



F1 Digest 2009 – Spain Qualifying

Welcome to F1 Digest 2009 – Spain Qualifying.

With all winners in Barcelona's history having started in the top three, qualifying today was going to be crucial. Let's find out what happened.

Free Practice 3

It was a cooler start to the day than we saw for Friday practice. The air temperature was at 19 degrees C, and the track just a few degrees higher on 23.

Trulli was the first man out on track, but it was installation laps all the way. Teammate Glock was the first out for a serious laptime, and he circled by himself for a few minutes, before Trulli, both BMWs and Alonso all came out to beat his time.

The Ferraris were out relatively early, and mixing it with the faster cars. Raikkonen slipped into fourth and improved to second, whilst Massa jumped to the top. Kovalainen was the last out of the garage, and when he did manage to set a time, it was 20th. He improved to 17th, which isn't actually that much of an improvement.

Heidfeld went off track, crashing into the advertising boards. He was okay and got out the car, but the front suspension looked pretty rough, and Nick had given his mechanics plenty of work to do before qualifying.

Hamilton was the first man to put on the soft tyres and he found himself in second, whilst Massa continued to lead at the top. That is, until Glock put his soft tyres to good use to take a temporary P1.

Rosberg had a quick off, and then we were into the last few minutes. Hamilton was on a lap but got held up behind Piquet, so he dived into the pitlane. It was all about Ferrari as Massa went quickest, Barrichello second, then Button pushed him down to third, and Raikkonen jumped the both of them making it a Ferrari 1-2.

Results

Massa completed 18 laps to get his final time of 1:20.553, whilst Raikkonen put in 22 and was just a tenth off his teammate's pace. Button finished up third and Barrichello fourth, whilst Kubica ended up fifth.

Trulli was 6th with a 1:21.256, followed by Hamilton, Glock – who completed 26 laps altogether – Buemi and Alonso. The second half of the timesheets was headed up by Kovalainen, followed by Rosberg in 12th and Webber in 13th. Bourdais Piquet, Vettel and Fisichella all kept it in the 1:21s, whilst Nakajima, Sutil and Heidfeld rounded out the order with the first two dropping into the 1:22s, and Heidfeld on a 1:23.457 thanks to his crash.

Qualifying

Things were getting warmer as qualifying came around, the track was up to 40 degrees C, and the air at 24. Sutil was the first out, but most drivers set an early benchmark time, with Piquet surprising up in first. He was knocked down by Heidfeld, who's car had been speedily repaired, and then Trulli topped the lot. In fact, the leader changed every few seconds as driver after driver headed out to make their mark.

Once again the Ferrari boys looked strong with Massa second and Raikkonen third. Massa went on to improve to the top spot, whilst the order continued to get mixed up.



In the last few minutes, Ferrari and Raikkonen decided to stay in the garage and not waste another set of tyres. Bad move. The times tumbled, and whilst Massa managed to stay at the top of the timesheets, Kimi was out.

Massa was fastest along with Webber and Button, but Kimi led those dropping out, along with Bourdais, Kovalainen, Sutil and Fisichella.

It took a few minutes into the second session before anyone hit the track and Nakajima was the first out. Williams set the early benchmark then Red Bull took over as first Vettel then Webber were fastest. BMW left it the latest, and their first laps saw Heidfeld seventh and Kubica third.

For the last few laps, Barrichello posted the fastest time whilst teammate Button managed fifth. Piquet jumped out of the bottom five, but gradually, as is the way, he was bumped back down again.

The fastest three were Barrichello, Webber and Glock. Dropping out – Nakajima, Piquet, Heidfeld, Hamilton and Buemi.

The last ten minutes were busy, with Toyota out first, Glock posting a faster lap than Trulli. Barrichello posted a P1 time, but he was pushed down by Vettel. The final laps saw Barrichello take pole position, then Vettel took it from him. Button was the only one left to cross the line, having left just two seconds spare for him to start his final flying lap. He made it work for him though, and it's another pole position for Brawn GP.

Results

Button led the way ahead of Vettel in 2nd and Barrichello 3rd. Massa has succeeded in getting Ferrari's best qualifying performance so far this year in 4th, whilst Webber is stuck behind him in 5th. The Toyotas line up next to each other, Glock ahead of Trulli. Alonso disappointed the crowds by qualifying 8th, Rosberg 9th and Kubica in 10th.

Those who didn't make it through to Q3 in order then, Nakajima 11th and Piquet 12th. Heidfeld warned he might struggle without KERS and qualifying 13th isn't going to help matters. Buemi is surrounded by champions, with Hamilton ahead of him in 14th, and Raikkonen behind him in 16th. Bourdais starts 17th, then Kovalainen, Sutil and Fisichella round out the grid.

Fuel Loads

The fuel loads each driver has going into the race were published a few hours after qualifying, and the biggest surprise was that Massa has a pretty good fuel load on board. Button was relatively light, making his pole position not as special as it seemed. Massa will definitely be the one to watch on race day.

Alonso went really light to try and grab the headlines and it did not work. Now he is light and starting towards the back of the top ten.

Behind him, Nakajima, Piquet and Heidfeld all have basically the same fuel load and sitting just outside the top ten, this will be an interesting battle to watch, especially when it comes to the first round of pitstops.

Towards the back, Kovalainen has gone for a light strategy, which is unusual as he normally gets bundled with the heavy load. It is Hamilton, though, who has stocked up on fuel, presumably hoping to outrun some of his opponents in the mid-field.

Team by Team



Ferrari had a really mixed up day, what with leading the practice session, and qualifying 4th, and, um, 16th. Massa says: "We demonstrated that the car has improved and is much more competitive than at the other races. I am happy to be back at the front end in qualifying and the credit for that goes to everyone at the Scuderia, who have worked day and night these past weeks to get so many new elements on track so quickly." However, the other side of the garage isn't quite so happy. Kimi says: "I didn't get any particularly good laps on my only run in Q1, but we thought my best time would be enough to make it to Q2 and so I stayed in the garage. There's no point in saying whose fault it was, because we can't do anything about it now. I certainly wasn't keen on doing another run as I was thinking of saving a set of new soft tyres for Q3 and the team reckoned we could make it."

Both BMW drivers think their car has improved but are disappointed that they couldn't make the most of it today. Kubica says that he was struggling with understeer, particularly when it mattered, whilst Heidfeld had the big crash: "After I went off in turn twelve in this morning's free practice and hit a tyre barrier I couldn't do anymore running to prepare for qualifying. Predictions for the race are difficult and overtaking isn't easy in Barcelona, but I still hope for points."

Red Bull start 2nd and 5th, and Vettel is happy to line up on the front row: "We only needed one run on the hard tyre in Q1 and one on the soft tyre in Q2. It was a great job and compliments to the whole crew for their hard work. Some parts arrived quite late, which has meant some long nights for the boys, but they will have some rest later today." Webber says he is slightly disappointed but fifth isn't a terrible position to start the race from, so fingers crossed for tomorrow.

Over at Williams, Rosberg thinks their qualifying performance was much improved on their practice in the morning, and so although the tyres weren't working with them, 9th and 11th isn't awful. Nakajima is going to put a little bit of homework in though: "I felt comfortable throughout the session but I then lost time towards the end of my quick lap. The car felt really good too so I need to look over my data and see why I was losing that time."

Sutil is still convinced that missing out on track time yesterday didn't hinder him, he says: "We knew that this would be a tight session and it was. The balance of my car was OK and I don't think missing the free practice session yesterday put us at a disadvantage, it was just really close out there again." Meanwhile, Fisichella is a bit worried about the big names around them: "With Kovalainen and Raikkonen not far away from us I think the race will be a tough one, but let's see what we can do with the strategy and try and gain some positions."

Hamilton still isn't his optimistic self, and says there was little grip on the car, but his lap wasn't exactly perfect anyway. Meanwhile, Kovalainen is out and out disappointed: "This was the first time this year that I didn't reach Q2. Into the last sector, Nick was a little bit ahead of me but I don't think he lost me a lot of time."

For Toyota, Glock is looking at keeping the statistics up: "I've scored points in all the races so far this season and starting from the third row gives me a good opportunity to keep up that run. Finishing on the podium will not be easy but of course I'll be pushing as hard as possible and we'll see what happens in the race tomorrow." Trulli found that the low fuel runs were a little harder due to the lack of grip but things worked much better in Q3, and that bodes well for the race as well.

The Toro Rosso boys found it tough out there today. Buemi says: "We were hoping for better than that. Apart from going off the track, I also encountered some traffic in Q2 and I think without that I could have been two or three tenths quicker and been a couple of places higher." Apart from going off the track of course. Bourdais, meanwhile: "I had a bit too much oversteer in the slow corners, so I couldn't carry enough speed, and for a fraction I didn't make the cut..."



Alonso is looking ahead to Sunday: “For the race tomorrow we know that the seven cars in front are quicker and the ones behind us are quite heavy on fuel and could jump ahead of us during the pit stops, so it might be difficult to keep our position. Nonetheless we need to score points and that will be our aim in tomorrow's race.” Piquet agrees, and says starting 12th isn't too bad as he gets to choose his fuel. He is one of those behind Alonso who is heavier.

Each race that goes by is more satisfying to Jenson, he says this is his best pole position so far. He is wary of the race though: “It's really important to start from the front here as overtaking can be difficult but we do have Felipe behind us with KERS so a good start will be crucial tomorrow.” Barrichello is annoyed not to be on pole as he felt he had the potential. However, he also notes Massa as the one to stay ahead of tomorrow.

Quote of the Day

That's it for today. It looks like it's shaping up to be a good race, so please join us on Sidepodcast.com for live commenting if you can. If not, the next F1 Digest will run through all the important action in about ten minutes or so. I will leave you now with a quote from Dominic Harlow of Force India:

“Clearly we've some work to do still to improve our qualifying pace on circuits like this. We'll look to be creative with our race tomorrow and make the best of any opportunities that come our way.

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