



F1 Digest – France GP

Intro

You're listening to F1 Digest for the French Grand Prix – welcome. We've covered free practice and qualifying, and today we will wrap up the weekend with all the action from the race.

The Race

The track temperature ahead of the race was 33 degrees, but the main focus was on the moisture in the air. A very light shower occurred pre-formation lap, but all the cars lined up on the grid with dry tyres on. Race Control were reporting there could be rain at any point in the first 30 minutes.

Everybody was clean off the grid, Alonso lost a couple of places to Trulli and Kubica, but managed to get back past the BMW. Hamilton was already on a charge, running off the racetrack to get past a Toro Rosso, and then lightly touched Kovalainen with some small bodywork flying off Hamilton's car, but not any serious damage. Lou left a comment on Sidepodcast.com, saying: "Lewis hit Heikki. Well, that's one way of telling him to get out the way." Alonso was desperate to get past Trulli, but couldn't make it work.

Kovalainen was stacked full of fuel, so it was only a couple of laps before Hamilton got past him. Button ran very wide at the last corner, and it emerged he had dislodged his front wing. He had to limp slowly back to the pits for a new nose. Later we discovered there had been contact between Button and Bourdais on the first lap, which caused the problem. Hamilton began chasing Piquet as his next target, and although Piquet ran wide under pressure, the McLaren just couldn't get past. Scott in Italy got all nostalgic on us over at Sidepodcast.com: "Piquet for 8th place". I never thought I'd hear that phrase. Well not since say, the 1980s"

The stewards announced Hamilton was being investigated for the pass on the Toro Rosso – having run completely wide to make the place stick. Whilst they made up their minds, Hamilton couldn't get past Piquet, and then he was given the suspected drive-through penalty, so his strategy was seriously ruined. SteveintheUK felt this was the right decision: "Lewis has got a penalty, there was no way he would have been able to have pasted that car if he had slowed enough to make the turn. Sorry for Lewis but it was a good call by the FIA for once." Whilst MattW didn't think it was that fair: "Why is that Schumacher could pass cars by missing out the chicane with impunity - but not someone driving a McLaren? The governing body really have it in for McLaren at the moment. With that in mind, I would have instructed Lewis to hand the place back."

Alonso was the first to come in for a scheduled stop after only 16 laps, and came back out just in front of Hamilton. Button retired, having done serious damage on the lap with his front wing stuck under the car. Bourdais also struggled with his car, some bodywork flying off, most likely because of that original contact with Button.

Hamilton managed to get past Alonso, as the Renault ran wide, and they touched wheels on the way round. Then Hamilton took his planned pit stop, and came out 1 lap down.

Raikkonen dived into the pits and came out in second, and when Massa took his stop, he returned to the track in second, behind his team mate. Webber's pit stop allowed him to jump Alonso out on track, but then he spun and Alonso took the place back. Piquet and Kovalainen pitted together, and followed each other out of the pit lane, but Piquet had problems getting going, which allowed the McLaren to get past him.



Meanwhile at the back, Rosberg essentially allowed Hamilton past, knowing that the car was faster and their races were not with each other. Fisichella was his next target, but the Force India came into the pits and out of the McLaren's way.

During the second stint, Raikkonen lost some time through traffic, but even once past the traffic, Massa was catching up. It looked like Raikkonen had a problem with a loose exhaust, and he let Massa past, but didn't come into the pits. He was losing a second a lap to Trulli, who was about 20 seconds behind. The exhaust was flailing around, and over on Sidepodcast.com, Poppy was slightly concerned, saying: "He should stop, that looks dangerous." Steven Roy also wasn't impressed. He said: "I can't believe he hasn't been black flagged. I know it is a Ferrari but come on. All that would happen is he would pit someone would pull it off and he would be on his way again." But Alex Andronov questioned this with: "My guess is that this isn't something you can fix in the pits."

Alonso headed up the second round of pit stops as well, and came out in front of Hamilton once again, a few laps later and the McLaren had got past. Despite the exhaust problem, and parts of the car melting slightly, Raikkonen began to pick up the pace again at the front. When he came in to the pits, a fire extinguisher was in place by the errant exhaust, but nothing could be done to solve the issue and he went on his way again.

Massa was in next, and came out in front, so for him, it looked to be an easy run to the finish. But, it started to rain lightly. Rocket left a thought on Sidepodcast.com: "Webber and Kubica very slow in the first sector. Drops on the visor?" The times slowed a little bit, but it was only a light shower and the rain seemed to stop just as soon as it had started. The piece of exhaust hanging off Raikkonen's car finally managed to fall off, but the attention was on Trulli and Kovalainen in a battle for third place.

In the closing stages of the race, the Toyota was running third, way behind the Ferrari's, but with Kovalainen catching him every lap. With 7 laps to go, Trulli picked the pace up, perhaps more confident once the rain had stopped. On the second to last lap, Kovalainen had a go round the outside but the two touched wheels, the McLaren had to run wide and gifted the third place to Trulli. It was pretty incredible to see this close action all the way to the finish line. Over on Sidepodcast.com, Dan Brunell put his caps lock on to say: "LAST LAP!!!! WHEEL TO WHEEL FOR THIRD!!!"

Whilst watching that, we missed Alonso running wide, and Nelson Piquet getting past – outshining his team mate for the first time ever. Steven Roy commented: "I would love to have seen what the press would have said if Piquet made a mistake like tha to let Alonso through. Well done Nelsinho beatin Alonso on the road in equal equipment."

The final finishing order was Massa, Raikkonen, Trulli, Kovalainen, Kubica, Webber, Piquet, and Alonso. Gaulty left a nice comment to finish off with: "Well done Massa, solid race. Well done Kimi for not going up in flames and well done to Trulli for being in a Toyota."

Championship

Massa takes over the lead in the driver's championship now, with 48 points, and Kubica just behind on 46. Raikkonen will be thanking his lucky stars he finished the race today and remains in contention on 43 points. Hamilton's zero points finish leaves him on 38, and Heidfeld has 28.

Ferrari retain their lead in the constructors championship, with 91 points over BMW's 74. McLaren have 58, whilst Red Bull and Toyota have 24 and 23 respectively.

Conclusions



Today was a very mixed bag for teams, with some faring better than expected, and others bitterly disappointed. Heidfeld falls into the second category, saying he lost two positions at the start of the race and just couldn't get them back. Kubica finished in 5th, which wasn't what he was hoping, but is at least in the points.

BMW didn't have quite such a bad day as Williams though, with Nakajima in 15th and Rosberg in 16th. Nico says: "In Canada, I was fighting the Ferraris and the BMWs, and here I was fighting at the back of the pack. It's incredible and not a very nice feeling. I thought I would be able to fight a bit more; I was giving it my all as usual, but the car simply didn't have the speed and it was very difficult. I am now looking to score some points at Silverstone – at least I won't have a grid penalty there!"

For Force India, Sutil is getting slightly frustrated being constantly at the back of the pack: "We have had some better races this year. It was a bit frustrating. Both myself and Giancarlo had a very aggressive strategy to try to make up some more places in the race, but we also needed to have some luck. Unfortunately nothing happened in the race to other people so I had lots of times when I had to move over to let cars on the lead lap go past and got out of the rhythm." I would suggest that it's never really a good thing if you have to go into a race hoping that everyone else crashes out. Fisichella summed up his day, saying: "It was better than yesterday, but we need a step forward to move on."

Vettel is looking on the bright side of the day, happy that he started and finished 12th, and was in traffic with BMWs and McLarens. To be fair, they were all out of position, and it wasn't that much of an achievement, but he is glad he kept ahead of one BMW on merit. Bourdais got stuck behind a one-stopping Nakajima, which compromised his race, and also had a problem with being lapped. "I lost touch with the pack ahead and then I had to let Raikkonen past, but as he was in difficulty, I was actually pulling away from him, but I still had waved blue flags, which I thought was a bit harsh. So I lost around three seconds letting him by and then more time behind him."

Sister team Red Bull suffered right at the start of the race. Coulthard said he lost three places round the first corner, whilst Webber said his start wasn't great. Coulthard had difficulties with his tyres, though: "I found the balance on the prime tyres wasn't as good as expected in the cooler conditions and the option was performing better than we thought. That was different from what we found the other day in practice, but some races go for you and some don't."

Alonso is pretty blunt about his feelings: "I have to be disappointed today. I am sure we could have fought for the podium, but I lost too many positions at the start, and after that I was not able to find the pace I had shown yesterday. The car was fast in a straight line, but I still couldn't make any progress." Piquet is clearly very impressed with his day: "It's the first time that everything has gone without any problems for me. The car and the team's strategy worked well and I was able to score my first couple of points today. I am happy and I hope that we can continue like this for the rest of the season."

Raikkonen remains optimistic despite the exhaust issue he had today. "The F2008 is definitely very strong because usually, when you have this sort of problem, retirement is almost inevitable. There is still a long way to go in the championship and I am in a better position than I was at this stage last year." Massa is happy with his win, although he knows it was gifted to him by Raikkonen's problem. For some reason he thanks the whole team and specifically their partners Shell. I'm intrigued why them in particular.

However you try and spin it, Honda had a bad day. Button didn't finish, and he seemed pretty glum about it, although offered the obligatory positive hopes for Silverstone. Barrichello feels he had a good race with an impossible car, and whilst he thanks the team he says: "There is no escaping the fact that this has been a painful weekend for us."



Hamilton said he felt he got past Vettel fairly, and only went across the kerbs because he lost the back-end, but he's not too disheartened by today, because he's only ten points behind in the championship now. Kovalainen says: "Given yesterday's grid penalty, this was a very good result. It also shows that we had a great strategy to be able to come from 10th on the grid to fourth at the finish."

Glock had a difficult day, managing problems with understeer, and the graining on his tyres. Trulli, meanwhile, finished on the podium, and couldn't be more happy about it: "What a great result and a great weekend by the whole team. We were pushing really hard because we wanted to dedicate this result to Ove Andersson, who has done so much for Toyota Motorsport."

That's all for this Grand Prix weekend. Thanks to everyone who took part in the Live Commenting on Sidepodcast.com, it's always a blast watching a race with that enhancement. And thanks to you for listening to F1 Digest, you should be all caught up with all the action in France now. We'll be back for Silverstone, but until then, you can email your thoughts to Christine @ sidepodcast.com or leave a voicemail on 0121 28 87225. Look forward to hearing from you soon.

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