



F1 Digest 2009 – Malaysia GP

This is F1 Digest – Malaysia GP.

The rain had been predicted from the minute we turned our attention away from Melbourne and started focusing on Sepang. It had managed to hold off for all previous sessions, but once the race began, we were not so lucky.

The Race

We knew the weather wasn't going to sit back and allow this race to go on unaffected, but the question was, how long would it be until the heavens opened. As the drivers headed off on their formation lap, the skies were darkening, the track temperature was at 37 degrees C, and the air about 30 degrees. The humidity was up to 75%. The lights went out and the pack got away, well, most of them. Kubica was very slow off the grid, barely moving, and he only made it a few corners before pulling off track, the BMW slowly catching fire. It took a worryingly long time for the marshals to come and sort it out, but they did and crisis was averted.

Meanwhile, Button had also had a poor start and allowed Rosberg into the lead whilst Trulli and Alonso also both got past the Brawn GP car. Kovalainen was the other first lap victim, as he spun off and out of the race. The Williams was sprinting away into the distance, whilst Button managed to get past Alonso to start his bid to recapture the lead.

In fact, Alonso was holding up quite a few cars, with Barrichello making light work of the Renault, but Raikkonen, Webber and Glock unable to get past. Behind Glock was a very heavy Heidfeld, and behind him an exceptionally light Vettel and Hamilton desperate to get through. It wasn't until Heidfeld ran wide and off track that the pair could fly past.

Drivers were starting to get told over their radios that the rain was coming in, most receiving a ten minute warning. Meanwhile, Alonso lost a place to Raikkonen, and then had a fabulous battle with Vettel, which ultimately saw the Red Bull go through. Vettel came into the pit lane on lap 13, which was about as early as expected, and two laps later Rosberg came in as well. Notably, all drivers pitting at this time chose the soft tyre. Kimi came in at the end of lap 18 and he was the first to be fitted with wet tyres. There were some spots of rain on the cameras but this was definitely another gamble from Ferrari.

Button had a swift pit stop, and then teammate Barrichello was in the next lap. Rubens didn't enjoy such a quick stop, suffering a little bit of clutch or gear trouble that held him up slightly. The next few laps were dominated by the battle between Webber and Hamilton for sixth place. Webber had the speed in the corners, but Hamilton had the added KERS advantage down the straights. The pair of them continued to battle corner after corner and it was amazing. Webber finally managed to make a move stick, and hurried off after Heidfeld.

As they kept us enthralled, the rain was gradually getting harder, and both Brawn cars, Rosberg and Trulli all came into the pits for a change of tyres. Raikkonen was heard on the radio telling his team that the tyres were completely destroyed – their gamble had not paid off. Glock, meanwhile, was still on the intermediates, and he and Webber passed Trulli, then Glock passed the Australian to take second.

It's hard to tell exactly what happened next, as the monsoon really hit. Drivers were spinning off all over the place, and Button came into the pits for extreme wets. He came out behind Glock, until the German had to give in and come in for wet tyres. Webber, Hamilton and Rosberg all joined him.



Vettel spun off, and the Safety Car came out on lap 32. Just seconds later, the race was red flagged. The cars slowly made their way back to the grid, and lined up in an unspecified order. The timer continues to countdown when the race is stopped, so the stopwatch was on to see how long the rain was going to last. The predictions were half an hour, and teams needed ten minutes warning of a restart. There was only about fifty minutes remaining, so it was going to be tight. Some drivers hopped out of the cars, others opted to remain seated. Webber started making his way to each car, presumably checking what each driver thought about continuing.

Aside from the fact that it was still raining, that it was getting dark, and that time was running out, word came out that if the race was restarted, most likely behind the safety car, then all the drivers apart from the top three would have a head start to un-lap themselves. The confusion continued.

Although mechanics can work on the cars as they are on the grid, they can't bring the car into the pitlane. However, Raikkonen's Ferrari was in the garage being worked on due to a KERS problem. Kimi had obviously already given up, he was out of his overalls and fetching an ice cream from the freezer in the garage.

Finally, time ran out, and it was confirmed that the race wouldn't start up again.

Results

There was a slight confusion about who was where in the points, because the results are taken as at the end of the lap previous to the one where it was red flagged. It's also important to note that as the race didn't reach the 75% mark, only half points are awarded for the top eight finishers. Anyway, Button takes his second victory in a row, and stood on the podium next to Heidfeld and Glock. Glock barely missed out on second, but all three drivers seemed pretty happy with their afternoon's work in the press conference.

Trulli finished in fourth, just ahead of Barrichello, who, it's fair to say, did not look happy afterwards. Webber came home in sixth, just ahead of Hamilton, and Rosberg picked up the final point, although in this case, only half a point. Massa was the best placed Ferrari in 9th, and Bourdais ended up 10th, just ahead of Alonso who was 11th, and the first driver to be classified a lap down. Nakajima was 12th, with Piquet 13th, and then Raikkonen in 14th.

Two Sebastian's together next with Vettel 15th and Buemi 16th, followed by Sutil and Fisichella to round out the order. All four of the above actually spun off in the dying moments of the race but still remained classified. Kubica and Kovalainen weren't though, after their first lap incidents.

Championship Standings

Button leads the drivers championship then with 15 points, Barrichello is second with 10 and Jarno Trulli in third with 8.5 That's going to get annoying, I can tell. Glock has 8, and Alonso rounds out the top five with 4.

For the constructors championship, Brawn are stocking up a nice lead with 25 points ahead of second place Toyota with 16.5. Renault and BMW both have 4 points, and Williams round out the top five with 3.5 points. Notably Ferrari and Force India are the only teams with zero points.

From the Comments

RG is happy with how his preferred driver did in the rain: "I love Glock even more now. Wasn't he just brilliant yesterday in the rain, went on the right tyres at the right time and unlucky to only finish third. Button I'm now scared of, if that car is that quick when its not to the max, the rest are in trouble."

Whilst Amy is a little upset about how her favourite did: "Any time I try and form proper thoughts and summaries they get pushed out by 'NOO HEIKKI NOOOO;'"



Gavin liked the rain, which is good, as he's been asking for it: "That was possibly the best half-race I have ever seen. Overtaking, fighting for position... some great action out there today! However, maybe I wished too hard when I asked for rain the other day. It will be interesting to see when all the cars have KERS - as it seemed that the best battles were between KERS and non-KERS cars. Finally, Ferrari will have to be very worried as they have made the worst start since 1992 and they get things very wrong today - how much do they miss Ross Brawn now?"

Monis left a great review, and here's just part of it regarding Williams: "I was unable to see the race live but I was successful in avoiding all news sources until I was able to view a recording of the race despite my brothers' best efforts to ruin it by telling me the results. The race was very enjoyable to watch right from the start and I liked watching Nico take the lead out of the first corner. It was disappointing to see him fade away during the race once again but still it is exciting that he has been in the points and constantly challenging at the top so far this season."

Meanwhile, Alex says: "Does it seem to be the more experienced teams that are doing better? As Brawn, Toyota, Red Bull and Williams seem to have had more stable and more experienced team management over the winter. Perhaps that has been the advantage so far. Overall it does seem that whatever the weather that Brawn is QUICK, QUICK, QUICK!"

Finally, Lukeh summed up what a lot of us are thinking: "I have no idea what's going on."

Team by Team

Today we'll start with Force India, who really didn't have a good day at all. Sutil thinks that the rain was both a help and hindrance, though. He says: "It was a bit of a shame that it couldn't be restarted as I think we would have had a good chance in the wet conditions. In the end though it was too dark to restart." Fisichella had a similar problem to Kimi, in that they changed to extreme wets too early. He explains: "Then it was raining and the grip was getting better and better but there was just so much water and the tyres were almost slicks so I could not control the car, it was just aquaplaning."

Hamilton thinks the conditions were the most dangerous he's ever raced in and concedes: "I love it when it rains, but this was just too much." Kovalainen doesn't have much to add, considering he was already out by the time the rain came, he says: "My start was okay. I was taking it quite carefully and was trying to slot in behind Lewis, then I just lost the rear and spun out. It was my mistake. Game over."

Toyota had a really good day with Glock 3rd and Trulli 4th, but Jarno feels like the luck wasn't on his side: "I feel a bit unlucky this weekend - I missed pole position by a tenth and it could have been an even better result for me." Still, Timo is happy with what he achieved today, especially as it turns out it was his decision: "I struggled a bit behind the guys in front of me in dry conditions but I made the right call on the intermediate tyres; I said let's just take the risk and go for it. It was a long time before the rain really came down and I was not sure what everyone else was doing."

Over at Toro Rosso, Bourdais is mulling over what might have been: "It was a shame, as it seemed we were pretty competitive in these very changeable conditions. I would have liked to restart, as it might have been an opportunity to pick up points, even if only half-points." Meanwhile, Buemi spun off at the end in the wet, so is probably relieved the race wasn't restarted. He also had some trouble at the original start: "We were competitive in terms of speed at some stages, running in the top six lap times, even though I was running last, having had to come in to change the nose. I think one of the Force India cars pushed me wide at the exit of the last corner and I ran over something that broke the front wing."

Ferrari have had two pretty poor races in a row now, and Massa says they need to evaluate what's going on: "We definitely need to analyse our mistakes and understand how they can be avoided, but I don't think it needs a



revolution which the always emotional onlookers demand: it would be wrong because it's not a case of us suddenly becoming stupid. It's the playing field that has changed." Kimi, meanwhile, found the early tyre change to be the end of his afternoon: "We were in a good position at the time of the first pitstop and then we made a mistake, fitting the rain tyres when the rain had yet to fall. And that was where my race was pretty much over."

For Williams, Nico is happy that they showed improved performance: "I took the lead off the start and it is a while since Williams have been out the front on pure performance and I have to thank the engineers for that. The car was going really well and I showed my ability to consistently push on each lap and open the gap to those behind me." Nakajima has found a new driver to take over the Trulli Train role: "I had wheelspin of the line and I dropped quite a few positions to the KERS cars around me, and I ended up behind Piquet and I struggled to get past."

Webber is adamant that the race should have been stopped when it was but isn't in the group of people that thing the later start was the problem: "I'm not so sure you can blame the time of day for today's conditions, as the weather was bad at 3pm too. It seems it was just one of those days. It's been the mistiest and coolest day I've ever seen in Malaysia for race day." Vettel spun off towards the end of the race, and actually blames new technologies: "A spin wouldn't have been much of a problem, but the anti-stall didn't work. Without that, I would just have spun, lost some time and that would have been it. In the past drivers had three pedals, a throttle, a brake and a clutch and when you were spinning you knew exactly what to do. It's not in our hands anymore, so it's a shame that we have to retire for this stupid reason."

Heidfeld had a good day, saying: "I'm obviously very happy to be second after starting from tenth. It was a really extreme and challenging race today. I had a good start but also quite a heavy car, which meant racing was not easy for me." Kubica explained the problem he had before the race even started: "When I started on the formation lap, my engine produced strange noises and there was very little power. I started the race, which under the circumstances was not easy, and continued to drive. I asked my team what I should do, but before I got an answer the car caught fire and I stopped."

At Renault, Alonso is looking forward to the next race, without letting what happened today get him down, he says that once the pit stops started it was tough: "This part of the race was interesting and it was difficult to decide what tyre to take when we made our stop because we didn't know how heavy the rain would be. We stay optimistic for the next race in Shanghai and we remain determined to continue fighting for the championship." Piquet believes the race ended just on time: "Just before the red flag it was impossible to drive; really difficult to hold the car. We tried to call the right decision at the right time and there is nothing more we could have done in these conditions."

We'll finish with our race winners then, but first Barrichello does seem a little annoyed at how things went for him today: "After a good start, I felt that I had the pace to catch up with the front-runners and score some good points. Unfortunately once the conditions started to deteriorate, we lost a little too much time on my side of the garage with the pit stops which cost me a few places." Button had a great day, even if it was tough: "I was happy with the car and our pace was good but the weather really threw the race wide open. Choosing the tyres was difficult but we made the right calls at the right time, particularly when it started raining so hard and so quickly."

Quote of the Day

That's it for this episode of F1 Digest. We've got two weeks to recover from this back-to-back start to the season, and we'll be back in a fortnight with the Chinese Grand Prix. I'll leave you with this quote from Luca Baldisserrri, Chief Track Engineer at Ferrari:

"Another disastrous race, and we can't make any excuses for it. Once again today we tried to second guess what might happen and every time the opposite of what we expected happened."