



F1 Digest - Britain Free Practice

Intro

This is the second edition of F1 Digest for the British Grand Prix weekend. We got to see the action first hand, but we also managed to keep in touch with the live comments. Hopefully this show can combine the best of both worlds.

Free Practice 1

As seems to have been the case for the last few races, there's a constant talk of rain ahead of the event. Although there's a possibility of it appearing at some point over the remainder of the weekend – we're camping, it's bound to rain – Friday was clear, bright, hot, but a little breezy. Just before the session started, the track temperature was hovering at 18 degrees C, whilst the air temperature sat at 19.

The Force India boys kept up tradition by leaving the garage first, but they were only the first in a long line of drivers to complete an installation lap before heading back to the pit lane. When Lewis hit the track, the air horns in the crowd were evident, but they also emerged for Coulthard, Button, Kovalainen, and interestingly Raikkonen. After ten minutes, it was only the two Ferrari drivers and Timo Glock who hadn't tested out the Silverstone tarmac.

There was the traditional gap before the action commenced. Lou left a comment on Sidepodcast.com: "Piquet not bothered by all this practice stuff.... just reading the Red Bulletin...." Five minutes passed and then did Vettel decide to be the first man to return to the track for a full lap. It was no use getting our hopes up though, it was yet another five minutes before Nakajima took his Williams out for another spin, and then a few more before Sutil joined the fun. After a couple of solid laps, Sutil ran wide onto the grass, and he was not the first we would see. Nakajima also struggled to keep control of the car, and Glock spun a complete 360 degrees. That didn't harm him too much though, because he took the top spot a few minutes later.

Kimi Raikkonen put pay to that though, on his first flying lap, as you would expect. That is including a few seconds getting past traffic in the shape of Kovalainen. Piquet took second, although Kovalainen pushed Raikkonen out of first, which in turn pushed Piquet out of his position. Hamilton settled for third, just ahead of the Renault.

It was almost fifty minutes before we saw any sign of Alonso, Massa and Coulthard, with the Red Bull driver having a slight off on his first lap. He still managed to slot into sixth, though, pushing Webber into seventh. Massa's first lap put him into fourth, and the newly emerged Kubica was held up by the Ferrari on his own attempt at a time.

Alonso appeared to be doing well, slipping easily into ninth, and then improving to fifth, but a few minutes later, the Renault slowed and stopped out on track with smoke pouring from his engine. Yet another engine failure from the Renault team. Alianora left a thought on the Live Comments: "It must be bad - Renault aren't laughing as the Renault fails at Copse. Glock slides on the oil." Glock wasn't the only one, as the resulting oil from Alonso's car left a slippery trail out on track that caught Massa out as well. The Ferrari's back end slipped away from him, the car turned fully around, and Massa ended up in the barriers backwards. It was a fast and heavy crash, but he was unhurt, and stepped out of the car. He joined Alonso in waiting for a lift back to the pit lane, while the red flags came out for the car to be cleared. Scott in Italy summed up the damage to the car over on Sidepodcast.com: "Wow. The Ferrari is really damaged from just behind the drivers cockpit, all the way down on the right side. The impact really didn't look that bad, bad angle I guess."

Arguments commenced amongst the remaining drivers and their engineers whether it would be worth returning to the track once the green lights came on. Kubica strongly disagreed with his team saying it would be pointless



attempting a lap with the track in the condition it was. Nevertheless, the cement powder was put down, and once the lights went green, we did see Fisichella return to the track.

A few others joined him, and all avoided the cement dust, until eventually Fisichella took the initiative and braved the racing line. In the end, there were plenty of drivers out on track, but with the oil spill seriously compromising the conditions, no one could beat the previous fastest lap set by Massa. Even though he could take no further part in the session, he managed to set the fastest time. The fastest five therefore, were Massa, Kovalainen, Hamilton, Raikkonen and Kubica.

Free Practice 2

Between the end of the first session and the beginning of the second, the sun came out in a big way. The track temperature rose to 28 degrees C, as the light at the end of the pit lane went green. Glock and Fisichella hit the track first, but most of the attention centred on whether Massa would make it out at all in the afternoon or not. In the first few minutes of the session, his garage was amass with mechanics doing what they do best and things were looking somewhat hopeful.

Installation laps were no longer the order of the day, with Glock setting a lap time after only a few minutes. Kubica then went faster, and Rosberg even better than that. Alonso did complete just a test run before diving back into the pits, but that's understandable given the problems from the morning. Kovalainen went fastest, then Rosberg, then Hamilton, and all this before ten minutes were even up. The wind was picking up slightly, with Bourdais and Hamilton both working extra hard to keep their cars on track, whilst Alonso took an extra long trip around one of the run off areas.

After 20 minutes, Glock pulled to a stop on track, his Toyota suffering from gearbox issues. The car was recovered under yellow flags and the session continued. However, it started to turn slightly strange, with Webber topping the timesheets, only to be knocked down by Vettel. Amazingly, Hamilton took to the track on soft tyres and still couldn't beat Vettel's time, whilst Kovalainen made that tyre selection work for him by pushing to the top spot. Alianora spotted something in the comments: "Wind speed's picked up a whole metre/second from the start of the session 13 minutes ago. No wonder Hamilton got caught out again."

An improvement for Honda saw Barrichello slot into fourth, and Rosberg on the harder tyre picked up third position. Lou also noticed that Button was faring better as well: "Ahh nice slow mo of Jenson there... even if it was showing his oversteer.. However it gave me enough time to see that Honda are running the lower nose today... That must be making some difference."

After forty minutes had elapsed of Free Practice 2, Massa finally returned to the track, an impressive feat from the mechanics given the state the car was in when it entered the garage. Massa spent the majority of the rest of the session diving between the track and the pits as improvements continued on the Ferrari.

With Toyota already having a bad afternoon in the form of Glock's gearbox, Trulli then found himself in the barrier with his rear wing halfway across the track. A brave marshal collected the offending piece of bodywork, and the Toyota was removed from the track under yellow flags. Nakajima suffered a similar fate, spinning on track and crashing into the wall. He managed to get the car back to the pit lane without any external help, however. Scott left a comment on Sidepodcast.com regarding Trulli's troubles: "Jarno really doesn't like Silverstone. I guess it comes mainly from the accident he had whilst at Renault. Up until that point, he was driving for a top team and giving Fernando Alonso a run for his money."



The times continued to baffle us, with Webber moving up to third, and Kovalainen stealing the top spot again. The last ten minutes were relatively quiet. Glock returned to the track, Trulli did not, and no one managed to push the McLaren out of the top spot. The final fastest five were: Kovalainen, Webber, Hamilton, Coulthard and Rosberg.

The final glimpse of cars out on track was yet another safety car simulation, testing out the proposed new ECU solution to the current lottery that is pitting under the safety car. As ever, it was impossible to see whether it worked or not, and to be honest, the cars didn't look that much slower to me.

Conclusions

Let's start with Honda, as they were our very kind hosts for this Grand Prix weekend. It's actually a much more positive start to the weekend for the team, although Button seems to be taking it with a pinch of salt. "We may be seventh on the timesheets today but that doesn't necessarily reflect our level of competitiveness, and we have a lot to achieve overnight to set ourselves up for qualifying." Barrichello agrees, with the added fact that he didn't have much running in the first session, due to a problem with the rear suspension. He says it's hard to know where they are compared to the other teams.

Hamilton was fully supported out on track today, with the fans showing their feelings through flags, air horns and general cheer. And he obviously appreciates it: "It was good to see so many fans at the circuit so early this morning! Although we'd only tested here last week, the track felt quite different today. The car's balance felt very good despite my having a little grassy moment at Turn Eight." Kovalainen is happy to be first at the end of the day, but does say he's not going to get carried away by the whole thing.

Raikkonen isn't sure what's up with his car or why he finished the day in 12th. "This morning things were not so bad, while in the afternoon I had a bit of a struggle to find the best settings on the car, which was not working as well as it had done at last week's test. We have to look at the data to understand why." Massa, meanwhile, is simply recovering from his crash. "It was a big crash, but that's part of the game and I have had much worse accidents in my career. I didn't see any flags and I had approached the corner in the usual way and then I totally lost control of the car under braking. I tried to slow down, but the impact was still pretty violent. "

Vettel completely outshone Bourdais today, if you take the finishing positions on face value. Bourdais defends himself though: "This morning I had a lot of understeer in the high speed corners and this afternoon we dialled a lot of it out, but that has made the car worse in other areas, so our lap time is no quicker." Sounds like he can't win. Vettel's happy to finish in 6th, as you would expect, especially as last week's test was his first time on this track. Apparently, he likes it.

Alonso praises his mechanics for getting his car ready to go out again in the afternoon, and says he mainly concentrated on tyres and setup work. Nelson finished in 18th but said: "Our times today were not especially significant as the main priority was to complete the programme, which we did. Overall, I am rather optimistic as we approach the weekend."

Clearly, Glock and Trulli struggled today. Chief Engineer, Dieter Gass, sums up the problems for us: "This was obviously almost the worst case scenario for us today as we missed most of the second session with both cars. Timo had a clutch problem and the mechanics did a very good job to fix that in time to get the car back out and give him a chance to try the option tyres at the end of the session. With Jarno we had a problem on the rear wing. He was running with a new part so we reverted to the standard spec with Timo and we will continue with that for the rest of the weekend."



I know I've said this before, but it is the fact that both Force India drivers are so understated. Fisichella: "It was a normal Friday for us." And Sutil: "Overall, it was not such a bad day." And Mike Gascoyne joins in the fun with: "It was a very productive day with no real problems on either car." There you go, that's all you need to know.

For Williams, Nico Rosberg accounts for his 5th position by saying the test last week meant definite progress for the team. He's hoping they will be a step ahead of where they were in France, so his 5th and Kazuki's 9th will definitely help that goal. Nakajima isn't too worried about his accident, except for the fact that the loss of track time quite irritates him.

Although BMW's timed laps can never be relied upon as evidence of their performance, Kubica in 11th and Heidfeld in 13th may be a slight concern. Willy Rampf, currently Technical Director for the team says that Kubica had a suspension problem in the second session, which cut out some of his running time, whilst Heidfeld says that the wind was a real factor in setup today.

We'll finish with Red Bull, as a second and fourth place at the end of the day is something to celebrate. Webber says: "We had a look at a few different settings, as conditions were not the same as at the test, but that's normal. After a small electronic problem this morning, we had some better running this afternoon when I was much happier with the car." And Coulthard: "It was good to get some more running time, after missing a lot of track time at the test due to various problems we had there. I didn't have a chance to run the option tyre during the test, so that was my first look at it today." Finishing in fourth is a pretty good first look, I'd say.

That's it for this Free Practice edition of F1 Digest. Don't forget that Sidepodcast.com is there for all your live commenting needs throughout every race weekend. Your most insightful thoughts could get read out on this very show. Stay tuned to F1 Digest for all the action from qualifying and the race.