

F1 Digest – Italy GP

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest from Sidepodcast – your dedicated race coverage. This weekend we've looked at all the Free Practice sessions and qualifying, and now it's time to catch up with what happened in the Italian Grand Prix.

The Race

Since the end of qualifying yesterday to the beginning of the race today, we have been constantly monitoring the weather. It didn't tell us that much, really, except that conditions were still changeable but mostly wet. No surprise then, to find that ahead of the race, it was raining, the track was wet and extreme tyres were the way to go. Massa even slid his way round the circuit just trying to get to the grid. The track was about 15 degrees C, and the air temperature about 1 degree lower. Button and Nakajima both decided to start from the pitlane, whilst we learnt that Massa was joining Webber in using his freebie joker card thing to change his engine without penalty.

With just five minutes to go, Race Control announced that the race would start behind the safety car, and whilst the rain was gradually getting lighter, the track was really, really wet. The safety car pulled away, the grid got moving, all except Bourdais, who had stalled. The mechanics pushed him to the pit lane and worked on getting him going again. The Safety Car led for two laps before peeling off into the pit lane, and Bourdais joined the back of the pack the second time round, meaning he was already a lap down before the race had even got going.

At the front, however, the other Toro Rosso was storming away, although storming might be the wrong word because they were all being a bit cautious. MSD commented on Sidepodcast.com: "Am always amused how they can see a thing in that spray... who will be first off?" Glock immediately managed to get past Alonso for 7th but the Renault pulled it right back again. Hamilton passed Raikkonen, albeit by cutting the chicane, and he sensibly gave the position back, the penalty seemingly ringing in all the drivers ears. Raikkonen then scampered away, and tried to overtake Fisichella in the Force India ahead of him. He couldn't make it stick down the main straight, and took the rest of the lap to finally get past. MikeP left a note in the Live Comments: "Hamilton will hate having Fisi in between he and Kimi." Hamilton responded immediately, closed in on the Force India, and had the same trouble before finally putting Fisichella behind him. Hamilton then passed Raikkonen, much too easily and began his journey through the field.

Towards the front, Massa and Rosberg were battling it out, the Ferrari sliding past after a chicane or two. However, it looked like Ferrari might have told Massa to give the place back, worried about the chicane business, so it took Massa another few minutes to finally make the move stick. Fisichella and Coulthard were also in the midst of an overtaking manoeuvre, with the Red Bull passing the Force India with ease, but Fisichella unable to slow enough. He dislodged his front wing, which then fell off, got lodged under the car, and sent him straight off into the barriers. A disappointing end after a great start for Fisi. Scottintaly thought Coulthard might have got a benefit though: "DC just did his fastest S1. Must have subtly adjusted his wings on the car next to him."

Hamilton got past Glock, Kubica and Alonso, making it look just too easy. Meanwhile, Vettel was the first to come in to the pits, on lap 18. He took on extreme wet tyres again, which seemed like the right decision as several teams were on the radio to their drivers predicting more rain.

After several more passes, and the three leading drivers pitting, suddenly Hamilton was up to second. With a one stop strategy, it looked like things may just be going the McLaren's way. He finally came into the pits at the end of lap 27, had a good stop, put on the extreme wets, and came out 10th. Coulthard came in for his stop on the next lap,



and was the first man to put on intermediate tyres. If the predicted rain hit, this would be an interesting choice. During Rosberg's pit stop on the same lap, the crew couldn't get the fuel rig out, and delayed him for several seconds.

All eyes on Coulthard then, as he gingerly completed his out lap on the inters. Alonso came in for his stop, and decided to join DC on the same tyre choice. Steven Roy commented on Sidepodcast.com: "What happened to the rain? Is there anyone in F1 who can forecast weather?"

Massa came in for his second pit stop, relatively early compared to his first, and he switched to the intermediates, seemingly the tyre of choice now. Piquet, meanwhile, just kept on going and going, without coming in for his stop. Everyone else came in for their second stop, chose the inters, and there was the Renault, still circulating. He finally came in, and you guessed it, put on the inters. Unfortunately for Hamilton, he also had to do the same, having made the wrong tyre choice on his initial one-stop strategy. With inters bolted on, he rejoined in 8th, and immediately overtook Webber. He kept the speed up and started posting the fastest laps.

A light rain started, seeing Coulthard run wide, Piquet mess up the chicane, and for some reason, Raikkonen wake up. He started posting the fastest lap times, although much too late to make any real headway. Whilst Kimi seemed to be on the up, Hamilton was struggling. With the right tyres on, he'd made good progress, but they soon burnt out, and he was falling back into the clutches of Webber. The pair actually touched round one of the corners, and Webber was pushed off track.

Barrichello also had tyre troubles, as he came in for his final pit stop with just a few laps left to go. He switched to what we assumed to be extreme wets, and struggled thereafter.

Nakajima tried to pass Coulthard, running all the way round the outside of the corner, but they came together, running the Williams off the road and leaving debris all over the track. Thankfully, most people avoided it and we didn't see any punctures.

Finally, after a long afternoon, Vettel held his nerve and crossed the start line to see the chequered flag first. He finished ahead of Kovalainen, Kubica, Alonso, Heidfeld, Massa, Hamilton and Webber. Ryan left a happy thought on Sidepodcast.com: "I predict that Monday morning will find the STR crew with the Mother of All Hangovers (if they're not still at it!)." Whilst Poppy was a little bit more cynical: "I think Toro Rosso have mixed a little Red Bull in the Fuel mix."

Championship

Hamilton is clinging on to his driver's championship lead, now only 1 point ahead of Massa – 78 to 77. Kubica stretches his lead on Raikkonen, the BMW driver now on 64, the Ferrari on 57. Heidfeld rounds out the top five with 53 points.

The constructors still has Ferrari on top with 134 points, but McLaren aren't far behind on 129, and BMW not far behind them on 117. The fierce battle for fourth has Toyota and Renault on the same points with 41 each. Although outside the top five, it's worth mentioning that Toro Rosso have now jumped Red Bull 27 to 26. How embarrassing!

Conclusions

Let's start with an Italian, then, for the Italian Grand Prix. Trulli had a disappointing day: "In the wet conditions early on I was going well on the heavy wet tyres but we had no luck with the strategy because the timings just didn't work out for us today. When I came in for my pit stop it was still four or five laps too soon for standard wet tyres. That meant we had to pit again shortly afterwards and we lost everything. Later on I was not as competitive because I was

sliding around. So it was not our day today.” Glock agrees it was difficult, with his spin compounding their troubles, although he is happy that he got some overtaking done during the race.

Alonso says Renault were looking forward to this race the least of all, so finishing 4th is a complete bonus. “We made up the five points that we needed in our championship fight, which is really rewarding and a big source of motivation for the rest of the season. I am now curious to see what awaits us in Singapore.” Piquet is pretty understated about his performance: “I had a good fight through the pack today and my pace was good considering the fuel load that I started with, which is quite satisfying. Unfortunately I finished outside the points, but I think that everything was decided in qualifying.”

Button explains his starting position: “We decided to start the race from the pitlane today as it may have given us an advantage with tyre choice, however when the race started behind the safety car it just meant that my tyres and brakes were very cold. The first couple of laps were quite difficult with the amount of spray and I lost a place which was disappointing.” He does cheer up slightly though, saying: “The last stint was a lot of fun though as we left the very worn wet tyres on and I had a couple of purple middle sectors.” Barrichello tells us that he switched to dry tyres, and not extremes: “The wet tyres worked well in the middle stint but when I came up to my second stop with ten laps to go, the team asked if it was dry enough for slicks. It was not quite dry enough however they asked me to give it a go as we had nothing to lose. I tried my best but it was definitely too wet. We could have finished higher up by sticking to the wets but it was worth trying something different.”

Sutil bemoans the trouble he had with his tyres and sums up his day by saying it was a race to forget. Fisichella admits it's tough not to have managed to convert the good qualifying position into a race result. Vijay Mallya tries to buoy them up by saying at least they have learned that Force India can be competitive in full wet conditions, which might be useful in the last few races.

Williams finished the day 12th and 14th, with Nakajima complaining about the poor visibility and Rosberg blaming the tyre degradation. Sam Michael gives us more of an insight into what went wrong: “We struggled for pace on Nico's car in the first stint with a heavy fuel load and then unfortunately at his pit stop window we stayed on extreme wet tyres, but within a couple of laps, it became clear that the track had shifted to inters and we were forced to make another stop, which cost us 25 seconds. On Kazuki's car, we started from the pitlane on a different aero level and this paid off at various stages in the race, but not enough for points.”

Webber admits that they made some mistakes today, but is feeling pretty optimistic about their performance: “The last section wasn't too bad, but when you're ten seconds behind starting it, then that's where you've finished. So we did give some points away today, but it's hard to get everything right on days like this.” Coulthard said it went wrong from the start: “I had some difficulties in the beginning as my brake balance bar jammed, so I couldn't get rearwards on the brakes - they locked up and I went off at 2nd Lesmo. Thereafter I burned out the rear tyres early so I had blisters on the rear wets.”

Kubica is very happy with third and a podium finish, especially because he says visibility was really bad: “When the Safety Car went in after two laps, I overtook Nick before the first chicane without even seeing him. It was really dangerous.” And Heidfeld's side of the story: “Unfortunately I lost a place to Robert right at the start. It was the right decision to let us start behind the Safety Car. When it pulled off the visibility was still so poor that I braked much too early and Robert passed me.”

Kovalainen didn't look too happy on the podium, picking up his second place, but he says the points are good, and his main problem was the extreme wet tyres. Once on the intermediates, he was more comfortable. Hamilton seems frustrated at how his day turned out: “I felt I drove a really good race and was moving through the field very quickly when the circuit was at its wettest. If it had kept on raining, I feel pretty confident I probably could have even won



from 15th grid position.” He says the day was all about damage control though, and he still leads the driver’s championship.

Massa concedes it was a tough race and that he was hoping to have done much better, but has to be satisfied with having made up a point to Hamilton in the championship. He says that if it hadn’t been raining, he believes he could have made it onto the podium. Raikkonen knows that today has put him even further back in the competition for the title, but says it was all down to tyres: “In the conditions at the start, as we have seen before in the past, we could not keep our tyres up to temperature and we totally lacked grip. I could do nothing but try to stay on the track hoping the conditions would change. When they did, unfortunately it was too late to aim for a points finish. The car worked well but without grip, you're not going anywhere.”

Unfortunately for Toro Rosso, Bourdais finished at the back, but even he can see that it’s a good day: “It should have been a dream weekend with a chance of finishing first and third but sadly for me, it was first and nothing. However, this has been a great day for Sebastian and the team.” The funny thing about Vettel’s quotes is that he has a whole paragraph thanking the team, then says he’s speechless, then there’s a whole other paragraph about the race. Not quite speechless then. He says it was a fantastic day: “In the last stint I was in a very good position on the intermediate tyre. I couldn't believe it when it kept saying "P1" on my board. But I kept my focus and kept pushing so as not to lose concentration. A perfect weekend.”

That’s it for this show. We’ve got a two week gap now before the action kicks off again, this time at Singapore and in the dark. It should be exciting and until then I’ll see you on Sidepodcast.com.

