



F1 Digest – Singapore GP

Intro

Welcome to the final F1 Digest for the Singapore Grand Prix weekend. We've looked at all that's gone before, the Free Practice sessions and Qualifying, but now it's time to take a look at what happened during the race itself.

The Race

Once again, it looked like we were going to escape rain, and as the driver's formed the grid, the track was at 31 degrees C, and the air at 28. Humidity was up to 78%. All but Alonso lined up with hard tyres on, whilst the Renault driver had chosen the soft rubber. Fisichella started from the pitlane.

The lights went out and the first ever night race got underway very cleanly. The front runners skipped away from the rest of the pack, whilst the mid field ran side by side through the first few corners. Alonso managed to get straight up to 12th, whilst the only real incident was with Kovalainen who had fallen backwards. He and Kubica jostled round a corner, touching at one point, although no major harm was done. Then Kovi overtook Glock, but the Toyota got the place straight back. At the front, Massa was pulling away from Hamilton, with Raikkonen struggling to keep up with the pair of them.

Trulli was holding everyone up, never has the phrase Trulli train been more appropriate. Rosberg was stuck behind him and told over his team radio to pass him or else that would be his race over. He attempted the manoeuvre but ran wide around the corner and effectively handed the place back. Next attempt though, and he got past, locking up as he braked hard into the corner. Once the floodgates were open, they were soon all streaming past the Toyota, as Nakajima and Alonso both overtook in the next minute or so.

There was some debris on the circuit, unknown but looking like a big part of someone's car. It was causing yellow flags. At one point Webber hit it and it looked like it was going to bounce out of the way, but it fell back onto the racing line again. Eventually, Massa ran right over it and it got lodged under his car. Thankfully, it didn't seem to cause him a problem, and at least it got it out the way.

Alonso came into the pits really early, on lap 12 having switched strategies. Meanwhile his team mate had a big smash out on track. Piquet had spun and crashed into the wall, apologising to the team over the radio. The Safety and Medical Cars were both deployed – the medical driven by Alex Wurz, apparently, as the regular driver had been taken ill. Rosberg, Kubica and Barrichello all dived into the pit lane, despite it being closed. Moments later, as the Honda returned to the track, he was slowing to a stop, his race over. The safety car stayed out for a few more laps to sort both cars out, the pit lane opened and everyone filed in for their stops.

Ferrari had another disastrous pit stop. Massa was in first, the automatic lights in place of a lollipop turned green and he went galloping down the pit lane. However, he was straight into the path of Sutil, again, with the Force India smartly avoiding an accident. More importantly, though, the fuel rig was still attached, the hose was ripped off, and Massa had to stop at the end of the pit lane, trailing the equipment behind him. The Ferrari mechanics sprinted down the pit lane, and spent a good minute trying to remove the jammed rig from the car. Eventually they managed it and released Massa but he was now at the back of the pack.

The safety car came in and the restart order was Rosberg, Trulli, Fisichella, Kubica and Alonso. We knew that Rosberg and Kubica would receive a penalty for refuelling when the pit lane was closed, and both Trulli and Fisichella still had to pit. Therefore, Alonso was the effective leader.

Webber and Coulthard, who had both pitted just as the safety car was called, and therefore escaped penalty, had returned to the track ahead of Hamilton, and began to hold the McLaren up. Webber ran really wide at one corner, and lost a handful of places, meaning Hamilton began to chase Coulthard down for 7th place. Meanwhile, Massa was investigated and given a drive through penalty for unsafe release from the pits, which he served straight away, and of course, returned at the back of the pack, although still in front of Bourdais.

Rosberg came into the pits and joined in front of Coulthard, and therefore Hamilton as well. Webber clearly had more of a problem than just running wide, as he headed back to his garage to retire. The new running order was Alonso, Rosberg, Coulthard, and Hamilton, and finally things seemed to calm down.

Hamilton was pushing to get past Coulthard, but couldn't seem to get around the Red Bull. Alonso came in for his final pit stop, and having started on the soft tyres, he was one of the few who could change onto the harder tyres for the final stint. Hamilton made it past Coulthard, and then dived straight into the pit lane. DC was in at the same time, but the McLaren was easily out in front.

Trulli's gearbox gave way, and the Toyota coasted slowly back to the pit lane. However, there was a little bit more mischief in the old dog yet, as Massa came across the Toyota which obviously threw him slightly, and he spun and hit the wall under the grandstand. Not hard enough to do any damage, and he pulled away, but hard enough to knock some water onto the track. Seconds later, Sutil was into the wall there as well. This time there was damage and the Force India's race had come to an end. The Safety Car came out and picked up Alonso to lead him round whilst the car was recovered. Race Control also announced that the kerbs at Turn 7 were falling apart slightly, although it didn't look like it would be a problem.

When the Safety Car peeled into the pit lane, Alonso streaked away to start rebuilding his lead, whilst Rosberg had less of a start but crucially managed to keep Hamilton behind him. It did look like the McLaren wanted to get past but after a couple of laps, he seemed to settle for third position. Meanwhile, Raikkonen, running in 5th, lost it over the chicanes and crashed into the wall. It wasn't a dangerous position, so no Safety Car required. For a moment, it looked as though the race would have to stop early, or else run over the two hour time, but it finished exactly on the mark.

The final points positions went to: Alonso, Rosberg, Hamilton, Glock, Vettel, Heidfeld, Coulthard, Nakajima.

Championship

Hamilton will be pleased to have stretched out his 1 point lead to a 7 point lead. He's now ahead of Massa 84 to 77. Kubica has 64 and Raikkonen 57, whilst Heidfeld remains in contention on 56. I say he remains in contention, but of course, with only three races remaining, and a maximum of 30 points available, Heidfeld has to make up 28 points, and Raikkonen, in particular, 27. That's a tough ask.

McLaren have finally overhauled Ferrari's lead in the constructor's championship, they now have 135 to Ferrari's 134. BMW have 120, whilst Renault cement their fourth position 51 to Toyota's 46.

Conclusions

Post race, it emerged that Toyota have lodged a complaint against Toro Rosso saying that Vettel was released into the path of Glock in an unsafe way. It seemed a bit odd from Toyota, as Vettel finished behind them and Toro Rosso are behind them in the constructors. The stewards rejected it, anyway. We'll start our quotes with Toyota then, and Glock says he's happy with his work today: "It was quite tough out there in these conditions and with such a bumpy track the car was not very comfortable to drive; I am sure I will feel the effects tomorrow. My goal at the beginning of the year was to score 20 points this season so I am very satisfied to achieve that with three races still to go." Trulli

believes he would have finished in fifth and picked up a good haul of points, but it was not to be. Now he believes that he's owed some good luck.

Vettel thinks the day was tricky, but is happy with fifth: "Overall, this was a good race for us, even if the safety car didn't help. It was a difficult race for everyone, but the important thing is we have scored some more points. The hardest elements in the race were dealing with the heat and concentrating not to make any mistakes, as it could be very easy to clip a kerb." Bourdais finished in 12th, but says it was a long night: "When I was running on my own my brake balance was fine, but once I was in traffic I kept losing the front end, even with all the brake bias on the rear. I know it was difficult to pass here, but I was even having difficulty following other cars and didn't know where my limit was."

For Force India, Sutil believes there wasn't much more he could have done: "It was just so unlucky when Felipe spun in front of me and then suddenly pulled away. The way was blocked, but I avoided a crash with him only to go into the barrier myself." Fisichella, meanwhile, believes he did the maximum he could today, and was actually just quite happy to be racing after so many accidents during the weekend.

Button finished 9th and although that's better than some of Honda's more recent results, he feels that the Safety Car timing was against them and that it's just frustrating to be out of the points. Barrichello is even more frustrated though, as he felt like he had good pace and a great opportunity with the Safety Car, but then the engine just died.

Coulthard is reasonably satisfied, although he did have a problem with his second pit stop that saw one of the guys twist his ankle, and burn his thumb. He's okay though, and Coulthard says these things happen. Webber knows he's missed out on something special: "I lost seventh and then fifth gear, which cost us a fantastic result, as I was stopping for my second pit stop later than Fernando. It would have been nice to share the podium with him today, with him winning and me second. We got a bit lucky with the safety car, but in the end it didn't work out."

Hamilton felt like getting stuck behind Coulthard was the turning point of the race, and even though he felt like he could have got past Rosberg towards the end, he didn't want to risk anything on a street circuit where it's going to be difficult to overtake. Kovalainen blames three specific things for his bad race. Firstly, the incident with Kubica which damaged his floor, secondly, he was stacked behind Lewis during the first Safety Car period, and thirdly, he had to conserve his brakes towards the end. All in all, a difficult day, but he's happy that McLaren have taken the constructor's championship lead.

Over at BMW, Heidfeld believes traffic ruined his day: "Although I shouldn't complain about finishing sixth when I came from ninth, I must say it is such a shame I couldn't show my pace today. The car was so good and I could have gone a lot faster if I hadn't been stuck in traffic all the time. I was even saving fuel and tyres because I hoped the others would kill their tyres and I could attack later. I think some did ruin their rubber, but still this wasn't enough of an advantage to overtake." Kubica found it a very tough day physically: "There are so many bumps, I hope the organisers will work on the surface for next year. On top of that, the visibility was getting worse and worse as I was getting tired. Over the final fifteen laps I had an incredible headache." Me too, Kubica, me too.

Rosberg is counting his blessings to have finished second: "Before my stop-go penalty, I just had to push like mad and do qualifying lap after qualifying lap and I managed to build enough of a gap to complete my second stop and hold on to second place. With a handful of laps to go in the most physical race this year and a car in your mirrors, time goes amazingly slowly, but for once everything went our way." Nakajima congratulates Nico on his podium, and although is slightly rueful of the Safety Car timing, he's still happy to have picked up a point.

I bet the driver's briefing at Ferrari will be an interesting one after this race, but let's keep it short for now. Massa says that people do make mistakes, and it's just unfortunate, although it's hard to lose what was such a promising



race. He also mentions picking up a puncture towards the end of the race, which made things even worse. Raikkonen is downbeat, and knows his title chances are essentially gone: "I was trying to attack Glock in case he might make a mistake, but I went slightly wide at the chicane, jumping over the kerb and when the car landed, I lost control and ended up in the barriers. My situation in the championship was already rather compromised, so this doesn't really make that much difference but I am unhappy because the team has lost precious points in the Constructors' classification."

The celebrations are reserved for Renault with Alonso not only getting on the podium for the first time of the season but picking up his first victory this year as well: "Winning a Grand Prix here just seemed to be impossible because we missed our chance yesterday in qualifying, but we were very fortunate today and it's a superb result for the team. We chose a very aggressive strategy and we had a bit of luck, but we had the pace and the car was fantastic throughout the weekend." Piquet is naturally disappointed but says he's happy for the team this evening. Pat Symonds sums it up best though: "I think the luck we had in the early part of the race was nearly a cancellation of the bad luck we had yesterday. The car has proven itself and so has Fernando. The whole result is a tribute to the team and this wonderful circuit is a tribute to Singapore!"

That's it for this week. The next races are a double header at Japan and China, so our body clocks will be all messed up. However, I will be back with more coverage in F1 Digest, and until then I'll see you on Sidepodcast.com.

