



F1 Digest 2009 – Spain Free Practice

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Spain Free Practice.

With the weather holding off for the first day in Barcelona, we got a glimpse at all the new aero updates. But would they pay off?

Free Practice 1

The sun was out but it was a relatively cool start to the day. The air temperature was around 16 degrees C and the track up to 23. Glock was the first man out on track, but it was installation laps for everyone – two, in fact, for Webber and Bourdais.

There were no lap times to be seen, though, until 25 minutes had passed. Bourdais was the first to put some numbers on the board, followed by the Toyotas. Bourdais' first time was about five seconds off the pace. The others started piling out on track, and we saw Rosberg jump to the top of the timesheets ahead of both Toyotas and his teammate Nakajima. However, instead of capitalising on his lead, Rosberg spun it. This allowed Massa to put in the fastest time and take some of the glory.

Nakajima was also struggling as bits of the cockpit had come loose around him, and he had to make his way slowly back to the pitlane. Meanwhile the Brawn GP guys got to work, with Barrichello slipping into second. Button was fourth and improved to first, whilst Vettel couldn't keep his Toro Rosso on the track and had a quick trip through the gravel. Glock also had trouble at the same spot and drove through the gravel as well.

Massa's Ferrari developed a small problem, and the team suggested that they might save tyres and not go out again, although the problem wasn't preventative in that way. However, just a few short minutes later, Felipe was putting on his helmet and heading out the garage. Kovalainen came to a halt in the pitlane though, troubles ending his session.

From the depths of the timesheets, in the last few minutes, Kubica managed to pull up to third and Heidfeld just behind him in fourth. Meanwhile Button topped the lot as the session came to a close.

Results

Button was the only driver to dip into the 1:21s for this first practice session with a 1:21.799. Trulli finished second, with Kubica and Heidfeld behind him. Rosberg's early pace saw him end the morning in 6th, and Piquet put in a good performance to finish 7th – notably ahead of Alonso, who was way down in 17th. Glock was 8th, with Massa the best placed Ferrari in 9th. Barrichello was tenth, just over a second slower than his teammate in first.

Raikkonen led the second half of the timesheets, with Webber and Vettel 12th and 13th. Hamilton was the top McLaren of the morning, with Bourdais and Fisichella bridging the gap from him to Alonso. Buemi finished up 18th, Kovalainen in 19th and Sutil last.

Free Practice 2

By the afternoon, things had warmed up a bit. The track was up to 36 degrees C and the air temperature was at 25. We learnt immediately that Sutil wouldn't be taking part in this second session due to a fuel cell problem on the car. Nevertheless, proceedings got underway and Vettel was the first man out on track, going on to immediately set a lap time. As others followed him, Buemi had to pull to a stop on his outlap, with some flames issuing from the back of the car. His brakes were on fire, and the car was pushed out of the way.



Piquet continued his good form by posting the fastest time, although he was soon knocked off there by BMW, Toyota and Brawn all leaping to the top of the timesheets. Piquet surprised us all by retaking the spot once more, though.

Heidfeld took his BMW cross country, showing that the improvements may not be completely to their liking, and then it was Piquet's turn. He had to, really, didn't he? Through the gravel, it looked as though he was stuck, but the marshals helped him on his way. Teammate Alonso was up into fourth, so that all was right with the world after the confusing Renault performances of the morning.

Buemi was back out on track, and then, oh, yes, Piquet was off track again. Once again he ran through the gravel, and once again, he kept it going. He was doing a good job at saving the errors, but Flavio Briatore was not looking happy on the pit wall.

Many of the drivers bolted on the softer tyre for the last portion of the session, and Rosberg posted the fastest time. He then pulled off track, and brought out the yellow flags, which meant no one could beat him, and the session ended.

Results

Rosberg showed his Free Practice pace putting the Williams on top yet again, but Nakajima closed in on second, making it a nice 1-2 for the team. Alonso was third with Barrichello fourth. Teammate Button was sixth, with Webber between the pair of them. Vettel ended up seventh, and Piquet, despite his off-track excursions finished up 8th. Buemi was 9th and Raikkonen 10th.

Bourdais must be ruing the fact that his teammate can still beat him despite struggling with brakes on fire, and his 11th position won't help that. Fisichella finished well in 12th, with the two McLaren's behind him – Hamilton ahead of Kovalainen. Massa was 15th with both BMWs behind him, Kubica ahead of Heidfeld. Finally, the two Toyotas rounded out the pack, Glock before Trulli, with Jarno the only man to fall two seconds off the pace of the leading time. Sutil set no time.

Team by Team

Let's start with Toro Rosso, and Buemi, who had his fair share of problems today, he says: "In the afternoon, I had a problem with the rear brake, which unfortunately happened right at the start of the second session, so I lost some track time, before the guys got me out again. It's not the best way to begin the weekend, but we will just have to deal with it." Bourdais adds that it's annoying they didn't manage to run their full programme with the new package, but they have some data to get to grips with.

Engine suppliers Ferrari had their own troubles today, but Raikkonen remains positive: "We have definitely made a step forward in performance terms on the car: you can feel a greater level of aerodynamic downforce and that's what we needed. Sure, it's Friday and it's always difficult to draw conclusions, but the feeling is that we have closed the gap to the top cars." Massa though, is remaining realistic: "We have done a good job over the past weeks and the car has improved, but of course, the others haven't been standing around with their hands in their pockets."

Over at Force India, Sutil doesn't think his missed afternoon will be too much trouble, and reckons he can peek at the information that Fisichella picked up anyway. On that subject, Fisi said: "It's good to run with the adjustable front wing, from my point of view it made things easier. We are still struggling a little with the understeer in the slow speed corners and we need to improve traction in that area but we got through our programme today and could cover a lot of laps."



For Renault, Alonso says the day was interesting with the new parts, and there were improvements, but there's still a long way to go. Piquet says he wasn't happy with the setup of the car, which would explain all the spins. Wouldn't it?

Webber admits that the drivers knowledge of the circuit makes things harder: "Obviously everyone knows this track very well, so it's always going to be pretty tight around here, but we had a pretty good P2. P1 wasn't that great, but P2 was better for us and I got a better feeling for the car." Vettel had a unique problem, though: "A pretty normal Friday except that at some stage we had a problem with the radio and I think I had some Spanish drivers to talking to me!"

Kubica felt like he had a pretty good day working on all the new things in the car, whilst Heidfeld struggled with his: "Unfortunately I lost some time this morning when we had a couple of problems during the first free practice session. Only at the end was I able to work properly on the programme. That was a shame because with such a new package and, for me, driving the car for the first time without the KERS, track time is especially important."

For McLaren, Hamilton seems to have lost some of his enthusiasm a little: "We're still a long way away and I didn't feel any improvement. I think it's going to be hard work to get into Q3 tomorrow. We're pushing but unfortunately the upgrades we tried didn't work for me and the car doesn't feel like it's improved." Heikki, though, felt like things were looking up, despite the fact he had a gearbox problem in the morning.

Neither Toyota driver seems particularly impressed with what they achieved today, but Trulli says he's hoping the changed track conditions by qualifying will help them out, and Glock is determined not to give up despite not knowing where to go to solve the problems he's found today.

Button is another guy hoping his teammates data will do the trick for him as well, as he says: "We have been struggling for grip which was a little frustrating but we believe that we have identified the reasons. The good thing is that Rubens has collected some good data today so we can look at that overnight and have a more positive day tomorrow." Barrichello himself simply says his "initial feedback is positive."

Finally, Rosberg led the way once again today, and feels like their upgrades are taking effect: "Today was our first run with the new aero components on the car and they all seemed to work well. They're giving us a few tenths extra per lap so we've made definite progress." Meanwhile Nakajima has found his preferred tyre: "I found it quite difficult to get enough grip with the hard tyre, the soft one definitely has the advantage for me."

Quote of the Day

That's it for today. We've got one more session of practice before qualifying gets underway and you can join us on Sidepodcast.com for all of the action if you're free. If not, I'll be back with a full roundup in tomorrow's F1 Digest. For now, I'll leave you with a quick quote from Martin Whitmarsh: "Are we as quick as we want to be? No. Do we believe we can get through into Q3 tomorrow? Yes, we do."