



## F1 Digest - Malaysia Qualifying

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### *Intro*

Welcome to F1 Digest, brought to you by Sidepodcast. This is the third episode of our Malaysia race weekend coverage. We've already looked at the first two Free Practice sessions, and now it's time to catch up with Free Practice 3 and Qualifying.

### *Free Practice 3*

Before Free Practice got going on Saturday morning, we found out that the Red Bull cars had been deemed safe by the FIA, although they were going to be keeping the situation under review. That meant both Coulthard and Webber could take to the track. The temperatures were similar to the first Friday practice, with the track temperature at 38 degrees, although humidity was high at about 70%.

Most drivers hit the track early, with only Button, Barrichello and Davidson not putting in an installation lap. But ten minutes in, they'd all returned to the garage and Timo Glock was left circling by himself. Glock posted the first lap time, quickly beaten by his team mate Trulli. They were both leapfrogged by BMWs though.

Raikkonen crossed the line for the first meaningful lap time, however, with Massa close behind him in second. Kovalainen looked to be on a strong lap but made a mistake in the last sector and scraped into 14<sup>th</sup>. On his second attempt, though, he barely improved to tenth fastest. Over at Sidepodcast.com, Lou commented on the live thread, saying: "Ferrari seem to have finally got their act together. Let's hope it's a better race for them this week!" whilst SteveintheUK asked: "Why are the McLarens over a second off the Ferrari times?"

Third place seems to be the coveted spot, as first Piquet took it, then Webber, and both were pushed out by Nakajima. Bourdais struggled to 12<sup>th</sup> and then returned to the pits.

During the second half of the session, we saw a lot of drivers struggling with grip and quite often running wide out of the corners. It also appeared difficult for anyone to improve on their own times. Hamilton got out of shape on one of the corners, and posted a time in 6<sup>th</sup>. Coulthard was the notable exception, though, proving his Red Bull is just fine by pushing into fourth.

When the track started to come together towards the end of the session, we saw Button in 5<sup>th</sup>, Vettel in 6<sup>th</sup>, whilst Heidfeld and Alonso were down at the bottom of the list. Alonso managed to improve to 12<sup>th</sup>, whilst Heidfeld pulled out a stunning lap to go fastest.

The top 5 were: Heidfeld, Raikkonen, Massa, Trulli, Webber

After the session had finished, Steven Roy pointed out: "I am not sure we learned anything in this session. Too many confusing times."

### *Quali 1*

Settling down to watch the qualifying session, all the talk was on whether it would rain or not. The official onscreen information was that it was not predicted to rain in the next 30 minutes, but Renault were on the radio to Alonso saying they would be sending him out early to avoid the rain coming in 7 minutes time.



Everyone seemed to take this line of attack, and after a few minutes all had posted a banker lap time except both BMWs and Kovalainen. Bourdais posted the first time of the session but he was eclipsed almost instantly by both Ferraris, Raikkonen on top.

As quickly as everyone had emerged from the pits, they all fed back in to prepare for their final flying lap of the session – no rain as yet. Heidfeld, Kubica and Kovalainen took to the track, hoping to benefit from the improved grip on the circuit. Kovalainen certainly did, grabbing P1, whilst the BMWs settled in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Heidfeld did look like he was attempting another lap, but messed up and decided to head back to the pits.

Just under ten minutes left, and Jarno Trulli pulled out one of those laps that gives him the title of qualifying specialist. He posted the fastest time. Dan Brunell commented on Sidepodcast.com: “If Trulli is a mental rollercoaster... how will he react to being P1 after Q1?”

With four minutes to go, both Alonso and Coulthard were still in the dropout zone, but both managed to improve on their lap times. As ever, the final few moments of the first session were manic, with an incredible number of cars still to cross the line after the chequered flag had dropped. Notably, Bourdais was on course to get out of the bottom six, but ran really wide on his flying lap and couldn't improve.

The fastest three were Trulli, Kovalainen and Massa, and dropping out: Fisichella, Nakajima, Bourdais, Sato, Sutil and Davidson.

### *Quali 2*

So, we saw no rain in the first session, and the official weather indication was that it wouldn't be raining in the next ten minutes. With Quali 2 being a 15 minute session, it could have made things interesting.

Both Ferraris and McLarens took to the track straight away, Kovalainen beat Hamilton but Raikkonen immediately topped them both. Massa's first lap saw him in 4<sup>th</sup>.

Trulli continued his form from the first session posting the third fastest time and Webber hauled his Red Bull into 6<sup>th</sup>.

Just like in the last session, both the BMW drivers left it late to come out of their garages, and when everyone dived into the pits with just five minutes to go, Heidfeld and Kubica were the only two left out. For the final round of flying laps, Rosberg was the first out, followed by Vettel. Rosberg could only manage 13<sup>th</sup> and Vettel improved to 12<sup>th</sup>.

The fastest three were – Raikkonen, Massa and Hamilton, whilst Button, Coulthard, Piquet, Barrichello, Vettel and Rosberg didn't make it into the final session.

Lou reflected on the comment thread: “Button 11th! Is that not what Honda wanted to achieve? So close to the top ten but still gets to choose fuel. Honda actually hitting targets!” whilst Steven Roy said: “Rosberg did 13 laps and couldn't do a decent time.”

### *Quali 3*

When fuel burning was the in thing last year, we often saw drivers piling up at the end of the pit lane waiting for the light to go green. Every extra lap made all the difference. With no more fuel burning to be done, this seems an unnecessary burden on the car, but still, Kovalainen was sitting in his McLaren at the pit lane exit as the session got underway.



Most joined him, though, and after a few minutes it was only Glock and Alonso still in their garage. Kovalainen crossed the line for P1, Hamilton was struggling to hold on to his car but managed to post the second fastest time. They were both beaten by Raikkonen, who was then beaten by Massa.

Alonso and Glock came out for their laps and both of them ran wide during their efforts. When Hamilton approached the start line for his final flying lap he had to avoid a Toyota down the straight. It wouldn't have made too much difference though, because Massa posted the fastest lap beating everyone else by half a second. Hamilton pushed his McLaren into 4<sup>th</sup>.

After the chequered flag had dropped and drivers were cruising back to the pit lane, Alonso and Heidfeld were still on hot laps. They had to thread their way through traffic in a crazy mix of top speed laps and slow in laps. SteveintheUK commented: "Stewards will be looking at that, could be some penalty's given out." And Steven Roy added: "Kovalainen did the second sector in 97.4 seconds on an in lap. There is absolutely no need for that." Magmount suggested: "Last year, to get back the fuel credits the times needed to be within a certain percentage of pole. Do we need something similar?"

The final ten positions went to: Massa, Raikkonen, Kovalainen, Hamilton, Trulli, Kubica, Heidfeld, Webber, Alonso, Glock.

However, after the final lap incident, Hamilton and Kovalainen were investigated by the stewards and it was found that they had impeded the laps of Heidfeld and Alonso. They were both docked five places on the grid, meaning Kovalainen starts 8<sup>th</sup> and Hamilton starts 9<sup>th</sup>.

### Conclusions

McLaren have called it an "unfortunate incident" and said that neither of their drivers were blocking either Heidfeld or Alonso on purpose. CEO Martin Whitmarsh said that they accepted the stewards decision and weren't going to appeal.

Heidfeld has welcomed the decision, saying that obviously starting 5<sup>th</sup> is better than starting 7<sup>th</sup>. He also understands that it may not have been intentional on the McLaren's part and says perhaps the rules need looking at.

Trulli is now promoted to third after his great performance in qualifying today. At the time of recording he hadn't commented on his promotion but Toyota were pleased with their running throughout the sessions. Trulli said he always runs well and feels comfortable at this circuit so they're hoping for an incident-free race so they can pick up some good points.

Luca Baldisserrri of Ferrari was happy with their result: "Finally, a trouble-free day," he said. Raikkonen said he would of course prefer to be on pole, but being behind Massa was the best position for Ferrari to be in going into the race. He has no doubt that tomorrow will be a tough race though.

Button was very happy with his qualifying position, despite it being 11<sup>th</sup> on the grid. He said the main problems of the day were choosing between the hard and soft tyres. He felt he could get the most out of the harder tyres, but everyone else was putting down rubber from the soft tyres, so he tried his last run on those and it obviously did the trick.

Towards the back of the grid, Sebastien Bourdais had an engine change between Free Practice 3 and Qualifying, and also suffered from brake trouble during the sessions, so he's not having a productive weekend so far. Vettel confirmed that getting into the third qualifying session was out of the team's reach for today, but thinks they have a good setup for the race.



We will be able to see how they and the others do tomorrow and whether it actually rains or not. Catch up with all the action on tomorrow's show, and until then you can join us in the live comment thread on Sidepodcast.com. It'll be open about half an hour before the race. See you there.

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