



F1 Digest 2009 – China GP

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With Vettel on pole, and two heavier Brawn GP cars behind, it looked like it was going to be an awesome start to the race. It wasn't, but the rest made up for it.

The Race

It held off all weekend, but finally, on Sunday morning, the rain started to fall. It was nothing like the monsoon we saw in Malaysia, but the continued rain did cause some concern. The cars lined up on the grid with the track temperature at 19 degrees C, and air at one degree higher. It was still raining as the race approached and we learned that it would be a Safety Car start.

As such, all cars have to start on extreme wet tyres, which they probably would have anyway. It also means no formation lap, so the lights went out and the Safety Car procession led away. An underwhelming start to the race. With increased access to radio traffic, we got to hear the drivers discussing conditions with their teams. Button suggested that visibility was particularly poor, a couple of drivers worried about aquaplaning, whilst Alonso said it would be fine. In fact, he pointed out, if the Safety Car got out the way, then the cars could get on with drying the track.

Rosberg came in to the pits after just five laps, which put him at the back of the pack, and Alonso made the same decision a couple of laps later. In fact, Alonso came out at the back just as the safety car came in on lap 8. Everyone got through the first corner cleanly, and Vettel led the way.

Raikkonen was struggling, and Hamilton dived past him almost instantly, whilst Buemi closed up to try and hassle the Ferrari. It was all going well until he ran wide and dropped back a little. He managed to catch it up, and overtook Kimi a couple of laps later. Both he and Hamilton also got past Trulli with ease.

Meanwhile, Glock was coming up behind Heidfeld and contact made the BMW spin going round the corner. It didn't look as though any damage had been done, but Nick lost quite a few places as he waited to right himself and carry on.

Webber was the first of the leading bunch to pit, coming in on lap 14, whilst Vettel was in on the next lap, handing the lead to Button.

Further back, we were suddenly confronted with Jarno Trulli's Toyota minus one rear wing. There were tyre marks on the shark fin, as well, and as the footage slowly began to emerge, Kubica had rammed into the back of the Toyota, his BMW flying right up over the top. Both cars made it back to the pitlane, with Kubica able to continue, but Trulli unfortunately not. The Safety Car came out whilst the debris was cleared up.

The two Brawn drivers and Buemi all came in for their pit stops, which gave the lead back to Vettel. As the Safety Car circled, Massa's Ferrari just conked out, and he pulled to a stop on the straight, another retirement for Ferrari. When the Safety Car pulled off and racing got going again, Glock had to pit for a new nose. A few laps later, Piquet spun off, clouting a polystyrene braking zone marker. Button made a mistake which meant Webber could pass him to make it a Red Bull 1-2, and he set about pushing to pull away a gap. However, he ran wide and Button moved back into second place. Webber then put in a fabulous overtaking manoeuvre, and took the position for good this time.



It was all about Red Bull as the pair at the front traded fastest laps. Even when Vettel pitted and returned to the track, his increased fuel load didn't stop him putting in some of the fastest sectors. Webber pitted which put Button back in the lead, but Vettel wasn't having any of it. Despite the fact the Brawn car had to stop again, Vettel stormed past at the end of the main straight, overtaking round the hairpin.

Elsewhere, Rosberg came in for his pit stop and was the first, and as far as we know, only, driver to try out the intermediate tyres. All eyes on the Williams then, but it didn't seem to have made any difference. Nico wasn't struggling but not making any progress either.

Piquet spun off again, as did Hamilton, and suddenly, Sutil was up to sixth place. A good points finish would mean the world to Force India, but it wasn't to be. Under pressure from Hamilton, Sutil went straight on at the corner, and crashed into the barriers. The entire front was damaged, his race was over, but Sutil was okay, and he jumped out safely.

Finally, we were into the last two laps, and everyone held their breath as Vettel navigated his way to the chequered flag. Red Bull scored not only their first victory but an impressive 1-2 result.

Results

Vettel stormed to victory ten seconds ahead of second place Mark Webber who in turn was half a minute in front of Button. The three were all smiles on the podium, but Webber must have been seething that he didn't get the RBR win first.

Barrichello finished fourth, with Kovalainen second, having overtaken teammate Hamilton during one of the Brit's spins. Apparently there were five altogether! Glock finished seventh and Buemi picked up a point in 8th. So far, the FIA have shown no signs of meddling with the points, thank goodness.

Alonso's early strategy call under the safety car didn't work out for him and he ended up 9th, with Heidfeld only able to make up one place from qualifying in 10th. Bourdais was outshone by his teammate as he only managed 11th, although he did finish ahead of Raikkonen and Kubica. Fisichella was the first man to fall a lap down in 14th, whilst Rosberg joined him 1 lap down and Piquet fell behind by 2. The four retirees were Sutil, Nakajima, Massa and Trulli.

Championship Standings

Button still leads the drivers championship on 21 points, whilst Barrichello is behind on 15. Glock and Vettel both have 10 points, but Seb is ahead thanks to this win. Red Bull's impressive performance today moves Webber up into 5th with 9.5 points.

Brawn GP still reign supreme in the constructors battle with 36 points, and Red Bull are now their closest competition with 19.5. Toyota aren't far behind on 18.5, but then the gap opens up to McLaren on 8. Renault, Toro Rosso and BMW all have 4.

From the Comments

Plenty of discussion in the comments about this race, but Scott wasn't completely convinced: "I found that a rather interesting race and despite the rain it could have been a bit more entertaining. Nevertheless, Vettel transformed his pole into a brilliant win with Webber close behind to score a 1-2 for Red Bull. A thoroughly deserved result for the whole team and now I hope that Webber gets one by the end of the season. As for the others, Brawn proved they're not as strong as they think they are in the wet, but still hauled a decent batch of points. Finally, Buemi impressed me



greatly with more points and a good drive, but it's Sutil I feel sorry for the most. Just 5 laps away from points and fate intervenes once again. Never mind, though. There's always the rest of the season!"

Sean also assesses the teams performance for us: "Ferrari still having reliability problems. As for them needing KERS, I called it after Free Practice. Still, it could just be one more thing to go wrong. Buemi is looking good. Everyone was putting him down before the season started but he's definitely silenced his critics. Sutil was unlucky not to grab F1's first points. Trulli seemed to have a few more problems, even before Kubica decided to go over him rather than around him. Glock did well to grab a few more points I guess. As for Red Bull, great to see them come 1-2, and obviously fantastic for Webber to get the best result of his career. Shame he didn't come 1st, but I'm sure we won't have to wait much longer to see him standing on the top spot."

Here's Alex's thoughts on the race: "The magnums were on standby for Massa as he was the Ferrari taking a bath. After all the talk of diffusers it was a trickless diffuser that made the difference as Vettel romped home. Webber must be the most disappointed second place man for a while in F1. And Brawn won't be happy to discover that after this rainy race Button's third place scored more than his win last time."

Gavin ponders the coverage we got: "Although it was good to see lots of overtaking, it was hard to see a lot of action on the track due to the spray. I was impressed by BBC but not by Legard - he was either asleep or he talked too much. I also would like to see Mike Gascoigne replace Eddie Jordan as he is far better as a pundit!"

Andy Taylor narrows the racing into just a few short sentences: "Safety car boring. "If we start racing the track will dry," says Alonso. Some exciting stuff. Oh no for Sutil. Hurrah for Vettel and Webber."

Finally, Alianora sums up what we have learnt: "Red Bull gives them waterwings. Noah's Ark as two Brawns and two McLarens follow. Sutil - so near and yet so far (reprise). Kubica learns that nosecones stay on better when not hitting Toyotas. Ferrari's competitiveness got lost at the visa office."

Team by Team

Starting with BMW, Heidfeld can't make up his mind about today: "Of course I'm disappointed with the outcome of today's race, but at the same time I feel I should be grateful I was able to finish it at all. The conditions in terms of visibility and aquaplaning were disastrous." Kubica also felt it was pretty dangerous out there, hence his accident with Trulli: "When Jarno braked into the corner I hit some standing water. Although I hit the brakes very hard the car still accelerated. I went quite high into the air after hitting his rear tyre, but fortunately nobody was hurt."

Ferrari had a terrible day and Massa is starting to feel it. He says: "Obviously, I'm very disappointed and a bit upset but my motivation is still intact. Today, I was in with a good chance of getting on the podium. I was third and lapping in the same times as the leaders, even though I had enough fuel on board to go for a one stop." Kimi had mysterious problems today: "A few times, the engine seemed to lose power, especially when I found myself close behind other cars, but then the problem went away on its own." They'll definitely need to sort that out.

Rosberg had a unique problem that wasn't to do with the car: "The main problem I had today was drops sticking to my visor which wouldn't run off making it virtually impossible to see. It's a problem related to my visor's anti-fog system which I've had in the past but haven't been able to resolve." That's a bit weird, isn't it? Nakajima retired without much fuss or fanfare, and I didn't even notice it had happened. He says: "I had a transmission problem today so unfortunately I couldn't carry on with the race." That explains it.

Sutil is pretty annoyed about how his race ended: "It's a shame - you focus so much and think you can do it, but the car was just out of control at the end. I had the same feeling as Monaco - it's hard to believe when you are in the car



and then suddenly you lose it and it's all over from such a great position." Meanwhile, Fisichella at least finished the race but says graining on the tyres made it ten times harder than it already was.

Hamilton found it difficult given the conditions: "I made a few too many mistakes today. It was very slippery and my front-left tyre was finished long before the end but I still gave it my best. This afternoon was a real struggle but I'm glad I got some points for the team." Meanwhile, Kovalainen is positive after his race – and he should be as he got past the first lap! He says: "Our strategy was spot on: finishing higher than fifth was not possible today and I'm very pleased to have scored four solid points without making a single mistake – despite some massive moments!"

Renault must be disappointed, as their engine customer car took up two steps of the podium, whilst the highest placed works car was 9th. Alonso says: "It's a disappointing end to a weekend where we showed a lot of potential. The team have done a great job to improve the car, which was very competitive, especially yesterday when we qualified on the front row. However, today we were unlucky and I think it's one of those days when you take decisions at the wrong moment and everything seems to turn against you." Piquet adds that he had a few "moments" he calls them, I call them "massive spins", but he did manage to keep the car going, albeit at the back.

Toyota didn't have a great day, but Glock is impressed that once again he started from the pitlane and managed to pick up some points. Trulli was disappointed, though, and blames the weather, plus, of course Kubica. He says: "On lap 17 I just felt a big hit from behind and I lost my rear wing. I made it back to the pits but we couldn't continue. Still, my pace yesterday shows we're close the front so now we must hope for better fortunes in Bahrain next weekend."

Button must be glad to have finished on the podium, but really he's just glad to have finished! "A very difficult race today and I am so pleased that we got both cars to the end of 56 laps and scored as many points as possible. The conditions were pretty crazy with rivers of water all over the circuit which changed every time you encountered them." Barrichello ended up 4th, despite quite a serious problem: "I only had three brake discs working on my car for the first 19 laps which made it even more difficult for me to keep the car on the road. Thankfully the problem resolved itself when the brakes heated up during my first pit stop and I had a good pace from then but unfortunately it was a bit too late."

Buemi put in a great performance, considering it's just his third race in F1, and he's being quite modest about it: "I am pleased that in three races, I have scored twice. Maybe I could have done a little bit better, but I'm happy all the same. We were very competitive in the early stages and I got past Raikkonen and Hamilton, but after that I struggled a bit. I think it was one of my hardest races ever." Bourdais, meanwhile, thinks conditions were too dangerous. "I've got mixed feelings, because I don't think we should have raced as there was so much aquaplaning. The fact the cars have a lot less downforce this year, aggravates the situation as it's hard to get the car down onto the track surface." He adds that the only positive thing that came out of today was that they put on a good show for the fans.

Finally, Red Bull will no doubt be celebrating for days. Webber says: "It's such an incredible day for the team – you have no idea what the guys went through last night." He adds, and this is modified for language: "We were absolutely eh-hem, scaring ourselves that the cars wouldn't finish the race because everytime we ran yesterday, they stopped. So, it's incredible to get the cars home and to get maximum points." And Vettel says: "It's unbelievable - I'm so, so happy. Ten laps from the end I tried to control the gap between me and the car behind and adapt my pace. I was trying to have everything under control, but it was difficult. At some points I was trying to bring the car home, but that meant I lost focus, so then I just tried to take it corner by corner, not looking too far ahead. On the last two laps I backed off a bit, as I didn't want to risk aquaplaning on the water at the side of the track. And then... well it's just fantastic."

Quote of the Day



That's it for today. It's not long now until we go racing again, so I want to thank everyone who live commented their way through the sessions with us this weekend. I can't wait for the next session. Neither can Rosberg, and I'll leave you with this quote:

“ Bahrain is only a week away and a good result, which everyone in the team deserves, is overdue.”

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