



F1 Digest – China GP

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest for the Chinese Grand Prix weekend. We've looked at all the Free Practice sessions and Qualifying, and today it's time to run through the race action.

The Race

Sunday dawned overcast and smoggy. The air temperature was up to 27 degrees C and the track hovering around 30. Race control announced there was a 40% chance of rain, but as the lights went out it was all clear. Both McLaren's got good starts this week, with Hamilton cleanly into the corner first, the Ferrari's behind. Kovalainen managed to get past Alonso for fourth, although it was only for a moment as the Renault went flying straight back past again. The first corner incident fell to Trulli and Bourdais, as the pair came together, the Toyota spinning off track. He had to pit at the end of the first lap, was checked over by the mechanics and came out again, but was back in the pits by Lap 2 and out of the race.

Meanwhile, on track, Hamilton was pulling out a lead, putting in the fastest laps to leave Raikkonen behind him. Further back, Webber was struggling to get past Barrichello, but after a couple of laps he had moved past the Honda and up into tenth, chased down Piquet and moved up yet again. However, the Red Bull was running very light and pitted on lap 12.

Just two laps later, Massa was taking his scheduled stop, with Alonso close behind him. On the next lap it was Hamilton and Raikkonen in the pits, and this allowed the Ferrari to close up the gap slightly. Kovalainen was leading until his pit stop, which meant the natural order was restored with Hamilton back in front again.

Whilst all the pit stops were happening, Sutil pulled to a stop at the side of the track, his gearbox letting him down. We assumed that Kubica was one-stopping, as it wasn't until lap 25 he came in, however he kept on the exact same tyres and would therefore need to come back in again for the softer compound.

Things remained as they were during the second stint, the only problem being Force India shaped. Hamilton, Raikkonen and Massa all lost a ton of time getting past Fisichella, and Raikkonen revealed his displeasure with two gloved fingers.

Kovalainen picked up a puncture, and managed to crawl his way back to the pit lane. The mechanics changed the tyre and sent him back on his way. Unfortunately, he was down in seventeenth after the unexpected stop. A few laps later he was back in the pit lane, pushed into the garage, with some kind of problem with his brakes.

Once again Massa came in for his stop earlier than the rest of the pack, with Hamilton and Raikkonen in next time round. The McLaren was now well over ten seconds ahead of his nearest rivals, so it became obvious that at some point in the remaining laps, Massa would be able to get past his team mate. The only question was how would they do it that wasn't too obvious?

Well, Raikkonen slowed right down on the straight, and Massa took his sweet time getting past. It was very obvious. The positions remained the same until the end, with Hamilton taking the chequered flag almost 15 seconds ahead of the Ferrari's.

The final points positions went to: Hamilton, Massa, Raikkonen, Alonso, Heidfeld, Kubica, Glock and Piquet.



Championship

Hamilton couldn't have done any more for his championship, picking up the full ten points. He's now on 94 to Massa's 87. Kubica slipped out of the title battle, now on 75, whilst Raikkonen has 69 and Heidfeld has 60.

Ferrari still cling on to their constructor's championship lead with 156 points. McLaren have 145, BMW 135, whilst Renault and Toyota are now 20 points apart – 75 to 52.

Comments

You may have noticed there haven't been any Live Comments included in recent F1 Digest shows, and that's because there are just too many brilliant comments now to go through. I miss them, though, so have come up with this idea instead. A simple summary of the action at the end of the Live Commenting sessions, for anyone who wants to have a go.

Our first one comes from Scott Woodwiss, who says: Absolutely flawless race from Hamilton. Brazil should be a breeze if he keeps his head and the title is as good as his. As for Ferrari, their "switch" was blatantly a team order and I should imagine the FIA would be getting stricter on such things. Average race but an awesome performance, well done Lewis!

Lady Snowcat has these thoughts about the race: Great weekend for Lewis, just when he needed it. The McLarens clearly had the edge all weekend although they significantly dropped the ball for Heikki! Great damage limitation by Kimi... and the other guy too. Best bit by far was Kimi's laugh and lack of pretence in the Press Conference.

R.G gives us a view for his favourite team: I think BMW had a relatively good race considering the fact of the "poor" qualifying. Heidfeld got off to a good start and finished ahead of his teammate. It is a shame however to see Kubica out of the title fight as he was the most consistent this season.

Rich very kindly left thoughts on all the teams, but I have just selected one to share with you: Alonso, may well be the most pleased F1 driver today. The Renault proved to be nearly as fast as the Ferraris and better than his expectation. Considering that even his team mate scored a point shows that the Renault did not desert him in his hour of need. All things considered his decision (still to be confirmed) to stay at Renault for next year will give him peace of mind and a good night's sleep.

And finally, Alex Andronov sums it up nice and simply: It was one of the least eventful races of the season, but that was exactly what Lewis Hamilton wanted.

Conclusions

Renault had a pretty good day, all things considered, with both cars finishing in the points. Alonso says: "Fourth place is the best result that we could have hoped for today and so I am therefore extremely satisfied with my race. We had good pace, close to the Ferrari, which is another reason to be pleased. We have now won the battle for fourth place in the constructors' championship, which was our objective, and so we can approach the Brazilian Grand Prix with confidence and aim to make the most of this final race of the year." Piquet adds: "It was a difficult race but I am happy with my performance. Of course I would have liked to have made more progress through the field, but the end result is satisfying and I have scored an important point."

For Red Bull, Coulthard says the start was okay, but after that it was all about tyre management. Webber says the ten place grid drop spoiled everything, but his team did the best they could.



Bourdais is confused by the start: "I'm not sure what happened with Trulli at the first corner. I guess he didn't see me. I was halfway alongside him and he turned in. I was right under Sebastian's rear wing and of course we are all very close in the first corner. We touched, he spun and I went really wide, dropped to the back and that was my race spoilt. It was a shame because after that, every time I was in clean air I had a good pace and passed around half a dozen cars." Vettel says his problem came in the pit lane: "We had a problem with the front left wheel which wouldn't come off. I think that cost me a position in the points. P9 is not bad but it's the most frustrating place, just outside the points."

Honda finished 11th and 16th, with Barrichello ahead. He says: "It was a better race today than some of our recent races but it is disappointing not to have been able to get into the points. I had a great start and first lap where I overtook three cars to move up to 10th and went flat out for the whole race to try and make up some ground on the people ahead." Button says he had some fun overtaking at the start, but overall it was a frustrating race and he just couldn't get the tyres to work.

Nakajima finished 12th and thinks this is a relatively good race considering his starting position. Rosberg says his day wasn't good, but he tried his hardest. Patrick Head clarifies: "It was not a strong result today, but I thought Kazuki did a good job defending his position. As we qualified poorly, we had to do something a bit adventurous with our strategy, so we split our options on the cars, but unfortunately the two stop route we took with Nico didn't work." Glock finished 7th, and says: "At the end of the first stint I had a light car but I couldn't make the most of it because I was stuck behind Nick Heidfeld when he came out of his first stop. So we lost some time there and maybe lost a place to Robert Kubica but we were quick again at the end. The strategy worked well so thanks to all the guys." Trulli, meanwhile, is holding a grudge: "Away from the line I was side-by-side with Sebastian Vettel but I had to give up on him because he had the inside line. Then Sébastien Bourdais suddenly hit the right side of my car at the rear and damaged it. It is frustrating because he did this once before this year at Spa, where he also ruined my race at the first corner."

Sutil was also a DNF today, and explains: "Very early on in the race my car developed a problem. I couldn't select gears anymore and had to pull off just before the main straight and park the car. Until that point I was quite happy in the car, even though the traction and grip was very low so it's disappointing not to finish yet again." Fisichella finished in 17th and says that they knew pace wasn't going to help them, so they tried for strategy, and that didn't seem to work out either.

Both Ferrari drivers did the best they could, but can't help being disappointed. Massa says: "This is a great result for the team, less so for me. Today's race was a difficult one: we were not quick enough to fight against Hamilton. Losing two points does not mean that I have lost hope." Raikkonen adds: "Today I had a good car, but it was not quick enough to beat our main competitor. At the start and after every tyre change, Hamilton managed to pull away, while when it got near to the pit stops I was able to go a bit quicker, but it was always too late." Regarding the position switch with Massa, Kimi simply says: "I am part of a team and I am well aware what they expect of me. I am out of the title fight and have to do the maximum because Ferrari can achieve both its objectives. It's as simple as that."

For BMW, although their championship hopes are now out the window, they still think it was a good day. Heidfeld said he was happy with his race, gaining some positions off the start, and was up to sixth pretty soon – almost as if the penalty had never happened. Kubica said he was struggling with the balance of the car, and it only got better in the final stint on the softer tyres.

Finally, McLaren had a day of two halves. Kovalainen says: "Later, I was still running in the points when I had a puncture early on in the lap - it cost me a lot of time driving slowly back to the pits and I knew it would be an uphill struggle for the rest of the race. In the closing stages, I had a problem with the pneumatic system so the team called me in as a precautionary measure." And Hamilton is happy with the entire day: "Everything just went right this



weekend: our car has been simply phenomenal, I made one of my best-ever starts and had perfect balance during the race. I owe so much of that to the guys in the team - both at the track and back home; they did an amazing job so a big thanks to them.”

That’s it for this Chinese weekend. It may not have been a stellar race in terms of action, but it keeps the championship going to the final race in Brazil. Until then, join in the conversation on Sidepodcast.com, and I will see you there.

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