



## F1 Digest - China Qualifying

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### Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest from Sidepodcast. This is the third show of four for the Chinese Grand Prix weekend. Today we'll take a look at what happened in FP3 and Qualifying.

### Free Practice 3

There was a small amount of rain overnight, but it had cleared up and the sun came out before Free Practice 3 got going. Both air and track temperature were at 26 degrees. Force India headed out on track first, but soon everyone hit the tarmac to get a feel of the circuit. It was installation laps all round, until Alonso set the first flying lap.

As others joined in, Piquet beat his team mate to the top, but only until the McLaren's and Ferrari's left the pit lane. Kovalainen went 8<sup>th</sup>, Raikkonen third, Massa 13<sup>th</sup>, then Kovalainen posted the fastest time. Hamilton soon took it from him, and then Massa, and surprisingly Bourdais joined in the mix at the top.

Hamilton took P1 once again, and then returned to the pitlane, only he struggled with the entrance. This time he managed to stop before getting to the gravel, and he reversed back onto the correct path.

Meanwhile, on track, Barrichello slipped into third, but Webber wasn't having such luck. His engine blew up in spectacular style issuing a plume of white smoke behind him. He climbed out of the car, and walked back to the pit lane, knowing he would be facing an engine penalty for the race.

The BMW boys were struggling down in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, but Kubica managed to slip into second, and Heidfeld suddenly popped up into P1. As the session drew to a close, the fastest five were Heidfeld, Hamilton, Kubica, Kovalainen and Trulli. The Ferrari boys were mysteriously down in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>.

### Quali 1

Before Qualifying, the track temperature went all the way up to 36 degrees, whilst the air temperature crept up slightly to 28. Piquet was the first man out of the pit lane, setting the first flying lap, but Glock almost immediately topped it.

Raikkonen was out relatively early for Ferrari, but he led the other front runners, and Hamilton took the early lead, and then Massa. Meanwhile Webber slipped into seventh, to be knocked down by Alonso. Piquet jumped up to third.

All eyes, however, were on Kubica, who seemed to be struggling the same way Heidfeld did last week. He was down in 17<sup>th</sup> and BMW brought him in to stick on the soft tyres. As a last ditch effort, Kubica managed 13<sup>th</sup> which let him through to the next session. Meanwhile, Heidfeld, on his in-lap, overtook Coulthard, who was on a hot-lap, and was tailed by DC round the final few corners.

The fastest three were Hamilton, Kovalainen and Vettel, whilst we lost Coulthard, Nakajima, Button, Sutil and Fisichella.

### Quali 2

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Raikkonen was the first driver to take to the track in the second session, and soon he was joined by all but the BMWs.

Kovalainen jumped above the Ferrari at the top, Massa slipped into third, Vettel fourth and Hamilton went fifth at his first attempt.

The BMW boys left the pit lane and began their flying laps just as everyone else returned to their garages. Kubica hauled his way into tenth, still struggling, and Heidfeld managed sixth.

Most drivers returned to the track for a second go at a lap time, although Kovalainen, Vettel and both Ferraris, the top four on the timesheets, remained in the pit lane. Hamilton put in the fastest time of the entire weekend to go top, whilst Kubica couldn't make it the second time round.

The fastest three were Hamilton, Massa and Kovalainen. Dropping out was Piquet, Kubica, Glock, Barrichello and Rosberg.

### *Quali 3*

The final session of qualifying got started with Vettel heading out first, and Raikkonen taking an early lead. Hamilton slipped into fourth, but was pushed down to fifth as Kovalainen took the top spot. Webber had a good start to the third session in second, then third as the McLaren topped the timesheets.

As the minutes ticked past, the drivers returned to the track for their final attempt at a lap. Raikkonen was provisionally on pole, but Hamilton beat him by three tenths of a second. Massa slipped into third, and then all eyes were on Kovalainen who could only manage fifth. After qualifying was over, he did not look happy with his performance at all.

The final top ten was Hamilton, Raikkonen, Massa, Alonso, Kovalainen, Webber, Heidfeld, Vettel, Trulli and Bourdais. However, Webber had his ten place grid drop, which sees him start in 16<sup>th</sup>, and promotes Piquet into the top ten. Red Bull also complained about the Heidfeld incident, and a few hours after the qualifying session, the stewards gave the BMW a three place grid drop. Heidfeld drops to 9<sup>th</sup>, and promotes Vettel, Trulli and Bourdais up.

### *Conclusions*

Red Bull had a pretty tough day all round. First Webber and his engine: "Unfortunately a penalty for an engine change drops you five rows back - and it's difficult enough anyway these days with the field being so tight." Meanwhile Coulthard is seriously annoyed at the incident: "I'm extremely disappointed with what Nick Heidfeld did at the end of Q1 on the last out lap. All the cars were bunching up on the second to last corner, as they jostled for position, but Nick suddenly passed me on the inside into the last corner, just as I was about to start my flying lap. It was very unlikely he was going to do a better lap on prime tyres and he was on the dirty side of the track, so he wouldn't have done a faster lap by squeezing through the inside at that point - and he came in before the end of that lap anyway! He would have known he was in the top ten already, so for me it was very un-sportsman like behaviour, as all he did was screw up my last flying lap - there wasn't any intention of him doing a quicker time."

On to happier thoughts now, and Alonso says despite a few balance issues in FP3, he's comfortable with his qualifying performance. He knows fourth on the grid makes a victory unlikely, but he's looking forward to a good race. Piquet is slightly annoyed: "It's frustrating to miss out on a place in Q3 by just seven thousandths of a second as I would have really liked to reach this part of qualifying. I am going to work with my engineers this evening and I'm hopeful of a strong race tomorrow. I will do my best in any case."



At the bottom of the timesheets, Sutil said something changed between Free Practice and Qualifying: "Normally you would always find grip, but this time the level was lower and so under braking I had lots of oversteer and locking at the rear and the traction was very bad everywhere, which made it quite difficult to do a perfect lap." Fisichella also struggled, saying he had oversteer that ruined his performance in sector two, but he does think they can make it up by having a good strategy in the race.

For BMW, Heidfeld's quotes – before the penalty – were pretty positive: "I think this was the best I could manage today, and I'm glad the positive trend in qualifying I had in the last three races has continued. I feel sorry for Robert. Apparently he struggled here and this grid position reduces his championship chances, but certainly we'll never give up." Kubica agrees he is very disappointed and said the car was difficult to drive, and he's expecting a tough Sunday.

Vettel said he was having a difficult weekend up until qualifying, but some changes they made between the Saturday sessions definitely helped. Regarding Sunday, he says: "Tomorrow in the race, I think it will be hard to catch the guys in front, so I will run my own race, do the best I can and if we can bring the car home, then we will see what we have achieved." Bourdais is happy for the simple things in life: "I was very happy to make it through to Q3 but then the final part of the session was pretty tough as we had no option tyres left at the end. I am very happy with this result." Both Toyota drivers felt like they had difficult sessions, and that the balance of the car was missing somewhat. Trulli felt like the tyres were the biggest problem and he couldn't find any grip. Glock was glad to have made a step up from practice, but couldn't get anything out of the softer tyres.

For Honda, Barrichello is pleased with his performance: "It was a really nice lap to progress into Q2 today as I had a slow out-lap because everyone was backed up and I was worried about the lack of grip, so it was a really good effort. I then had probably my best lap around this circuit by getting everything possible out of the car. I don't think we would have been able to produce anything more than that." Unfortunately, Button ended up 18<sup>th</sup> and said they couldn't really figure out why they struggled with the tyres so much.

Raikkonen feels like they may just be on the right path: ""Finally, things seemed to go right for me in qualifying. It's too late for the title, but we definitely learnt a lesson which will be useful for next year. All weekend we've struggled to find the right settings on the car, but then all the work we put in finally came good in Q3, when the car was pretty good." Meanwhile Massa knows 3<sup>rd</sup> will be hard for a win: "I can't deny I'm a bit disappointed with this qualifying: starting from the front is always important even if the race is very long, but I will do my utmost to get a great result. Today, it was hard to find the right balance for the car, especially in Q3."

Over at Williams, both drivers are a little disappointed. Rosberg says: "It's very dispiriting to be starting the race in 15th place like last weekend in Japan. I gave everything in the sessions and extracted the maximum out of the car, but it just didn't come together today. As a consequence, tomorrow's race will be difficult starting from this far back. Apparently it may rain, and if that happens, it may help us to achieve a better result." And Nakajima blames himself: "There were some points on the track where I really needed to improve, but I didn't manage to make any headway during qualifying. Of course the outcome is not what I wanted, but I guess I now need to try harder to improve in the race itself."

As I mentioned earlier, Kovalainen looked pretty disappointed following qualifying, but seems to have cheered up slightly: ""Q1 and Q2 went very well for me and I started Q3 feeling optimistic. But, unfortunately, on my last run, my tyres didn't seem to deliver the grip levels I'd expected. It's a pity, because I was hopeful I could get a better grid position than P5. But I'm still very encouraged by the progress we've made since yesterday, particularly with the balance, and I'm confident I'll be even more competitive in the race tomorrow." Hamilton thinks he did the best he possibly could when it really mattered: "I pulled it all together for my final attempt - and it was as close as I could get to a perfect lap. Our whole weekend has gone well, I can really feel the support from the team and my family and we'll give it our best shot in the race tomorrow."



That's qualifying covered, it looks like McLaren are still on strong form for the race tomorrow, so it should be interesting to watch. Don't forget to join us on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting, and I'll be back with a roundup of the action in tomorrow's F1 Digest.

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