



F1 Digest - Germany Free Practice

Intro

Welcome to the second edition of F1 Digest for this German Grand Prix weekend. Today we saw two sessions of Free Practice, and with weather conditions on the slightly damp side, it made for an interesting day.

Free Practice 1

In the preview show yesterday, we discussed the fact that Raikkonen was hoping for a hot race. So far, the weather doesn't seem to be listening. The first Free Practice session was declared wet, following a rainy night, and both track and air temperature were hovering around 17 degrees C.

Sutil was the first man out, followed by plenty of others, all set on doing an installation lap. In the Live Comments on Sidepodcast.com, Alianora knows how it works by now: "Two-thirds of the grid have ventured out... ..and most have ventured straight back in again." Usually, in such conditions, we would expect to wait forever for the cars to hit the track in anger. However, it all got going just over ten minutes into the session.

Vettel, Piquet and Trulli were the first guys to set a lap time, and Alonso also put in a marker before it began to rain. Hamilton had a quick spin on the wet track, and Piquet also managed to get some grass on his wheels. The rain began to ease off after about 30 minutes, and the two Ferrari drivers – last to have hit the track – made their mark. Massa took the top spot, whilst Raikkonen slipped into fifth on one lap, then quickest next time round. Rocket had a thought about this in the Live Comments: "Do you get the feeling Ferrari are trying to prove a point this weekend? And they're not wasting any time. Maybe it's more for themselves."

With most drivers on wet tyres, and the track drying out, the next task was to see who would make the switch to dry tyres first. In the end, it was Vettel, and it was a wise decision, as the Toro Rosso jumped easily into first place. The next lap was two seconds quicker, and it was obvious that the dry tyre was the way to go. Other drivers also crept up to the top of the time sheets, with Sutil and Fisichella in fourth and third, and then Bourdais nabbed second. Corey left a comment on Sidepodcast.com: "Morning all, just woke up and saw Vettel and Bourdais at the top am I still dreaming?" Bourdais' triumph was short lived, however, when a few minutes later, he was pulling over to the side of the track, and telling his engineers that the car just gave up.

Heidfeld, having sat out the session so far apart from his installation lap, finally took to the track, and proved the car was okay by putting it into fourth, he improved to second behind Sutil. That's weird. It was a good moment for the crowd, as all five German drivers were towards the top of the timesheets, but you just know it was short-lived. Rosberg went fastest, Piquet took second, then Webber took the top spot. When Massa took his lap, he couldn't improve, but Raikkonen posted P1, only to be beaten by Hamilton.

Kubica must have hit a damp patch of track, as he lost control of the car and spun off into the gravel, ultimately hitting a wall. It wasn't too heavy an impact, and the car was recovered under yellow flags. The final few minutes were all about McLaren. Hamilton couldn't improve on his time, but Kovalainen came round and took the top spot. This obviously spurred Hamilton on, as his next lap saw him cross the line as the fastest car. He was quickest ahead of Kovalainen, Massa, Alonso and Raikkonen.

Free Practice 2



Things dried out and warmed up considerably ahead of the second session. The track temperature was 23 degrees C, with the air a couple of degrees below. Bourdais was the first man out, with Vettel close behind. Kubica also took to the track early, his BMW patched up from the earlier accident.

Hamilton and Rosberg took to the track, but the McLaren was force wide on his first timed lap by Bourdais. He didn't look impressed, but made up for it next time round by posting the fastest time. Kovalainen slipped neatly into second.

Barrichello spun in the Honda, turning 180 degrees, and then back the same way to continue onwards. Massa and Raikkonen hit the track, with Massa second and Raikkonen third. Actually, the defending champ was struggling slightly, running wide on his next two laps. Steven Roy noted on Sidepodcast.com: "Kimi is really pushing and can't get near Massa. Very odd."

Barrichello spun again, whilst at the top, Massa kept on putting in fastest sectors, but not enough of them to knock Hamilton from top of the timesheets. Hamilton himself couldn't match his own time, as his car jerked away from him, but the McLaren driver held it well. At the exact same spot a few minutes later, Glock also suffered a wobble, but a much bigger one. The Toyota took flight momentarily and came down to earth with a nasty bump. Lou commented on Sidepodcast.com: "Flying lesson for Glock, Ouch I bet that hurt." Whilst Corey said: "Glock has a rally future I think. Perfect landing."

Rosberg ran wide, but was still doing better than his team mate. Nakajima emerged from the garage with only 30 minutes of the session remaining, having had some serious mechanical work done to the car. He could only manage to stick the Williams in 19th.

Towards the end of the session, many drivers improved: Alonso slipped into fifth, to be knocked down by Webber. Hamilton raised the benchmark and once again neither Massa nor Raikkonen could reach it. They finished the session in that order, with Kovalainen and Webber rounding out the top five.

Conclusions

Although Webber finished in 5th, he wasn't particularly impressed with his day. He says the team couldn't get all their planned running done as they had an electrical problem with the car, so they're already a little bit behind this weekend. Coulthard has very little to say today, the tyres took a while to get going on the green track, but otherwise everything was normal.

Kubica's big crash didn't put them back too much – only ten minutes or so. He puts it down to some standing water and says his afternoon went much as expected. Heidfeld feels he's making progress: "Compared to last week's test the car's balance was better today. We have made several changes during the practice sessions and completed the tyre comparison. After wet conditions this morning, we knew there was a chance of more rain at the end of the second session. Consequently we switched to soft tyres earlier than usual."

For Toyota, Trulli feels he had a good and comfortable day, evaluating the setup of the car, especially with the new aero package. Glock says the weather didn't make things easy: "The first session this morning was pretty good despite the changing track conditions but in the second session the car felt completely different. It was difficult to drive and the wind was changing, so it was pretty tricky to find the right way in terms of set-up."

There's an obvious difference between Rosberg in 7th and Nakajima in 17th, but the pair feel relatively satisfied with their day's work. Rosberg does mention that it was pretty windy, and driving wasn't easy, whilst Nakajima says the weather changes they experienced today can only set them up well for the weekend.

Pat Symonds, Executive Director of Engineering at Renault, says of today: "As at the last race, we recently tested on this circuit and therefore the focus of our programme today was mainly to resolve unfinished business. The conditions were slightly different than at the test last week, but it remained cold and the grip level was basically low." Despite this, Alonso experienced a normal day with no particular difficulties, and Piquet believes he made good progress and is headed in the right direction.

Sutil had a difficult day, and points the blame on the car, although he does say sometimes it was oversteer that was the problem, and sometimes understeer. Apparently they tried a lot of things to experiment with the setup in an attempt to fix it. Fisichella struggled with balance, grip, and the rain.

Vettel finished 11th, but his main complaint of the day is that people aren't seeing the hot and sunny side of Germany. Bourdais seemed to suffer most of the bad luck for the team: "I did not get to do too many laps today, because in the morning I had a problem with a flywheel sensor and then this afternoon it was the gearbox. But the guys did a great job to get me out before the end of the session."

Although he managed to top both sessions, Hamilton says the morning and afternoon were very different. Of FP2, he says: "Maybe the wind had picked up, or changed direction, but the car didn't feel as stable. But by the end of the session, however, the car felt a lot more consistent - we found a good direction with the tyres and the set-up and so things look positive for tomorrow." Anyone else think if they were super-fast and struggling, McLaren are looking dominant this weekend? Heikki may not agree: "The front-end of the car felt very good, but I felt less comfortable with the rear of the car, particularly in some of the slow-speed corners." They did manage to make some changes to help towards the end of the day, though.

Massa is full of fighting talk: "We were always competitive, as were our main rivals. It won't be a stroll in the park, but we can take them on." Raikkonen is slightly more caution: "As I said at the start, there are too many question marks to be certain: what I can say is that we will be competitive, especially as right up until the final minutes, the times were all very similar."

In the current climate, Barrichello in 14th and Button ahead in 13th isn't actually too bad. Barrichello says the morning saw some good balance on the car, but conditions in the afternoon were tricky, whilst Button disagrees and says he's not happy with the balance on the car. More work to be done.

That's it for this F1 Digest show. Please join me again tomorrow when we'll be discussing all the happenings of Free Practice 3 and Qualifying, and we'll find out who lines up on pole position.