



## F1 Digest 2010 – Malaysia Qualifying

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Hello and welcome to F1 Digest for the Malaysia Grand Prix weekend. We knew that rain would affect the outcome of at least some of the sessions. Friday threw a little doubt on the matter but Saturday turned things on its head, quite literally. Here's what happened.

### Free Practice Round-Up

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Free Practice 1 saw the introduction of another Friday driver, with Paul di Resta returning to take the helm for Force India - swapping Sutil's car for Liuzzi's this time, and Fairuz Fauzy getting behind the wheel of Kovalainen's Lotus. The pair of them were first out on track, and it was a slow start. After 30 minutes there were only seven drivers with times. Alguersuari suffered a problem with his electronics, and the Toro Rosso returned slowly to the pitlane.

When the other drivers hit the track, it was Hamilton and Button who dominated proceedings, the McLaren car showing really well. A couple of cars struggled to stay on track - Fauzy spun it, de la Rosa ran through the gravel, as did Massa. When the session ended, it was Hamilton, Rosberg and Button leading the field.

FP2 was very similar, although a shower between sessions cooled the track considerably. Kovalainen and Liuzzi got their cars back, whilst it was McLaren still heading up the field. Webber suffered some kind of failure, potentially engine or gearbox, as he pulled off track into the gravel. He wasn't the only one to visit the gravel, although he never managed to regain the track. Sutil, Alguersuari, and Senna to name but a few also found their way off the traditional racing line.

At the end of the session it was Hamilton, Vettel and Rosberg the fastest three.

Saturday dawned very hot, and all eyes in the paddock were on the skies, trying to determine when the rain would fall. It remained dry to begin with, it was installation laps all round, then the visits to the gravel traps started in earnest. Petrov began it, whilst Hamilton put in a superb lap to take the fastest time.

There was a small panic over an incoming rain shower, but it passed the track by. Webber just managed to pip Hamilton to P1 at the end of the session, leaving the fastest three as Webber, Hamilton and Vettel.

### Qualifying

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On to qualifying, and the serious weather watch began. We could see the rain closing in, and half the drivers were lined up at the end of the pitlane, ready to go when Q1 began. Vettel was the first of the front runners to make a break for it, as the rain started to fall.

Di Grassi had a problem with his car and was legitimately stuck in the garage, but we couldn't quite work out why both McLarens, Mercedes, Ferraris and Webber were staying in the dry as well. They assumed the shower would pass, but it did not, and eventually, they had to head out on track in the wet. Almost instantly, Hamilton spun it but managed to avoid the gravel. Button was not so lucky, he spun off, into the gravel and got stuck. Petrov followed him at the same corner but managed to keep going and disappeared from view, as the JCB came to rescue the stricken McLaren. He had managed to set a time leaving him in 13th place, whilst Hamilton was struggling in last place but one. Both Ferrari drivers were also way down the order, as Alonso spun a 360, and then doubled it a few corners later. Somehow he managed to keep on going, though.



Di Grassi finally managed to get out of the garage, but he could do nothing to improve on last place. For this session, the fastest three were Kubica, de la Rosa and Vettel, whilst we lost Trulli, Alonso, Hamilton, Massa, Chandhok, Senna and Di Grassi. Both Kovalainen and Glock got their Lotus and Virgin cars through to Q2.

The second session was underway with Petrov the first man out. Button was through to Q2 but couldn't take part, so within a minute or so there were 16 drivers out on track. There were a few running wide - Glock had a spin, Buemi just avoided the gravel - whilst Schumacher was running nearer the top for most of the session, but dropped way down the order and narrowly scraped through. The fastest three in Q2 were Vettel, Kubica and Sutil. We lost Petrov, De La Rosa, Buemi, Alguersuari, Kovalainen, Glock and of course Button.

The final top ten shoot out featured some unexpected names, and it was the Force India boys who lined up at the end of the pitlane to get out first. A queue formed, but a rather cheeky Kubica jumped the lot by pulling up beside Liuzzi and getting out before him. The session was red flagged before anyone could set a time, and we had about a twenty minute wait before it began again.

This time, Force India learned their lesson, and had their cars side by side at the end of the pitlane, blocking any sneaky Renault movements. When the lap times began, it was Sutil who was looking good. Vettel could only managed 6th, Rosberg 10th. Webber bolted on intermediate tyres, a brave decision but one that instantly paid off. He took pole position, and managed to be the only driver improving on his times when everyone else was struggling. The final top ten was Webber, Rosberg, Vettel, Sutil, Hulkenberg, Kubica, Barrichello, Schumacher, Kobayashi and Liuzzi.

### Teammates

It is probably not really fair to compare teammates directly in these sort of changeable conditions, but we're going to anyway. Webber was first, with Vettel third - more than a second off the pace. The tyres are the clear difference here, but even so, Vettel was behind Rosberg, who had about a tenth up on him. Rosberg was also way ahead of Schumacher down in eighth - over a second ahead, and this time the tyres can't be used as an excuse.

Sutil finished 4th, whilst Liuzzi rounded out the top ten - quite a difference between those two, which may come down to experience. Hulkenberg blows that theory out the water though, as he finished ahead of Barrichello by half a second. Kubica was 6th, whilst Petrov was down in 11th, an improvement from the Russian. Finally, Kobayashi was 9th whilst de la Rosa was 12th - youth over experience once more.

### Team Quotes

Now, let's see if we can unravel the mess of today's qualifying with some thoughts from the teams, starting with Mercedes. Rosberg says: "I'm really pleased with my first front row start and it's great for me, the whole team and Petronas to have such a good qualifying result in Sepang for one of our home races. It was very difficult out there today and hard to keep it on the road at times." Schumacher adds: "On my last run in Q3, I wanted to secure a lap time and then go for the second lap but after I finished my first quick lap, the tyres were already gone so I could not go for it anymore. Though it is good to know the limits of the wet tyres for tomorrow, now I have to concentrate fully on the race."

Force India also had a good qualifying, and Sutil thinks he saw the weather coming: "As I expected it rained at 4pm, I said that yesterday I think! It was challenging and the conditions changed a lot over the sessions. Sometimes it was a lot of rain, sometimes half wet, half dry, so it was very important to choose the right tyres. I think we did a great job in those conditions and every session we did the optimum." Liuzzi points out that he had a problem on his last lap locking the front brakes which cost him a fast run, but he thinks they're in a strong position for the race.



Virgin had their best qualifying so far with Glock up in 16th. He said: "It was good to see us do a better job than some of the top teams and as a result they will be starting behind us. Q2 wasn't perfect though, as we came in too early and that cost us the place against Heikki." Di Grassi was last, and sounds quite downbeat about it: "Once more some problems affected us today and we had to rebuild parts of the car between Free Practice and Qualifying. It was touch and go whether we would even get the car out at all for quali but the mechanics did an incredible job and because of that we were able to do at least a couple of laps to make sure the car was working well."

Trulli feels he was held up by others around him: "It was disappointing because I was doing very well. Unfortunately on my quickest lap a car spun in front of me, which impeded me through the second and third sector so I couldn't close my fast lap; and then the rain was getting worse, so there was no chance to improve on lap time." Kovalainen is much happier though: "I really like these conditions - it's very hard to judge your speed and you really have to take some risks, and all the time you're feeling like you might lose the car, but that's the challenge and I love it!" It's great seeing a driver so happy, but I think he wouldn't be loving the conditions if it hadn't worked out quite so well for him.

Over at Hispania Racing, Chandhok is eyeing up his unusual competition: "I will start tomorrow's race just behind Trulli, Alonso, Hamilton and Massa. The weather was not looking good in the afternoon before qualifying and I was not sure if it would hold until the qualifying session as well. It didn't and that gave us our first wet experience driving the car for the first time in heavy rain." Senna says: "It's been a bit of a difficult day. Conditions were very tough... I covered five laps before sliding off on the very wet track and unfortunately the engine stalled. Luckily I could go out of the gravel, going back to the garage and do more laps after it."

Now for Sauber, and de la Rosa also bemoans the difficult qualifying due to the conditions, and also traffic: "You never knew how much water to expect when braking into a corner. The car was pretty good in the wet, and I could have made it into the top ten if I just had a single clear lap. But even on my fastest lap I had to overtake two cars in the last sector." Kobayashi did make it into the top ten though, saying he learnt lessons from the crazy qualifying in Brazil last year.

Now, on to McLaren, who, let's face it, had a terrible day. Button is keeping his fingers crossed for his car, saying: "I just hope I haven't damaged anything on the car because I was sat in the gravel with the engine running for some time, hoping to get pulled out. It was a strange, disappointing session - both Lewis and I went out early. But, even so, I'm in front of three of my world championship rivals on tomorrow's grid. and I suppose that's the best way of looking at it." Hamilton is pretty downbeat: "This was just one of those days. It had been a very good weekend for us up until qualifying started, and the simple fact is that we didn't expect it to rain anymore. We went out at a similar time to the other top teams, and as a result quite a lot of us were all out of luck."

Ferrari is a team who also were out of luck and Alonso says: "Rain might make things more spectacular but the session just turns into a lottery. Today it went badly for us and we found ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, the result of qualifying is only worth the paper on which it is written, because the points are assigned at the end of the race." Massa takes a different attitude and is apologetic about the whole thing: "We are very sorry about what happened. We waited a bit before going out, because it was raining hard and the forecast was for an improvement... We made a mistake and we were caught out by the weather forecast." Happens to the best of us, Felipe.

Now, let's head back up to the sharp end of the grid and Hulkenberg qualified 5th. "Finally we had a bit of a breakthrough today. It was very tight out there and my lap wasn't perfect so I could have done a little better, but I'm happy where I am and I'm happy for the team as well." Barrichello is looking at qualifying in both a positive and negative light - they qualified well, but he thinks he could have done even better if he'd put on the intermediates for his last run.



Now, some real emotion from Toro Rosso, Buemi says: "I'm angry because I did not make the most of Q2." He gets over it pretty quick though: "But there's nothing I can do about it and so we will have to tackle the race from where we are." Alguersuari is looking at the bigger picture: "When you look at what happened to some of the quicker guys, I would say this qualifying result is reasonably okay for me. However, maybe if I had come in early in Q2 to switch from full wets to intermediates, then maybe I could have had a chance of seeing Q3."

Our penultimate team Renault had a bit of a mixed day. Kubica says: "For the final part of qualifying we thought the rain would get heavier so I pushed really hard on my first timed lap in Q3, which destroyed the tyres and made it difficult to improve as the track continued to dry. However, sixth place is a good place to start and I'm looking forward to the race tomorrow." Petrov adds: "It was difficult to predict the weather today, so we decided to go out as early as possible, which was the right decision because the rain kept getting heavier in Q1. In Q2 the car felt good on the intermediates and I pushed hard throughout the session, but I just missed out on Q3 which is a shame."

Finally, Red Bull made it work for them today, and Vettel says: "It was very tricky at the start of Q3, there was a lot of water and it was the right thing to call the red flag - it was just impossible... The water disappeared quicker than the majority of people thought and Mark was on the better tyre in the end, but I think third is a good result for the team." Webber himself says: "A few big names went out in the first session, which was a surprise, but it just goes to show how sensitive everything is to timing. The pole goes to Ciaron, my engineer, as he made the call for inters in Q3. I said 'have a look at the track, what do you think?' and he said 'yea, let's go for it.'"

### Predictions

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On the preview show, I handed the victory to Vettel, thinking it might be his time to turn a pole position into a victory. Well, he didn't get pole position, that went to Webber. Despite the fact that there is probably going to be plenty of rain tomorrow to cause chaos, I'm gonna go for Webber for the win. Let me know what you think - christine at sidepodcast dot com.

### Outtro

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That's it for this episode of F1 Digest. The race tomorrow will be intriguing with or without rain, as we have drivers out of their usual position throughout the grid. It'll be fascinating to watch how it unfolds. Have a good one, hopefully I'll see you in the comments on Sidepodcast.com, otherwise I'll be back with a full rundown of all the action.