



## F1 Digest - Japan Qualifying

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### Intro

Welcome to the third F1 Digest show for this Japanese Grand Prix weekend. We're looking at Free Practice 3 and Qualifying, so, let's get started.

### Free Practice 3

Saturday dawned with the predicted rain, although it had stopped by the time Free Practice was ready to start. The air and track temperature were both at 20 degrees C, and the session was declared wet. It's worth noting that Mount Fuji had disappeared into the clouds, just like last year.

Rosberg was the first man out, but it wasn't long before all were setting installation laps. Just Barrichello and the Ferrari boys remained in the pit lane. Button was the first to go out for a full lap time, and once he started, more followed his lead. Raikkonen left the pit lane, and slipped into fifth, whilst Vettel and Bourdais made it a Toro Rosso 1-2, until Kovalainen spoiled their party at the top.

Hamilton managed to jump into the lead, as Massa left the pit lane, almost twenty minutes into the session. The Ferrari slipped into seventh, as Glock took P1. Hamilton soon had it back though, whilst Massa improved to third. He was up to second next time round, and he started another lap. He ended up behind Raikkonen, though, and we saw one Ferrari move out the way of another – a sign of things to come perhaps? Either way, Massa couldn't improve on that particular lap.

The times began to tumble, we saw Piquet up in fourth, Glock second, and then Webber slipping into fourth as well. As the track dried, we saw more of these improvements, like Nakajima moving up to sixth. Raikkonen, meanwhile, was still down at the bottom end of the timesheets, He was 15<sup>th</sup>, then 13<sup>th</sup>, and then spun round on track.

With just a few minutes to go, Piquet posted the fastest time, then Heidfeld jumped him, then Kubica topped them all. By the time the session drew to a close, Kubica remained on top, followed by Glock, Piquet, Heidfeld, and Nakajima.

### Quali 1

The temperature between FP3 and Qualifying rose to 22 degrees for both air and track temperature. The clouds cleared, things brightened up, although the sun was still yet to make an appearance.

Piquet left the pit lane first, and set the first benchmark lap time, and he was followed by Rosberg Trulli and more. Massa was the first front runner to set a time, posting P1, but he was soon knocked down by Hamilton on a charge. Raikkonen slipped into 3<sup>rd</sup>.

With 10 minutes to go, BMW, Alonso and Webber were yet to get a time on the board, but Kubica put that right by jumping to sixth. Alonso managed eighth, whilst Webber couldn't haul himself out of the bottom five.

Glock went fastest, and Kovalainen slipped into second, then Massa posted P1, and then Hamilton. Meanwhile, at the bottom of the grid, it was surprising to find the BMWs once more, with Kubica squeezing through to Q2 in 14<sup>th</sup>, but Heidfeld not managing it.

The fastest three were Glock, Hamilton, Massa, and dropping out: Heidfeld, Barrichello, Button, Sutil, and Fisichella.

## Quali 2

The sun finally made its way through the clouds for the second session of qualifying. Raikkonen made a surprise journey to the track first, but it was over two minutes in before he did so. Others joined him, and although he posted the first benchmark, Massa soon jumped him. Glock slipped into third, but for the first time all weekend, team mate Trulli managed to get in front and push him down to fourth.

Hamilton posted the second fastest time, and Alonso eighth, although the Renault did look as though he was going to enter the pit lane before changing his mind at the last minute.

Kubica and Piquet left it the longest before setting a time, the BMW managing to get into seventh, but Piquet, with just four minutes to go, could only post the 12<sup>th</sup> fastest time. He went straight back into the pit lane, obviously accepting his inevitable knockout. Bourdais managed to slip into 8<sup>th</sup>, was pushed down to 10<sup>th</sup>, and teetered on the brink of being knocked out.

Everyone else was out on track trying to top their times, but at the end of the session the fastest three were Massa, Kovalainen and Hamilton, whilst we lost Coulthard, Piquet, Webber, Nakajima and Rosberg.

## Quali 3

Surprisingly, it was a few minutes before anyone hit the track in the third session, and once again it was Raikkonen and Glock who got things going. Raikkonen set the first benchmark, Massa posted the second fastest time, and Hamilton, although seemingly on a flyer, ended up P3.

First round to the Ferraris, then, and it was time for a pit stop for the softer tyres. Raikkonen kept his lead for his lap, and Massa remained in second, but when Hamilton finished his flying lap, he jumped to pole position.

Glock slipped into fourth, but once again Trulli managed to jump him. Alonso leapfrogged Massa for third, and then it was just left for Kovalainen, who pipped Alonso to third. The final grid line up is Hamilton, Raikkonen, Kovalainen, Alonso, Massa, Kubica, Trulli, Glock, Vettel, and Bourdais.

## Conclusions

Coulthard starts the race from 11<sup>th</sup> on the grid, and is pretty satisfied with that. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that he's actually in a good mood. "It was very close today. That was one of my better qualifying sessions, each of my laps were very tidy. I would love to have got through to Q3, as it would have meant more driving in the car on low fuel, but I don't think there was much more I could have got out of the car with the balance I had." Webber is only two places down on his team mate but is much more disappointed: "I wasn't quick enough today and when you don't get the times you don't go through. I didn't get it together in Q2 and you pay the price. There was more to get from the car, but I over drove on the last sector. It was a shame as I had had a good feeling for the car both yesterday and this morning, but qualifying didn't seem to work out for us today. It will be difficult from there tomorrow."

Over at sister team Toro Rosso, Vettel says getting both cars through to Q3 again is good, but the gap between them and the next fastest car is a bit too big. He believes the key to the race will be looking after your tyres. Bourdais is glad to be keeping up with his team mate, and especially because he thought he would struggle with the car at this circuit.

Williams have their cars in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> which wasn't as good as they were hoping. Rosberg is particularly disappointed after a podium finish in Singapore, but admits they were expecting to be less competitive. Nakajima has similar thoughts: "After a strong run in the practice sessions that was a difficult qualifying, but we did do our



best. I don't think that this afternoon's conditions suited the car that much and some traffic interrupted my last run, which didn't help me either. We now need to prepare a good strategy for tomorrow's race."

Although Trulli is happy with Toyota's qualifying performance today, he's not convinced about the cars with fuel in: "In Q2 I was 4th and Timo was 5th so it shows that the Toyotas are going well. Q3 was a bit of a mystery because as soon as we put the fuel on the car was rather unbalanced and we lost a lot of grip. So I wasn't so happy about the pace of Q3 but maybe its down to the different fuel levels." Glock is still doing it for the home crowd: "There are a couple of places where you can overtake here so let's see what happens tomorrow. What is great is the home support we've had here. There are so many Toyota fans and now we have both cars in the top ten we have a good chance to get both cars into the points."

For Renault, Alonso believes the car is working well with fuel: "We can be happy with fourth place, which is a good result and the work we did yesterday certainly paid us back today. We had a bit of trouble in Q2, but in Q3 with fuel on board the car felt good, which is encouraging for the race tomorrow and I think we can realistically aim for a top five finish." Piquet shares the fact that he's annoyed with himself: "I am very disappointed as I made a mistake in Q2 and I wasn't able to make it through to Q3. It's all the more frustrating because the car was really working well and I was feeling comfortable with it. I won't give up, but I know that the race tomorrow will be difficult and so I will do all that I can to try and fight through the field."

BMW had a completely topsy-turvy day with Kubica in 6<sup>th</sup> and Heidfeld 16<sup>th</sup>. The difference comes down to tyres, as Willy Rampf explains: "The most difficult part of today was the first session of qualifying, during which we planned to use the harder of the two tyre compounds. We wanted to have enough sets of the softer one for the remainder of qualifying and for the race. This decision cost Nick a place in Q2. It will be difficult to score points from 16th. Robert's performance was strong and he managed to clinch sixth. This was what we realistically expected."

Force India line up at the bottom of the grid with Sutil 19<sup>th</sup> and Fisichella in 20<sup>th</sup>. Sutil believes it was close today, and he's happy with his performance. He's taking some stock of the fact that Force India ended just 1 second from pole position, which is an improvement from the beginning of the season. Fisichella had problems with traffic and lost time with a lockup through the first corner, but he's looking forward to an exciting race.

Button is hoping for wet weather, which isn't looking likely: "It has not been the best of days for us today but hopefully the race tomorrow will be better. I have been struggling with the car for the whole weekend and have found it difficult to achieve a good balance. The car was better in the wet this morning, however the bumps and corner apexes are unsettling the car in the dry and we have not been able to resolve this." Barrichello meanwhile says they added front wing on his last run and it just caused major tyre problems.

Raikkonen appears to have finally conquered his qualifying demons, and says: "I'm pleased to be back on the front row, even if I'm not totally happy as I always want to be the fastest. On top of that, I'm not completely satisfied with the handling of my car: all weekend we have worked very hard to find the best set-up but we did not get it a hundred percent right. All the same, we have improved our performance, especially with a heavy fuel load." Massa starts from 5<sup>th</sup>, and isn't happy about it: "A shame. Today I was the quickest man on track but at the wrong moment. In Q3, I never had the right amount of grip from both sets of tyres that I used. On my first run I was a bit cautious on my "out" lap and so suffered in the first sector, making a mistake at Turn 3. On the second run, I did the opposite and found myself without grip at the end of the lap. So, I've ended up fifth on the grid, which is definitely not an easy place to be."

McLaren line up 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Hamilton thanks the team for doing a good job. "Usually, on a heavy fuel load, the car can be quite tough to drive on the limit, but I managed to pull all the sectors together and drove a pretty good lap. It wasn't perfect - I made a small mistake in the final corner, where I lost a tenth - but we had a good session."



Kovalainen says: "A pretty good session for me - it took a little time to get up to speed in Q1, but I put two good laps together in the final session. We were very quick in Q2 as well - and, while third was really the best I could manage today, I'm still very pleased with the result." So, it looks like it's McLaren's race to lose, and we may see team tactics come into play. I can't wait to see what happens.

That's it for this show. Don't forget that Live Commenting is available on Sidepodcast.com, no matter what time the race airs where you are. I hope to see you in the comments, or else I'll be back with the final F1 Digest for this weekend tomorrow.

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