



F1 Digest - Hungary Qualifying

Intro

This is F1 Digest, your dedicated F1 coverage from Sidepodcast. After two relatively uneventful Free Practice sessions, we're looking to today's FP3 and Qualifying action to hot up the weekend. Listen on to find out if it happened.

Free Practice 3

Any talk of a damp or cold weekend must be instantly dismissed now, as Free Practice 3 began with the air temperature at 28 degrees C and the track at 33, plus plenty of sun brightening the day. As per yesterday's morning session, it was all about installation laps for the first few minutes. All but the Ferrari and Honda boys tested out the tarmac and returned to the garage for some analysis.

About eight minutes in, Sutil returned to the track to be the first man to set a lap time, it was relatively slow but faster than his team mate who followed him out. Renault, Toro Rosso and Raikkonen joined in the fun, with Bourdais beating Vettel, only for both to be pushed down by Raikkonen. The Renault's meanwhile were traveling ridiculously slowly. While the top runners were breaking into the 1 minute 21's, Piquet clocked up a 1:52, and Alonso a 1:47. They were being overtaken all over the place, but didn't appear to have a problem. Alianora updated us on Sidepodcast.com: "Autosport theorises that the Renaults are doing some very careful scrubbing-in of tyres to combat graining." And Rocket added afterwards: "Or it's the worst case of sandbagging ever!"

Massa and Kovalainen joined the track, and the Ferrari posted ninth on his first lap, and then fastest on his next attempt. When Hamilton hit the tarmac, the McLaren's made it a 1-2.

The Renaults continued to circulate painfully slowly, and we had to put it down to the tyre strategy idea. They dived into the pitlane, and when Alonso returned, he posted a much more sensible time to go 11th, and Piquet slotted into 4th and 2nd next time round.

Massa and Kovalainen demoted Hamilton to third, whilst Bourdais and Vettel were scrapping for the very next positions. Steven Roy joined in the Live Commenting: "Nice to see Vettel has managed to get into double figures in this session but Bourdais in P4?" Piquet improved to second, whilst Alonso still couldn't get past tenth. When the time came for the last flying laps, Massa managed to pip everyone else to the top spot, followed by Glock, Kovalainen, Piquet and Heidfeld.

Quali 1

Between FP3 and Qualifying, the temperatures rose slightly, air at 30 degrees C and track at 41. Vettel was the first man out on track, although it wasn't immediately the lights went green. Once he took the initiative though, he was followed by his team mate, and Coulthard.

When the top four emerged from the pit lane, it was Kovalainen who got first dibs on the fastest time, the two Ferraris behind him, but then Hamilton immediately bumped them all down a place. Scott Woodwiss liked what he saw from Lewis: "Nice lap from Hamilton, quicker by nearly 8 tenths on the harder tyre. Impressive." Trulli put in a super performance in his Toyota to post the third fastest time. Behind him Webber slipped into 7th, and Alonso into 8th. Flibster left a comment on Sidepodcast.com: "The Red Bulls are reasonably quick, but they look an absolute pig to drive."



The BMW boys couldn't seem to put on their usual performance. Kubica only managed 10th, whilst Heidfeld was stuck in 15th. On his final flying lap, he came across Bourdais who appeared to hold him up. He couldn't improve on his time, and moments later Button demoted him into the dropout zone. The Williams drivers also looked to be in trouble with Nakajima in 17th, but Rosberg managed to pull his car into 13th. He no doubt had his fingers crossed that this would be enough to scrape through and it was.

At the end of the session, the fastest three were Hamilton, Massa and Trulli, and we lost Heidfeld, Nakajima, Barrichello, Fisichella and Sutil.

Quali 2

When the lights went green for the second session, Raikkonen was following Glock out of the pit lane after only a minute or so. Trulli joined them, but neither he nor Raikkonen could touch Glock's initial lap time.

Alonso, Piquet, Hamilton and Kovalainen all tried and failed to knock the Toyota off the top spot, and it was down to Massa to get the deed done. Once achieved, he, Glock and Hamilton didn't feel the need to defend their times. AC posted what we were all thinking in the Live Comments: "Wow...McLaren NOT on top!" And Rocket was impressed with what he saw: "I have been a little hesitant to regard any Toyota improvement over the last few years as they seem to drop away immediately after doing something good. But I have a feeling we may be seeing a turning point here this weekend."

It was left to the rest then, to fight for the chance of getting into the top ten. With just a few minutes remaining, Rosberg had yet to set a lap time, but then he was shown out of the car and talking to the pit wall, and Alex Andronov let us know why: "Rosberg has a hydraulics problem."

Vettel managed to squeeze into ninth, but was pushed out by Piquet and Webber. Trulli slipped into fifth, just ahead of Raikkonen. At the end of the session, Massa was fastest from Glock, Hamilton, Kovalainen and Trulli. We lost Vettel, Button, Coulthard, Bourdais and Rosberg. SteveintheUk posted a thought on Sidepodcast.com: "So the poor Bourdais, Vettel and Button have to start the race with DC right next to/behind them. I wonder how many of them will last the first couple of laps?"

It emerged that Bourdais was under investigation for the Heidfeld incident.

Quali 3

The final ten minutes got underway with Toyota out first, Trulli and Glock circling the track by themselves for much too long. Lou noticed how hard working the Toyotas were: "Glock has done more laps than anyone." Eventually, they were joined by literally everyone else. Kovalainen posted an early fast time, then, obviously, Hamilton even faster. When Ferrari clocked up their times, they were second and third, Massa slightly ahead.

Hamilton posted the first time to dip into the 1 minute 20s, and from that moment on it looked all but over. The last ditch effort from everyone saw Kubica improve to second, then Kovalainen from 9th up to second as well, and Massa could only manage third.

Hamilton's pole position was safe, but he posted that last flying lap just in case.

The final grid is Hamilton ahead of Kovalainen, Massa, Kubica, Glock, Raikkonen, Alonso, Webber, Trulli and Piquet.

Conclusions



Starting at the very bottom of the grid, then, Sutil had a hard day: "It was a hot, tough qualifying and I am not 100% happy with the session. The tyres did not behave as we expected and I had lots of graining, which meant we couldn't get a good balance out of the car." Fisichella is coming to a sad realisation: "I think we're not particularly quick round here and we have to accept that, but we are still quite close to the others."

Webber is a bit annoyed that he couldn't get the pace he wanted, saying: "I'm disappointed I'm on the wrong side of the grid, an odd number is always better, but we definitely have a chance to get something from where we are, so we'll see how we go tomorrow." Team-mate Coulthard does have an odd number, and he's not happy with that either: "It's tough from thirteenth for sure, but the Hungarian race can be unpredictable, so let's see."

Finally, Button has something to smile about with the new updates to the Honda, and he is impressed that they were only three-tenths away from getting into the top ten. Well, he was anyway. Barrichello is unfortunately stuck down in 18th, however he says it was all his own fault: "After a good first sector, I went in too quick for turn 11 and made a mistake which ruined my lap. With that went the chance to progress to Q2 and the time from my previous run puts me in 18th place on the grid."

Sam Michael sums up Williams' day for us: "It was always going to be a tight qualifying session for us. Unfortunately, Kazuki didn't progress through from the first session. Nico obviously could have delivered more, but a hydraulic problem kept him in the garage for the whole of Q2. There was no sign of it during the last run in Q1, but it became apparent when we fired up for the second session. We're investigating the cause now and will resolve the problem in time for the race."

Like Button, Sebastian Vettel is slightly disappointed to have only missed out on the third qualifying session by one hundredths of a second, but he is happy that it means they are more competitive, especially with his lack of running yesterday. Bourdais really struggled with the tyres, but doesn't know much more than that: "I was very happy in a well balanced car earlier on but after that I'm not really sure what happened. I am disappointed, because even if Q3 would have been hard to reach, I could not match my Q1 time in Q2." It was also announced that he would be receiving a five place grid drop from the Heidfeld incident, meaning he lines up on the back row.

Here's Heidfeld's take on the situation: "I'm totally disappointed. It looked quite good at the end of yesterday's practice and also this morning. But on my last lap in Q1 I had four cars in my way. Most of them at least tried to give me room, but it still cost me time. Towards the end of the lap I had one car in front which was on an out lap. He saw me and accelerated. He then overtook Sebastien Bourdais before the last corner, and then Sebastien was right in my way. I was hoping it was so obvious he would be penalised right away and I could still get into Q2." On the flip side, Kubica is happy with his 4th place, and says this was one of his best qualifying sessions so far. The car was difficult so 4th is an unexpected result.

It's unusual to see Glock quite so high up the time sheets, and he's clearly very happy about it: "That was a very good qualifying session for me and I'm obviously delighted. We made a good start in first practice yesterday. The team did a good job overnight and we made the right choice over set-up. It wasn't easy today because we had a very tight choice over tyres so we had to make a close decision for every lap." Trulli says he is glad to have made it into the top ten, but finishing in 9th is somewhat disappointing after the Toyotas have looked so strong so far this weekend.

Alonso says he knew the qualifying sessions would be close, so finishing 7th isn't too bad. He does say that the race tomorrow is going to be difficult to move forward in, but if he can pick up some points, he'll be happy. Piquet agrees that it was much more competitive out there than he'd imagined, but just getting into Q3 was enough.

Raikkonen starts from sixth, and isn't particularly impressed: "I made a mistake on my final flying lap which cost me precious time, and that followed on from not having got a great lap on my previous attempt, which explains why I'm



sixth. Of course I am not happy and, starting from the third row, my race will be an uphill struggle." Massa in third is trying to remain optimistic: "Clearly, overtaking isn't easy but we have a good pace and I will try and exploit that in fighting with the two drivers ahead of me on the grid."

I'm sure it's no coincidence that at this particular racetrack, Hamilton is saying: "There's a great harmony within the team at the moment and we really deserved this. I couldn't ask to be in a better position, we've both got good strategies for tomorrow and we'll be challenging for the win." However, he's absolutely right, and with a 1-2 start, McLaren really are going to be tough to beat tomorrow.

I will leave you with that happy thought, and invite you all to come back to Sidepodcast.com tomorrow, to join in the Live Commenting. Our new auto-refresh page makes the whole experience much more pleasant, and hopefully there will be at least some action to comment on. F1 Digest will be back as well, to round up the weekends action, so join me then.

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