



F1 Digest – Japan GP

Intro

This is F1 Digest, brought to you by Sidepodcast. We cover all sessions of a Grand Prix weekend, and having looked at Free Practice and Qualifying, now it's time for the race.

The Race

No rain was predicted for Sunday at Fuji, but there were clouds in the sky and it was cooler than it had been all weekend. The track temperature was about 22 degrees, the air at just 16.

As the lights went out, Hamilton had a bad start and let Raikkonen in front, whilst Kovalainen drew level with him. Hamilton braked really late at the end of the long straight, a stream of smoke pouring off his tyres as he locked up. The McLaren, and both Ferrari's ran wide around the corner, and allowed Kubica and Alonso through.

Further back, Coulthard got caught between Bourdais and Piquet into the first corner, and his suspension gave out, barrelling him across the grass and into the barrier. He was unhurt, but an early exit for the Red Bull. Nakajima had to take avoiding action to keep out the way of this incident, but also ended up running off track, his front wing flying off into the air. He kept on going, though.

Having lost all the places at the start, Hamilton tried to get past Massa, but the Ferrari went defensive. Massa ran off the track over the kerbs, and rejoining the pack, he nudged Hamilton and spun him round. Hamilton had to wait for the entire pack to pass before he could spin it back and continue on his way. He dived straight into the pit lane, where his car was checked over and his strategy changed to a one stop.

Glock came into the pits just a few laps later, and whilst it looked like an ordinary stop, he returned to the track only briefly before heading back to the garage. He climbed out of the car, another race finished.

Only another lap or so more and we had our next retiree, with Sutil's tyre deflating rapidly as he came to the end of the home straight. He pulled off track just past the pit exit. Meanwhile two incidents were announced as being investigated. Raikkonen, Hamilton and Massa for the first corner shenanigans, and Massa and Hamilton for the incident that saw the McLaren spin. For the former, Hamilton was given a drive through for forcing a car off track, and for the latter, Massa was also given a drive through.

At the front, Kubica led Alonso, with Kovalainen third, and Raikkonen desperately trying to catch him. However, Kovalainen's engine appeared to give up, and he pulled off the track.

Kubica and Raikkonen were the first two to take their scheduled pit stop, giving the lead to Alonso. The Spaniard came in on the next lap, though, leaving us with the ultimate Trulli train for the second race in a row. Hamilton served his drive through, Massa pitted for an actual stop, and then served his penalty on the next lap.

Trulli handed the lead to Bourdais, who gave it to Piquet, who came in to the pits on lap 28. Alonso had managed to come out in front of Kubica, having taken on less fuel, so the Renault was leading.

Meanwhile, Force India suffered their second retirement of the afternoon when Fisichella was pushed into the garage and out of the race.



Alonso began to pull away from Kubica at the front, putting in a couple of fastest laps, and by the time he pitted on lap 43, he had enough time to stay ahead of Kubica, who came in three laps later.

Raikkonen was briefly in the lead, as these pit stops took place, and set his own fastest lap, finally waking up. However, it was nowhere near enough to make a difference to the leaderboard. His pit stop saw him effectively remain in third.

Bourdais took his stop and on the way out of the pits, found Massa speeding down the straight. Bourdais wasn't prepared to hand it to Massa, so the pair battled round the first corner. It's not clear whether they touched or not, but Massa spun and lost the place. He righted himself and carried on, no major harm done. The stewards decided that this incident would be investigated but not until after the race.

Now stuck in tenth, following his final pit stop, Massa quickly dispatched Heidfeld and looked ready to chase after Webber. It looked an unlikely feat, with only 8 laps to go and the Ferrari as many seconds behind. However, Webber was struggling on tyres that were wearing very thin, and it took Massa only a couple of laps to close up. He hunted the Red Bull down the straight, and decided to overtake on the inside, crossing the pit lane white lines.

The action didn't stop on the last lap, either, as Hamilton, one lap down, found himself directly behind race leader Alonso. Desperate to unlap himself, Hamilton hassled him round a few corners, before Alonso wisely allowed the McLaren through. Crossing the line first, Alonso picked up his second victory in a row.

The final points positions went to Alonso, Kubica, Raikkonen, Piquet, Trulli, Bourdais, Vettel and Massa.

However, the investigation into the Bourdais/Massa incident saw the Toro Rosso receive a 25 second penalty added to his time. This pushed him down to tenth, promoted Vettel to sixth, Massa to seventh, and Webber got his point back.

Championship

Hamilton retains his lead at the top of the championship, and must be glad that Massa only picked up two points. The pair are on 84 and 79 respectively. Kubica is on 72, so is still in the title hunt. Raikkonen is now on 63 and Heidfeld on 56, neither are able to win the championship now.

Ferrari re-take the top spot in the constructor's championship with 142 points. Neither McLaren finished in the points, so they remain on 135. BMW have 128, whilst Renault have leapt to 66 points. Toyota must have to settle for fifth now, with 50 points.

Conclusions

Let's hear what Bourdais has to say first, then, as he's convinced he did nothing wrong: "For me it's very clear. Yes, I exit the pits, yes I'm supposed to be careful and I was. I stayed inside and I didn't push him out, I didn't overshoot the corner. I did everything I could not to run into him and he just squeezed and turned and behaved like I didn't exist, like I wasn't there." The best bit of his quote though, was: "I don't know what I was supposed to do basically. I could have unrolled the red carpet and given him the corner. That is the only thing I could have done." Meanwhile, Vettel said he had a tough day fighting his way back after the first corner chaos, and was hoping for more points, but he says getting some is good enough.

Both Williams drivers are disappointed with their day. Rosberg says they had a technical problem at the start so he just fell backwards off the line. He did manage some overtaking though, ending up 11th. Nakajima finished 15th, which was technically last, and although the first corner incident didn't help, he thinks the problem lies elsewhere: "I



don't think our race pace was that great, though, so I couldn't make any progress. We need to go away and work on our performance to see where we can improve for the next time.”

Glock explains what saw his race end early: “That was a short afternoon's work for me. I made a good start but I lost ground when everyone went wide at the first corner and I was pushed off the track. Then following David Coulthard's accident it felt like I drove over some of the debris. After that the car felt strange and in the end I lost the car on the kerb at the exit of turn six. I went over the grass and the car launched through the air. When I landed it felt like something broke on the rear, causing us to retire. It's a particular pity because we had a lot of fuel, we looked strong all weekend and we were confident of picking up a good result in front of our home fans.” Trulli adds that his fifth place is something, but he was also hoping for more for the crowds.

For Honda, Barrichello said he suffered from his own incidents: “I had a great start to the race today, passing three or four cars on the way down to the first corner and was able to hold the position well. Unfortunately I was then hit from behind by Fisichella which damaged the rear end of the car and affected the balance for the remainder of the race.” Button also feels he had a good start to the race, and was inside the top ten at one point. However, tyre strategy didn't play out so well for him and the soft tyres basically ruined everything.

Kubica sounds like he found it a tough day, but fun all the same: “I was pushing as hard as I could, but after the pit stop, Fernando Alonso was in front of me and I was not able to match his pace. At the beginning of the final stint the tyres were graining heavily and my lap times were slow, so I came under strong pressure from Kimi Raikkonen and we had a great fight.” Heidfeld also felt like he was fighting for most of the race: “For me the nicest moment of the race was certainly when I managed to overtake two cars at the same time on lap four. I was on a one stop strategy and, as well as that, the second last one-stopper to pit. It was not easy to handle the heavy car. Now I'm looking forward to next weekend's race in Shanghai where we should do better in qualifying.”

The ITV crew told us that Hamilton left the circuit almost immediately after the race, but he returned having calmed down a little. He says: “Obviously, I'm not happy after a result like today's - but I'm already getting over it and tomorrow will be another day. Disappointingly, I didn't make a great start, but I slipstreamed Kimi and went up the inside. I braked a bit late - but so did everybody. A lot of cars went wide at Turn One - and I just went a bit wider than everyone else. But you can't undo the penalty or change today's result.” Kovalainen is frustrated with his bad luck and says he was targeting Kubica and Alonso: “I was feeling pretty confident about catching them both because the car was feeling just fantastic and then, all of a sudden, the engine stopped. That was a real pity because our reliability has been fantastic all season.”

Talking of retirements, Force India saw a double DNF, with Sutil suffering from a puncture, and Fisichella from his incident with Barrichello. They both say that they felt a lot more racey today, though, and that strategy and pace were good, so things are looking up. As Fisichella says: “At least we are fighting again.”

Christian Horner sums up Red Bulls day: “After a nasty looking accident, thankfully David isn't injured. Contact at the first corner put his car in the air and then the rear suspension broke, which turned his car acutely left and into the barrier. Mark lost a huge amount of time at the start, but thereafter, on a risky one stop strategy, drove a very good race to claim a Championship point. He came within two laps of getting another, but unfortunately Massa was too fast to hold back.”

Raikkonen explains what happened at the first corner: “Even if third place has put an end to a run of poor results, I am a bit disappointed because today we had the means to win. At the start, I got away well but then, at the first corner, the two McLarens arrived too fast at the braking point and prevented me from turning in, taking me off the track. That lost me a lot of ground and I found myself in the middle of the pack. On top of that, the car was not quite right as I was hit by one of the McLarens: the steering was a bit light and there was other damage as well.” Massa



explains each of his battles on track in his quotes, with the most interesting bit being his overtake on Webber: "I saw a space down the inside and went for it. He moved over on me a little bit towards the wall which might have looked a bit scary but it was not like that from the cockpit. Anyway, it was a very important moment in the race and I had to try."

That just leaves us with Renault, then, and Alonso is ecstatic: "It's still difficult to believe what we have done today! Winning in Singapore was unexpected, but we benefited from special conditions. Today we won again on a circuit that was not supposed to suit us." Piquet also is happy with how strong the team were and how well the car handled. Briatore finishes it off for us with: "We had said that we could come back to the top and we confirmed that here today."

That's it for this weekend's F1 Digest. There's no rest for the wicked, as we return to action in China in just a few days time. Don't forget to leave all your thoughts about today's race on Sidepodcast.com, or if you're feeling particularly brave, the voicemail is 0121 28 87225.

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