



## F1 Digest – Turkey GP

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### *Intro*

This is the fourth edition of F1 Digest for the Turkish Grand Prix weekend. We've covered all the practice sessions and qualifying, and now it's time for the race.

### *The Race*

Coverage of the 2008 Turkish Grand Prix began with the admission that a couple of stray dogs had interrupted the GP2 race. They had broken onto the track, and Bruno Senna had actually retired from the race due to hitting one of them. Although the problem appeared to be under control by the time our guys arrived at the grid, it's fair to say that no one was particularly confident of the circuit security.

The temperature leading up to the race hovered around 17 degrees C, with the track temperature reaching 29 degrees, and the sun was out, scaring off any chance of rain. When the formation lap was complete, the drivers seemed to have to wait an inordinate amount of time for the red lights to come on, but eventually they did, and then they went out.

Massa had a good start, as did Hamilton and Kubica. Raikkonen was slow off the line and lost a couple of places, and Kovalainen also let a few of his neighbours in front. Towards the back, Fisichella went into the corner too fast, couldn't brake in time, and crashed into the back of Nakajima, actually flying over the Williams chassis to land on the other side of the track. The safety car came out. On the live comment thread on Sidepodcast.com, Lou said: "Force India **NEED** to sort out their livery! I was sooo sure that was a Macca or maybe a Honda!" and Steven Roy added: "That is pathetic. How can anyone with Fisi's experience do something so stupid. It was like a rookie."

Sutil was involved in the incident somehow, as he dived into the pits for a new front wing. Nakajima entered the pits for a new rear wing, but his suspension was shot and his race was over. Vettel had to pit for a puncture, and after the safety car came in on the second lap, Kovalainen also had to pit for a puncture. The McLaren emerged at the very back of the field.

Raikkonen overtook Alonso for fourth place, although on the replays it looked as though Alonso didn't put up too much of a struggle. Scott noted in the Live Comments: "It's strange Alonso made it easy for Raikkonen, as both are lapping at a similar pace." At the front Massa was keeping ahead of Hamilton, but only just, as the pair traded fastest sectors and laps.

Coulthard and Trulli, running in the mid-field were holding up at least four cars, but Trulli looked desperate to get past the Red Bull. Kovalainen began his fight back through the field, overtaking Sutil.

At the end of lap 15, Alonso was the first to dive into the pits for a scheduled stop, and a rather early one at that. Hamilton came in on the next lap, though, and after a really short stop, the questions about his strategy began. It looked as though the McLaren team had decided to put him on a three-stopper.

Kovalainen overtook Vettel.

Massa came into the pits, with Kubica close behind him leaving Raikkonen at the front of the pack. Time to work his Ferrari magic, and by the time Raikkonen had finished his stop, he had leap-frogged Kubica. Vettel also pitted, but had to return to the garage one lap later, as the refuelling rig hadn't released any fuel.

Hamilton made a close but storming overtaking manoeuvre on Massa, taking the lead easily, and pulling away from the Ferrari with alarming speed. When things began to settle, he was running a full second faster than those behind him. Scott Woodwiss left a comment on Sidepodcast.com: "If Lewis is pulling away a second a lap, he must be 3-stopping. I'm not really sure anyone on hard tyres with a heavier fuel load can pull away by that margin. Unless, McLaren knows something we don't."

After a few more laps, though, he has dived into the pits again for his second of three stops. This was made clear as he took on another set of hard tyres, matching those he had for the first stint, and he would obviously need to take on the softs at his next stop. He came out third, just behind Raikkonen.

Bourdais spun out on track and ended up in the gravel. He was unable to get the car going again and retired from the race. Scott in Italy gave us some info on this on the live comments: "Not sure if you've heard already - Bourdais agreed that "something broke". Apart from his ability to keep the car on track."

Kovalainen overtook Glock. It was some fantastic sportsmanship, as the pair were battling corner after corner, with Kovalainen taking the position, then the Toyota getting it back. However, on the main straight, Kovalainen had the advantage and finally made it stick. Just ahead of that battle, Piquet was fighting to get past Button. After a couple of foiled attempts, he finally got the better of the Honda. Kovalainen made the most of Button's temporary lapse in concentration and stormed past as well.

Massa and Kubica came in for their second pit stops, leaving Raikkonen to lead the way at the front. Raikkonen couldn't leapfrog anyone in the pits this time, coming out in third, behind Massa. When Hamilton made his final pit stop, putting on the soft tyres he detests so much, he came out in front of Raikkonen. Although the gap was small, and there were a few laps left for Raikkonen to try and close up even more, it wasn't to be. The three front runners were posting almost identical lap times and nothing was going to shake that.

Kovalainen overtook Rosberg for a points position, however, he had one more stop to complete, making his efforts somewhat in vein. It was some fantastic racing though.

The final points positions went to: Massa, Hamilton, Raikkonen, Kubica, Heidfeld, Alonso, Webber and Rosberg. For the record, Kovalainen finished 12<sup>th</sup>.

### *Championship*

Massa has closed up the gap in the drivers championship, considerably. Amazing when you consider he had zero points a few races ago. However, Raikkonen leads from his team mate, 35 to 28. Hamilton is also on 28. The BMW boys are next with Kubica on 24 and Heidfeld on 20.

Ferrari pull away in the constructors championships, currently on 63, to BMW's 44. McLaren are close behind on 42, then there is the massive gap to Williams on 13 and Red Bull on 10.

### *Conclusions*

Let's start our post-race wrapup with Toyota. Trulli says his race was spoilt from the very beginning. He says: "I think I was touched by a car and I lost three positions. That was it for my race because after that I couldn't do anything to make up the ground. We were quite close but unfortunately with these cars as soon as you get two lengths behind the other car you just lose grip and start going off." Glock, meanwhile, believes the pace of the car is good, but this was too much of an incident-prone race to get any worthwhile results. He particularly pointed out that racing past the blue flags made it difficult to overtake.



BMW had a consistently good finish with Kubica in 4<sup>th</sup> and Heidfeld in 5<sup>th</sup>. The latter was happy with his finish, considering he started 9<sup>th</sup> on the grid, and comments that he felt he had a particularly lonely race, and even managed to turn down the engine revs. Kubica also hints at being a bit lonely saying: "I was then a little bit slower than the three guys in front of me, but quicker than the rest of the pack."

It was a mixed day for Williams, with Rosberg picking up a point from 8<sup>th</sup> position, having as good a race as he could have with the car he was given. Nakajima, though, didn't get past the first lap. Of the accident, he says: "I don't know exactly what happened; I just went into the first corner following the guy in front. I didn't change my line and I was suddenly hit from behind. I wanted to make it back to the garage as I thought there was a chance to get the problem fixed and get back out, but my car had suffered too much damage so I had to retire."

Both Red Bull drivers finished reasonably well, both had some successful and not-so-successful battles with cars around them, and both seem to be relatively happy with what they achieved. Webber points out a good statistic, that he has the same number of points now that he had in the whole of last year. So, they are definitely doing something right.

Fisichella is adamant he's not really to blame for the first lap incident. "I made a good start but then under braking Bourdais changed direction twice and I couldn't brake in time and went into the back of the Williams." Whether or not this is just in response to Bourdais' rant yesterday, we'll have to wait and see. Sutil was just happy he could keep Vettel behind him.

Speaking of Vettel, the positive spin he has to put on his race is that at least he finished it, having not managed that for the first four rounds of the championship. However, the actual race was awful for him. He had the puncture during the first few laps, and then his refueling rig problem meant another extra pit stop. Four pit stops instead of two, it's no wonder he finished 17th. Better than Bourdais, however, who explains his DNF: "Something broke at the back of the car, I don't know what it was yet. Going into Turn 12, I braked at the usual point and the car went sideways, I felt the right rear corner of the car drop and it spun me round."

As ever, with Renault, Alonso finished well, Piquet not so well. However, Nelson says he is satisfied with his performance after all the setbacks he incurred, he couldn't have got anything else out of the car. Flavio is still being nice about his rookie, saying: "It was difficult for Nelson starting from so far back, but he managed to drive a consistent race and kept pace with the midfield pack. We are confident that we are starting a new phase which will see us get closer and closer to the top three teams."

A disappointing result for Barrichello in 14th, given this is his record-breaking weekend. The car just wasn't fast enough, and Rubens said he was suffering from understeer. Button finished 11<sup>th</sup>, said he was happy he had a clean start but that he had a problem on the first stint with his front tyres, because the brakes were overheating. This is an interesting fact because it's the first race that Honda ran the wheel bins.

Ferrari, as ever, are happy. Massa is ecstatic to have won his Turkey hat trick – three years in a row he's finished first. It looks like he may have had a bit of a panic when Hamilton zoomed past him and into the distance, but Massa credits his engineer Rob Smedley for keeping the situation calm and analysing Hamilton's strategy. Raikkonen acknowledges that he had a difficult day but that six points are better than nothing. He says: "At the start, I was almost alongside Heikki but then he slowed and I had to brake too to avoid a heavy crash. We touched just enough to damage the end plate of the front wing on my car: it was not a very serious problem, but it definitely didn't help my race." Raikkonen finishes by saying they need to work hard for Monaco, as they were not competitive there last year.



Ron Dennis has summed up the McLaren day, crediting Lewis with a great drive on a difficult three stop strategy, and Kovalainen for his commendable efforts getting through the field after the puncture. However, a minor controversy is stirring, as in the press conference Lewis blamed his problems on the tyres. He said: "The reason we went for a three-stopper was due to Bridgestone being concerned as they thought the tyre was going to fail like last year. Therefore, they made us do a three-stop." Afterwards, Bridgestone's Director of Motorsport Tyre Development responded, quite bluntly, saying: "It was not that they must do it. We proposed a strategy of 20 laps, 18 laps, then a final stint of 20 laps, if they took a two stop strategy. That is what we would have preferred." Discussing the problems they had last year, he said: "The car's are a little bit quicker this year and somehow Lewis' driving technique is different to the other guys." And finally, most damning of all: "Heikki had no problems at all, it was just Lewis. He is a bit severe on the front tyre." The good news for Hamilton is that this track has the most extreme corner in Turn 8, and the rest of the year should be easier on his tyres.

That's all for this weekend in Turkey. F1 returns in two weeks at the glamorous Monaco, where we will praying it won't be a procession. F1 Digest will be back to fill you in on all the action, but until then keep up with the gossip at Sidepodcast.com and the news at F1Minute.com. See you soon.

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