



## F1 Digest - Italy Qualifying

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### Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest for the Italian Grand Prix weekend. This is your dedicated Sidepodcast coverage, and boy, do we have a show today. We're talking about Free Practice 3 and Qualifying at a very wet Monza, and I think we'd better get started.

### Free Practice 3

After all the rain yesterday, there was more precipitation overnight, and as FP3 started, a light shower was also on its way. The air temperature was about 21 degrees C, and the track was about 18. There was no waiting around in the garages today, as all but three of the cars headed out for at least an installation lap.

Barrichello continued on his way though, setting the first full lap time of the day. Glock set the first benchmark, despite messing up the first chicane. He wasn't the only one though, the slippery corners also caught out Alonso. In the Live Comments, Alianora said: "Something tells me that Fernando's having trouble with the wet conditions..." After about twenty minutes, Massa hit the track and managed seventh, whilst Glock continued to improve at the top of the times. Massa went up to fourth, but then three other drivers pushed him right back down again.

Raikkonen's first lap saw him in seventeenth, the slowest official lap time of the session, but there was no time for him to try and improve. The rain got harder and everyone returned to the pitlane. Dom noted on Sidepodcast.com: "Standing water everywhere." And Stuart, from the track, left two comments: "Sheeting it down now." And: "Game over, folks. Everyone's coming in."

With twenty minutes left, the weather eased, and Heidfeld headed out again, but it didn't look like the track was clearing too much. BG predicted on Sidepodcast.com: "Looks like Glock already won this session, there's no way the conditions will get good enough to do a better lap than his." Webber also took to the track, but was told over the radio to take it easy. Hamilton braved the conditions and continued to circulate, but nobody on track could get anywhere near Glock's earlier time. He and Bourdais, Nakajima, and Kovalainen all had a go, but the rain kept the Toyota at the top. Scott thought it was good for those who went out: "Could be worthwhile getting in some running given the possibility of heavy rain for the race."

The fastest five at the end of the session were Glock, Vettel, Rosberg, Trulli and Nakajima.

### Quali 1

By the time we got to the afternoon, the track temperature was the same at 18 degrees C but the air had cooled to 20. Despite there being a break in the rain between the sessions, by the time the lights went green for Q1, it was pouring down again.

Heidfeld was the first man to hit the track, but he was just leading up the pack as everyone headed out. Extreme wets were the tyre of choice, but even they were proving difficult, as Heidfeld spun, and Alonso messed up a chicane. Regarding Heidfeld, Rich commented: "Rare but will not do much for his qualifying confidence!" Glock once again posted an early time, with Bourdais behind, but Hamilton soon knocked them down. The track must have been clearing slightly as Glock regained the top spot, Sutil also beat Hamilton, and Kovalainen slipped into second. Red in Canada left a thought on Sidepodcast.com: "When the guys run in conditions like this, I gain a whole new level of respect."



Raikkonen meanwhile, was struggling. His first lap saw him 15<sup>th</sup>, although he did manage to improve to 10<sup>th</sup>. There was little opportunity to analyse the action. Kovalainen went quickest, whilst Hamilton was now pushed down the order and posted the 9<sup>th</sup> fastest time. He improved to second, with Rosberg third. The order was jumping around so much, it was almost impossible to keep track, and the only way was to watch who was about to drop out, and monitor their performance.

Raikkonen was stuck in the bottom five, but managed to improve to 7<sup>th</sup> to save his session. Webber went from 19<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, and Alonso just managed to squeeze into 12<sup>th</sup>. For the first time ever, Fisichella managed to get Force India through into the second session of qualifying, whilst Sutil lounged at the bottom of the timesheets.

At the end of the session, the fastest three were Kovalainen, Hamilton and Vettel, whilst Barrichello, Piquet, Nakajima, Button and Sutil all dropped out. Scott Woodwiss asked: "So why has Sutil, who is known for being good in the wet, lost out to his teammate who isn't?"

### Quali 2

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There was a pause in the rain as Q2 got going, and Bourdais led the way as everyone hurried to set at least one time. It wasn't long before the next shower started, and Hamilton had to dive into the pit lane. He had started the session on intermediate tyres, and soon realised that was not the best rubber to be on.

Vettel went easily fastest, followed by Kovalainen, whilst the other McLaren continued to struggle. Massa and Raikkonen were both in the knock out five, but Massa managed to squeeze into tenth. Hamilton meanwhile was 15<sup>th</sup> and didn't seem to be able to pull a lap together, as the rain just got worse. He then spun off track, saved it, and carried on but he was having a bad session.

Nobody was managing to improve on their times, and Massa just scraped through in tenth. Alex Andronov commented: "Massa sitting pretty. That lap was possibly the most important of the season..." Kubica spun on his final lap, and couldn't make it to the next session.

Kubica, Fisichella, Coulthard, Raikkonen and Hamilton were in the lowest five, whilst Vettel, Kovalainen and Rosberg were the fastest three. Rich said: "Vettel fastest - It would be so good for STR to trounce Ferrari and win Monza - especially as they are using Ferrari engines - I would laugh for days."

### Quali 3

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Massa was the first out, but everyone hit the track straight away. For the third session in a row, Glock set the early benchmark, but Kovalainen quickly set a better time, only to be beaten by Vettel. Dom commented on Sidepodcast.com: "Toro Rosso for pole?!? No Way!!!"

Bourdais was third momentarily, until he was pushed down by Rosberg and Webber. To compound his trouble, Bourdais then spun, but he carried on. They all continued to circulate, and Vettel still looked strong but there were no improvements on time, meaning Toro Rosso got their first ever pole position, and Vettel became the youngest ever pole sitter.

The final grid lineup is Vettel, Kovalainen, Webber, Bourdais, Rosberg, Massa, Trulli, Alonso, Glock and Heidfeld. RG summed up the day for us: "You can't help but smile though, I've got to say congratulations Vettel and Toro Rosso, they both deserve the pole. Been brilliant all qualifying and the last few races."

### Conclusions

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Honda came out with their quotes ridiculously early, possibly before qualifying had even finished. But then, they just didn't have a good day. Barrichello says the opportunity was there but he had a miscommunication with the team: he wanted to pit for more front wing but stay on the existing tyres, but when he did pit the team took some wing off and put on fresh tyres. That's a hell of a miscommunication, the complete opposite of what he wanted! Button said he thought the wet conditions would help but the car was just undriveable.

For Force India, Sutil is disappointed to have finished last, but says that once they changed to a new set of tyres, the grip just wasn't there. Fisichella had a better day: "Of course I'm really pleased to be able to give the team its first entry into Q2 this year and particularly here in Monza. Conditions in the first session were bad at the start and it was difficult to find some grip but they improved at the end and that was when I was able to find some space and push. We went out as soon as we could in the second session as the rain was getting heavier and we really did the optimum - we weren't too far from Q3 with the quickest lap." Crikey, we've only just got them through to Q2, and already he's wanting more!

Massa is philosophical about his starting position, saying: "It's true it could have been better, but it could also have been much worse. I am ahead of my main rivals in the fight for the championship and I still have a good grid position." Raikkonen is clearly quite miffed about what happened today: "There's little to say and I am definitely not happy with this result. I was unable to do a time in Q2 when the conditions would still have made it possible and then it was impossible to catch up. On that lap, I went off at Ascari where there was a lot of water on the track, which meant I didn't make it through to the next session. Now we must try and make the best of this situation which is definitely not ideal." He also mentioned his main priority at the start is to try and avoid colliding with any other cars.

Rosberg is happy with his 5<sup>th</sup> place and says the most important thing is that they didn't compromise either setup or strategy too much for qualifying so things are looking good for the race. Nakajima, meanwhile, starts 18<sup>th</sup> and is disappointed, especially considering he finished 5<sup>th</sup> in Free Practice.

Red Bull have Webber in 3<sup>rd</sup> and Coulthard in 13<sup>th</sup>. The Australian thought he'd messed up Q3 because he didn't get a good first lap in, and was expecting rain. However, he says: "It was crucial to get both of the chicanes right and I really had to focus on the Ascari Chicane because it was like running on rail tracks. I drilled that though and it helped me to get my lap time." Coulthard has the excuses at the ready: "As you saw with Hamilton and Raikkonen, it wasn't getting any quicker out there with the worsening conditions. Congratulations to Sebastian on his pole position, it was a great performance from him."

Kovalainen starts 2<sup>nd</sup> on the grid, and says he just missed pole by .076 of a second. He's disappointed, obviously, but congratulates Vettel, and says second isn't too bad at all. Hamilton's 15<sup>th</sup> place was all about timing: "It was a joint decision to go out on wet-weather tyres at the start of Q2 - partly mine and partly my engineers'. We thought it was the right way to go at the time because it was getting dryer but the grip-level was poor so I came in and switched to extremes. By the time I got out, it had begun to rain and I just missed the window when the track was at its fastest."

Pascal Vasselon – Chief Chassis Manager of Toyota - says: "The whole team did a fantastic job throughout qualifying without any mistakes to get both cars through to the top ten. Only two teams managed that so it's a very good result for us on top of a fine performance from both drivers. We are a little bit disappointed by the final ranking in Q3, but obviously as usual we will have to wait for tomorrow's pit stop laps to know more about today's performance." Trulli sums it up by saying: "That was a hell of a session."

BMW start 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, and Heidfeld says that he was expecting more from Q3, and was surprised that the grip got less rather than more as the time wore on. Kubica believes they might have got their Q2 strategy wrong: "We put a new set of tyres on the car for the second qualifying session, as we planned not to make a pit stop in the session."



You need two or three laps to make the tyres work. The track dried up after the first laps, but then it started to rain heavily so unfortunately I was not able to improve the lap times.”

Alonso is pretty satisfied with 8<sup>th</sup> on the grid, and says that it probably would have been the same if it was dry. Piquet is not happy with 17<sup>th</sup>, but was expecting a difficult day, and knows tomorrow will be exactly the same.

Vettel, obviously, is ecstatic, and says it will take time for pole position to sink in. He said: “There are two Italian teams, Ferrari is the bigger one, but I think today, people will also know about Scuderia Toro Rosso.” Bourdais sums things up nicely for the whole team: “It was a bit crazy out there. Seb pulled out a great lap and pole is fantastic for him and the team and so is having both cars on the two front rows. I was third for a moment, but I'm not complaining. Given how things went in the dry in practice, I certainly could not have hoped for better than this.”

That's it for Saturday at Monza. I hope you can join us on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting during the race tomorrow, or if not, I'd love to hear your thoughts on whatever happens, either by voicemail – 0121 28 87225 – or email me Christine @ sidepodcast.com

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