



F1 Digest 2010 – Bahrain Qualifying

Hello everyone and welcome to your F1 Digest roundup of the Bahrain race weekend. We've previewed the event, and we'll be covering the Grand Prix itself afterwards, but for now, it's time to talk about Free Practice and Qualifying.

Free Practice Round-Up

Free Practice was always going to be fascinating, even if it ended up being the usual quiet sessions. Thankfully, there was plenty to keep us interested. In Free Practice 1, there were installation laps all round except from Chandhok, Senna and di Grassi. That was an indicator of what would happen in the other two sessions as well. The dusty track meant teams were reluctant to send their drivers out, but eventually the action got going.

Hamilton set the first realistic time, whilst we spotted drivers struggling a lot with the new section of the track. There are considerable bumps there, and it was all they could do to keep control of the car. We even saw overtaking in practice, as Massa got passed a slower Pedro de la Rosa down the home straight. Kovalainen had a bit of an issue with a pipe burning the back of his legs, but that was resolved very quickly.

By the time the first session drew to a close we had Sutil, Alonso and Kubica as the fastest three, whilst Chandhok hadn't left the garage, and neither Senna nor di Grassi had set a time.

Free Practice 2 continued in a similar fashion, although tyre wear was high on the agenda of a lot of drivers. The rears seemed to be struggling considerably. A small piece of end plate from the rear wing of Trulli's Lotus fell off on one of his laps, which was a little concerning, especially considering one his mirrors also fell out of the casing during FP1.

More overtaking as Alonso and Vettel scabbled for some track for a few corners, with Alonso getting in front, and Kobayashi took to the dust to get past a much slower Senna. The only other incident of note was a spin from Alguersuari which took him off track, and he narrowly avoided the barriers. It was a lucky escape but he was able to finish his lap and return to the pitlane.

The fastest three at the end of FP2 were Rosberg, Hamilton and Schumacher and in new car watch we had Senna almost 12 seconds off the pace, whilst Chandhok still hadn't made it out of the garage.

For Free Practice 3, then, all eyes were on Chandhok. The team were still having trouble with the gearbox, and the car was up on jacks. Di Grassi also had gearbox trouble and returned to the pitlane after one installation lap. The other Virgin was lapping quite happily, until the front left wheel came off, in it's entirety. It rolled down the track, with Senna close behind, keeping a wary eye on it and steering clear.

After a little investigation, it turned out the wheel gun wasn't tightening any of the wheels correctly, and all of di Grassi's tyres had been potentially capable of rolling right off as well. Needless to say Joe Bauer, the FIA technical delegate was straight in the garage looking particularly cross.

With fifteen minutes left to go, and the qualifying setup runs about to start, Lewis Hamilton had to return to the garage and sit the rest of the session out. He had a problem with one of the brake ducts. For Chandhok, it hadn't even got started and as the time ticked onwards, it became clear that he was going to have to make his debut in qualifying itself.



The fastest three at the end of the session were Alonso, Rosberg and Webber. Chandhok didn't leave the garage, and di Grassi also did not set a time.

Qualifying

The track temperature was way up to 47 degrees as qualifying got underway. The Virgin drivers headed out on track first, but no one else was in a huge hurry to follow them. Alonso set the first realistic time of the session, whilst the Red Bulls waited until the very last minute. Chandhok finally made his F1 debut, and his first lap time was 21 seconds off the pace which was terrifying. He improved and finished the session two seconds off his teammate, but he was last and out of the running. The fastest three at the end of Q1 were Alonso, Vettel and Sutil - a good showing from the Force India, and the expected speed from Ferrari and Red Bull. Dropping out of the session were Alguersuari, Glock, Trulli, Kovalainen, Di Grassi, Senna and Chandhok.

All the new teams, then, plus Jaime. He made a mistake in his final lap which saw him lose a significant amount of time.

For the second session of qualifying, Vettel was out first, followed by Buemi, and everyone else. The Saubers were the last out of the pit lane, but soon everyone was out on track - all seventeen cars. Vettel posted the fastest time and returned to the pitlane, and everyone followed him, leaving us with the second wave of cars, and the final rush to get into the top ten.

We concentrated on the bottom seven to see who could make it out and as the final laps began, Button was in 11th, just outside the top ten. He managed to improve, but he wasn't looking strong. The fastest three were Vettel, Alonso and Webber. When Q2 was over, we lost Barrichello, Liuzzi, Hulkenberg, De la Rosa, Buemi, Kobayashi and Petrov.

The final top ten shoot out began with the Ferrari drivers out first - Massa ahead of Alonso. Both were on the super-soft compound. Initially, Alonso beat Massa, with Hamilton slipping into third behind them. Some drivers returned to the pitlane to change tyres, others left it until their last opportunity to hit the track. Finally, everyone was out and with two minutes to go we waited to see who would get the glory.

Sutil moved up to third, but it was Vettel who looked really fast. He was eight tenths up by the time he got to the third sector and easily took a provisional pole. Webber made a small mistake on his lap, slipping into fourth, but he was pushed down by Hamilton. Massa made it to second and Alonso third, whilst Rosberg was fifth and Schumacher only managed seventh. The final run down of the top ten: Vettel, Massa, Alonso, Hamilton, Rosberg, Webber, Schumacher, Button, Kubica and Sutil.

Results

Rather than running through the list of drivers again, let's do a quick comparison of the top ten and their teammates. Vettel was obviously deliriously happy to get the first pole position of 2010, compared with Webber down in 6th. However, it was due to a mistake rather than a lack of pace so not too much to be downhearted about. Alonso will be slightly annoyed that Massa beat him but the Ferrari shows good pace. Hamilton was way up on Button - 4th to 8th, and similarly Rosberg ahead of Schumacher 5th-7th. Kubica is the most impressive, finishing 9th, whilst Petrov was way down in 17th. Finally, in the top ten, Sutil scraped through to Q3, whilst Liuzzi was down in 12th.

Team Quotes

Let's start with Renault, and Kubica isn't happy with his position. He said: "The first target for today was to get into Q3, so we can be pleased with that part of the qualifying session, but I am actually a bit disappointed to be only ninth on the grid. I did two good laps in Q1 and Q2, but on my lap in the final part of the session I had a big snap oversteer in the hairpin at turn 16 that cost me about four tenths." Petrov is a bit more positive: "For my first ever



qualifying session, this is a normal result, but I really enjoyed today. Our first target was to make Q2 so we achieved this, but we were not very lucky in Q2 and could not continue.”

Over at McLaren, Button finished lower down than he was hoping, he says: “I was getting happier with the car throughout each stint, but in Q3 something didn’t feel quite right. The engineers are looking at the data to see what it was. It’s been a surprise to us to see the pace of the quickest cars. Today we saw which cars are fast over one lap; tomorrow maybe we’ll see a slightly different picture because these cars work very differently on higher fuel loads.” On the other side of the garage, Hamilton admits: “We’ve struggled in the middle sector - we’re lacking a bit of downforce - but I know the guys back in the factory will be pushing as hard as they can. And this is a much, much better position to start the season in than the one we found ourselves in last year.” You can say that again, Lewis.

Force India have drivers starting 10th and 12th, and despite showing well in practice and Q1, Sutil is still happy with 10th: “The team should be very proud of it. I’m very proud of this, so let’s see how it goes tomorrow... At the moment I’m in tenth and hopefully we can make one or two positions up as I’m the only car on the hard tyre so it may be an advantage. I’m surprised that the others were on the soft tyres so our decision could pay off tomorrow.” Liuzzi just missed out on the top ten and puts it down to a problem with traction, but he thinks he’ll be strong in the race.

Barrichello indicates how happy he is in his team again: “Our general direction is good, we have a good understanding in the garage and we have real belief in the team... I was just a little bit behind Jenson, so it was not so bad and of course, I have some new tyres for tomorrow, which will be helpful.” Hulkenberg is disappointed: “I had hoped to achieve more in my first qualifying session, but we didn’t get the car quite perfect and I didn’t manage to put the good lap together. This combination is very costly as you would expect in F1, and we didn’t make it to Q3.”

Another disappointed driver, Pedro de la Rosa: “I can’t say I’m satisfied because before we came here we expected to be a bit higher up. But we already knew yesterday this is a bad track for us with the new infield. I have to blame myself for losing a couple of tenths, because I made mistakes on my very last lap when I just pushed too hard because at this time there wasn’t much to lose.” Kobayashi points out they really struggled with the bumpy part of the new track, plus they hadn’t anticipated such high temperatures - the tyres were struggling.

For Toro Rosso, Buemi says: “It’s pretty much what we expected and we appear to be fighting with Petrov, the Saubers and the Williams. As always, I felt I could have done better, but not by much, maybe two tenths.” Alguersuari was also hoping for more: “We hoped to be in Q2 but I made a mistake on my fastest lap on the soft tyres. The grip level was quite low, I was pushing hard and it caught me out, going too fast into a turn.”

Moving back towards the front of the grid, now, and Ferrari are starting 2nd and 3rd. Massa is happy to be starting on the front row, saying: “It’s great to get back to being so competitive after such a difficult time. It’s a good way to start the new season and a nice reward for all the work the team has done over the winter.” Alonso adds: “Up until today we did not have a clear reference as to how competitive we were: with our cars on the first and second rows we can be satisfied because it means our championship is getting off on a positive note.”

Now onto Lotus Racing who will start 20th and 21st, Trulli ahead. The Italian says: “All in all not too bad considering the amount of running we had this morning. We had some bad luck this weekend but the team has operated very well, in a very professional way, and we just need a bit more time to make the step forward we need in terms of performance.” Kovalainen is also relatively satisfied: “Pretty much what we expected. The car was very reliable, which is good, and the performance was roughly where we knew we’d be. I’m reasonably happy - it probably isn’t the best qualifying lap I’ve ever done and maybe I didn’t get everything out of it I should have done, but we have a good base to work from tomorrow.”

Nico Rosberg admitted that he was absolutely sure he could get pole position today, and so it's not a surprise to hear him say: "To be honest, we were hoping for a bit more today although we were lacking the pace to challenge right at the front so I guess we should not be too disappointed. It was so difficult out there with the tyres overheating." Schumacher, meanwhile, says: "I am satisfied with seventh place today having been away from Formula One for such a long time. By coincidence, it's the same grid position that I had when I started my career at Spa in 1991."

Let's return to a team knocked out in Q1, but neither driver is too upset. For Hispania Racing, Senna says: "It was certainly a relief to continue to add laps to this car, when others have already completed thousands of miles in testing, we only have 26 laps on board. We have already learned a lot and will continue to do so with every lap we complete." Chandhok really wasn't expecting anything from qualifying and says: "I still can't believe that we will be on the grid tomorrow. It was not looking good in the morning and I was not sure if we would make it to the qualifying session as well... For me it was just a string of installation laps and to finish just a second slower than Bruno is definitely a huge achievement."

Virgin Racing achieved their goal of qualifying as the best of the new teams, and Glock says: "To be just 2.7 seconds away from teams with many more years of experience is even better. We have a big mountain to climb but we go into our debut race having achieved our first target and I think this will give us the momentum we need to keep on pushing." Meanwhile, di Grassi adds: "For us to be here with a healthy car is fantastic. For me, it was still the very beginning. I only did three laps in the session this morning due to the issues we had. I'm quite happy to have done my first qualifying in F1." Just quite happy. Nothing more.

Finally, we have pole sitter Vettel and Red Bull. Sebastian says: "It's a big surprise to get pole. We didn't know where we were with performance during the winter testing... It was a long night for the mechanics and there were some tired faces this morning, but everyone was still so keen. I knew we had a good car." Webber is not quite so happy: "I did my worst lap at the most important time today. It was going well until Turn 16, but it wasn't so good from there on. Seb did a good job for pole position, there was more in the car than sixth today. It's disappointing, but all is not lost and it's a long race tomorrow."

Predictions

So, I said Lewis Hamilton for the win, did I? Interesting. I am definitely changing on my mind on that one. The natural instinct is to go for Vettel to win, as he's good at leading from pole and holding station there, but the strategies are so unknown that I think I'm going to go for Massa to win it. I know that Rob Smedley can make it work. What do you think?

Outtro

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest. It's going to be a long old race tomorrow, particularly for the cars that are still a good six or more seconds off the pace. I think traffic will play as much of a role as tyres, so I hope you'll join us for live commenting on sidepodcast.com as we enjoy the race, and stay tuned to F1 Digest for a full run down after the event.