



## F1 Digest 2009 – Abu Dhabi Qualifying

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Welcome to F1 Digest - Abu Dhabi Qualifying.

We've seen a couple of quiet sessions already, what would Saturday hold in store?

### Free Practice 3

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FP3 dawned in the daylight one again. The track temperature was at 45 degrees C and the air at 34. Fisichella led the pack as the installation laps got underway, until all but Alguersuari had been out.

It fell quiet, until fifteen minutes in, when the two Ferraris returned to the track. Raikkonen was two seconds faster than his teammate, and posted the early benchmark.

Hamilton continued to dominate the track, the first man to drop into the 1:41s. Vettel was close behind him, though, and Sutil also way up there in third.

It turned out that Alguersuari couldn't start the session due to a hydraulic problem, so he was hanging about in the garage, wondering whether he would get any running in. Meanwhile his teammate Buemi was doing much better, managing to beat Hamilton to take P1 briefly, and dropping the times into the 1:40s.

In the final few minutes, Grosjean spun it, but continued onwards, whilst Hamilton regained P1 by a tenth of a second. He couldn't hold onto the lead, though, having dominated the majority of the session. Button popped up into P1, and Hamilton's final lap to try and improve saw him finish just two thousandths of a second behind.

At the very end of the session, Liuzzi ran wide and bumped the rear of his car into a barrier, but he appeared to continue on unscathed, whilst Grosjean... he spun it again.

### Results

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Button finished on top with a 1:40.625 after 21 laps. Hamilton was just behind him, with Barrichello and Buemi also in the 1:40s. Heidfeld was 5th, followed by Kovalainen, Trulli, Kubica and Sutil, with Raikkonen rounding out the top ten.

Vettel ended the morning in 11th, with Rosberg, Kobayashi and Liuzzi behind, then Webber, Alonso and Nakajima. Grosjean and Fisichella were 18th and 19th respectively, with Alguersuari 20th having set no time.

### Qualifying

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Ahead of qualifying, it was still light but the temperatures had dropped with the air down to 30 degrees C and the track at 34.

Alguersuari was out early, trying to catch up some of the time he missed in free practice, but he was soon joined by everyone else bar the Red Bulls. Heidfeld put in the early benchmark, with Grosjean behind him, but they were both jumped by Rosberg and then Kubica. The times were falling rapidly, and Hamilton popped up into P1, whilst Kovalainen spun further back. The Red Bull boys came out halfway through the sessions, but Webber could only manage 15th, whilst Vettel improved to tenth.

Hamilton continued to show his pace by putting in the fastest lap of the weekend so far and went P1. The bottom five who needed to improve were Liuzzi, Heidfeld, Kobayashi, Grosjean and Fisichella.



Having dropped into the 1:39s, Hamilton came back into the pits, his work done for the moment. Heidfeld had managed to pull himself out of the bottom five, leaving Rosberg in the danger zone instead.

The track temperature was dropping, the sun was beginning to cause a glare. Grosjean spun it, which wasn't helping his chances. The timer ran down to zero, with the fastest three Hamilton, Kubica and Heidfeld, and dropping out: Alonso, Liuzzi, Sutil, Grosjean and Fisichella.

The second session began, although the drivers were not in such a rush to get out this time. The two McLarens plus Webber and Buemi were out first, whilst the others gradually joined in.

Hamilton was easily the fastest again, whilst Kovalainen came to a halt out on track with a gearbox problem. He was pushed out of the way under yellow flags.

At the top, Webber improved to P1, whilst looking to get out from the bottom five, Nakajima, Rosberg, Alguersuari, and Kobayashi. Vettel improved from the drop out zone to drop Raikkonen in there. The Red Bull went even further up the grid and pipped Button to P1. Hamilton wasn't having any of it though, and jumped back into the lead, and the session drew to a close with Vettel and Button behind him.

Dropping out: Raikkonen, Kobayashi, Kovalainen, Nakajima, and Alguersuari.

The final ten minutes got underway, with everyone out instantly except for Hamilton, who left it a couple of minutes. Before the McLaren posted his fastest time, Button put in a provisional P1. Hamilton ran a bit wide which ruined his first lap. He had plenty of time to have another go.

Trulli jumped up to P1, then Barrichello, but all eyes were on Hamilton who navigated the track safely this time and put in the fastest time. Webber went P1, Vettel went P1, neither Brawn car could make it to the top but it was down to Hamilton to take the glory by well over half a second.

## Results

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Hamilton took pole position easily, with Red Bull taking up second and third on the grid, Vettel ahead of Webber. Barrichello finished fourth, with Button behind him, followed by Trulli, Kubica and Heidfeld. Rosberg finished 9th with Buemi 10th.

The rest in order then, Buemi, Raikkonen, Kobayashi, Kovalainen, then Nakajima 14th and Alguersuari 15th. Alonso, Liuzzi, Sutil, Grosjean and Fisichella last.

## Adjustments

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Kovalainen stopped on track with a gearbox problem, and will have to change it before the race tomorrow. He qualified 13th, but with a five place grid drop that sees him way down the order in 18th.

## Fuel Loads

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Of the top ten, Kubica is the lightest man in seventh, whilst Rosberg in ninth is the heaviest. Hamilton has a respectable amount of fuel on board, more than the Brawn boys a little further back. Vettel, however, starts second and has a significantly larger amount on board.

Further back, Grosjean is fuelled really heavy, as is Alonso. Fisichella has the lightest of the bottom ten runners, but the majority of that half of the field are on very similar strategies, it seems.



## Team by Team

Let's start with Toyota, and Trulli says: "It was a difficult session because it was an extremely hard fight in hot conditions; the lap times were really close despite it being a long circuit. I felt I got it right in each session and I am happy with sixth place." Kobayashi adds: "I was hoping to be in the top 10 here but it was my first time in Formula 1 to qualify in dry conditions, so I needed to get used to it."

Nakajima is disappointed with his 14th place, saying: "I'm a bit disappointed because I didn't manage to put everything together in Q2, but there was still a reasonable gap to the first ten so maybe I wouldn't have made it into the final qualifying session anyway. The track demands that you are precise all the time and one mistake here is costly which makes it pretty difficult." Rosberg thinks his session was okay, but ninth was the best they could do and the track doesn't really suit their car in the open sections.

Kubica feels he was still suffering from missing a lot of FP2: "As a result I had no experience of the track conditions at this time of day. The conditions were completely different compared to the third free practice session. The lower temperatures had quite a big effect on the car's balance." Heidfeld says: "I think my eighth position is alright. On the last lap there was a small chance to improve, but I had traffic with Mark Webber in front of me, and anyway there is no guarantee this lap would have been faster. If I take the fuel load into account, I'm happy with my grid position..."

Buemi is also mostly content with his starting position of 10th: "I was hoping for a little bit better after finishing seventh in Q2, but I am happy with our fuel load which should allow us to be flexible in terms of race strategy." Alguersuari is realistic about his day: "Taking into account that I was unable to do any laps this morning, because of a problem with the car. I think my performance in qualifying was quite positive, especially as I was not completely happy with the aerodynamic balance of the car. I was not expecting to make it to Q2 after not running in FP3 on a track that is new to everyone."

For Brawn GP, Barrichello says: "It's been challenging to get the right set-up throughout the weekend as the sessions are taking place in very different track and ambient conditions. The car seems to improve towards the end of the day with the cooler temperatures so we can hope that the track comes towards us tomorrow." Button had a few problems today: "I started to get massive vibrations every time that I hit the brakes which made the steering wheel shudder. With such a smooth circuit any kind of vibration just leads to understeer which made the car quite a handful to drive."

Renault had a poor day, lining up 16th and 19th on the grid - although a little higher now thanks to Kovalainen's grid drop. Grosjean says: "It was a difficult qualifying session today. We were missing performance but we still hoped to make it through to at least into Q2. We have done as much as could, but sadly we were out in Q1." Alonso simply says: "Although the team have done their best to prepare the car, it just wasn't quick enough to set a better time this afternoon. Tomorrow I will do all I can to get the best result possible in my last race with Renault."

Force India also saw both cars out in Q1, and Sutil says: "A very short session with a lot of problems. The car didn't seem to have any grip at all, particularly on the rear, and there was just so much oversteer that I was struggling to keep the car on the circuit." Liuzzi wants to try and work out what went wrong: "We should have been in Q2 so we have to understand how this happened - whether it was the tyres or the tyre pressures, we need to work on this now. With a lot of fuel we showed a really good performance yesterday but starting so far back will not make it easy..."

It's fair to say that Red Bull weren't expecting McLaren to be quite so dominant. Webber says: "A good day for the team - I'm happy to be starting near the front of the grid and we have a good chance tomorrow for a strong result. I'm surprised at Hamilton's time, McLaren have done a very good job, no question about it, it seems that this suits them." Vettel agrees: "I think both Mark and I were surprised by the gap to Lewis. He's been quick all weekend and



the McLaren seems to be generally very strong here. We could see in Q1 and Q2 that it would be difficult to match their pace, so I think this was the maximum we could do today.”

For Ferrari, Raikkonen is trying to stay optimistic: “What I can say is that eleventh place is better than tenth, given that I will start from the clean side of the track and can choose the ideal fuel load. It will be hard to get third in the Constructors’ because the McLaren is very competitive.” Fisichella starts last and isn’t that hopeful: “Tomorrow will be hard, but I know I can manage a strong pace: we will do our best to get a good result.”

Finally, McLaren, and whilst Hamilton was flying out there today, Kovalainen was not. He said: “What a disappointing outcome to my qualifying. I got stuck in second gear during Q2 and that was it. I already had minor problems with the gearbox yesterday when it jumped out of gear, so it’s frustrating when you have a car you can easily take into Q3.” Hamilton did just that and he says: “My pole lap wasn’t too aggressive. I was very smooth and it just kept getting better and better.”

### Quote of the Day

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That’s all for now. All we’ve got left to do is watch and enjoy the race, and I will be back to tell you all about it in the next F1 Digest show. If you’re watching it live, please join us on Sidepodcast.com as we comment our way through the Grand Prix. I’ll leave you with this quote from Pascal Vasselon of Toyota: “All in all it was a reasonably good result, our fuel load is competitive so we should have interesting race tomorrow. This is obviously the last race of the season and we definitely want to end on a high; we are in pretty good shape to do that.”

