



F1 Digest - Monaco Qualifying

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest. This is the third show in our Monaco weekend coverage. Having already previewed the event and looked at Free Practice 1 and 2, it's time to catch up with all the action from Saturday.

Free Practice 3

The predicted weather forecasts looked to be at least partly true, as Saturday dawned with some rain having fallen overnight. The Free Practice session was declared wet, and there was a good chance of some more rain at some point over the next hour. The track temperature was 20 degrees, with the air about one degree lower.

As per usual, Fisichella was the first man out, but he was followed by everyone else as they all set an installation lap. Even the Ferrari's were out relatively early, with Massa waiting until the rest had come in, and Raikkonen following him soon after. Massa set the first official lap time of the day.

A dry line began to appear on the track as Massa continued to circle and others joined him. Rosberg posted the second fastest time, just pipping Raikkonen who settled for third. Over the next few laps, Raikkonen improved to P1 but traded the position with Massa.

As more and more traffic joined the track, Fisichella ran wide, pulling off the racetrack at Mirabeau. He managed to continue though and the rain began to fall lightly.

Hamilton joined the fight for the fastest time, posting P1, and Kovalainen joined him in second. Next time round, Kovi took the top spot, but the lap after that was a disaster. He bashed into the wall at the Swimming Pool, damaged the rear of his car and spun right round on the track. He climbed out of the car safely, whilst the marshals waved yellow flags, but they were upgraded to reds as the car was retrieved. On the Live Comment thread at Sidepodcast.com, Lou looked on the bright side: "So, Heikki is pretty quick/ was pretty quick. Do we think he could be in for a chance at challenging Lewis? If so, will Macca let them race?"

Whilst the red flags were out, the rain became heavier, and when the track was clear, it was no surprise to see the cars remain in the garage. Coulthard remained in the pits despite not having set a lap time yet. It was unclear at this stage whether he was being cautious or had a problem with the car. Scott in Italy responded to a comment on Sidepodcast.com about Coulthard, saying: "I was just going to ask about DC too. Way behind in 20th. I bet he's disappointed about the lack of the Super Aguri's."

Eventually, the Renaults broke cover and headed out on track, and in response the rain cleared up slightly. With just over five minutes to go, everyone bundled out on track except for Fisichella, who remained in the garage. Coulthard finally managed to set a time, although it was not at all fast. The lap times stayed at least 10 seconds off the pace, although plenty of drivers showed improvement on their previous runs.

The fastest five at the end of the session were Kovalainen, Hamilton, Raikkonen, Rosberg and Kubica.

Quali 1

The weather dried up considerably between FP3 and the first few minutes of qualifying. The track temperature remained at 20 degrees, but the air temperature had risen to 23.



After the earlier practice session, Fisichella had to change his gearbox, which means he will join Vettel in being demoted five places wherever he finishes up in qualifying today.

Coulthard was the first man to hit the track when the lights went green for quali 1. Having missed out on plenty of running so far this weekend, he used the first few minutes of the session as his own private practice. Meanwhile, Sutil and Vettel hit the track, although their times were meaningless once Kovalainen, Raikkonen and Massa began their laps. Massa took an early lead, but he was knocked down by Kovalainen, who in turn was demoted by Rosberg. During Live Commenting, Corey noted: "Rosberg back into the mix again. Keep an eye on this guy this weekend." Alonso also showed promise by posting the fourth fastest time, whilst struggling team mate Piquet headed off track and onto one of the few run off areas. Discussing whether Piquet is managing to impress his watchful bosses at Renault this weekend, Rich left a comment saying: "Unless he finishes in the top 10 I suspect it will be his last."

With half the session gone, the BMWs emerged from the pitlane, whilst Raikkonen posted a P1 briefly, until it was taken by Hamilton. It was tight in the midfield, as Kubica, Webber and Glock were all fighting for 5th and 6th place. In the other BMW, Heidfeld struggled into 12th.

In the closing minutes, Kovalainen posted a final P1 time, before he and the other top runners retired to the garages. Their work was done for now. Massa, though, obviously didn't get that massage and ran for one last time, taking the fastest spot.

The fastest three at the end of Q1 were Massa, Kovalainen and Hamilton, whilst missing the cut was Bourdais, Piquet, Vettel, Sutil and Fisichella.

Quali 2

Two minutes passed of the second session before anyone exited the pit lane, the first driver out being Fernando Alonso. However, the threat of rain appeared to be increasing, so he was soon joined by everyone else. Raikkonen posted the first benchmark, with Rosberg slipping into second. Massa completed his first hot lap, pushing his team mate out of the top spot. Hamilton had his turn for a hot lap, and looked to be going quickest of everyone, but he had a small wobble at the hairpin and couldn't do better than third. On Sidepodcast.com, Ryan left a comment about how the drivers were coping out there: "Without traction control they look like World Rally Championship cars sliding around the corners..."

Alonso was the first man out, and therefore the first man to return to his garage for consultation with his engineers. He watched as Kovalainen, Webber, Coulthard and Glock all pushed him down to 13th place. Both Kovalainen and Hamilton headed out on track to improve their times, with Kovi staying put and Hamilton getting the second sector wrong again.

Whilst the last ditch attempts at a flying lap were being attempted by Alonso, Heidfeld, Button, Trulli and more, we saw a tyre bouncing along the track, by itself. After a moment, and a replay, it became obvious the lone tyre belonged to David Coulthard, who had hit the barrier upon exiting the tunnel, and flown down the run off at almost 300 km/h. He was unhurt, and climbed from the car for a quick jog to the pit lane to discuss what happened. Scott in Italy did the same thing on Sidepodcast.com: "I wasn't watching closely enough, but did it look like he lost it, or a part went at the back suspension? This is red bull and they've never been the best at suspensions. Or gearboxes. Or engines..."

We were busy watching the Red Bull being craned away from the track, and the session ended. The fastest three were Massa, Rosberg and Hamilton, and the five unlucky ones were Glock, Button, Heidfeld, Nakajima and Barrichello. Coulthard made it through to the top ten, although he would clearly not be able to take part.



Quali 3

Kovalainen and Rosberg hit the track first, and posted lap times that kept them in that order, although Hamilton soon came along and demoted his team mate from the top spot. The Ferrari's hit the track with Raikkonen taking P1, and Massa making a couple of mistakes to only manage third. Kubica was another driver making a small mistake, locking up his tyres, but he still managed to move into second position.

The top four continued to fight for the top spot, switching places frequently in the last few minutes. Blink once and Kovalainen was in P1, blink again and it was Hamilton. When the session ended, however, it was Massa who had pulled out a stunning lap to head the pack.

The final grid positions went to Massa, Raikkonen, Hamilton, Kovalainen, Kubica, Rosberg, Alonso, Trulli, Webber and Coulthard.

Conclusions

Between the first and second sessions, the stewards announced they would be investigating an incident between Fisichella and Barrichello, where the Force India was held up by the Honda. This kind of thing is bound to happen around the tight streets of Monaco, but the stewards decided no punishment was needed.

Let's see what the drivers think about it, though. First up, Fisichella says he is disappointed with his entire day, given the gearbox change and the hold up. He says: "My first run was not great, but the second was better but then I lost the chance to do a quick lap as I got caught behind Barrichello just after the swimming pool as he was slowing down. Very, very frustrating." So, not explicitly blaming the Honda, just angry. His team mate Sutil was relatively satisfied with his day, saying they got some tyre problems fixed so they've taken some good steps forward.

Barrichello doesn't make mention of the incident at all, but does say traffic was particularly bad today. Button is also disappointed with his qualifying, saying: "Sadly the yellow flags prevented us from realising our full potential. We're not in the top ten and it's disappointing. That's Monaco for you."

Toyota should be relatively happy with their performance, Trulli finished 8th and Glock in 11th. He said he was frustrated with missing out on Q3, but satisfied that he could now come up with his own strategy. Trulli gave his thanks to the team as he's happy to be back in the top ten.

For BMW, Heidfeld kept it simple. He finished 13th and said: "Unfortunately, I don't have much to say: my qualifying result is disappointing. Here in Monaco I can't heat up the tyres quickly enough." It is quite a poor showing compared to Kubica in 5th, who said he had Hamilton in front of him, not holding him up, but making things tricky.

Optimist of the day must go to Giorgio Ascanelli, technical director at Toro Rosso: "I am pleased that we experienced no problems with either car and managed to shake down two new rear ends. The performance though is not quite there and it looks as though there are some difficulties in putting together the necessary lap time." Hmm, with Bourdais in 16th and Vettel in 18th plus the penalty, the new car clearly isn't up to speed just yet.

Hamilton sums up his day as good but not great. "Obviously I would have preferred to be on pole, but I am pleased with how the car felt and our strategy. The team did a solid job, and I didn't have any problems with traffic." Kovalainen is slightly disappointed because he feels he put his all into the car and could only come out 4th behind his team mate.

Renault have another one of their up and down days. Alonso is up in 7th, Piquet down in 17th. Alonso puts his finger on the point here, saying: "In Monaco qualifying is more important than anywhere else and our goal today was to



make it through to Q3.” Are you listening Piquet? Nelson does say that he had a small problem with his brakes, but really, he’s just hoping for some rain to mix things up a bit.

Coulthard is okay after his accident, although he did say he hit the wall quite hard. He had admitted he doesn’t believe it to be a technical issue, and he just hit the brakes which swerved the car towards the wall. They intend to check the car thoroughly before the race tomorrow. Webber is happy in 9th, although he did say he was locking up quite a lot over the whole lap, which is something that he needs to keep an eye on.

Technical director Sam Michael sums things up for both Williams boys: “It was a good qualifying session for Nico and he’s in a good place for tomorrow’s race. It was a shame for Kazuki that he didn’t get through to Q3, but he did a good job considering this is his first time round Monaco in a Formula One car. He’ll have to keep his head down tomorrow but, if it’s a wet race, anything can happen. We had no reliability issues today.”

Now let’s see what Felipe said about the track that he doesn’t like: “Incredible! I have got pole on a track where I have always struggled. Now I am beginning to like it a bit more.” Kimi is, hmm, magnanimous about his position. He says: “Obviously, I would have preferred to be on pole and there’s no point denying it, but two Ferraris ahead of the rest is a great result for the team.”

I wanted to finish with a quick note. After qualifying, Glock said: “It was frustrating to miss out on Q3 today because the weekend had been going well. I don’t know what happened.” Kovalainen, in his quotes, said: “The car felt good, so I don’t know where the small gap to the cars in front comes from.” Now, I’m not a mechanic or an engineer or anything, but surely this is quite simple: You are not fast enough.

On that happy note, I’m signing off for today. If you’re near a computer when you’re watching the race, visit Sidepodcast.com for the live comments, I’ve got a feeling it’s going to be a good one. Otherwise, join me tomorrow for a roundup of all the action. See you then.