



F1 Digest – Malaysia GP

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest, your fully comprehensive race weekend coverage brought to you by Sidepodcast. So far this weekend, we've previewed the Malaysian circuit, taken a look at Free Practice and Qualifying and now it's time to run down what happened in the race.

The Race

As the time ticked closer to the start of the Grand Prix, the big question remained on everyone's lips – will it rain? As the drivers lined up on the grid, it was bright and sunny and starting to look like the answer would be no.

The lights went out and all 22 drivers took to the first corner carefully, and they all made it round safely. Trulli dropped back, in the process touching wheels with Heidfeld which knocked the BMW back a few places as well. Hamilton, meanwhile, had made up a few places off the start line, and it was almost as if his grid penalty never happened.

It wasn't until a few corners later that mistakes were made. Bourdais spun off, whilst Glock and Rosberg collided. Rosberg managed to pit for a new nose and continue his race, but it was over for Glock in the Toyota.

On Lap 3, we saw some of the best racing we've seen for a long time, with Coulthard running down the main straight, chased by Alonso and Heidfeld. Alonso dived to the right, whilst Heidfeld went left, and they sandwiched the Red Bull around the first corner. Heidfeld made it through to take the position, leaving Alonso and Coulthard running through the next few corners side by side. Eventually, Coulthard relented and Alonso got the position, although he didn't gain anything, having let Heidfeld through as well. On the live comment thread over at Sidepodcast.com, Lou said: "Wow, who says there is no overtaking anymore? Great racing between Heidfeld, DC and Alonso!!"

Sutil ran straight on at a corner, on Lap 6, and rolled to a halt on the grass, suffering from hydraulic problems. Raikkonen and Massa began to trade fastest laps, both running away from the next placed Kubica.

Webber was the first to come in for a meaningful pit stop, and it looked like the rear light was hanging off the back of his car. It didn't appear to be causing any trouble though. Nakajima also came into the pits, but Massa was the first of the front runners to dive into the pit lane. Raikkonen was only out for one extra lap but he made the most of it, and when emerging from the pit lane, he leapfrogged Massa to essentially take the lead, although Kubica was actually in front having not pitted yet.

Hamilton came in for his pit stop, and the mechanics struggled with the right front tyre and the wheel bin. It cost Hamilton at least an extra ten seconds, and he emerged in 11th, having pitted from 2nd. He found himself chasing Webber and frustratingly not able to get past.

At the end of lap 30, Nakajima and Rosberg both dived into the pits, meaning a really quick turnaround for the Williams crew. They managed to get both cars out without any holdups though. On the next lap, Massa clipped the kerb and spun off track. He was unable to get his car out of the gravel again, meaning the second non-points finish for him. Dan Brunell commented: "I think Massa will be driving for his job the next couple of races..."



Sato led the second round of pit stops, heading in on lap 37, Raikkonen dived into the pit lane the next time round. Webber eventually stopped, freeing up Hamilton.

Vettel compounded Toro Rosso's miserable weekend by pulling off the track, smoke pouring from his Ferrari engine. Barrichello was given a drive through penalty for speeding in the pit lane of his final pit stop, which he served on his very next lap.

On the subject of the circuit, Scott Drydon had some interesting thoughts: "When Sepang was first introduced to the calendar, I remember it was said that Tilke designed it specifically with overtaking in mind, with two long straights followed by slow corners. Yet we have Hamilton who's quicker than Webber, and Trulli who's faster than Kovalainen. Yet neither of them are anywhere near putting in a pass."

Towards the end of the race, the only two notable battles were between Alonso and Webber for 7th place, and Hamilton and Trulli for 5th. Hamilton was closing the gap to Trulli every single lap, although he did wobble occasionally. In the end, there were not enough laps for him to attempt an overtaking manoeuvre.

Raikkonen took the chequered flag, followed by Kubica, Kovalainen, Trulli, Hamilton, Heidfeld, Webber and Alonso.

Championship

Despite a mid-scoring finish here in Malaysia, Hamilton retains his lead at the top of the driver's championship. He has 14 points, to next place Raikkonen's 11. Heidfeld also has 11 points, but sits behind Raikkonen in the table due to the Ferrari's win. Kovalainen is fourth with 10 points, Kubica next with 8 and Rosberg has 6.

The constructors championship has McLaren on 24, BMW on 19, and Ferrari on 11 – all points scored by Raikkonen. Williams have 9, Renault 6 and Toyota round out the top six with 5 points.

Conclusions

Ferrari are both elated and frustrated with their results. Kimi's win has pushed his championship, and the team's, into a much more healthy position, but it is worrying for them that Massa has yet to score a single point. He is determined to start his championship campaign off as soon as possible, hopefully in Bahrain. Ferrari tested their over the winter, so they have plenty of data to work from, although they don't believe they have a massive advantage over any of the other teams.

Kubica is happy with his podium finish, having not been on any of the three steps since 2006. Robert did say that after the second pit stop he turned the revs down to save the engine, and he wasn't feeling particularly well so his last ten laps were tough. Heidfeld, meanwhile, is confident that the pace of the car is good, but found his weekend pretty frustrating overall.

Mark Webber's luck held out today, and he managed to not only finish the race but also pick up a couple of points. He says the traffic was a bit of a problem, compounded by the fact that his strategy was changed and his pit stop brought forward. Nevertheless, two points is better than none.

Vijay Mallya spoke highly of both his drivers, despite Adrian Sutil retiring his Force India early on in the race: "Unfortunately Adrian once again went out in the early stages through no fault of his own, which sadly denied him the chance to show how he could do under race conditions, but Giancarlo drove an excellent race, setting some very promising times and was able to fight for position. I feel this is highly promising for the rest of the season." Fisichella finished 12th.



Without the mixup of wet weather conditions, this was a relatively normal race compared to last week in Australia. There are now two weeks to digest everything that's happened in this first two rounds of the championship, before the racing gets going again in Bahrain.

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