



## F1 Digest - China Free Practice

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### *Intro*

Welcome to F1 Digest from Sidepodcast, your dedicated race weekend coverage. This week it's the Chinese Grand Prix and today we're looking at Free Practice.

### *Free Practice 1*

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It was cloudy as the action got underway on Friday at the Shanghai International circuit. The air temperature was about 24 degrees C, and the track just one degree lower. Race Control announced there would be no rain during the session.

Force India hit the track first, as they always do, and it was installation laps all round for all but the Ferrari drivers. It took 18 minutes before Bourdais left the pit lane again to set the first lap time, and he was soon followed by Piquet, Rosberg, Trulli and more.

Bourdais led the way, Piquet slipped into second, and Webber third, however Raikkonen had his first go at a lap time and pushed Piquet out of his second place. On his next lap, the Finn was fastest, and celebrated with a quick spin at the first corner.

Kovalainen took second, Hamilton popped up into fourth, but Massa was way down at the bottom of the timesheets. On his next lap, though, he jumped Kovi who had improved to the top spot momentarily. P1 was changing hands constantly, however, as Raikkonen took it, then Kovalainen, then Hamilton. BMW appeared to be less interested in fast times, with Heidfeld in tenth, and Kubica in sixth, although he did improve to fifth on his next lap.

Trulli had quite a spin, and ended up facing the wall, but thankfully not in it. He took a few moments to get going again, and returned to the pit lane. We saw quite a few drivers running wide, including Bourdais, and many were complaining that the track was pretty greasy.

Piquet had a scruffy lap, and when returning to the pit lane, he missed the corner and ran out into the gravel. It was eerily reminiscent of last year, but the Renault managed to claw his way out of the gravel trap and into the pit lane. All the drivers hit the track for a final go at a time, but there was very little improvement. The fastest five at the end of the session were Hamilton, Massa, Raikkonen, Kovalainen and Kubica.

### *Free Practice 2*

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The start of the second session saw the temperatures slightly higher, with air at 26 degrees C and track at 29. Still no sunshine, but equally, still no rain. Piquet was the first man out this time, but as is the pattern for FP2, there were no installation laps, everyone was out early and it was all about getting a time on the board. The initial pace setter was Trulli, however Hamilton soon took his place at the top.

Within a few minutes, all but Massa were out on track, with Hamilton still leading the way. When Massa did attempt a lap, he posted the seventh fastest time and moved up to sixth on his next go. He returned to the pit lane. Kubica was in the pit lane queue for a practice start, and had a bit of trouble. A mechanic had to come and pull a cooler off the car, and do it in double quick time because the BMW had Massa stacked up behind him.

We started to see some improvements, Rosberg slipped into fifth, whilst Bourdais jumped up to second. The Williams then slipped into third and Kubica jumped to sixth, then Trulli leapt to second, pushing Bourdais down.



The second half of the session saw less improvement, and many more drivers running wide. Vettel found plenty of dust just off the track, Nakajima spun round, and Bourdais got stuck in the gravel at Turn 1.

In the dying moments of the session, Piquet jumped up to second, only to be pushed down by team mate Alonso. When the timer hit zero, the fastest five were Hamilton, Alonso, Piquet, Trulli and Webber.

### Conclusions

Honda knew they were going to struggle at this track, and Barrichello says it's just as they expected. He said the car has problems with both understeer and oversteer, and poor traction. However, he and Button want to work on any improvements they can overnight so they can have a better time in qualifying tomorrow.

Trulli finished in 4<sup>th</sup> overall and was satisfied with his work: "It was a good, productive day for us. In general the car seems to be behaving well. We tested several things, both mechanically and aerodynamically, and we made some good progress on setup and balance. We also did some long runs which will help us to understand about the behaviour of the different tyre compounds." Glock said he found the car a bit difficult to drive and is going to have to work hard on setup to get a good balance.

Sutil also had a tough day, but thinks things can only get better: "We are still struggling for grip a little and to get the tyres to work, but we did improve over the day and there's still one more practice tomorrow." He does mention that the track doesn't particularly suit their car but Fisichella says: "For the afternoon session we made a step forward with the set-up so it was more comfortable and we could improve a fair bit."

Williams are another team who believe the car doesn't work well on a track such as Shanghai, and Rosberg says: "We are still not quick enough, but we have progressed the car well since this morning, working on the weight distribution which positively affected the balance, which in turn helped the tyres." Nakajima adds that his Friday practice work here last year has helped him get off to a good start, and he feels they are steadily improving.

Both Alonso and Piquet say they collected some interesting data – so I wonder if that means something they weren't expecting? Nevertheless, Alonso finished in second, and is contented with that, whilst Piquet in third is simply happy that he got lots of good practice in the three hours they had available.

Kubica finished the day in 12<sup>th</sup>, and said they were working on all manner of different things to try and get the setup right, but that he's not yet happy with the balance of the car. Heidfeld ended up 9<sup>th</sup>, and added: "In the second session especially I was quite happy with the long runs, as well as with the single laps. We have done quite a lot of set-up changes in the course of the day and during both sessions. Not every step was one in the right direction, but we understood and learned a lot."

Bourdais is a fan of the circuit, despite his off: "It's my first time here. I like the track, even if it seems quite hard on tyres because of all the long corners. Aside from that, it's a nice combination, requiring different techniques for different parts – interesting. We seem to have found a good pace right from the morning session and we kept the momentum going through the day. Hopefully we can do the same tomorrow and have a good qualifying. Right at the end, I lost the rear of the car on my first lap of my final run at the first corner. Maybe I was just a bit too optimistic." Meanwhile, Vettel says he's not where he wants to be, but that his 15<sup>th</sup> place isn't actually representative of their pace.

At sister team Red Bull, Webber points out that the track could have been a lot worse, as the GP2 cars have been running recently, whilst Coulthard isn't happy with his car at all: "Generally, it feels like the balance itself isn't so extreme, but that rear traction stability is the main issue, I think that's got a lot to do with the nature of the track here though. Regarding overall load, we just don't seem to be generating a lot of grip."



Raikkonen will be celebrating today, despite only finishing 8<sup>th</sup> fastest overall: "It was nice to see so many fans in the grandstands to celebrate my birthday. As usual it's difficult to judge the relative strengths of the teams just by looking at the results sheets. At the start, it could have been that our main rivals were quicker but then the situation seemed to balance out and I think that's how it will be for the rest of the weekend." Massa agrees that they're getting more and more competitive so things are heading in the right direction.

At McLaren, the drivers both share optimism, despite being at opposite ends of the timesheets. Kovalainen, in 13<sup>th</sup>, says: "The circuit felt surprisingly dirty and dusty this morning, but everything went well in both sessions. We were immediately quick - which is always encouraging - and spent both sessions just working on the balance of the car." Hamilton, at the top, agrees that the car is getting better and better and has given him a confidence boost for the rest of the weekend.

That's it for today's F1 Digest. If you're around during Free Practice 3 or Qualifying, join us on Sidepodcast.com for Live Commenting, where we welcome your thoughts, ideas, and especially your predictions. I will be back tomorrow with another F1 Digest.

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