



F1 Digest 2009 – China Free Practice

Welcome to F1 Digest – China Free Practice.

Although the track action can sometimes leave plenty to be desired, we're looking forward to some nice, clean F1 action this weekend.

Free Practice 1

With China being so much earlier in the year, we established yesterday that some of the drivers were concerned about the cooler temperatures. Ahead of FP1, the air temperature was 16 degrees C, whilst the track settled around 26 degrees.

Sutil was the first man out on track, but he was soon joined by many others, all completing their installation laps to get a feel of the tarmac. After about fifteen minutes, everyone had been out at least once, and Buemi headed off for the first proper lap. Hamilton was close behind him, testing out a new front wing and a new rear diffuser.

His first lap time was much slower than Buemi, though, and his improvements saw him stuck behind Raikkonen and Nakajima as well. Meanwhile, Massa was heading out, and generating heat in his tyres down the pitlane, zig-zagging his way towards the track. He slipped into third, while Trulli took the top spot. After improving on his time, though, the Toyota driver slowed right down and cruised back to the pitlane, telling the team he had a problem. It turned out to be an electrical fault and the team got to work.

At first, it seemed as though Kovalainen was faring better without the new McLaren parts, as he slipped into third with Hamilton sixth. However, Lewis pulled it out the bag next time round and took the top spot. He was knocked down by Button, with Barrichello second, but soon managed to retake the lead.

Trulli returned to the track with about twenty minutes to go, but there was little else of note as the timer counted down to zero.

Results

Hamilton topped his first session of the year with a 1:37.334, completing 22 laps. Button was close behind him just a tenth down, and Barrichello one tenth further. Kovalainen finished up fourth, with Webber in fifth. Trulli completed 19 laps, which wasn't the lowest despite his hour in the garage, and he finished the session 6th with a 1:37.764. Rosberg was seventh, splitting the Toyotas, as Glock finished up 8th. Alonso was the first to dip into the 1:38s with Bourdais close behind him, and Raikkonen two hundredths of a second behind the Toro Rosso.

Vettel finished up 12th, after quite an anonymous morning, whilst Buemi was 13th having completed 26 laps. Sutil finished ahead of a Ferrari, 14th to Massa's 15th, whilst Fisichella split the BMWs, Heidfeld ahead of Fisi ahead of Kubica. Finally, Nakajima was 19th with a 1:38.730 and Piquet last on 1:38.825. The entire field was split by just 1.491 seconds.

Free Practice 2

Both temperatures warmed slightly before FP2, with air at 19 degrees C and track up to 34 degrees. The sun was high in the sky, but clearly not warming things up much.

Glock was the first to hit the track, and as is the form, laptimes were immediately on the cards. Glock set the benchmark only to be beaten by Trulli. It took about fifteen minutes for everyone to have a go, and Bourdais popped



up into first momentarily, before Buemi topped it, then Nakajima, then Rosberg. Heidfeld was one of the last to leave the garage and posted the tenth fastest time on his first attempt, whilst Kubica was scrapping round the track and completely last.

Fisichella had a bit of a spin, but continued onwards, and then a short while later, Sutil also ran off track. Those using the soft tyres were starting to struggle, and the super soft and medium compounds brought to China this weekend may play a vital part in proceedings.

Meanwhile, at the top, Barrichello jumped upwards, and then improved on his time, whilst Button slipped into second. Rubens held on to the lead for a relatively long time, but then lost it to his teammate. A few improvements down the field and a second spin for Sutil in the Force India, and the session was over.

Results

Button finished on top then, with a 1:35.679 and he completed 35 laps. Rosberg managed to split the two Brawn cars, finishing just two hundredths of a second behind Jenson. Barrichello was two tenths behind the leader. Webber and Vettel finished fourth and fifth, the teammates posting almost identical times, but Webber taking 32 laps to do so, to Vettel's 22.

Trulli was the hardest working man out there, completing 42 laps, and presumably making up for his extended garage stay in the morning. He ended up 6th with Nakajima 7th and Glock 8th. Kovalainen was granted the front wing during the second practice, but no rear diffuser and he ended up 9th. This was only three tenths ahead of Hamilton, but that translates to four places, as they were split by Bourdais, Sutil and Massa. Despite his spins, Sutil once again finished ahead of the Ferrari. In 14th, Raikkonen, who struggled with his tyres during the session, then Buemi in 15th and Piquet 16th. Kubica running KERS for the first time today ended up 17th with a 1:37.491, with Heidfeld directly behind him. Finally, Alonso finished 19th and Fisichella rounded out the pack just over two seconds behind first place Button.

From the Comments

Following on from the sessions, we had a couple of insights in the comments, Sean said: "I think Ferrari have to put KERS back on for FP3 to see the impact it actually has. Will be interesting to see if Kubica keeps his for tomorrow. As always, good to see Webber up there, also the fastest non-diffuser car. Possibly to be expected though."

Alianora summed up the action in some nice, compact sentences: "Nothing happened for most of FP1. Hamilton fought Brawn back with his new diffuser in FP1. Button showed him what a real double diffuser is like in FP2. The Force Indias went off-track a lot. Ferrari need KERS; Kubica doesn't."

RG can't quite figure out if what he saw was the truth: "That was my first real taste of getting up way too early in the morning to watch a practice session. What have I learned? That the 5Live coverage is excellent, it can get rather dull at times. From the practice itself, hard to tell how much BMW are 'sandbagging', normally its in the midfield but this is right at the back of the grid. Does Kubica really need KERS because he might be fast enough without the weight of it?"

Scott runs through who is doing well for us: "Brawn GP go into qualifying with the advantage once again, Jenson leading Rubens is becoming the status quo. But hot on their heels is Red Bull, something which I for one am pleased to see. Webber looks to be the stronger of the two and I think he could be on course for a good result this weekend. Toyota and Rosberg are a little behind this time but not too much as they still take up their customary places behind Brawn. Meanwhile, McLaren seem to be making some progress with a new front wing and double diffuser, although it looks like their stellar FP1 performance was just a shortlived thing."



Finally, Chris Evans didn't put in the required effort: "I tried staying up to watch FP1 and fell asleep after about half an hour. It doesn't sound like I missed much though!"

Team by Team

Starting with Force India, Fisichella ended the day last and isn't impressed: "I'm not particularly happy with how today went. I am struggling with the car balance at the moment. It's not consistent just yet and I don't feel entirely comfortable." Sutil, though, is a little bit happier: "The medium tyres are OK over the longer run, but very hard over a single lap. The supersoft on the other hand is fine for one lap but not as bad as we expected over the longer runs. Overall it went OK, we completed our work and the general balance is good. I'm pleased with the position so I think it was a good start." He would say that, being in 11th, wouldn't he?

Alonso defends their almost last place position, saying: "Although we are at the bottom of the timesheets, I don't think we should be too worried as we concentrated more on race configuration today. Tomorrow morning in the third free practice session we will be preparing for qualifying and so I think we can remain optimistic for the rest of the weekend." Meanwhile, Piquet says that the track conditions were not good in the morning, but by FP2 things were looking up. He isn't happy with the setup of the car, though, so more work to do.

For Toro Rosso, Bourdais is feeling quietly optimistic: "Our weekend seems to have started off quite well. We have made progress in terms of understanding the car and using it to its best. There is still some work to do, specifically in terms of making better use of the Option tyre. We can definitely see that the small updates we have on the car since Malaysia are working well." Buemi is here for the first time and says that simulator work helps although it's hard to say how much. A small technical problem cost him some time in the morning, but by the afternoon things were a little bit smoother.

Trulli is another driver not yet happy with the setup of his car, so he's looking to tomorrow's practice to get that sorted. He adds: "That was a busy Friday for me. This morning we had an electrical problem which cost us a bit of track time but we recovered to complete our programme of work on set-up and tyres. The track surface wasn't in fantastic condition this morning but it improved during the day." Glock also thinks the circuit was tough first thing: "The track was quite tricky this morning because there wasn't much grip. I was sliding around on the green track and had to find a way to get the car together."

Ferrari are running a message on their cars as a sign of support to those affected by the earthquake in Italy, and this is made mention of a few times in their quotes today. Regarding the day's action, though, Massa says: "Here we are also running without KERS and as a result, we are losing even more performance, in addition to not having as much aerodynamic downforce as the best cars. We must try and push as hard as possible on the development of the car, but we know it will be very hard to catch up. The only recipe for getting out of this difficulty is to work." Kimi adds that the lack of KERS isn't really affecting the balance of the car, but they're still just not fast enough.

Both McLaren drivers feel like the new additions to their car are making the difference. Lewis says: "The car instantly felt a bit better. I can definitely feel more stability and downforce from the front. We've definitely made a step forward for this race." And Heikki adds: "I'm very impressed by the performance upgrades for this race. We still need to do more work to find the best balance, but our car definitely feels more stable here."

For Red Bull, Webber says that during FP2 he had a problem with the rear suspension, which stopped his running earlier than they had scheduled. He also notes a serious problem with the tyres: "As you can see, graining is the main issue, but thankfully I have my helmet and visor, which protects my eyes as the rubber is coming off!" Meanwhile, Vettel is always a breath of fresh air: "We've dried out from Malaysia and, instead, we had perfect driving conditions today, so we'll see how we go tomorrow. I enjoyed it out there."



Rosberg ended the day 2nd, but is looking at the bigger picture: "The one major thing for us at the moment is that this season we have consistency from one track to another. We're now going to a race and not getting any big surprises as we seem to have learnt from our mistakes from last year." Nakajima felt things were a bit harder out there, and he really didn't get on with the tyres at all in the morning. However, he's looking forward to try and improve before qualifying.

Over at BMW, the pair confirm that they are not worried about getting fast laps and headlines. Heidfeld says: "As is normal for us on Fridays we focused on tyre evaluation for the race. They do not really work as we would like them to. We now have to try to improve the balance of the car." Meanwhile, Kubica had KERS for the first time, and says there was plenty of testing to do during the day, and now plenty of data to go over before tomorrow.

Finally, Brawn GP, and Jenson Button who finished the day 1st, despite a different problem to those we have heard already: "There seemed to be a lot of traffic on track today so my main concern was finding some clear air. It was a useful first day of running but we still have some work to do tomorrow to be happy with the balance for qualifying." And Barrichello signs us off with an uplifting sentiment: "Another positive Friday and we achieved some good work today which will set us up well going into the weekend."

Quote of the Day

That is all for today. Don't forget to join in with the live commenting on Sidepodcast.com. A thread is usually opened about half an hour before each session starts and it really is great fun. I'll leave you with this comment from rookie Sebastien Buemi, who may have been a bit overwhelmed by it all:

"I didn't get a perfect lap today, so I think I can do a lot better tomorrow. I like the track; it's very big, very new, very everything!"

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