



F1 Digest 2009 – Australia GP

This is F1 Digest 2009 – Australia GP.

What a race to start the year with. The controversy continued throughout Sunday but couldn't possibly overshadow the action. Let's run through all that happened.

The Race

With Brawn GP on pole, we already knew that we were in for a special weekend, and finally figuring out how all the rule changes were going to work just added to the anticipation. Sunday dawned with the air temperature up to 21 degrees, and the track temperature at 32. The sun was still relatively high in the sky, considering the late start of the race, but the wind was getting up.

Both Ferrari drivers chose to start on the softer tyre, as did Hamilton and Kubica, whilst the rest of the field chose the medium compound. Both Toyota drivers started from the pitlane.

The lights went out and Button got a great start off the line, whilst Barrichello was almost at a standstill – the anti-stall kicked in. Trying to regain his place, Rubens hurried forward, but was involved in the first lap collision. It wasn't too serious, we'd anticipated worse – the front runners were already through – and it was Kovalainen, Heidfeld, Webber and Sutil who came together. Kovalainen returned to the pitlane but his front suspension was too damaged to continue. Sutil and Webber were the first to have those ugly front wings changed, whilst Heidfeld struggled back to the garage with a puncture.

Button was streaking away at the front, with a 4 second lead over second place Vettel, but the Red Bull was just about managing to keep up. The pair of them started trading fastest laps. Throughout the field, the battles were pretty close. Rosberg was chasing Raikkonen but in turn being harassed by Barrichello. In only a few laps, both of them had managed to get past the Ferrari, but on lap 10, Kimi dived in for an early pit stop. It was clear that the softer tyre was not holding up under the pressure of racing laps.

When Rosberg came in for his stop, though, it was a slow one, and he rejoined the field behind the Ferrari again. Meanwhile, teammate Nakajima spun and crashed into the wall at Turn 3, scattering pieces of Williams all over the track. It was an obvious Safety Car situation, but it took a few laps for the car to be deployed. In that time, Button and Heidfeld both had their pit stops and returned to the track. Finally, the safety car emerged, but seemingly in the wrong place. A stream of cars had to pass it, and then it was slowed right down waiting for Button. The Brawn driver, on a different part of the track, was slowed right down, waiting for the Safety Car. They finally met up and all returned to normal, but it was a weird moment.

Massa locked up twice during the slow procession, and clearly getting heat into the tyres was proving difficult. The Safety Car came in and almost instantly, Piquet spun off into the gravel. He claimed a brake problem. Meanwhile, Glock was falling backwards, as both Hamilton and Alonso got past him almost instantly.

At the front of the pack, Button stretched out his lead again to just over 3 seconds, proving that the Brawn really is fast. However, with the second round of pit stops due, he would have to take on the softer, and clearly more useless tyre, whilst some of his nearest competitors would not. Kubica, in particular, started putting in the fastest laps before coming in for his own stop.



After emerging from the pit lane, Raikkonen slid wide and bashed into a wall, which lost him a few places, although he continued running. To compound Ferrari's misery, Massa slowed right down, a problem with the car signalling the end of his race.

Button's last pit stop was a slow one, with the main fuel rig having to be swapped for the back up. He still managed to come out in front of Vettel, who was in turn being chased by Kubica.

Glock's last pit stop was on lap 50, and he came out behind Buemi, but the Toro Rosso couldn't hold him up. The new boy's defensive driving skills need some work. Rosberg started falling backwards. On the softer tyre, he fell pray to first Barrichello, then Trulli and then Hamilton.

However, all eyes were on Kubica and Vettel, as the BMW was determined to get past. Vettel made a small mistake going into the corner, and Kubica tried to take the position, but the pair of them collided and both appeared to be out of the race. The Safety Car came out again, and it was a simple procession to the end of the race. Vettel, though, despite having one wheel hanging off, continued to circulate the track, presumably to try and pick up at least a couple of points. He didn't make it to the end, though, pulling off track before the final lap. As the Safety Car returned to the pit lane, Button led the field across the line, taking the chequered flag.

Results

Jenson Button scored his second career victory, with Barrichello on the next step of the podium, making it an incredible start to Brawn GP's life as a team. Trulli had somehow managed to make it into third, although there had clearly been some action we hadn't seen behind the safety car that allowed this to be possible. Hamilton was in fourth, and Glock in sixth, which proved what a mixed up race this was – three drivers that started at the back of the pack finishing third through fifth.

Alonso finished sixth, almost five seconds down on the leader, and Rosberg in seventh – impressive considering his problems with the softer tyre – and Buemi picked up a point on his debut. Bourdais was just behind, still outshone by his rookie teammate.

Force India's performance seems mightily improved with Sutil in 10th and Fisi in 12th, with Heidfeld in between. Considering Kubica was heading for a second place finish before the incident, Heidfeld's KERS device didn't do him any favours.

Webber was the first driver not to finish on the lead lap, in 13th, Vettel was classified 14th and Kubica 15th. Finally Raikkonen was classified 16th but three laps down. The retirees were Massa, Piquet, Nakajima and Kovalainen.

Adjustments

In a weekend full of controversy, it could hardly be expected for the race to be any different. Afterwards, the incident with Trulli was investigated. It turns out that under the safety car, Trulli had been running in third, with Hamilton behind. Although we didn't see why, it seems as though Trulli ran wide, off track – maybe avoiding a slow moving Vettel. Hamilton made his way through, and once Trulli regained the track, he took the place back. However, the stewards investigated, as you can't overtake under the safety car. He was handed a 25 second penalty, which moved him from third down to 12th, and promoted Hamilton through to Bourdais up. Le Seb picked up the final points position.

Toyota have said that they want to appeal the decision, but the stewards said it was inadmissible – similar to the penalties at Spa last year. However, Toyota may take it further and bring it to the Court of Appeal.



In further penalty news, Vettel was handed a ten place grid drop for Malaysia, after the crash with Kubica. The team were also given a \$50,000 fine for allowing Vettel to run with one wheel hanging off.

From the Comments

A couple of comments about the action on Sunday, Gavin said: "Fantastic race - great to see the natural order of F1 turned on its head. BBC did a great job for their first weekend back - light years ahead of ITV coverage. I'm yet to be convinced that the new rules encourage more overtaking as the field seems more spread out than last year, but KERS does seem to provide quite a power boost and the cars are able to use more of the track than last year. The only downer was that Vettel and Kubica took each other out of 2nd and 3rd places and these guys were both in my Fantasy Racers team."

Chris Lee emailed me and said: "First of all, congratulations to Brawn GP. Both drivers were on top of their game, and have produced the best drives I have ever seen from either of them. I feel that Vettel's punishment was a little harsh, especially as I feel that both drivers were to blame for their little tangle. I also think that both Toyota drivers and Hamilton should be commended for their charges through the field."

And finally, Alianora said: "Great weekend for Brawn, Hamilton did well to get third after starting from 18th, Trulli was unlucky, and what were Kubica and Vettel thinking in that crash? But basically, the story was Brawn."

Team by Team

Let's start with Force India. Sutil says the race was really exciting and the team should be happy with what they achieved. "After the first safety car everything was fine – we had a good strategy with a short stint on the soft tyres in the middle. On the restart I could get past a few cars and then on the hard tyre it went really well." Fisichella made an error in his pit stop, and says: "I'm very disappointed with the mistake I made. I was just confused with last year as we were always in the last slot in the pitlane, so I just overshot and had to be pulled back into the pits." However, he does take positives away, because the team can fight with the others rather than being stuck at the back.

Rosberg is notably critical of the tyres, saying: "The restart after the first safety car on cold tyres was very difficult, I had no grip at all and again in the last part of the race, I had taken everything out of my tyres and they were dropping out, so it was impossible to keep anyone behind me. All said, I think two points is a good outcome." Kazuki's accident was actually a lot scarier than it looked, and he says: "I had quite a big accident on lap 17 when I ran wide at turn four and I hit the kerb, which unsettled the car and then I lost the rear. It was quite a fast impact, but I had a precautionary check in the medical centre, everything is fine and physically I am okay, but of course the outcome - my retirement - hurts!"

Alonso explains what made his afternoon tricky: "Sixth place is not the best result, but in a way we have to be happy because we started the race in a difficult position and I was pushed wide at turn 1 onto the grass and so I dropped to the back of the pack. After that, it was difficult and so it's great to score points." And also, he said that KERS didn't seem to make a big difference and he was a little disappointed at how it worked. Piquet confirms that he started having problems with the brakes under the safety car and when he was ready to overtake Rosberg once it was all clear, the brakes just didn't work.

Buemi disagrees with Alonso's assessment of KERS, saying: "First race first point, so I'm very happy. Maybe we had a bit of luck with the accidents, but even without that we were not too bad and our strategy worked well and I am very happy with the way my race went. I made a mistake when I was alongside Massa, hitting the limiter button, but when he put the KERS on you could really see the advantage it brings." Bourdais seemed to have a day where everything just went wrong: "A few more Safety Cars would have helped as I did a final stint of 36 laps and in the early part the car felt a bit like a caravan with all that fuel weight on board. I had a very big moment where I was



lucky not to crash and then I had a seat belt come loose and I had to find a way of locking myself into position in the car." That sounds scary.

For BMW, Kubica blames Vettel for the incident: "Sebastian went wide in corner one and then he braked early. I was already in front, but he didn't want to let me by. Then he had a lot of understeer and touched me. My front wing was under the car, therefore I crashed in corner 5. I think Sebastian was a bit too optimistic." Heidfeld is disappointed with his race, especially because it all went wrong on the first lap: "I was in the middle of the track but suddenly I got a big bang. I had to pit for new tyres and a front wing, but the damage to the car was a lot more than that and driving with it was hopeless. I think at least the KERS helped me to defend my position with such a slow car."

Massa says: "We knew the Brawn GP cars would be unbeatable today, but all the same, we thought we could have a good race." Of course, they didn't and he says the only thing they can do for Malaysia is: "Work and work hard." Raikkonen is feeling very optimistic considering both Ferrari drivers finished with a DNF: "When I ended up in the wall it was my mistake. A shame as, given what happened later, I could have finished second. We lost valuable points but we will try and make up for it starting right away in Malaysia. There, we will get a clearer picture of the situation because this circuit is not very indicative of performance."

Kovalainen also suffered a DNF, which wasn't his fault and he has very little to say about: "Obviously, my race was very short. Webber had a moment at the first corner and his front wheel hit my left-front. It was a racing accident – these things unfortunately happen." Conversely, Hamilton had a very good day, considering how it started: "We scored way more points than we could have realistically expected. Considering the package we've got, I wrung every last ounce of pace out of the car, drove one of my best ever races and absolutely raced my heart out - I'm so satisfied."

Red Bull had a pretty poor day, with Vettel's accident and Webber struggling at his home race. After the first lap incident, he said: "That was frustrating at my home race. I was so disappointed to drive round with a damaged car. I wanted a good result for the fans today, but we'll do our best to recover from the next race on - it would have been nice to have got a good result here." Vettel admits that the Kubica incident could have played out very differently, but that he didn't want to concede the place. He also adds that the pace of the car means they should still feel optimistic, even if today didn't go their way.

Over at Toyota, Trulli explains what happened under the safety car. "I can't say how disappointed I am to finish third but have the result questioned. When the safety car came out towards the end of the race Lewis Hamilton passed me but soon after he suddenly slowed down and pulled over to the side of the road. I thought he had a problem so I overtook him as there was nothing else I could do." Glock is happy to have finished fourth, although he wishes it wasn't at the expense of Trulli.

And of course, we finish with the winning team, Brawn GP. Barrichello is happy to have achieved a podium despite all the troubles: "Well you could say that I had an eventful afternoon! I had a lot of mixed emotions during the race and honestly I am so delighted to have achieved second. It was really tough for me at the start as the anti-stall kicked in which cost me a few places off the line and then I was hit heavily from behind going into the first corner and thought my race was over." Button, meanwhile, simply says: "This is just a fairytale ending to the first race of our career together at Brawn GP. It may have looked like an easy victory but it really wasn't easy at all out there today but we brought the car home and that's all that matters. This win is for me, my family and my team."

Quote of the Day

That's it for this episode of F1 Digest, and it brings our first race weekend to a close. The action moves on to Malaysia in just a few days time, so join me again for the preview show very soon. I will leave you with this quote



from Sam Michael of Williams: “Congratulations to Ross Brawn, Jenson and their team for an impressive result, we will try our best not to let them make a habit of it!”

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