

## F1 Digest – Brazil GP

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### *Intro*

Welcome to the last F1 Digest of 2008, where we will be taking a closer look at the championship deciding Brazilian Grand Prix. It was an astonishing race, so let's get started.

### *The Race*

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With the grid in the shape it was, a lot of our attention during the morning was focused on the weather. It rained around lunchtime and was drying up with an hour to go until the race. However, as the cars lined up on the grid preparing for the formation lap, it absolutely poured down. All the mechanics on the grid, and Bernie, were completely soaked, and the race was delayed by ten minutes for the shower to pass. It stopped almost as soon as it started, leaving the teams dripping and with a tyre dilemma.

In the end, all but Kubica chose intermediate tyres, but at the end of the formation lap, he dived straight back into the pit lane, clearly having made the wrong decision. The lights went out, and the guys at the front made a good start, getting through the first corner cleanly. Alonso had a poor start and lost a few places off the line, but he hauled them back again.

Two drivers weren't quite so lucky at the first corner, as Coulthard was hit by Rosberg from behind, spun, and collected Nakajima on his way off. His final race was over and he'd barely completed one corner. Piquet also ended up on the grass and out of the race, although that remains a bit of a mystery. The Safety Car was deployed while the two cars were sorted out. It came in on lap 4, allowing Massa to pull out a small lead. Trulli was keeping up, but generally holding up Raikkonen, who in turn was in Hamilton's way.

By lap 7, the track was dry enough for some brave drivers to attempt the hard tyres. Button and Rosberg came in first, and on the next lap Bourdais and Glock led the train into the pit lane. Having serviced both their cars, Honda had a bizarre incident with fire extinguishers malfunctioning and spraying foam all over the pit box. The mechanics hurried to work with brooms to clean it all up again.

Massa was the first of the front runners to pit for dry tyres, and next time round Trulli, Raikkonen and Hamilton took their turn. Raikkonen managed to jump Trulli for second, and it wasn't long before out on track, Hamilton got past the Toyota. Having stopped earlier than these guys, Vettel and Alonso had found their way into second and third, Fisichella was up to fifth, and Hamilton was sixth, just out of the position he needed to be in for championship success.

Surprisingly, it wasn't easy, but Hamilton chased down Fisichella, and after a couple of laps, threw his all into an overtaking manoeuvre. It was supremely brave and pulled off in style. Glock, just a few seconds behind Hamilton, also managed to get past the Force India, and began to hunt down the McLaren.

An overtaking manoeuvre that didn't work quite so well was Trulli's attempt to get past Bourdais. A similar idea of taking the inside line and braking later resulted in Bourdais having to swerve out of the way to avoid a collision. He ended up crossing the grass and losing a lot of places.

Massa was being chased by Vettel, but the Toro Rosso dived into the pits, rather unexpectedly. It seemed to be a scheduled stop, although a little early.



Things settled down somewhat, and then we entered the second round of pit stops. Glock came in and had a long stop that appeared to fuel him to the end of the race. Massa was once again the first front runner to come in, and three laps later Alonso and Hamilton did the same. When Hamilton returned to the track, he found himself being chased by Kubica, who was actually a lap down, and looking determined to unlap himself.

Vettel stopped again, leaving him in fifth, behind Hamilton. A few more laps of calm before drivers began to hear radio calls from the pit wall warning of rain. With just 7 laps to go, the rain began to fall and the pit stops began. Heidfeld and Fisichella were the first guys in.

By the time it all became clear again, we had Massa, Alonso, Raikkonen, Glock, who had not stopped to change to wet tyres, Hamilton and then Vettel. The Toro Rosso was once again chasing down the McLaren, and this is where it becomes almost indescribable.

Hamilton ran wide at the last corner of the circuit, and Vettel managed to get past, meaning Lewis was now sixth and out of the championship fight. He wasn't going to sit back and take that, obviously, and chased the Toro Rosso to the line. He didn't manage to catch Vettel, BUT Glock was struggling with his dry tyres and slipping backwards. He couldn't seem to make it up the hill and pulled off the racing line. On the last corner of the last lap, Hamilton passed the Toyota, and crossed the line just 5 seconds ahead of Glock. Amazing.

The final points positions went to Massa, Alonso, Raikkonen, Vettel, Hamilton, Glock, Kovalainen and Trulli.

### *Championship*

As it's the end of the season, I'll do a quick rundown of the full championships, rather than just the top five. Hamilton scooped glory by just 5 seconds and becomes the 2008 Driver's World Champion with 98 points. Massa was just one point behind on 97. Raikkonen managed to overtake Kubica for third, with both drivers on 75 points, but Kimi ahead on wins. Alonso's second place meant he not only won the battle with Kovalainen for sixth in the championship, but also jumped Heidfeld placing him in the top five. Alonso ended on 61, Heidfeld on 60 and Kovalainen on 53. Vettel had 35, Trulli 31 and teammate Glock was close behind on 25. Webber couldn't quite get into the top ten drivers with 21 points, Piquet had 19, Rosberg 17 and Barrichello 11. Nakajima just missed out on double figures, with 9 points, Coulthard had a dismal last year picking up just 8 points. Bourdais finished with 4 and Button 3. Neither Fisichella nor Sutil picked up a point.

Ferrari won the Constructor's Championship with 172 points to McLaren's 151, with BMW on 135. Renault finished up fourth with 80 points, and Toyota behind them on 56. Toro Rosso outclassed Red Bull by ten full points, 39 to 29, and Williams were close behind on 26. Honda finished the year with just 14 points, and Force India couldn't get the one point they so desired.

### *Comments*

After the race, I asked those in the Live Comments to sum up the action, and I had a couple of responses. Firstly, R.G took a look at the whole season, but here's an excerpt about the race: "Well, what a race that was. Couldn't have asked more for a championship showdown in Brazil. Though I may have accidentally jinxed Felipe Massa by announcing he was the champion thirty seconds too early. Needless to say, not long after, Hamilton passed Glock to win it. Well done to Hamilton nonetheless." The rest of R.G's thoughts can be read at Sidepodcast.com.

Scott Woodwiss enjoyed Hamilton's success: "That was quite possibly THE most unbelievable and exciting finish to both a race and a championship I think we'll ever see in our lifetime. Lewis could not have been more lucky if he'd tried, and the fact that he didn't even know he'd passed Glock made it an even better surprise. I am absolutely



overjoyed that he has done it at last, and what a way to do it. I must give credit and respect to Massa also, as he was very gracious in defeat and took it like a man, and I like that.”

### Conclusions

Let's take a look now, at how the teams found the weekend. Rosberg finished in 12<sup>th</sup>, which isn't bad considering he started in 18<sup>th</sup>. He said: "I think I drove a good race, I had a great start and everything worked well. A long season is over and I am now really looking forward to the winter." Nakajima was less impressed with his day: "That was a very disappointing race and pretty much over for me in the first corner. The car took a lot of damage to the bodywork and to the suspension which compromised my pace a lot."

Button says he had a good start, but the team made two important strategy calls that left him 13<sup>th</sup>: "We made an unusual call on my strategy, pitting early and switching to what would have been a three-stop programme to avoid the traffic situation. When I did have clean air, the car's performance was actually not bad, however unfortunately the strategy didn't really work out for us. We then needed to stop again for wet tyres at the end of the race anyway and fitting the extreme wets didn't pay off for us." Barrichello also rues the extreme wet decision: "It was a crazy race with the weather playing a big role in the result today. It was actually quite a competitive race for us in the context of the car's performance and I was running just outside the top ten before the final pit stop."

Force India finished up 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, and Sutil doesn't think it was too bad. "I think it was a good finish for this season – at least we could see the chequered flag. We had two cars behind us too, which was a good effort."

Meanwhile Fisichella had some problems: "Unfortunately in the first pit stop I had a problem with the clutch and dropped right back. In both stops there was no clutch and I lost a lot."

Bourdais had a troublesome encounter during the race as he admits he was struggling with the last corner: "This allowed others to close on me. Jarno decided to go for it, which was fine, except he outbraked himself and pushed me towards the grass and I lose six places. It's the second time in a row that Jarno has upset my race. After that, I was stuck in traffic, with some graining and I was unable to attack anyone as I continued not to get the last corner right." Vettel finished fourth and was much happier with his time out there: "It was a difficult and chaotic race and it's great to end the season on a high with this fourth place. I didn't make any mistakes and I feel we deserved this result, even if I was hoping for a podium. It was great to be racing against Massa, Alonso and Hamilton. Great fun!"

Sister team Red Bull had a dismal day, and Webber is disappointed in his 9<sup>th</sup> position: "The car was pretty difficult to drive today. We had a long middle stint but the pace wasn't there and I struggled." Coulthard, however, feels even worse: "I'm pretty gutted, it's not how I wanted to end my career. I was going to do some donuts for the crowd, which is something you normally get fired for, but it didn't work out. I can't complain though, I've had a good career, so thank you to everyone who has supported me."

For Toyota, Trulli pinpoints where it all went wrong for him: "It was an eventful race. We had a good start and the first laps were pretty good, when I was following Felipe Massa. It started to dry up and we went for dry tyres. Unfortunately I got stuck behind Fisichella who was much slower than me. I didn't have the top speed to overtake him so I lost a lot of time over those laps." Glock, meanwhile, was unaware of the effect he was having on the championship: "I was on dry tyres at the end of the race when it was raining quite badly and it was just impossible on the last lap. I was fighting as hard as I could but it was so difficult to just keep the car on the track and I lost positions right at the end of the lap. Finishing in the top six is a decent result for me because I'd been struggling with the car earlier in the weekend but we were very close to fourth place so I am a bit disappointed."

BMW are all round disappointed, as Heidfeld says he had a bad getaway: "My biggest problem today was the start. I just had too much wheel spin, so I literally stuck on the spot. Then I had a few good overtaking manoeuvres and gained positions. Later the balance of my car tended to become very difficult and, especially when I was behind



Jarno Trulli, I lost downforce." He finished tenth, one place ahead of Kubica, who is annoyed with his own championship challenge: "Losing third place in the Drivers' championship in the last race is definitely not the best situation. We made too many mistakes during the weekend and this is the result. Unfortunately I started on dry tyres, as we had the wrong information about the track conditions."

Alonso's championship improved dramatically with his finish: "I am very happy with this second place. The conditions were difficult but we were able to take advantage of them. We did our maximum, the team made the right decisions at the right times, and I managed to keep Raikkonen behind me until the finish. It's a fantastic result for the team and a great way to end the season." Piquet was knocked out at the very start, but even he's not entirely sure what was going on. "I don't really know what happened: if I was touched or if I simply lost control of the car, but I couldn't see that much and I lost the rear of my car in turn 3. It's really frustrating not to complete my home Grand Prix because a lot of things happened in the race and we could probably have taken advantage of them."

So, just Ferrari and McLaren to go then. Raikkonen praises the team for their hard work: "'I am happy that the team has managed to win the Constructors' title and I am sorry for Felipe, who has lost the title by a single point. That's racing and we have to live with it. I am particularly happy for Stefano, in his first year as team principal as I know how much pressure he has had to deal with and I think that this result is a good reward for that.'" Massa is obviously upset but very magnanimous in defeat: "It was an exciting day. We did everything to perfection and we almost managed to pull it off. Then, as I crossed the line, Rob told me that Hamilton had finished fifth and therefore he took the title by one point. Sport is like this and one has to accept that. Congratulations to Lewis: whoever gets the most points deserves the title. I am very proud of the whole team and how much support they have given me during this fantastic season. Now we must be happy with what we have done, namely bringing home the Constructors' title which I know is so important for the team."

Meanwhile, Kovalainen seems to be getting ideas above his station: "'The most important news today is that Lewis pulled it off; he did exactly what he had to do to win the championship. Everybody in the team deserves this title, particularly after what happened here one year ago, but the guys stayed focused throughout so congratulations to everyone. I'll now work even harder over the winter and hopefully next year's world champion will be on the other side of our garage!" And finally, here's what our new world champion had to say: "The most dramatic race of my whole life. It's pretty much impossible to put this into words: I'm still speechless. "This was one of the toughest races of my life, if not the toughest. I was shouting, 'Do I have it? Do I have it?' on the radio. It was only when I took the chequered flag and got to Turn One that the team told me I was world champion. I was ecstatic."

That's it for F1 Digest for this weekend, and of course, this season. It's been a rollercoaster ride, and I think we need the off-season to come to terms with everything that happened this year! However, stay tuned to Sidepodcast.com because the fun never ends, and F1 Digest will return in 2009.