



F1 Digest 2009 – Bahrain Qualifying

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Bahrain Qualifying.

Free Practice never really gives us enough information to predict who will be on pole, so the only thing for it is to find out what happened on Saturday in Bahrain.

Free Practice 3

Free Practice 3 began with the sun nice and high in the sky, the air temperature at 36 degrees C and the track at 47. With just one hour of running left before preparing for qualifying, the drivers all headed out for their installation laps straight away. Kovalainen, though, came to a halt at the end of the pitlane, and his mechanics had to run over and push him back.

Massa set the first time of the day, with Glock slipping in behind him. Their teammates were close by though, with Raikkonen taking the top spot, and Trulli knocking Glock down as well. It was Raikkonen and Glock who improved though, the pair of them pushing each other for times, with the German holding P1.

Rosberg came out and went second, Vettel came out and took second, and Hamilton, he also popped up in second. Meanwhile the Brawn GP boys had sprung into action – Button fourth, whilst Barrichello could only manage 13th. Kimi also joined the group who liked to post the second fastest time, and then Hamilton bolted on the soft tyres to shave an entire second off the Finns time and slip into first. Massa brought his Ferrari up from the wrong end of the timesheets to, you guessed it, second.

The Force India drivers were impressing, Sutil had already posted a tenth fastest time at one point, and now Fisichella jumped into fourth. Once again, Glock set the fastest time of the day, but on his next lap, he gradually pulled to a stop at the side of the track. He hopped out the car and the marshals had to push the stricken Toyota out the way.

Despite last minute efforts, no one could beat Glock's time.

Results

Glock was the fastest man out there, posting a 1:32.605, whilst Massa was a tenth down in second, having completed the most laps – 20. Rosberg ended up 3rd with Hamilton just behind him in 4th, and Raikkonen rounding out the drivers who made it into the 1:32s. Piquet seemed much improved in 6th, with Kubica behind in 7th, and Nakajima, Trulli and Heidfeld completed the top ten.

Vettel finished the morning 11th on a 1:33.443, with Kovalainen just behind on a 1:33.478 and Alonso a 1:33.482. Sutil's good showing left him ultimately in 14th, but he was ahead of two Brawn cars, Button in front of Barrichello. Buemi was 17th, Webber 18th and finally Fisichella and Bourdais stuck to the bottom of the timesheets.

Qualifying

Both temperatures had risen slightly as qualifying began. The track was up to 51 degrees, and the air up to 38. Fisichella was out first for Force India and he set the first laptime. Teammate Sutil was another out early, but he was at least three seconds off the pace, clearly having made a mistake somewhere around the lap.



Most drivers went out for a banker lap, and it wasn't long before the times started dropping. Trulli set an early benchmark, but then Raikkonen beat it by a good half a second. Meanwhile, Kovalainen locked up his tyres heading round Turn 10. Raikkonen improved his time, but then succumbed to Massa who took P1 for a Ferrari 1-2.

The BMW boys emerged from the pitlane finally, having left it late like they always do. Heidfeld only managed ninth and Kubica crossed the line sixth. Not a great start but enough to keep them out the drop zone.

With everyone determined to make it through to the next session of qualifying, the times began to tumble and the traffic out on track got worse. Glock jumped up to the top, beaten by his teammate Trulli and the P1s kept coming. Further back, Webber got held up behind Sutil. He didn't cross the line in time to complete another lap, and he was a big name out in the first session.

He was joined by Sutil, Buemi, Fisichella and Bourdais, whilst the fastest three were Vettel, Trulli and Hamilton. Kovalainen was out early in the second session, the first to set a time, but he was pushed down by Barrichello and Raikkonen and Vettel. Hamilton squeezed into the top ten, whilst the BMW boys remained in the garage. When they finally emerged, Kubica was 13th and Heidfeld just behind in 14th.

A moment of calm before the final attempt at a fast lap. Kovi was out first once again, but soon joined by everyone else bar Vettel. Trulli jumped to second, and Glock pipped him to the post but neither could beat the Red Bull's time. BMW, meanwhile, couldn't get either driver above their current position. They both dropped out.

Joining them Piquet, Nakajima and Kovalainen, with the fastest three Vettel, Glock and Trulli.

Toyota were keen to get going for the last ten minutes of qualifying, sending Glock out first. He set the first time, but Trulli soon beat it. Button slipped into third with Hamilton fourth. Vettel struggled to keep his car on track but did manage to push the McLaren down a place.

The final ditch effort for pole saw Button fastest, and Hamilton second. Glock then took P1, and Vettel slipped into second. Barrichello crossed the line sixth but it was all eyes on Trulli as he took pole position.

Results

Trulli takes his fourth career pole position, having already scored one for Toyota and two previously for Renault. Glock made it a Toyota 1-2 taking second, with Vettel just behind in 3rd. Button lines up 4th with Hamilton splitting the Brawn GP cars, his fifth to Barrichello's 6th.

Alonso finished 7th, just three tenths ahead of Massa in 8th. Rosberg was the first of the top ten to dip into the 1:35s, and Raikkonen rounded out the first half of the grid.

Kovalainen settles for 11th, Nakajima a tenth behind him, Kubica another tenth back and Heidfeld also a tenth behind his teammate. Piquet lines up 15th, Sutil qualified 16th, with Buemi, Fisichella, Webber and Bourdais behind him.

Adjustments

Sutil was handed a three place grid penalty for getting in Mark Webber's way during the first session of qualifying. It looked as though Sutil came from behind Webber, assuming he was slowing or something, to try and make space for his own lap. However, it held the Red Bull up. The penalty drops Sutil from 16th to 19th – not a particularly long way to fall – and promotes Buemi, Fisichella and Webber up one place each.

Fuel Loads



With the fuel load information released about two hours after qualifying is over, we now know who was running light. Glock was the lightest of the top ten, with Trulli just a tiny bit heavier. The Brawn GP cars have a medium amount of fuel on board, but Vettel is heavier than the top seven, so he is in a good position for the race. Massa, Rosberg and Raikkonen all have quite a lot more fuel on board, which might explain their lower positions.

Further back, the heaviest car is Kubica, with Heidfeld only slightly lighter. Fisichella and Webber are both fuelled pretty light, presumably intent on making their way through the field in the first stint of the race.

From the Comments

There was plenty of discussion in the comments following today's action, starting with Webber555 who said: "I'm obviously disappointed by Webber's "incident" but so happy for the Toyota boys and Vettel. This should be a close race. Hamilton has done well and is always a contender if given a sniff. Think the weights will be similar between the top runners. I don't think Brawn will be much heavier than anyone else. Toyota and Red Bull are just fast."

Gavin saw this coming: "Must say that I thought that Toyota would do well because they had tested there previously. Ferrari too, and although they still didn't get near the front they did improve. BMW were the ones that looked silly today and Sutil had an unusual, but major brain fade."

Scott Woodwiss likes what he sees: "3 different teams locking out the front row in the first 4 races? What is this 2009 season coming to? Looks like the winter testing Toyota conducted here has paid off even though they say it hasn't. Vettel is also quite heavier than both Jarno and Timo, which means his lap was rather special."

Journeyer agrees with the assessment of strong performances from Hamilton, Vettel and Trulli and adds: "It was also surprising to see the big gap between some of the team pairings. Red Bull will have cars starting 3rd and 18th. McLaren's cars will be starting 5th and 11th, whilst Renault's boys are 7th and 17th. The mixed-up grid should produce some good racing."

Finally, RG's fanboy status has gone up a notch: "Gooooo Timo! Brilliant result and I'm happy for him and Trulli and in general Toyota. Great weekend for them and I think they have a good shout for a win. Vettel should be watched though, I think he's got some little trick under his sleeve and I wouldn't underestimate the guy. BMW, disappointing this year, might cry." Aww.

Team by Team

BMW didn't do well today, and whilst it was a surprise to us, Kubica says it wasn't really for the team: "We already knew before qualifying it would be difficult today. We lack overall performance. In qualifying 2 I struggled with the grip of the new option tyres. Additionally, our radio didn't work today so, as a result, it was quite hard to fine-tune tyre pressures and stuff like that." Heidfeld agrees: "This was quite a difficult qualifying for us. A lack of pace is obvious and, as we are waiting for our aerodynamic update for Barcelona, it is clear we lose lap time in comparison to competitors who already have new parts." A team already looking forward to the race being over, I feel.

Sutil discusses the Webber thing, although his quotes come from before the penalty was given: "There was a little problem with Mark Webber in the last corner: I was just trying to make a gap to Alonso to start my lap and Mark came in on a flying lap, but I didn't know that. I just tried to stay in my position to get a clear start to the lap. It was a misunderstanding and I apologised to Mark after the end of the session." Fisichella hopes things will improve for them during the Grand Prix itself: "Tomorrow we need a good strategy to get to the end of the race but we know our pace is better over a race distance."

Vettel admits that things are getting pretty close out there: "That was a good session, we could see in Q1 it was very tough and it wasn't enough to do one run on the prime tyres, so everyone had to put on the option. But it was a



smooth qualifying session and we had no problems.” Webber, of course, isn’t happy: “I had nowhere to go in the last corner of my first lap and then Sutil slip-streamed past me for the start of my second, so it was a disaster. Q1 is the worst session to have had that problem, as now we’re at the back for tomorrow – my race is screwed.”

Nakajima is keeping it positive from 12th position: “It’s difficult to say where I lost my time. I didn’t make any mistakes and the car was performing pretty well. If I think about the gap separating Nico and me, I’m pleased with my afternoon.” Rosberg says he was lucky to have even got into Q3, and thinks his 9th position start is okay strategy-wise as they have a good fuel load on board.

Over at McLaren, the improvements just keep on coming. Hamilton says: “I’m very proud of what we’ve achieved: “Firstly, it was good to get into the top 10, then it was even better to battle inside the top 10! We’ve got a similar pace to some of the guys in the top five; as long as everything goes smoothly we should be able to get a top five finish tomorrow.” Heikki isn’t quite there yet but is still happy they’re on the up: “The fact that I was less than one tenth of a second behind 10th position in Q2 shows that we have made some more progress.”

Piquet knows that he is being watched like a hawk, and needs to improve his performance but he tries to defend his qualifying today: “I pushed a bit too much to try to get into Q3. I had four cars around me and I really couldn’t do much so I had to take some risks and pushed hard, but it wasn’t good enough to go through to Q3.” Alonso doesn’t sound like he’s enjoying racing at the moment: “Once again we saw a very close qualifying session. It’s difficult and stressful inside the cockpit, but I guess it’s very interesting for the viewers.”

Buemi is disappointed in his low position as he says the car could have done more. However, he admits: “Tomorrow, I still think we can have a good race, because this afternoon’s performance does not show what the car is capable of, so I am hopeful I can make up some places. How many is difficult to say. As for the tyres, it’s clear that the softer ones are those we will want to run the most in the race.” Bourdais thought things were going well during qualifying, especially after he lost track time this morning, but having corrected some understeer he was faced with oversteer, and it just wasn’t to be.

Massa was also suffering with the car setup, he says: “This morning, the car was handling very well, but in the afternoon it lost a little bit of performance because of oversteer, probably down to the track conditions. Tomorrow it will be very hot and that will have a considerable effect on reliability and tyre performance. We must try and make it to the finish and bring home some points, maybe making the most of the KERS, especially at the start.” Kimi’s starts tenth and says: “It would have been difficult to do better than tenth. In the first two parts of qualifying, the car handled better than we had expected, but in Q3 I no longer had any new soft tyres, having already used all four sets.”

Button didn’t quite achieve his target out there: “We were aiming for pole position today but unfortunately it wasn’t our best qualifying session of the season and the pace just wasn’t there. I didn’t have a great lap on my final run in Q3 and we were struggling for grip on the corner exits and locking tyres throughout the session.” Barrichello agrees and looking forward to the race, he says: “Our competitors are improving and it will be interesting to see how that affects the race. It’s going to be tough but I am confident that good points are possible tomorrow.”

Finally, Toyota locked out the front of the grid with a 1-2. Glock says: “It’s brilliant that we’ve been able to take the top two places today. We had a problem on my car yesterday and we were struggling but the team did a good job to change things for today. We were quickest in the session this morning, though I lost a bit of running with an electronics glitch.” And Jarno: “I’m thrilled to be back on pole again. This weekend has gone well and it’s great to be starting at the front tomorrow. In fact this afternoon didn’t go quite as smoothly as yesterday because I had a bit of a problem with my brakes during the session. That’s a bit of a worry for the race so we’ll have to look into it overnight.” He says he’s still confident though.



Quote of the Day

That's it for today. I don't know about you guys but I'm eagerly looking forward to the race and hoping the weather doesn't intervene so we can enjoy some good, clean fun. I'll leave you with this quote from Pat Symonds, who is likely hoping the same:

"The race will be difficult tomorrow. The wind has already caused problems today and is forecast to be even stronger tomorrow. Strategically it will be important to look after the tyres."

