

## F1 Digest - Singapore Qualifying

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### Intro

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This is F1 Digest brought to you by Sidepodcast, and this week we're covering the Singapore Grand Prix. Already we've enjoyed Free Practice 1 and 2, and today we'll look at what happened in FP3 and Qualifying.

### Free Practice 3

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Despite all the talk of a wet weekend, we have so far yet to see any rain. Free Practice 3 began with a beautiful sunset, although humidity was once again high. The track was at about 32 degrees C, and air at 30.

As soon as the lights went green, a host of cars dived out onto the track, and installation laps were set by everyone bar the Ferrari's. Coulthard must have been disappointed with his, though, as he crawled round the track really slowly – his Red Bull stuck in third gear. He returned to the pit lane and Dom commented on Sidepodcast.com: "DC out before he's even begun." Jeremy added: "I guess that's what installation laps are for."

Glock was the first man to set a time with Trulli close behind him. When Raikkonen hit the track, his first lap put him out of the top ten, but next time round he posted the fastest time. Massa managed third at his first attempt. Glock re-took P1, but Vettel soon beat him, showing that his Monza form wasn't a one-off. By half-time, the McLarens were making their mark on the timesheets, Kovalainen just sixth, whilst Hamilton popped into second on his first timed lap.

All of a sudden, Piquet posted the fastest time, whilst Button also managed to make his way up into the top ten. Raikkonen, who was running around 7<sup>th</sup>, ran wide and disappeared down a run off road. He couldn't seem to find his way back, and eventually had to give up. Meanwhile, Nakajima brushed up against the wall but managed not to sustain any damage, whilst Fisichella was launched over the chicane kerbs and hit the wall. The Force India did sustain some damage.

As the session drew to a close, we saw lots of drivers taking to the track with soft tyres on. Alonso went fastest, whilst Kovalainen had to swing out wide to miss a slower car, and almost came into contact with the wall. Kovi managed to save it though, but couldn't pull his final lap together.

At the end of the session, the fastest five were Alonso, Hamilton, Massa, Piquet and Rosberg.

### Quali 1

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Sutil was the first man to hit the track for qualifying, followed by Glock, and Raikkonen, who was out unusually early for a Ferrari. Fisichella was still stuck in the pit lane, his car being worked on from his off earlier in the day. Sutil's first lap time was three seconds off the pace, so once again it was Glock who set an early benchmark. However, the McLaren's joined in the fun, as did Massa, leaving just the Renault's and Fisichella in the pit lane.

Raikkonen's first lap put him into sixth, whilst Kovalainen slipped into P1 momentarily, until Vettel beat him, and then Hamilton beat the pair of them. The Renault's finally left the pit lane, and Alonso immediately went second. Scott Woodwiss left a comment at Sidepodcast.com: "At the moment the McLarens, Massa and Alonso look best suited to this circuit so far."

There have been concerns through most of the sessions about the pit lane entrance, as it involves cars braking on the racing line. We saw our first problem, with Barrichello on a hot lap, discovering Heidfeld in the BMW slowing to



go into the pit lane. Barrichello gesticulated his displeasure, and gave up his lap, deciding to dive into the pit lane himself.

As everyone came into the pits for new tyres, Raikkonen returned to an almost empty track, having already visited the garage. He posted the fastest time. Meanwhile, Fisichella had also managed to leave the pit lane but just a lap or so later, and he was into the wall again. In the live comments, Dom said: "Fisi has done exactly the same thing???" with three question marks! The yellow flags came out, holding up some flying lap attempts. Fisichella did manage to get the car moving again, and returned to the pit lane slowly. After the timer hit zero, Rosberg disappeared off down a run off, missing the wall by inches.

At the end of the session, the fastest three were: Raikkonen, Kovalainen and Hamilton, whilst dropping out: Piquet, Bourdais, Barrichello, Sutil, Fisichella.

### Quali 2

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It took a few minutes for the action to get going in the second session, and Kovalainen was the first to brave leaving the pit lane. Once he had done so, everyone came out and after four minutes, it was just the BMW boys left to make an appearance.

Alonso suddenly slowed and pulled off track, and we heard him on the radio to his team saying the car was just stopping. It turned out to be a fuel supply problem and Alonso did not look best pleased. Meanwhile, Kovalainen set the first lap time which was about three seconds off the pace of Vettel, who immediately posted P1.

Hamilton's first attempt at a flying lap went very wrong, after locking up, he ran wide off the track and completely missed a corner. He had to abort the lap and returned to the pit lane. He remained in the pits for worryingly long, until he was the only man who hadn't set a time, if you discount Alonso.

When everyone returned to the track, Kovalainen posted the second fastest time, whilst Hamilton could only manage 8<sup>th</sup>. He crossed the line in time to complete another lap however. Glock slipped into 5<sup>th</sup>, and was then pushed down to 6<sup>th</sup> by Rosberg. All eyes were on Hamilton but towards the end of his lap he hit some traffic and had to abandon that lap as well. He fed into the pit lane, sitting in 10<sup>th</sup> position, and must have had his fingers crossed. Luckily for him, no one managed to push him out and he scraped through to Q3.

The fastest three at the end of the session were: Massa, Kovalainen, Raikkonen, and we lost: Trulli, Button, Webber, Coulthard, Alonso.

### Quali 3

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There was no waiting around for Q3 as seven drivers hit the track in the first minute, and everyone was out thirty seconds later. Vettel was the first to set a lap time, but he was immediately beaten by Raikkonen. Once again, Kovalainen's first attempt at a lap was several seconds off the pace. Both Williams drivers were in the middle of the pack, which is the first time both have been through to Q3 since Monaco 2006. Thanks to R.G. for doing the research on that fact.

The quick tyre change in the pits saw Vettel first in and out, putting on the harder compound. With two minutes on the clock, all had been into the pits and all were back out again, trying for their final flying lap. Hamilton managed to finally pull a lap together and posted the fastest time, but behind him was Massa on a charge, and he grabbed pole position by 6 tenths of a second. Jon Waldock said: "6 tenths!! he's gotta be lighter!!" Dom added: "That was incredible." Whilst UncleM0nty said: "What a shame, Lewis really pulled one out of the bag there."

The final ten: Massa, Hamilton, Raikkonen, Kubica, Kovalainen, Heidfeld, Vettel, Glock, Rosberg, Nakajima.



Afterwards, the stewards announced a three place grid penalty for Heidfeld, dropping him from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, just ahead of Nakajima. They felt that he impeded Barrichello. However, the Honda driver got his own penalty, a 10,000 Euro fine, for diving into the pit lane and not using the deceleration zone during that same incident.

### Conclusions

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Webber said that he had a disappointing day and felt it was difficult to find a good rhythm out on track. He also reckons that traffic might have cost him some time as well. Coulthard said of his day: "I had to make it up a little bit in qualifying today, as I missed out on track time this morning. On a track like this you really need miles to get your hand in. On my flying lap I was over the top on some corners, but I think I did pretty well on others. It's not good to start the race tomorrow in the middle of the pack."

For Toro Rosso, Vettel's happy with his performance today, and wasn't expecting to finish 7<sup>th</sup> after some difficulties yesterday. He does believe the race will be long, difficult, and hot, but seems to be looking forward to it. Bourdais had a slightly more tricky time: "I don't know what happened in this session. Every time I braked, the car went sideways. It was pulling to the left and alternately locking one of the rear wheels. The car behaved completely differently to FP3 but we have not changed anything. My first run was messy and my second run was just weird and there was no way I felt I could attack as I had no stability or grip, with the car running asymmetrically."

Alonso's incredibly unhappy with his 15<sup>th</sup> grid slot: "It's a really big disappointment because we had a real chance to do something special today, perhaps not pole position but to at least qualify in the top four. Our weekend was going really well and we had big hopes for this evening." Piquet is another who felt good at the end of Free Practice but couldn't get the car to work in qualifying.

Button is feeling positive about the race: "I'm pretty happy with our qualifying performance today and it is certainly a big improvement on the last few races. My final lap was compromised with too much understeer and very low grip in the first sector, but it was reasonable and it's nice to have the pace to compete in Q2 again. We got to grips with the circuit pretty quickly at the start of the weekend, which has provided a good foundation for qualifying today and our race preparation for tomorrow." Barrichello knows that traffic was his downfall today, getting stuck behind Heidfeld, obviously, but also Alonso who caused some yellow flags.

Nakajima starts tenth, but it's the first time he has got into the third session, so he's pretty pleased: "It was a great qualifying session for me today. Over the course of the season, I have missed out on Q3 many times by a very small margin, so it was great to make it into the top ten. After the first two sessions, qualifying with extra fuel for the first time was difficult, let alone the usual issues with traffic and just having one chance to get it right." Rosberg echoes his sentiments, saying it's good for the team to have both cars in the top ten, but he was hoping for more than the ninth he achieved on track.

For BMW, Kubica thinks qualifying fourth is alright, but he's not happy with the a couple of the laps he did. He thinks that tyre degradation is going to be a really important factor in the race. Heidfeld was relatively happy with his 6<sup>th</sup> place, but is presumably not so impressed with 9<sup>th</sup>. He ends his quotes with: "This could become the most demanding Grand Prix of the year."

Fisichella holds the "Understatement of the week" award for: "Unfortunately today wasn't my day!" You can say that again, Fisi! He continues on: "I had an accident over the kerbs in turn 10 in practice - the kerbs in that corner are very dangerous as I launched over them and went into the barriers. The mechanics did a fantastic, fantastic job to get the car repaired and out for qualifying in the last five minutes. Unfortunately then I had a puncture and then another crash as the steering wasn't right because of the puncture. I'm really disappointed, not for myself as I think it would have been a tough qualifying anyway, but for the team as they worked so hard." Sutil adds that this is



probably one of the worst qualifying performances for the team, and that they'll be working hard to find out the problems before tomorrow.

Glock thinks he did the best job he could today, so 8<sup>th</sup> isn't too bad, and adds that the stability of the Toyota has been improved over the bumps. Trulli found the session frustrating, and is annoyed not to have got into Q3. Pascal Vasselon does try and cheer him up though, with the age old: "Starting 11<sup>th</sup> means choosing your own fuel level."

Hamilton thinks making tyre decisions is going to be tricky, as he couldn't feel a big difference between the hard and the soft compound. Kovalainen says it was just a small thing that sees him in 5<sup>th</sup>: "In Q3 on my last run I touched the wall slightly three corners from the finish which cost me some time. It's so close and competitive nowadays that even a minor mistake can cost me a few places on the grid, despite having a well balanced and quick car." Ron Dennis makes me chuckle though, saying: "Well, that was a pretty stressful qualifying hour!"

Finally, Ferrari, and Massa is happy with what he achieved today, pole position: "Given my margin over the others, with hindsight it's easy to say maybe I could have run with slightly more fuel, but we firmly believe we have a very competitive strategy. At every corner, at every braking point I tried to get the most out of the car and I think I managed it." Raikkonen is slightly more understated in third: "All things considered, this is a good result. Of course, you always hope to be in front of everyone but third place is not so bad. In Q1 and Q2, the car worked very well on the soft tyres but in Q3, on the harder ones, it was not so good anymore. Today, it was difficult to choose the best type of tyre for the decisive session because the performance difference over the first lap was not so great." Hmm, it sounds to me like tyre decisions could prove important in the race tomorrow.

That's it for today. Don't forget to visit Sidepodcast.com for the race, as we'll be live commenting throughout. Even if you just want to drop by and share your predictions, we'll be happy to hear them. Either way, I will be back tomorrow with a full round up of the action from the race.