Nakajima simply says the day was interesting, with the changing daylight conditions and an improving track, whilst Rosberg thinks the biggest challenge is working out which tyre is going to be the better choice.

Alguersuari had two things to adapt to today: "I have enjoyed driving this new circuit. It has nothing particularly tricky about it and it reminds me in parts of Valencia. This morning I was learning the track and I also had to get used to an F1 car again, as last weekend, I was racing in the World Series." Buemi adds: "It was a bit difficult to get the tyres working properly, especially the Option, but apart from that, the car is not too bad. Now we have to see what we can do for tomorrow, when it will be important to qualify well."

Renault finished the day down in 16th and 18th and Grosjean explains where he struggled: "I quite like sectors one and two but not sector three as you cannot afford to make any mistakes there. These very different sectors are a challenge when it comes to setting up the car." Meanwhile, Alonso concludes that they gathered plenty of data about the track and grip levels, and they'll be making a few changes before tomorrow's practice session.

Red Bull had a pretty good start to their weekend and Vettel managed to put in quite a few laps, he said: "So, that was the last Friday practice of this year. I'd like to say thanks to Renault - many people didn't believe that we'd succeed without having to change an engine, but here we are having completed a lot of miles on another Friday without a single problem." Webber also talks engines: "A productive first day at a new track. We had an engine change between P1 and P2 - the guys did a brilliant job to get the car turned around in time. Other than that, we got on with the normal tyre comparisons and other tests we do on a Friday - so although a new track, a normal Friday."

Kubica had engine issues and suffered as a result: "We were just starting to work on the set-up and the tyre evaluation in the second free practice session when I had an engine failure. Now the track conditions are improving with each lap, this is a big loss and I lost nearly one hour of valuable track time." Meanwhile, Heidfeld enjoyed the track: "The visibility during sunset and twilight wasn't an issue today. I hope this doesn't change if we get more dust in the air. In respect of the total darkness and floodlighting, I have the feeling it was brighter in Singapore."

Finally, McLaren dominated the entire day and Kovalainen finished on top. He said: "The whole day was pretty good. We'd already done some good work in Woking preparing for this circuit, so we had a good balance right from the start this morning." Hamilton adds: "It looks like we might be quite competitive here - our long runs appear to be good, the car feels great and the track is great."

### Quote of the Day

That's all for this Free Practice episode of F1 Digest. I will be back with coverage of the qualifying sessions in the next show, but until then, I'll leave you with this quote from Norbert Haug of Mercedes: "An exceptional new racetrack with fantastic facilities. Sincere compliments to the hosts in Abu Dhabi for establishing the new benchmark of new grand prix racetracks. The atmosphere here – especially at night – is absolutely fascinating, and I am sure this will become even better during tomorrow's qualifying and Sunday's race."