



## F1 Digest - Malaysia Free Practice

---

### *Intro*

This is F1 Digest from Sidepodcast, our dedicated race weekend coverage. So far we have already brought you a preview of what to expect in Malaysia this weekend, and now it's time to look at how things went in Free Practice 1 and 2.

### *Free Practice 1*

Sepang is notorious for hosting the hottest and most humid race of the season. Although stormy weather is predicted at various points throughout the weekend, the Friday Free Practice sessions escaped without any rain. At the start of the first session, the track temperature was 38 degrees C and humidity was at 71%.

The two Force India cars were the first out on track but they were soon joined by a host of others. The majority of drivers put in an installation lap and then returned to the garages.

It may have been the effect of the heat or the back-to-back race weekends, but most of the drivers looked absolutely exhausted. Hamilton was moving about in slow motion, Alonso was slouched at the back of his garage and Trulli sat in his car, looking as though he was struggling to keep his eyes open.

On the live comment thread over at Sidepodcast.com, Steven Roy said: "Lewis looks so relaxed it is like he owns the world and doesn't have any problems." And Corey added: "Jarno seems really enthusiastic."

Out on track, Bourdais posted the first timed lap, a very slow one at that. He improved on his time on his second go, but team mate Vettel was quick to beat him.

More drivers began to emerge from their garages, Coulthard, Hamilton, Rosberg and Trulli all headed out onto the circuit. The lap times began to fall and it wasn't long before Hamilton posted the fastest time of the session so far. Raikkonen, just behind him, could only manage third.

Sutil pulled off the track with engine trouble, smoke was pouring from the back of his Force India. Another Ferrari engine bites the dust, but Sutil did manage to recover his car to the pit lane unaided.

Coulthard, meanwhile, had a catastrophic incident. He ran wide off the track, then hit the kerb coming back onto the tarmac, only this launched him into the air. For the second weekend in a row, his car shattered into a million pieces, even the tyres unable to stay restrained to the front suspension.

Scott Drydon commented: "The wheels came off in DC's accident, so it'd appear as if the tethers didn't do their job."

The session was red-flagged for the debris to be cleared, but Raikkonen couldn't manage to get back to the pit lane. He pulled off to the side of the track having run out of fuel, due to a miscommunication with the team.

The session was restarted with just over 30 minutes to go, and Kubica, Nakajima, plus both Super Aguri drivers had yet to set a lap time. They were amongst the scrum who headed back out on track once the red flag had gone.



Webber's luck continued to be sour with his Renault engine giving up along the back straight. Lou summed up what we were all thinking in the comments: "Oh no, not Webber again!" Kubica also looked like his car was having problems, as the BMW mechanics scrambled about trying to get him out to improve on the three laps he had managed to complete. It turned out to be a problem with the gearbox and he finally took to the track with just over 5 minutes to go, hitting 9<sup>th</sup> fastest on his first flying lap.

In the dying moments of the session, Vettel flew off the track into the gravel, and the replay showed a mysterious puff of black from his front right brake disc – similar to the problem Webber suffered last week in Australia.

When the time was finally up, the top five were: Massa, Raikkonen, Kovalainen, Rosberg and Hamilton.

### *Free Practice 2*

---

Ahead of Free Practice 2, the track temperature had increased to 47 degrees C, but the humidity was down to 53%. This obviously woke our drivers up a bit from the last session, because they all headed out on track as soon as the lights went green. The McLaren boys posted early fast times, with Kovalainen just pipping Hamilton to the top.

It emerged that Coulthard would not be taking part in the session, as the Red Bull mechanics pored over the remains of his car. Webber was out, though, running quite happily in the midfield.

The Ferrari engine continued to be a nuisance, as Bourdais pulled his Toro Rosso to the side of the track on his outlap. Vettel, meanwhile, was running in fifth. Massa posted the second fastest time, whilst Hamilton overtook Kovalainen to the top spot. On his next time round, Vettel improved to jump Massa into 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

The final corner appeared to be causing problems for a few drivers with a lack of grip – Alonso managed to spin 360 degrees, and then continue.

In Free Practice 1, all the drivers were on the harder tyre, so this second session was a chance to experiment. Hamilton ran a few laps on the medium compound, then tried out the hard tyres again, before switching to the medium tyres until the end. Massa stuck to the mediums, whilst Raikkonen switched between the two.

It didn't seem to make too much difference to the times though, Michael Roberts commented in the live thread: "4th to 17th are covered by just over a second!"

With under ten minutes to go, Hamilton posted the fastest time, looked like he was going to enjoy a second go at the top spot, but retired to the pit lane at the last minute. Massa attempted to grab the headlines, but could only manage second.

SteveintheUK noticed that it wasn't really a strain for Hamilton, saying: "Lewis is so fast he has time to look at a huge wrist watch when driving an F1 car. Now much does that weigh?"

The top five were: Hamilton, Massa, Raikkonen, Button and Vettel.

### *Conclusions*

---

The big news to emerge from both Friday sessions is the unreliability of the Red Bull chassis. In fact, the stewards have asked Red Bull Racing to provide them with a technical report to convince them not to exclude the cars from the race. There is clearly a problem with the suspension, after last week's race and Coulthard's smash in FP1. Christian Horner defended the car after his first meeting with the stewards, however, saying it was a new component that failed, they are fully aware and in control of the situation and they don't expect any more problems.



The other notable incidents were the Ferrari engine failures. Ferrari themselves are pretty happy with their running today, whilst Bourdais has said it was a mistake on Toro Rosso's part that broke the engine and not just a simple failure. You have to wonder though, if Toro Rosso will make it through the weekend safely. They've got all of Red Bull's chassis worries and all of Ferrari's engine problems bundled together in one car. Scary stuff.

Renault are feeling more confident after their performance today. Alonso did comment on the heat, and he had a problem with his gearbox in the second session, but says they will be analysing that before qualifying. Piquet is happy he managed to complete all the work he had planned and feels much more prepared for this race than he did for Australia.

Button finished 4<sup>th</sup> fastest in the second session but doesn't harbour any illusions that this will be maintained through qualifying and the race. Jenson said they did plenty of running to try and evaluate the completely resurfaced track, and get as much data as possible. Barrichello says that Honda are aiming to qualify 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> – best of the rest. That way they get to choose their own fuel level and don't have to waste an extra set of tyres.

Graham Taylor, Sporting Director of Super Aguri, really summed up their experience so far. "A wide range of analysis has been conducted today, with neither driver particularly happy at the start with the balance, but our work continues. I believe that we are all lamenting the lack of winter testing and it is really hitting home now."

Let's hope for good things in qualifying for them tomorrow, if only to lift their spirits. You can find out what does happen in tomorrow's qualifying show, but before then, make sure to visit Sidepodcast.com during Free Practice 3 and all three quali sessions and join in the live commenting. See you there.

sidepodcast.com  
YOUR WEEKLY F1 FIX