

F1 Digest – Europe GP

Intro

This is F1 Digest for the European Grand Prix. We've already looked at three free practice sessions and qualifying, which all led up to today's race. Now let's take a look at what happened.

The Race

The track was much hotter today than we've seen throughout the weekend, at 44 degrees C, whilst the air hovered at about 28 degrees. Sutil and Barrichello both had to start from the pitlane, as they had both opened up their gearboxes and made some changes. On Sidepodcast.com, Lou was pragmatic about this: "Oh well, at least Rubens and Sutil don't lose anything for tampering with their gearboxes. It's not like they will be any further back." And AC noticed something useful for the start: "Ok, Rosberg the only starter on softs..."

The first few major corners were clean, Massa held his lead from Hamilton, and Kovalainen jumped Raikkonen off the start. Unfortunately for the home crowd, Nakajima braked too late and went straight into the back of Alonso. The Williams had to pit for a new front wing, and Alonso pitted for a new rear wing. It looked like he might be able to come back out again, after repairs. In the Live Comments, Corey said: "Ahhh, was hoping to see Alonso being on the ragged edge of control trying to impress home crowds. What's the point of losing 5 mins unless they hope for a safety car to allow him to catch back up because he will be at least down 3 laps by the time he comes out." And Steven Roy added another view: "If I was Renault I would want to run him as a test for next year." However, the damage to the Renault was too much, and without even completing a lap, his home race was over.

Massa began to pull out a lead over Hamilton, and the pair of them were splitting from the rest of the pack. Further back, Sutil felt he was being held up by Fisichella, but in turn Coulthard must have felt Sutil was in his way. He attempted an overtaking manoeuvre on the Force India but couldn't make it stick and spun.

Towards the front again, Kubica suddenly had a slow moment, setting a lap 2 seconds off the pace. It turned out he had a piece of debris stuck in the front wing, which the team told him they could remove when he came in for his pit stop. He managed to recover some speed to at least hold the cars behind him at bay, if not catching those in front. Bourdais also had a front wing issue, with some debris on his nose, although it was unclear whether it was from his own car or someone else.

Massa was the first front runner to pit after only 15 laps, and he came out just in front of Raikkonen. Although it looked like Kimi would try and get past, he eventually conceded the place, despite being stuck behind a team mate stacked full of fuel. Hamilton pitted two laps later, and emerged behind both Ferrari's. Scott commented on Sidepodcast.com: "Hmm... so Hamilton comes out behind Raikkonen. Will the second Ferrari driver be asked to 'do a team job' now?" and Ryan also picked up on something: "Did you notice from the on-board shot when Massa pitted, just how dusty the pitlane is?"

Kubica led briefly before pitting, then Kovalainen also led before himself diving into the pit lane. Order was restored at the front. In fact, the only out of place car appeared to be Glock who was one-stopping and got as high as 5th. He came into the pits after 30 laps. In fact, Glock was one of the highlights of the early race, Scott in Italy commented: "This race could get interesting - the one stoppers are looking pretty good. As the field starts to be clear on who is where, we could have some real competition. At least I am hoping because this has not been a good race as far as viewing."



The front wings seemed to be struggling around Valencia, with Piquet sporting a piece of bridgework flapping in the breeze. We didn't know, and never really found out what that was from, but can only assume he may have brushed the wall.

Massa began to extend his lead over Hamilton again, and after posting a couple of fastest laps, dived into the pit lane. It was a good pit stop, but the Ferrari was released as Sutil was making his way towards the pit exit. They managed to avoid each other and make it out safely, but Race Control announced they would be investigating the incident – considering it to be unsafe.

Although he made it out of the pit lane okay, Sutil's eventful race was about to be over. One minute his Force India was on the track, the next he was in the tyre barriers. And Ferrari's woes weren't over either. Kovalainen and Raikkonen came into the pits at the same time, racing for position. Raikkonen was obviously a little eager to get out in front of the McLaren and pulled away before the fuel hose had been removed. The refuelling mechanic was pulled to the ground in a painful way. He was stretchered to the medical centre.

As if that wasn't enough drama, Raikkonen's engine then gave way on the home straight, pouring smoke out the back of the car. His race was finished. Poppy left a thought on Sidepodcast.com: "Ehatever they say about Renault engines they have had a whole lot less smoke coming out the back of them than the Ferrari ones...." And Rocket missed the fun: "What happened? I leave the room for one second and the race goes crazy!"

The stewards announced they would come to a decision over the Massa pit lane incident after the race, which cast a shadow over the rest of the laps. Massa continued to lead, and the positions remained as they were. He took the chequered flag ahead of Hamilton and Kubica, but we didn't know whether he was going to receive a time penalty or not. Red picked up on something in the Live Comments: "Post race press conference should be interesting. How does Massa answer questions about the win with the penalty hanging over his head?"

The final finishing order was Massa, Hamilton, Kubica, Kovalainen, Trulli, Vettel, Glock and Rosberg. About an hour after the race finished, the stewards announced that Massa would receive a reprimand and a fine, thus the results stood.

Championship

Hamilton is still on top of the driver's championship, now on 70 points. Massa has jumped his teammate to second with 64 points to Raikkonen's 57. Kubica has 55, and Kovalainen has 43.

In the constructor's championship, Ferrari are leading with 121, with McLaren close behind on 113. BMW have 96, and Toyota have 41. Renault drift away on 31 points.

Conclusions

Red Bull haven't really had a very good weekend at all. Webber says that the team just weren't quick enough, and as their strategy was hoping for a safety car which never occurred, things didn't go to plan. Coulthard explains what happened with Sutil: "When I tried to pass one of the Force India's, I aborted the manoeuvre and made contact with them, so sorry to them for that. That damaged my barge board and the side of the car, so after that the balance and downforce were very poor."

Kubica says his slow moment early on in the race was due to a bit of litter: "Suddenly I saw a white plastic bag flying across the track, but could not avoid it and it went under the car. I couldn't steer for two corners, which was extremely dangerous. Fortunately most of the bag soon flew away, but my confidence was low over the next sector, and I lost around three seconds." Heidfeld has finally realised that his races just aren't up to scratch saying that finishing 9th in a car that could attain third simply isn't good enough.



For Renault, Alonso echoes the standard line under such circumstances: "I am extremely disappointed because I was hoping to have a special race in my second home Grand Prix and for the supporters who came here this weekend to support me. I now want to concentrate on the rest to the season and the next race in Spa." Piquet finished 11th and is disappointed but found it a difficult race that was impossible to overtake in.

Button says the best part of the race came early on: "I had a good start and gained three places to 13th but that was the highlight of my race really." Barrichello says the changes they made overnight that saw him start from the pitlane did help slightly, but finishing 16th isn't exactly what they were hoping for.

Vettel is a ray of sunshine amongst some frankly quite miserable quotes: "Incredible! A perfect day. It was fun but tough and hot out there. It's a nice race track. We made no mistakes, no mistakes all weekend and maximised our performance." Bourdais is also happy, although a little more understated: "That was a very nice race, apart from the fact that I touched with Heidfeld which broke my wing." Ah, that explains the bodywork issues then.

Toyota had a good result, 5th for Trulli and 7th for Glock. Trulli says that he's satisfied with the result after such a bad start to the weekend. Glock is also relatively content, having suffered through a bad cold during the weekend. Also notably, team principal Tadashi Yamashina points out that after Trulli missed the practice sessions, he was using Glock's setup, so that's a good performance from him.

Force India had a mixed afternoon, with Sutil retiring midway through the race. He said the barrier was just too close to avoid crashing into. Fisichella ended 14th, which he feels wasn't so bad, and particularly notes that the gearbox is an improvement.

For Williams, Nakajima finished in 15th, and said it was difficult from the beginning: "I had a bad start and we have to find the reason for that. On lap one, going into turns four and five, I was just behind Alonso, but there was a bit of a battle going on in front and I couldn't avoid him going into the corner." Rosberg says that picking up one point is good because they haven't done that for a long time, and he thought the race was fun.

We had Glock with a cold earlier, and it turns out that Hamilton was also suffering with flu, and a sore neck. In which case, he says: "I can't complain with second place today. This was a strong weekend for us despite my having a few problems health-wise, but we pulled through." Heikki got past Raikkonen on the start but then says: "I'm not really happy with how the race went for me after that, because I had grip problems with the prime tyres in the first and second stints."

Finally we have race winner Massa who says it is fantastic to win the race after the disappointment of Hungary. Of Kimi's engine problem, Massa says: "I am sorry for what happened to Kimi: we have to look very carefully at our reliability. I am confident the team knows which countermeasures to take to react to this issue, as it has always done in the past." Raikkonen himself isn't really very talkative: "Not much to say after a day like this. It was definitely not the weekend I was hoping for but I do not believe that, despite this negative result, I am now out of the running for the title. There are still six races to go and sixty points up for grabs. We have seen that the situation change really quickly, even if I realise things are now more complicated." Regarding the pit stop incident, Kimi admits his mistake and is thankful that the mechanic is not too badly hurt. Hear, hear.

That's it for this race weekend, it wasn't perhaps the event we were looking for, but there was enough going on to tide us over until Belgium in two weeks time. Let us know your thoughts about the race on 0121 28 87225, or email me Christine @ sidepodcast.com.