



F1 Digest – Monaco GP

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest for the Monaco GP weekend. This is coverage of all the race action today, and boy, it's going to be an epic.

The Race

If you watched the race today, you already know that this is going to be a longer show than usual. If you didn't, then get yourself comfortable, because we have a lot to get through.

Let's start with the weather. It rained overnight, and as the cars were heading on to the grid, it was beginning to rain once again. Both track and air temperature were temporarily at 20 degrees C. David Coulthard joined the list of drivers starting with a new gearbox, and thus a five place grid penalty, thanks to his smash yesterday. This dropped him down to 15th on the grid.

Heading off onto the parade lap, the drivers left Kovalainen behind, as he had stalled. He couldn't get it started in time before the last car passed him, so the mechanics had to push him into the pit lane to start from the back.

When the lights went out, Raikkonen was slow off the grid, and Hamilton managed to get past him going into the first corner. The initial few turns were taken safely, with all but Piquet starting on intermediate tyres and everyone taking it carefully. At the front of the pack, Massa was wobbling his way through the lap, feeling out the state of the track. At the hairpin, Rosberg went into the back of Alonso, dislodging his front wing. Further along, Button was trying to get past Heidfeld and lost his front wing. He dived into the pit lane for a new nose. Rosberg attempted to keep going, despite the fact the wing was broken and trailing under the car. On the third lap, he had to pit for a new nose.

The front wings appeared to be falling off all over the place, as Timo Glock also lost his nose, after spinning on track – no one else involved. He had to visit the pits at the end of lap 4, relieving some rather frustrated drivers behind him.

Massa began to edge away from Hamilton slightly, and on lap 7, the McLaren hit the barrier, causing his rear right tyre to deflate. Luckily for Hamilton, he was right next to the pit lane and jumped in for a replacement. Somehow, he only dropped to fifth place, whereas Button and Rosberg's untimely stops had thrown them to the back of the pack.

There was no respite from the action, as at the top of the hill, Alonso clouted the barrier. He damaged his tyre, headed into the pits and got a replacement. Moments later, Coulthard hit the wall at exactly the same spot, and seconds after that, Bourdais made the same mistake, bashing into the back of the Red Bull. Scott in Italy left a thought on the Live Comment thread, saying: "And nice to see DC attracting something just as I predicted. But I was not expecting a wall AND a car."

The safety car came out as two cranes went to work to retrieve the stricken vehicles. All this, and we're only at lap 9, as the safety car returned to the pit lane.

Race control announced they were investigating Raikkonen for an unknown cause, that later became apparent as a pre-race infringement. He didn't have his tyres fitted in time for the three minutes limit before the race started, and received a drive through penalty. Presumably, he had either made the wrong decision going onto the grid, or just



couldn't pick which was the best way to go. He waited as long as possible to take the penalty, and then pulled into the pit lane.

Alonso was pushing his way through the crowds, having changed to extreme wets at his last stop. He had a ton more grip than everyone else and dispatched Webber with ease. He began looking at the next car, Heidfeld, but the BMW was driving as defensively as he could. Alonso was getting frustrated for a lap or two, and eventually attempted to get him around the hairpin. Not an obvious choice for an overtaking manoeuvre, and Heidfeld wasn't about to let him past, so inevitably the pair collided. Heidfeld appeared to have escaped damage, and pulled away, whilst traffic began to build heavily as Alonso recovered from, you guessed it, a broken front wing.

Webber stopped millimetres from the back of the Renault, having an unusual turn of good luck, or good braking. Nakajima and Barrichello had to run wide to avoid the pair, and in so doing, allowed Sutil past them. Rosberg was attempting catchup as well, as drivers slowed down in this train of cars, but having reached the hairpin, he realised the yellow flags were waving, so he slowed down. Taking his position back, Kovalainen was on the way round, and there was contact, with the McLaren running over the Williams front wing. I'm getting kinda bored of saying that now. Nelson summed up the event over on Sidepodcast.com: "That was just plain stupid from Alonso, I understand he wants to make a point, but that was stupid."

Meanwhile, at the front, Massa made a mistake and ran off the track. He recovered it nicely, but not before Kubica had managed to get past and take the lead of the race. His team mate Heidfeld started slowing down considerably, clearly not as unscathed from the Alonso incident as previously thought. He came in for an early pit stop, changed tyres, and it appeared he had been suffering from a slow puncture. At this point it had stopped raining, but drivers were still choosing the intermediate wet tyres, due to the standing water around the racing line.

Kubica came in for an actual scheduled pit stop, and came out behind Raikkonen in 4th. The Ferrari gifted the place to the BMW though, by running straight on at the corner and damaging his ugh, front wing. He had to run the whole lap with the wing flapping about and visited the pits yet again.

Massa pitted from the lead, and came out in second, meaning he managed to steal back his place from Kubica. Glock spun out on track again, this time mercifully avoiding any damage.

Fisichella pulled into the pitlane and retired, having struggled with gearbox problems throughout the race, despite starting with a new one. His team mate, however, had crept up the pack and was running in fifth, and managed to set a fastest lap. Scott left a sobering comment on Sidepodcast.com, though: "Reliability may be a concern for Sutil. Fisichella suffered a gearbox failure during free practice, and it appears as if the same thing may have occurred during the race."

Now came the tricky point of the afternoon. The track was drying considerably, handing fastest laps out to everyone – no offence Sutil – and it looked like switching to dry tyres should be on everyone's to do list. However, there was still talk of further rain, and making that decision would mean gambling on the weather one way or another. Hamilton, at the front, was the obvious marker, as he gradually pulled away from Massa, but was bound to come in for a stop anytime soon.

However, it was Alonso who made the decision first, taking the risk and putting on the first set of dry tyres. Piquet followed him soon afterwards, and also took on the dry tyres. It looked to be a bad decision, as Alonso wobbled around the track and missed the chicane. Moments later, Piquet cut across the same piece of tarmac, and then put it into the wall. His race was over, and the frustration was clear to see. Corey questioned Renault's decision in the Live Comments, saying: "Why would you put your struggling rookie (who is having a decent time on 'inters') onto dry tyres with Alonso fighting with them. A bit silly I think." MattW came to Piquet's defence: "If he was running out of

petrol, then he had to come in, and another set of inters was never going to last till the end of the race. It was a big ask, but the guy is supposed to be an F1 driver..." Corey gave it some thought and commented back: "It was the only logical choice at the time. Definitely was a big ask in my opinion based on how he has been performing and trying to warm up those tyres on patches of dry and wet couldn't be easy but as you said he is supposed to be an F1 driver so he better learn fast."

More and more drivers began to pit for the dry tyres, and eventually Hamilton took the decision to come in and do the same, but only after building up enough of a lead to have a pit stop in hand. He rejoined in the lead. The dries began to come into their own, though, as Alonso posted a new fastest lap time.

Coming out of the tunnel, Kovalainen approached the chicane way too fast and tagged Button in front, who spun 180 degrees. On his way past, Kovalainen signalled his apologies to the Honda.

Massa came into the pits, but having stayed out so long on the wrong tyres, and struggling through the traffic on his in lap, meant he handed the place back to Kubica. Perhaps in a last ditch effort to save face, Massa switched to the super-soft tyres.

Hamilton had been stretching out his lead again, but it was reigned in as Rosberg crashed heavily into several walls. The Williams was trashed, but luckily Rosberg appeared okay, leaping over the wall as the safety car was deployed. There was debris all over the track, but no one appeared to pick up a puncture this time, and the marshals went to work. Ryan lightened the mood over at Sidepodcast.com, with: "Anyone want to buy a used Williams — real cheap..."

Before the safety car came in, as usual, the lapped cars were allowed to go ahead and free themselves up. Loads of drivers buzzed past the safety car, but Kovalainen and Heidfeld both remained in position. We waited, we watched, we scratched our heads in confusion, until eventually Kovalainen pulled past, and Heidfeld a few moments later. The safety car came in, the race restarted. Hamilton stretched out his lead again almost instantly, but Sutil was the talk of the town. Running in fourth, it would have been the best result ever for the Force India gang and a well deserved one at that. However, Raikkonen lost it coming out of the tunnel, perhaps hitting a damp patch, and lurched his way into the back of the Force India. He ruined his own race, by having to pit for another new nose – how many is that now? – but it was worse for Sutil who came in and had to retire. Devastation all round, Sutil appeared inconsolable, and who wouldn't be?

The sheer amount of incidents, safety cars, and general slowness in the rain meant that all the laps wouldn't be completed in the two-hour limit enforced in F1. So, as the clock counted down the last few minutes of the race, things remained as they were. Only two laps were missing in the end, but it doesn't look like they would have made much difference.

The final result was Hamilton, Kubica and Massa on the podium, with Webber, Vettel, Barrichello, Nakajima and Kovalainen picking up the rest of the points.

Phew.

We had a couple of good comments post-race, starting with My FA Fantasy, who said: "I wonder why F1 world champions tend to crash in Monaco more than anybody else? Senna, Schu, Alonso and now Kimi all did crazy things there. I'm a bit sorry for Sutil. And Force India can't complain because Ferrari supply their engines."



Rich had something to say on the Ferrari's: "I think Massa actually did well today considering how wrong they got the strategy. The way ickle Felipe and cool Kimi drove you would think they swapped cars, overalls and crash helmets. I think Kimi might find his team mate ahead in the points if he continues making these sort of errors."

Top commenter Lou left a final thought, saying: "I think Kimi and Sutil's smash overshadowed Rosbergs accident and how bad it was."

Championship

Raikkonen's last incident meant he finished outside the points, which has handed the lead in the driver's championship to Hamilton on 38 points. The Finn has 35, and Massa has closed up on 34 points. The BMWs are next, with Kubica ahead of Heidfeld 32 to 20.

In the constructors, Ferrari remain in the lead with 69 points, whilst McLaren and BMW are close behind on 53 and 52 respectively. Williams and Red Bull round out the top five, both on 15.

Conclusions

Let's start off with Rosberg, then, to hopefully put Lou's mind at rest about him. He has been taken to hospital for precautionary checks, but that's really only because it was such a heavy crash. He appeared fine when climbing out of the car. Sam Michael said Rosberg was frustrated to come out of the race with nothing having worked through so many previous incidents. Nakajima finished 7th, having a relatively quiet day, and said he had a slight problem with a pit stop, but finishing in the points means a good race for him.

At various points throughout the race, both Glock and Trulli were holding cars up, both of them instigating Trulli-trains. Glock rued his couple of mistakes and a wrong tyre choice, whilst Trulli was happy with a couple of overtaking manoeuvres. He did say that once the rain stopped, they were left on the extreme wets which were a handful on the drying track.

Vettel had a great race to finish in 5th, considering he started with a grid penalty as well. He says: "The race today was extremely difficult especially at the start when with all the water on the track surface, there was a lot of aquaplaning. But we were very strong as the track began to dry and that's what made the difference. It's great to score my first points of the season at Monaco and with the new car as well." Bourdais obviously had less of a good day, and blamed yellow flags and the conditions as they were "complicated". Comparing his drivers, team principal Franz Tost said of Vettel: "Doing this on his first appearance in Monaco in an F1 car and with the new car is really a fantastic performance." And of Bourdais: "There are plenty more races this year for him to show what he can do."

Coulthard was obviously somewhat involved in Bourdais' crash, albeit indirectly and said of his own errors: "It was always going to be a race where you had to be very careful at the beginning. I was having difficulty with my downshifts and got caught out on the entry to Casino; I corrected, corrected, and corrected, but then ran out of road." Webber continues his consistent points finishes, this time landing 4th place. He says: "That was good, a great result, which gives us a lot of points. It wasn't the most exciting race in the world in terms of racing, but it was very difficult early on in the wet conditions and we were aqua-planing at Casino." Uh, Mark, firstly, were you at the same race I was watching, because it was exciting? And secondly, if aqua-planing doesn't make a race more interesting, I dread to think what is an exciting race for you?

Heidfeld continued to struggle in his BMW, having not really matched Kubica's form all weekend. Whilst his team mate finished on the podium, Heidfeld put the blame mostly on the incident with Alonso. "This caused heavy damage to the left hand side of my car, and due to a puncture I had to pit. I was then last and, because of the damaged car, I had no chance at all to improve. It is a Sunday to forget but this is not too easy.

For Renault, Flavio Briatore sums up the drivers performance with: "Fernando drove an aggressive race, but after his off it was clear that he was too far behind to finish in the points. Nelson's race was disappointing, but Monaco remains a difficult test for a driver and it is a very unusual circuit. From here we now concentrate on the next race in Canada." Whilst Pat Symonds took a view on the car's performance: "Setting the third fastest lap in the race reinforces the progress that we have made, even on this very different type of circuit, but that is all we take away from Monaco."

Only one driver appears to be going away from this race 100% happy, and that's race winner Lewis Hamilton. He said he is over the moon, it's the highlight of his career and he loved it. Kovalainen, meanwhile, had a tough race from the very start. "An extremely difficult race with any chance of finishing in a top position already gone when I could not engage a gear at the start of the formation lap. Consequently I had to change the steering wheel in the pit lane from where I had to start my race."

Barrichello got back into the points today, finishing in 6th place. He felt like he had a good race, although he did get held up by the Trulli train. Still, it's the first points he's scored in a long time, and this can only be a good thing. Button is more disappointed, blaming the two incidents with Heidfeld and Kovalainen, and saying overall it was a messy race.

For Ferrari, Massa isn't happy to have finished third, despite getting on the podium. He felt he had a quick car and should have been able to do better but mistakes got in the way. He also said he suffered without a radio for some of the race, which obviously didn't help. Whilst Raikkonen said he had a poor race that started with breaking the rules on the grid, all we want to know is what he says about the Sutil incident. "I am sorry for Sutil, who I hit with just a few laps to go. I lost control of the car under braking coming out of the tunnel and I could do nothing to avoid him." Somewhat of an apology there, but probably not enough to make Sutil feel any better.

For Force India, Sutil says: "I can't believe it, it was so close. It feels like a pain in my heart. It is like a dream gone to a nightmare. The race was over and it was a real shock. A few tears came out as the adrenaline was high – I just can't explain it." Don't worry, Sutil, no one is judging you for shedding a tear about that. Team owner Vijay Mallya puts the only positive spin on it that he can: "This performance in Monaco has given a huge boost to the confidence of the team and our drivers. Though we are sadly disappointed we will take away many positives and renew our determination to demonstrate further improvement over the rest of the season."

What a day and what a race. A little bit of rain can really spice things up, and adds that element of unknown that makes a race really intriguing. Now we have two weeks to mull over what happened before F1 returns in Canada. Don't forget to leave your thoughts about the race on Sidepodcast.com, or call us on 0121 28 87225. If you don't want to leave a voicemail, you can always email me Christine@sidepodcast.com. Look forward to hearing from you.