



F1 Digest - Brazil Qualifying

Intro

This is F1 Digest for the Brazilian Grand Prix weekend, and today we're looking at qualifying. The entire season has been building up to this weekend and pole position has never been so important. No pressure.

Free Practice 3

We saw damp conditions yesterday and Saturday was still cold with plenty of clouds in the sky, but it wasn't raining. The track temperature was 28 degrees C and the air 20. Everyone was out straight away for an installation lap, with just the Ferrari boys remaining in the garage.

There was the usual lull in action before Fisichella, Sutil, Piquet and Glock all went out to set times, Piquet taking the early benchmark. With more drivers hitting the track we saw Heidfeld slip into second, Barrichello then pushed him down to third. Raikkonen posted P1 and then Kovalainen beat him.

The early battle between Massa and Hamilton saw the Ferrari in second, with Hamilton last on his first lap, but first on his next go. They both attempted another lap but neither could improve on their times.

Heidfeld was soon slipping down the order, and Kubica was hoping to improve on his 14th place, but couldn't manage it. He was heard complaining to his team over the radio, which isn't exactly an unusual thing to occur.

With time ticking on, most of the other drivers were struggling to improve, so it was down to a last ditch effort to jump up the timesheets on the soft tyres. Webber slipped into third, then Bourdais grabbed the place. Massa soon pushed him down, taking third for himself, with Raikkonen settling for eighth.

Just like yesterday, Alonso left it to the last minute to post the fastest time of the morning, and rocketed to P1. The final five at the end of the session were Alonso, Hamilton, Kovalainen, Massa and Vettel.

Quali 1

Between FP3 and Qualifying the sun came out and the temperatures improved. Track was at 39 degrees and air at 22.

Piquet hit the track first, to the welcome cheers from the crowd, although his initial time was soon beaten by Glock. Trulli jumped his team mate to the top, and Kovalainen just behind him slipped into second. Massa posted the third fastest time and Hamilton got P1.

Vettel was doing very well up into 5th. Glock managed to spin round which ruined both Renault drivers lap, putting Alonso in tenth.

The dropout zone was looking slightly worrying for both Red Bull drivers, and surprisingly Rosberg. Coulthard managed to haul himself out but remained borderline. At the front, Massa jumped to the top of the timesheets, much to the crowds approval, with Raikkonen into second.

Kubica improved to seventh, Heidfeld eighth and Webber tenth, which knocked some new drivers into the bottom five.



At the end of the first session the fastest three were Massa, Raikkonen, Hamilton, whilst we lost Nakajima, Button, Rosberg, Fisichella and Sutil.

Quali 2

The second session began with both Toyotas out first, Trulli taking the lead over Glock. The Ferraris were also out early, with Raikkonen jumping the Toyotas, and Massa beating them all.

The McLarens were next, with Kovalainen in fourth, and Hamilton easily the quickest man out on track. Glock managed to jump into the middle of the battle at the top, whilst BMW were still struggling for performance. Kubica was 11th, and Heidfeld marginally better in 6th.

Kovalainen quickly improved to take the top spot and then returned to the garage to wait out the session. Massa also decided he was safe in third, whilst everyone else wanted another go at a lap.

Vettel jumped up to second, Bourdais into 8th, a good showing from the Toro Rosso guys, but bad news for those failing to make the cut. At the end of the session, the fastest three were: Kovalainen, Vettel and Hamilton, whilst dropping out were: Piquet, Webber, Kubica, Coulthard and Barrichello.

Quali 3

The last chance for the top ten drivers to get themselves into order, and once again Glock was out early to set the first lap time. His benchmark was beaten by Vettel, and then all eyes were on Massa and Hamilton. Massa went fastest by a country mile, and Hamilton slipped into third. Trulli jumped into second, with Raikkonen pushing Hamilton down for third place.

The obligatory pit stop before the final flying lap attempts took place. Then, Massa looked like his times weren't going to improve, however he flew in the final sector to secure his pole position. Hamilton slipped into second for a moment, before Raikkonen and Trulli both knocked him down. Yes, Trulli. Kovalainen couldn't do better than his team mate, and Alonso ended up 6th which will be directly behind Hamilton on the grid.

The final positions are Massa, Trulli, Raikkonen, Hamilton, Kovalainen, Alonso, Vettel, Heidfeld, Bourdais and Glock.

Conclusions

Over in the live comments, Scott Woodwiss summed up the qualifying sessions for us: "As you can tell being a Lewis fan, I'm rather unhappy that Ferrari are ahead of him. It never pleases me when that happens, but that's the grid so it's the race where I'm hopeful. 5th is all he needs and the title belongs to him, regardless of anything Massa and Kimi do. Big surprise from Trulli, but my bet is that he's rather light. Kovi can't really do anything when he's BEHIND his teammate except for trying to make sure Alonso doesn't try anything. All in all, it's disappointing that it's not P1 for Hamilton, but I and I'm sure himself are both praying for rain. Fingers crossed."

Whilst R.G kept things short and sweet: "Where did Trulli come from?"

Team Conclusions

We'll start with Force India, and Sutil isn't happy with his day: "I did three runs and even though each lap was quicker, I'm a little disappointed as my sector times were quite good." Fisichella says he was struggling with his car but admits: "Perhaps I could have improved by a couple of tenths, but it would not have made a great difference, maybe one position. We'll look to the strategy to improve tomorrow and try to be flexible to be ready for whatever comes."



The Red Bull camp are also pretty disappointed with the outcome of qualifying. Webber says: "We had a pretty good run yesterday, but we always knew it was going to be tight round here in terms of times and unfortunately we didn't have enough pace to get through to Q3. I did the best I could, but it's simple - if you're not fast enough you don't go through." Coulthard agrees: "I'm not really happy with that as my last F1 qualifying session. We went reasonably well here last year and got into the top ten, so we came here thinking that might be possible again. But, in the end, we didn't manage to find enough grip in the middle sector."

BMW are a little bit more positive, although, not really. Kubica admits: "This is obviously not the best position for tomorrow's race. This is the second weekend in a row that I have been struggling with the overall grip of the car. Starting from so far behind will make the race very difficult for me." But Heidfeld says: "Qualifying was okay for me. In Q3 I thought in the end I could have improved more than the three tenths of a second I managed from the harder to the softer compound, but I have to say it was a good lap and I just couldn't do any better."

At last, a team in a good mood, Toyota. Trulli feels he's worked hard for the result today: "Before coming here I knew this was one of those difficult, technical tracks where I could be strong and my car could be very competitive. So I have been preparing and waiting for this grand prix and now here I am. It's ironic because for the first time in my career I thought I might not make it on Friday because I was feeling really ill with flu. So after this result I have to thank the whole team for the job - the mechanics, the engineers and also to the doctor." Glock blames his 10th place on the lack of tyres for Q3, but says top ten is not bad, so he's relatively satisfied.

Oh well, back to the depressing news. Barrichello is trying to be optimistic for Honda: "I'm pleased that we were able to make it into the second qualifying session here in Interlagos today. We had a perfect lap on my second run in Q1 with the option tyres working really well. Unfortunately we couldn't get the same grip level in Q2 and were really struggling with understeer." And Button is also seeing the positive side, sort of: "The car was a definite improvement from practice this morning as I had much more front grip. Unfortunately I made a mistake on my second lap in turn 4, which cost me some time. We made some adjustments to the pressures to help the front end grip before my final run and we were able to go quicker but not by enough."

For Williams, Nakajima says the balance of the car was good but the track conditions didn't suit them, and Rosberg agrees that warming up the tyres was a real problem. Technical director Sam Michael sums it up: "That was a disappointing final qualifying session for 2008. We'll be looking hard at our race strategy now to see what we can get out of tomorrow. There were no mechanical issues today and the drivers extracted what they could out of the car."

Vettel is a driver who actually had fun out there: "Good to get both cars in Q3 for the final time this year. It was a fun session. I had a very strong lap in Q2. Then Q3 started very well and I got a good first run, but I'm not too sure where I lost the time on my second run, because I lost a bit of feeling for the tyres." Even Bourdais is satisfied: "Things have been getting better over the past few races and this performance today confirms that. My lap was probably the best Q3 lap I've done this year, so I am very happy."

Hamilton congratulates Massa on his pole position in front of the home crowd, very gracious of him, but adds: "Tomorrow, I will be focusing on my own race: it will be a tough afternoon but I'm comfortable with the fuel strategy we chose; the guys in front are probably on a different strategy. But we're in a good position to finish in the same place as we are today - and that's got to be our aim. We don't need to do anything spectacular." Heikki says the day was straightforward, and agrees with Hamilton that it will all come down to strategy during the race.

Alonso is aware that the times are very tight: "We thought that it would be very close and competitive this afternoon and we were not mistaken. We knew that it would be difficult to try and match the Ferraris and McLarens and so I think we have done our maximum this afternoon by qualifying in 6th place." Piquet is disappointed not to have done better for his home fans but will be turning his attention to the race.



And finally we come to Ferrari. Kimi says qualifying wasn't perfect but things are improving and he's satisfied with third on the grid. Massa is really happy with today: "It's fantastic to have taken a third consecutive pole on this track and it's an incredible emotion to see everyone celebrating in the grandstands. I got a great lap on my first run in Q3 and I could have even not bothered to finish the second one, but you never know what might happen."

That's all for this episode of F1 Digest. Don't forget to join us on Sidepodcast.com at 2pm GMT for the Parade Lap – a two hour season finale special show, which should be a nice build up to the racing. For that, stay on the site for Live Commenting and I'll see you there.

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