



F1 Digest 2010 – Australia Qualifying

Hello and welcome to F1 Digest, this is our free practice and qualifying round up for the Australia GP weekend. The threat of rain isn't something you would usually associate with the race in Australia, but that is what the teams are dealing with and it made for some interesting tactics on Friday and Saturday. Let me tell you all about it.

Free Practice Round-Up

Friday dawned with a very green track, dusty with low grip, so it wasn't a surprise that the teams and drivers waited until about half an hour had passed before they started to hit the tracks. The new teams made the jump first and it also wasn't a surprise that when Hamilton joined them, he knocked about six seconds off their initial times.

Paul di Resta got his opportunity to participate in his first ever Friday practice session, in Sutil's car, and he did a very respectable job, completing 25 laps and finishing the morning in 11th place, just behind teammate Liuzzi.

Meanwhile, Kobayashi was really struggling. He caused a red flag after his front wing fell off. Trulli had some problems with the car, as the mechanics peered under the engine cover, and Timo Glock also had reliability issues, only able to complete 8 laps.

The fastest three were Kubica, Rosberg and Button.

Free Practice 2 saw the promised rain, with only seven drivers setting installation laps. There was a 15 minute period of dry running, in which all but three cars headed out on the track. Chandhok pulled to a halt just out of the pits with a gearbox problem - he did manage to complete 19 laps in FP1 though, so although a disaster, not of the epic Bahrain proportions. He didn't manage to set a lap time and neither did his teammate Senna, whilst di Grassi managed two laps but also set no time.

The fastest three at the end of Friday were Hamilton, Button and Webber.

The hour long FP2 session was dry and therefore busy. Aside from the hideous traffic problems, it was mostly uneventful. Pedro de la Rosa was notable for getting in the way of Buemi, and Chandhok completed only a few laps before climbing from the car - not looking particularly impressed. He was back in for the end of the session, but pulled to a halt out on track, causing a yellow flag that left the session with a rather subdued ending.

The fastest three ahead of qualifying were Webber, Alonso and Schumacher.

Qualifying

Ahead of qualifying we learnt that de la Rosa had been reprimanded by the FIA for impeding the other drivers, and in Q1, there was all the traffic problems that we had seen in Free Practice, and then some.

The problem with qualifying was that some cars were going slow to try and create gaps, others were on their hot laps, others were gearing up to start. It was very confusing. The drivers also had to contend with a layer of cement dust on the home straight, after a massive crash at the start of the GT support race. The track was clear but it took a few laps for the drivers to trust the grip along the main straight.

Having navigated the traffic, Q1 offered up no major surprises. The fastest three were Vettel, Alonso and Webber, whilst dropping out: Petrov, Kovalainen, Trulli, Glock, di Grassi, Senna and Chandhok.



Perhaps Petrov was a surprise, as Kubica managed to finish much higher, but that is just what we saw at the last race as well.

Q2 got underway with mixed reports of drops of rain starting to fall, so the remaining 17 drivers were out early to try and get some lap times in. Hamilton came in to the pits a little earlier than we were expecting, and when he returned it was clear that he was lacking some pace. He was in the bottom seven, alongside the Force India, Toro Rosso and BMW Sauber drivers.

He was released from the pit lane to an empty track, but it was just in time to hit traffic when he began his flying lap. He improved to 7th, but gradually dropped back down the order again, just missing out on a spot in the top 10.

The fastest three in Q2 were Vettel, Webber and Alonso, whilst we lost Hamilton, Buemi, Liuzzi, de la Rosa, Hulkenberg, Kobayashi and Alguersuari.

With Q3 came more concerns about the weather, so Webber and Alonso jostled their way out the pitlane to lead the pack. Webber emerged first, but somewhere on that initial lap, Alonso managed to get past and headed up the first round of flying laps.

Sutil remained in the garage for the first half of the session, it looked as though he might not attempt a time, satisfied with 10th, however he did come out for a lap towards the end. There was no stopping Vettel though, who put in a stunning time to take provisional pole. The drivers started another lap to try and beat him, but the rain was starting to fall, the track wasn't ideal, and most of them gave up. Vettel continued onwards but even he couldn't beat his own time.

The final top ten, then - Vettel, Webber, Alonso, Button, Massa, Rosberg, Schumacher, Barrichello, Kubica, Sutil.

Results

Now for our run through of teammates in the top ten - Vettel once again takes pole position, just beating teammate Webber by a tenth of a second - although he did manage it with less laps. Alonso third with Massa fifth is acceptable, but it is Button between them that is the surprise. Hamilton down in 11th, and the McLaren pair separated by about half a second.

Rosberg finished ahead of Schumacher again, although many people in the paddock have commented that Schumi seems more comfortable in the car this weekend, and Bahrain was just blowing off the dust.

Barrichello finished eighth and Kubica ninth, compared to their teammates Hulkenberg down in 15th and Petrov down in 18th - showing how experience really does count for a lot in qualifying.

Finally, Sutil qualified 10th, whilst Liuzzi missed out on the top ten and qualified 13th - the two Force Indias split by just three tenths of a second.

Team Quotes

Let's start with BMW Sauber, and de la Rosa finished 14th, Kobayashi 16th. Kamui says: "I expected to finish qualifying a bit higher up because the speed in the third free practice was encouraging. I pushed very hard and nearly lost the car, but we didn't make it into Q3." Probably because he nearly lost the car? de la Rosa is relatively optimistic though: "We are still a step away from Q3 but we were closer than in Bahrain. We will keep working hard and further improve the car for the future, and tomorrow we will go and fight for points. This is what I really want - finishing a good race and score." From 14th, that is really quite possible.



Hispania Racing make up the last two places on the grid but they seem to think they are improving. Chandhok says: "I am very pleased with this result for our second Grand Prix. We are not too far from the top runners. I haven't made any significant errors. It's a great way to start my F1 career!" Hey, now, I like Chandhok a lot but I'm not sure if he's looking at a different set of top runners? Meanwhile, Senna did have some troubles: "It's been a bit of a difficult day, stopping on the circuit this morning with an hydraulic problem after we solved yesterday's fuel pressure problem." Will either car make it to the end of the race?

Over at Williams, Barrichello says he was happy with how qualifying went, and that their pace might be even better than it shows, due to that pesky traffic. Hulkenberg was less enthused: "I'm disappointed with qualifying and expected more. The target was obviously to get into the top ten, but I didn't get the lap together and this is the result. This is my first qualifying here; it's not an easy circuit to learn and it's very narrow and quite bumpy."

Trulli was suffering out on track today in his Lotus, he says: "I had a problem with the seat which meant it wasn't easy to drive, bouncing around in the car, so it was a difficult qualifying session. I'm pleased for the team though, as both cars are ahead of the new teams and we are performing really well." Kovalainen echoes these thoughts and says the aim for tomorrow is to stay ahead of the other teams, and of course to finish the race.

For Renault, Kubica says: "I think I got the maximum that was possible from qualifying today, I had to push hard because the car was not easy to drive and I think we lost some performance in the colder conditions. For the race tomorrow the weather could play a big role, but I don't care if it's wet or dry." Petrov adds: "I'm disappointed not to make it out of Q1 because the car has been competitive all weekend. Qualifying is a new experience for me and I'm still learning: it's very busy out on track, it was difficult to get a clear lap and I didn't put my three best sectors together when it counted on my final run."

Towards the top of the grid now, Ferrari are happy with their 3rd and 5th place. Although, Massa says: "Not the qualifying I was expecting, going into this Grand Prix. Ever since the temperature dropped, I have always struggled to find the best way of getting the tyres up to temperature, while yesterday morning for example, when it was hotter, the situation was much better." Slightly worried for him if it rains during the race, then. Alonso says: "We knew the Red Bulls were very strong, but we are close to them and can count on having a good race pace. Our aim is to get to the finish, not making any mistakes and getting a good result, maybe making it to the podium."

In the Mercedes garage, the drivers are only one place apart and have vastly different opinions on the session. Rosberg says it was disappointing, Schumi thinks it was reasonable. Michael thinks traffic was a problem out there, and they made some setup changes to the car that didn't work out, but for tomorrow, he's on the clean side of the grid and it should be a good race. Rosberg is frustrated not to have got the most out of the car as he knows it has more to give.

Virgin Racing still have reliability niggles and Glock says: "We had another tough morning so all I could do is try to get the best out of the car in qualifying. We were carrying more fuel than we would have liked because of a pick-up problem, otherwise I think we would have been able to have more of a fight with Lotus." On the other side of the garage, di Grassi says: "Free practice was okay for me and the car was feeling quite good. I was certainly feeling some improvement. I didn't manage to maximise the performance of the car in qualifying as I made a mistake on my quick lap."

Hamilton isn't quite sure why the pace wasn't there today, he says: "Today was a surprise - I wasn't expecting to be out in Q2. I felt I got as much as I could out of the car, but I just couldn't get the grip from the tyres." He also blames the traffic... but, doesn't everyone? Button also felt like there was a lack of grip, but adds: "Nevertheless, qualifying this afternoon was good. I felt pleased with the car on every lap except the final one in Q3. I don't know whether it



was the wind picking up, but I didn't feel the car was working quite as well as it had in the first two sessions." Still, fourth place is nothing to grumble about.

Just a couple more teams left, and Force India are mostly disappointed with their day. Liuzzi says: "There was so much traffic - it was just impossible. Pretty much every lap I some problem, particularly with the Williams of Hulkenberg and the Sauber of de la Rosa, who don't seem to be able to use their rear view mirrors." Ooooh, get him. Sutil says: "It's not disappointing to start tenth but it's not entirely satisfying either as I felt we could have done better. All the same we made it through to Q3, which was another great effort from the team."

On the flip side to that, the Toro Rosso drivers seem relatively happy with their performances today. Buemi says: "I don't think I could have done much more and I was unable to improve on my second set of soft tyres. I am very happy to be 12th as 11th was too far out of my reach, as I was about five tenths off Hamilton." Alguersuari says: "Because the track is not so long, the times are all very close. I am quite happy with what I did today, as I am getting closer to my teammate's performance, which is one of my objectives. But there is still plenty of room for improvement."

Finally, sister team Red Bull really got the most out of the day, locking out the front row. Webber said: "I would prefer to be on pole position of course, but second is still a good result and it's great for the team to have a one-two. I wasn't mega concerned about the weather today, as it's the same for everyone and whatever happens, happens!" Vettel isn't sorry to be ahead of his teammate: "It's obviously Mark's home race here - but he got pole in Germany, so it's kind of a revenge. But, it's a long race tomorrow."

Predictions

Phew, am I glad I didn't pick Hamilton for the win, because based on qualifying, it would be quite an achievement for him. I went for Button, and I think I'm going to change that. We've got two Red Bulls followed by a Ferrari, and this is eerily familiar to proceedings in Bahrain. I'm going to change my prediction to Alonso for the win. What do you think?

Outtro

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest. I hope you will join us on Sidepodcast.com during the race as we live comment all the action. If you can't, or if you need a reminder after the event, F1 Digest will be back with a full summary of the Grand Prix. See you then.