



F1 Digest - Australia Qualifying

Intro

This is the third episode of F1 Digest for the Australian Grand Prix. On Thursday we previewed the event, Friday was all about Free Practice, today we'll be looking at qualifying and tomorrow we'll cover the race.

Free Practice 3

Saturday dawned, hotter than the previous day, and 16 drivers hit the track for an installation lap. They all returned to their garages and it was very quiet for the next few minutes.

Davidson eventually made a break for it, with Bourdais joining him and going fastest of the other few drivers on track.

The track was still slippery, with Toyota, McLaren and Force India all seeing drivers run wide.

Alonso posted a fastest time, but was instantly beaten by Raikkonen.

It began to be slightly obvious that Piquet was struggling, as whilst Alonso was battling for the top of the timesheets, Piquet was down in 18th. He also spent plenty of time off the track.

With 20 minutes to go, Trulli hadn't set a time, but when he did emerge from the garage, he jumped straight up to 4th fastest.

Towards the end of the session, Coulthard only completed a few laps and appeared to be five seconds off the pace, which was slightly worrying until the track temperature suddenly spiked, seeing unexpected drivers jumping to the top of the timesheets. Vettel posted a P1, Webber went 2nd, until he was beaten by Fisichella. Rosberg took the fastest time until everyone dived into the pits to prepare for their last ditch attempt at a flying lap.

Eventually, the top 5 fastest were: Kubica, Heidfeld, Alonso, Rosberg, and Coulthard.

Your Comments

From the live comment thread:

Steven Roy: "I guess it is all about being on track at the right time. The humidity chart looks like a spike. It no sooner hit 58% till it started dropping again. So there was a very short optimum time."

Felipe Leite: "Well, I guess we can't take a session like this too seriously. The best Ferrari/Mclaren finished in 11th."

Quali 1

Qualifying has been tweaked slightly for 2008, with the dreaded fuel burn element of the third session removed. Now, Quali 1 is 20 minutes, Quali 2 is 15, and Quali 3 is just a simple ten minute dash to pole position. Since the morning Free Practice session, both the air and track temperature have increased slightly, making conditions just that tiny bit more suitable for a flying lap.



There were two waves of drivers during the first ten minutes of qualifying. Bourdais was out first, along with Glock, Vettel, Davidson, Sutil and Fisichella. Glock immediately ran wide and Sutil went through the gravel.

The second batch of drivers included Alonso, Piquet, Coulthard, Webber and Kovalainen. Eventually all the drivers had been out except for Ferrari and BMW.

Kovalainen went P1, then Hamilton was looked like he was going to steal it, except he ran wide and lost a lot of time. It looks like he was too busy keeping his eye on the car in front, rather than concentrating on the corner, and without traction control, you have to think about the corners.

BMW and Ferrari finally emerged, leaving it very late. Heidfeld made a mistake on his hot lap, and Kubica was held up by Raikkonen, although not enough for Kimi to receive a grid penalty.

Massa went P3, and Raikkonen P5. It looked like Raikkonen was going to have another go at a lap, but then he started coasting round the track. He obviously had a problem and although he got to the pit lane entrance, he couldn't quite make it back to his garage.

In the dying minutes, Sutil span in sector 3, which should have compromised the laps of other drivers on track. Button, Trulli, Rosberg, and Fisichella didn't appear to pay too much attention though. Later, they were asked to explain how they set their best lap times under yellow flags, but they all escaped without sanction.

The fastest three were Kovalainen, Heidfeld and Massa, and dropping out: Fisichella, Bourdais, Sutil, Sato, Piquet and Davidson.

Quali 2

Before the start of the second session, we learned that Kimi Raikkonen wouldn't be taking any further part in qualifying. Having not been able to make it back to the pitlane under his own power, the car was rescued from the track, and was therefore in parc ferme conditions. Barring any other driver penalties, Raikkonen would be starting in 16th.

Once the lights went green, Vettel was the first man out on track. He wasn't alone for long, though, and after a couple of minutes, Webber flew into the gravel. He was out of the car quickly, leaving it in a dangerous position. This caused a red flag and the session to be stopped. It looks like he had a brake failure, although this hasn't been confirmed yet.

When the session restarted, just a few drivers took to the track, Coulthard, Massa, and Hamilton who was fastest. With 3 minutes to go everyone poured out of the garages for their flying laps.

Notably, Vettel was up to 6th, whilst Alonso struggled in 11th.

The fastest three were – Hamilton, Kubica and Kovalainen, whilst missing the cut were Barrichello, Alonso, Button, Nakajima, Webber and Raikkonen.

Quali 3

The final short stint to secure the top ten grid positions saw Vettel again out first, swiftly followed by Heidfeld and Rosberg. Hamilton was soon out as well, making the most of the soft tyres and the hot tarmac.

Soon, everyone was out except for Timo Glock, but Vettel dived back into the pits. A short time later, he was climbing out of his car and leaving the others to fight for pole position.



Rosberg, Heidfeld, Kovalainen and Hamilton shaved seconds off each other's times and then it was a quick pit stop before the final showdown.

With just a few minutes remaining, Kubica pushed for pole and took the fastest time, despite running wide just before the last corner. When Hamilton came round for his turn, he beat him by just over a tenth of a second.

The final ten positions went to: Hamilton, Kubica, Kovalainen, Massa, Heidfeld, Trulli, Rosberg, Coulthard, Glock and Vettel.

Your Comments

OpenWheel: "Timo off, love to see these cars go sideways. Looks like they are all on the learning curve."

Lou: "At least they can choose their fuel strategy now. He is still in a fast car, points are not out of the question. But still poor Kimi!! How many people did you have ring in and say they think that Kimi would win?"

Steven Roy: "That McLaren looks fabulous."

SteveintheUK: "I think Kubica just proved that F1 drivers don't need traction control, great save."

Conclusions

Glock was happy with his first qualifying, getting through to the third session was quite an achievement. However, he has had a gearbox change which results in a five place grid drop, and he's also been penalised for impeding another driver, meaning another five places lost.

An incredible lap from Kubica got him into 2nd place on the grid. He admitted to taking a lot of risks in the third session of qualifying, which is no doubt why he ran wide on that hot lap. If he had managed to keep it on the track, it may just have been a pole position. And with Heidfeld in 5th, this is a good start for the BMW boys.

Giorgio Ascanelli, technical director of Toro Rosso summed up their qualifying experience: "Vettel did a very good job to make it into Q3, but unfortunately he was unable to take any part in the final session because of a technical problem. On his first ever F1 qualifying session, Bourdais could have made it through to Q2, but unfortunately his final attempt was spoilt by yellow flags."

Raikkonen's technical issue appeared to be a fuel pump problem and Luca Baldisserri is sure that if they could have got the car back into the garage, it could have been fixed in time for Kimi to continue qualifying. Nevertheless, Raikkonen is determined to get as many points as possible.

A frustrating session for Mark Webber, at his home Grand Prix. He's not confident that he'll pick up any points tomorrow, but is determined to do his best.

Alonso and Piquet are generally disappointed in their qualifying positions, 11th and 21st respectively. Alonso said the car was very difficult to drive with differential issues causing balance problems. Piquet says he will try his best to move through the field tomorrow, but most of all, he will learn as much as he can.

All that's left now is the actual race. Join me tomorrow for a full run down of all the action, but if you can't wait until then, join us at Sidepodcast.com, where we will have a thread open for live commenting. You might get your opinion featured on the show. See you then.