



F1 Digest - Britain Qualifying

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest, Sidepodcast's dedicated coverage of all the race weekend's action. Today we're talking about Saturday at the British GP. Let's get started.

Free Practice 3

Free Practice 3 started out withstanding the predicted rain, however, as the track was already damp from some serious overnight showers, the session was declared wet. The track temperature was about 16 degrees C, and the air temperature two degrees higher.

Glock left the pit lane first, with many others joining him for installation laps. Steve left a comment at Sidepodcast.com: "Both Renaults well out of shape. Everyone is heading straight back into the pits after one lap." And SteveintheUK noticed: "Wet track so all drivers apart from Hamilton are on Extreme Wets, Hamilton on standard wets." Trulli was the first man to put in an actual lap, followed by Alonso, with the Toyota taking the top spot. Hamilton set his own lap time, coming in between the pair already out on track.

The wet session saw some crazy lap times, Alonso and Piquet were at the top for Renault, then Bourdais pushed Piquet out the way. Raikkonen only managed second, whilst Vettel posted the fastest time, with Bourdais topping that once more. Finally, things began to make sense, with Hamilton posting the fastest time, with Kovalainen and Massa heading towards the top end as well. The Ferrari, however, was already showing signs of struggling with the conditions, as Massa slipped and slid his way round a couple of laps.

The track began to dry out and sector times began to get quicker. Scott in Italy left a note on the Live Comment thread: "With 13 minutes to go, dry tyres are definitely the way to go. Expect this to be a fast session with lots of order changes." That's an understatement. Coulthard posted the second fastest time, then Glock, then Sutil got into fourth. Some sections of the track were still damp though, Rosberg had a spin, Kubica had his own moment, and team mate Heidfeld struggled with his own lap, although he did manage third.

Although Coulthard was second on his first lap, he only completed six in total, before heading back to the garage. Some problems were evident as the mechanics hurried around the Red Bull car. The times shifted around some more, and by the end of the session, things were no clearer than at the beginning.

When the clock ran out, the fastest five were: Alonso, Webber, Kovalainen, Vettel and Hamilton.

Quali 1

Between the morning session and the start of qualifying, things had warmed up considerably. The air temperature sat at 20 degrees C, whilst the track had risen to 30.

Rosberg was first out, with Glock close behind, and with the threat of rain obvious from the number of clouds in the sky, all the cars but Massa were setting in a banker lap to be on the safe side. Nakajima was the first man to post a lap time, with Hamilton and then Kovalainen beating it. When Massa finally hit the track, he went second, only to be bumped down by Raikkonen.

SteveintheUK gave us an update on the weather at Sidepodcast.com: "wind is 8ms, strongest for any qualifying this year, So that should make braking and overtaking interesting."



Rain started to fall, but only on some parts of the circuit, meaning that the cars and their lap times were constantly changing positions. A quick trip back to the garage for a rethink, and then the second attempt at a flying lap. Scott in Italy noticed a Williams having problems: “nobody on track. nakajima came out and heading straight back in - must have been wrong tires. what weather conditions were they watching? fools...” Notably Bourdais’ last lap saw him slip into sixth. By the end of the session, we had Kovalainen, Hamilton and Vettel at the top of the timesheets, whilst Rosberg, Fisichella, Sutil, Barrichello and Button all failed to make it through to the next session.

Quali 2

With the rain taking a break for a while, there was less of a rush for the drivers to hit the track this time. A few minutes went by before Alonso left the pit lane, the first of our guys to do so. He was followed by Glock, and unusually Raikkonen.

Raikkonen was the fastest of the three, but when Kovalainen had his turn, he managed to pip the Ferrari to the top spot. At the half time break, we were left with Nakajima and BMWs, Kubica taking the top spot, with Heidfeld only managing fourth. The last few frantic minutes saw Vettel slip into Vettel, but Bourdais couldn’t repeat his performance from qualifying 1.

The fastest three at the end of the session were Hamilton, Kovalainen and Webber, whilst Coulthard, Glock, Bourdais, Trulli and Nakajima all dropped out. Rich commented on Sidepodcast.com: “Macca a one two - great they are showing Ferrari a thing or two.”

Quali 3

With the Ferrari boys struggling somewhat, it was less of a surprise to see Raikkonen first out in this session. Hamilton followed, with Kovalainen, Alonso, Heidfeld and Massa close behind.

With the minutes ticking away, Vettel and Kubica were both lacking a lap time. It was assumed that Vettel wouldn’t be setting a time, considering he was unlikely to do any better than tenth. But Kubica needed to hit the track. Hamilton appeared to be suffering from an unsettled car, struggling round a few corners, but no major problems. Steven Roy left a comment on Sidepodcast.com: “I can only assume Lewis wanted a lap to check the car. No point coming in fitting new tyres and then finding a problem when he went back on track. Do not overdrive Lewis.” Webber surprised all by sticking his Red Bull on pole position, but it was only momentarily as Kovalainen came and stole it from him. The Finn’s first ever pole position. Dom summed this all up for us in the comments: “That was quite something from Webber and Kovi.”

The final grid positions were: Kovalainen, Webber, Raikkonen, Hamilton, Heidfeld, Alonso, Piquet, Vettel, Massa and then Kubica. Vettel did come out for that extra lap, by the way, and managed to beat a Ferrari!

Conclusions

Rosberg was so optimistic yesterday, feeling that they were on the right track to do better than in France. However, he finished in 18th, saying he had problems with his suspension. Nakajima was only slightly better in 15th, and said his problems were mostly with grip.

Glock is adamant that his results today reflect a lack of practice time. He says: “Following our problems yesterday, when we missed half the day’s practice, today was another difficult day. A lot of cars were close together and we just failed to reach Q3 so the running time that we missed probably had an effect.” Trulli is disappointed at not making the top ten, and thinks it is all to do with the balance and the fact that the car was bottoming out quite significantly in the first sector.

Sutil seems to be quite happy with his qualifying performance and believes he got the most out of the car, despite the fact he only managed to finish in 19th. Fisichella says he had a problem with his engine cover which caused all kind of problems for him. He does point out that they were only three tenths away from the goal of getting into Q2, however, it is still just out of reach.

Vettel is understandably happy with his 8th: "I qualified 7th in Indy with BMW, but to be 8th with Toro Rosso means we can be very proud of what we have achieved today. We had a very good balance on the car and all weekend I've felt very comfortable even on my first race weekend at this tough and challenging track." Bourdais feels slightly unlucky in 13th: "Not exactly the most satisfying result, but given how much we struggled here in practice, it's good to move up a notch and be a bit more competitive."

Although BMW don't seem to be quite so competitive as they have been of late, Heidfeld is happy with 5th as it's an upward trend, and believes the rain will make it an exciting race tomorrow. Mario Theissen discusses the problems that Kubica faced: "Up to the top ten qualifying session everything went according to plan, but then Robert aborted his lap in Q3 because he realised he had a technical problem with the car. Unfortunately time was too short to analyse the problem during the session and get him back out on the track. It is a shame because both drivers were strong, which is proved by Nick's fifth place."

For Renault, Alonso says the track conditions were so changeable it was almost impossible to get a decent lap, plus that beautiful British weather – wind and rain. Finishing in 6th isn't so bad though. Piquet is very happy to be just one place behind his team mate, and said the car felt good and improved with every lap.

You can imagine that Hamilton would be a little annoyed at his team mate snatching pole position at his home race, but he's quite gracious: "Congratulations to Heikki on his first Formula One pole position. I felt comfortable in the car and the speed was there; however, on my first flying lap in Q3 I ran a bit wide at the exit of Priory and went onto the gravel. Obviously I just pushed a little bit too hard and it's a pity that I missed the front row." Kovalainen is super happy, of course, and says the car is feeling fantastic at the moment.

Quite a sizeable gap between Webber in 2nd and Coulthard in 11th, with Mark thanking all the local factory guys for working so hard. David is disappointed not to finish higher up, especially at his last British race, but of course, eleventh is the best place strategy wise, which is even more important if, I mean when, rain is going to come into play.

Neither Honda driver made it past Q1, with Barrichello saying that the pace really does reflect how the car is at the moment. Button is disappointed and pinpoints the weather as a significant problem as the shower of rain picked a very bad time for him. As with Coulthard, though, it will be all about the strategy come race day.

To have Raikkonen in third, is not that bad for Ferrari, but it is most surprising to find Massa down in 9th. He explains: "It's a real shame ending up ninth on the grid because of a problem with my pit stop. I lost so much time as the mechanics had trouble changing the right rear wheel and I was unable to start my second run. I think I could have done a good time, maybe not enough to take pole but at least good enough for a place on the front two rows." Raikkonen sums up his day simply by saying: "Compared to yesterday, the situation is definitely better."

So that wraps up another day at the track with our twenty drivers fighting for a place on the grid. Tomorrow we will recap all the action from Sunday, where they take their grid positions and convert them, hopefully, into points. Join me for another F1 Digest then, and don't forget to visit Sidepodcast.com for all the gossip in between.