



## F1 Digest 2009 – Bahrain Free Practice

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Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Bahrain Free Practice.

We're all looking forward to a normal race, but if Free Practice is anything to go by, predictions are going to be just as hard as the previous races.

### Free Practice 1

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The wind was pretty strong by the time FP1 was ready to go, although that was the only sign of a sandstorm so far. The air temperature was at 32 degrees C, and the track at 46. Vettel was the first to leave the pitlane, but within the first ten minutes all had been out for an installation lap.

That was it until about half an hour had passed, until eventually, Bourdais broke the silence and headed out on to the track. His first benchmark time was about three seconds off the pace, but that probably had a lot to do with the state of the track. Raikkonen was next, but he spun out on his first timed lap, narrowly missing the barriers.

He managed to sort himself out to go fastest ahead of Rosberg, but then Bourdais topped them both. Rosberg came back and posted the fastest time, whilst Hamilton managed to improve his own time to slip into second.

Hamilton then went quickest, whilst the Ferrari boys could only manage mid-field times. Massa posted seventh, then fourth and then made a mistake on his next lap.

With just thirty minutes left, Kubica and Buemi were still to set times, whilst Button had only managed to find 17<sup>th</sup> place, due to a mechanical problem with the car. It must have sorted itself out, as his next lap saw him in third. Kubica emerged from the pitlane, and eventually found himself ninth, but Buemi couldn't make any impression, languishing near the bottom of the timesheets. Whilst the order itself shuffled about a little, no one could beat Hamilton's time, and the timer hit zero.

### Results

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Hamilton was fastest with a 1:33.647, having completed 19 laps. Heidfeld and Kubica showed good BMW pace – which is unusual for Free Practice sessions – they were second and third respectively. Rosberg was fourth, followed by Button and Kovalainen.

Barrichello ended the morning 7<sup>th</sup>, with Massa 8<sup>th</sup>, and Webber and Raikkonen finished 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, although posted the exact same time down to the third decimal place. In 11<sup>th</sup> place, Nakajima with a 1:34.880. Vettel and Piquet behind him, just four hundredths separating them. Sutil finished up 14<sup>th</sup>, the first driver to drop into the 1:35s. Trulli was 15<sup>th</sup>, Fisichella 16<sup>th</sup> and Glock 17<sup>th</sup>. Finally, rounding out the order, Alonso, Bourdais and Buemi. The entire pack were separated by just 1.7 seconds.

### Free Practice 2

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Both temperatures shot up ahead of FP2, with air at 37 degrees C and the track at 50. The Toyota boys emerged from the pitlane first, and as the pattern goes on a Friday, laptimes were set immediately. When the order settled down initially, Button was the fastest, knocking Kubica from the top spot. Heidfeld then pushed his teammate down to third, and Kovalainen slipped into fourth.

Glock jumped up to first, only to have his time beaten by an entire second by his teammate Trulli. Next time round, Glock made up the time and moved back up to P1. These two were on the soft tyres, which were making the



difference, but most of the drivers were struggling with grip today. Staying on track, let alone on the racing line, was proving to be problematic.

As if to prove a point, Piquet had a massive spin, but the Renaults were both struggling for pace anyway, so he didn't really lose much. Vettel split the Toyotas by posting the second fastest time, but the big surprise was Sutil who managed to jump up to fourth.

A last ditch effort for times saw Alonso managed to haul his Renault up into second, whilst Rosberg showed his Free Practice form once again.

## Results

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Rosberg finished the day on top with a 1:33.339, having finished 36 laps. He was followed up by Alonso, then Trulli and then both Red Bull drivers – Vettel ahead of Webber. Button ended up sixth, with Sutil running strongly in 7<sup>th</sup>. Glock was 8<sup>th</sup>, Barrichello 9<sup>th</sup> and Nakajima tenth, over half a second off his teammates P1 pace.

Hamilton headed up the second half of the order, followed by Fisichella, Buemi and Bourdais. Piquet finished 15<sup>th</sup>, with Massa behind him in 16<sup>th</sup>. Finally, Kubica, Raikkonen, Kovalainen and Heidfeld rounded out the top 20. The split from 1 to 20 was just 1.45 seconds, even closer than FP1.

## From the Comments

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I only had one summary today, which makes sense really, because things aren't that exciting out in the desert! Sean said: "Toyota seemed to find some pace in FP2; Trulli sat on top for a fair while. F1's upgrades seem to have helped, Sutil for points this weekend? Webber, Vettel and Button are fairly close together, and I think that those three are favourites for podium again. Perhaps McLaren will be up there as well."

## Team by Team

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Talking of McLaren, Hamilton is going against the grain and suggesting his car does have grip: "We've definitely got a very well-balanced car around here. The track felt very grippy from the start of the session and our work on the prime tyre was very consistent. Both sessions were consistent and very productive." That is a man who's mood has improved along with the car. Heikki agrees with Hamilton's track assessment, but notes where it isn't quite so easy: "The track was surprisingly grippy at the start of practice, but the pitlane was quite dusty and slippery, making it easy to lock wheels." He adds that he still feels more comfortable with the old front wing rather than McLaren's new one, but the decision has not yet been made.

Force India seem to be another team who are improving as each race passes. Sutil has some small complaints though: "It's quite good balance-wise for a Friday, we can still tweak the general set-up and we still have to look at the brakes as I'm not 100% comfortable right now. I think the update package has helped us - if I look at my position in the afternoon, I think it is the best position I have been in ever on a Friday." That is good to hear, and Fisichella adds that the team worked really hard and did a great job to get the new package ready, so he's hoping for a good result.

Alonso says the conditions mandated their programme today: "We had very hot track and ambient conditions today - even hotter than we had in Malaysia. We therefore concentrated on evaluating the brake cooling for race conditions and also compared the tyre compounds to make sure that the tyres work well in these temperatures." Meanwhile, Piquet has added parts on his car: "I've had a solid start to the weekend and ran with the new diffuser for the first time today, although it's difficult to know how much extra performance it gives the car."



Trulli may be rethinking his opinion that their winter testing data will help them: "We had to change some of our set-up in order to suit the car to these temperatures, which are much hotter. There is also quite a lot more sliding around than we had in the winter but I guess that's the same for everyone." Glock is also finding things tough: "During our winter tests at this circuit we had a good, consistent pace but so far today I've found the car quite hard to drive. The lap times aren't bad but I've been struggling for balance."

Over at Toro Rosso, Buemi can always find something to fix: "I am happy with the car, even if it can always be better, as I lacked traction coming out of the slow corners and occasionally, I locked the front wheels under braking." Bourdais is pondering where they fit in the grand scheme of things: "As always on a Friday, it is nearly impossible to evaluate where you are compared to the others, until qualifying. 13th and 14th is not where we want to be tomorrow, but we will work hard now and then see what happens."

Button is enthusiastic for an exciting weekend for the right reasons: "The heat is intense, however we are well prepared for this and looking forward to the novelty of a dry race weekend. The pace looks good from our initial evaluations and I am sure it will be a closely fought battle in qualifying tomorrow." Barrichello admits that the cars were running completely different setups to maximise their testing time, as they had so little over the winter. They seem to be doing okay so far without it though, don't they?

Heidfeld thinks the problem is the tyres: "Obviously we looked better in the morning session than we did in the afternoon. The difference in the balance with the softer Option tyres compared to the harder Prime tyres is quite big here, which makes it really difficult to set-up the car." Kubica says the day was usual for the team, except that they worked on KERS, which is apparently harder as the temperatures are so high.

Vettel finished the day fourth and he's realistic about what that means: "So, obviously it's back to normal now. Last weekend was fantastic, but we have to carry on as there's a lot of work to do!" Webber is happy the reliability is so far so good this weekend: "We had a productive Friday, running on both tyres and the car ran faultlessly. In terms of pace it's always hard to say who's where on Friday – but hopefully we're in good shape again to get some good results on Sunday."

Ferrari are the only team feeling relatively down in the dumps about things. Massa admits: "This was definitely not a good day. We worked a lot towards the race, but we have to try and improve the handling of the car to move up the order for tomorrow and Sunday." And Kimi adds: "Even if we don't know what fuel loads the other teams had, it's clear that we are not as quick as we would like, but we have to try and make the best of this situation. Anyway, we knew that the picture for this race would be no different to what we've seen in previous ones."

Finally, Rosberg finished the day on top and is once again optimistic that the team can do well and score some decent points this weekend. Nakajima adds: "The circuit is getting better and better the more laps we do, which is good. It's also really hot out there, but fortunately it's bearable."

### Quote of the Day

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That's it for this show. Please join us on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting during both Free Practice 3 and Qualifying, if you can. If you can't, don't worry, because F1 Digest will be back to fill you in on all the action. I'll leave you with this quote from Willy Rampf at BMW:

"Last year the field was covered by 4.3s, today it was only 1.4s! So we can assume it will be a very close qualifying tomorrow."