



F1 Spa Blog – F1 in the monsoon

What a rude awakening. For the F1 circus to return from holidays in sunnier climes to a circuit where rain is not torrential so much as Biblical is a harsh change of conditions. But the show must go on, and everyone loves Spa despite the weather, not because of it.

This morning's Formula BMW practice session was red flagged; the rain was so heavy that track conditions were deemed to be unsafe. There was a brief respite from the skies in the 45 minutes between Formula BMW and F1 practice sessions, but the track was full of standing water and driving conditions were unpleasant at best when the cars exited the pits.

Thanks to the weather, lap times were somewhat slower than typical, and drivers battled to stay on the track. Any times sets this morning would not be seen as representative of typical pace at any other track, but rain is the rule at Spa, not the exception. With rain expected for qualifying and Sunday's race, all that really matters this weekend is wet weather performance and control, not outright single-lap speed.

Fernando Alonso went fastest for Ferrari, setting a 2.00.797s in the final ten minutes of the morning session. Immediately behind him was Lewis Hamilton, seven-tenths slower than his former teammate. Robert Kubica piloted his Renault to P3, half a second behind Lewis, while 2010 qualifying supremo Sebastian Vettel was four-tenths slower in his Red Bull.

The weather led to a few surprises in the top ten: Adrian Sutil ended the morning in P5, while Kamui Kobayashi's 2.03.401s – 2.7s slower than Alonso's pace-setting time – was good enough to see the young Japanese driver in P8. Sutil's P5 is perhaps less of a surprise, as the German driver is good in the wet and gaining in confidence this season. But Kobayashi's performance is particularly impressive, and offers hope to all those fans hoping to see more kamikaze drives from the young talent,

What was particularly telling about F1 was the paucity of laps completed. Where practice sessions usually see most drivers complete a number of laps in the teens, a quarter of the field completed fewer than ten.

Although the skies are calm for the moment, more rain is expected at some point during FP2.

Times (unofficial)

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 2.00.797s
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 2.01.567s
3. Robert Kubica (Renault) 2.02.081s
4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 2.02.450s
5. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 2.02.646s
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 2.02.913s
7. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 2.02.926s
8. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 2.03.401s
9. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 2.03.424s
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 2.03.489s
11. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 2.03.601s
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 2.03.649s
13. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 2.03.654s
14. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 2.03.851s
15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 2.04.145s
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 2.04.250s
17. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 2.04.690s
18. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 2.05.680s
19. Timo Glock (Virgin) 2.05.697s

20. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 2.06.695s
 21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 2.07.189s
 22. Bruno Senna (HRT) 2.07.737s
 23. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 2.07.955s
 24. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 2.10.507s
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F1 Spa Blog – FP2 on a drying track

The rain might be infuriating, but it makes for good shots of rooster tails shooting up against darkened skies.

The weather improved over the course of FP2 in Spa, and the track dried out accordingly. By the time the first half hour had expired, the rooster tails and plumes of water had begun to make way for falling lap times. But not before the odd driver flirted with the walls and gravel traps.

But the biggest threat of the afternoon came from spectators in a dangerous area. They led to the session being red-flagged with 15 minutes remaining; by the time the session restarted there were only four minutes remaining on the clock.

Ferrari's Fernando Alonso made the most of the limited time available, knocking Adrian Sutil off the top spot with a 1.49.032s, one-tenth faster than the Force India driver. Sutil had dominated the early part of FP2, making the most of the drying track before spectators brought a temporary end to play. But Alonso is a man on a mission at the moment, and the Spaniard did what he does best in the final minutes, pulling out an advantage of just over a tenth.

Does the Spaniard's double on Friday bode well for Ferrari's Saturday qualifying? Alonso has never won at Spa; his best result at the track was 2005's second place, when he was driving for Renault. The combination of the ever-improving Ferrari and Alonso's number one status within the team could change all that – the Spanish driver has been driving like he has something to prove, which he does. To win the drivers' title in his first year as a Ferrari driver would be a magnificent feather in his cap.

But Red Bull are traditionally slower on Fridays than they are on Saturday, giving the other teams some hope to get them through the weekend. The team broke with tradition today, however – birthday boy Mark Webber had engine problems that put paid to any charge this afternoon, and the Australian driver finished the afternoon in P18. Teammate Sebastian Vettel fared better, finishing six-tenths behind Alonso in P6.

Force India spent much of the summer break downplaying last year's Spa performance, saying that it was unlikely to be repeated. But Adrian Sutil's performances in both morning and afternoon sessions indicate that the team will perform well here, even if that does not translate to pole position on Saturday and P2 on Sunday.

The current weather forecast for Saturday afternoon's qualifying session says that patchy rain is possible, but this being Belgium possible means highly likely. Should the weekend weather bring a repeat of the past two days, tomorrow's qualifying session could lead to an unexpected grid on Sunday.

Times (unofficial)

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.49.032s
 2. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.49.157s
 3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.49.248s
 4. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.49.282s
 5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.49.588s
 6. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.49.689s
 7. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.49.755s
 8. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 1.50.081s
 9. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.50.128s
 10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.50.200s
 11. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.50.251s
 12. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.50.341s
 13. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.50.382s
 14. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.50.682s
 15. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.50.831s
 16. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.51.520s
 17. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.51.523s
 18. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.51.636s
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.53.480s
 20. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.53.639s
 21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.54.325s
 22. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1.55.751s
 23. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 1.56.039s
 24. Timo Glock (Virgin) 2.03.179s
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F1 Spa Blog – It can't rain all the time

Or can it? One thing that Spa does not lack is rain. It's on the track, in the air, and in everyone's clothes. The press room is filled with dripping

umbrellas, soggy journalists, and people trying to dry their shoes and socks using the hand-dryers in the circuit bathrooms.

But while it's easy to moan about the weather if you're a member of the press, it's also easy to stay tucked up inside the hospitality suites when the deluge threatens to drown. If you're a driver and you're due on track it's another matter entirely. The open cockpits become swimming pools, but the drivers persevere.

Some do more than that.

Lewis Hamilton said after Friday afternoon's practice session that he hoped for more rain to come, as the inclement weather would increase McLaren's chances of success here in Belgium.

"If it rains," Hamilton said in the team's official press release, "then we seem to be competitive, but we have realistic expectations for this weekend – I didn't score in the last race, so it's important that we get more points on the board on Sunday."

McLaren have had a tough season so far. Fulfilling, in many ways, but tough. While the team briefly had the F-duct advantage over the competition, their bells and whistles were all about race pace, not single-lap qualifying speeds. And with Red Bull dominating qualifying throughout the season, both McLaren drivers have had to capitalise on opportunities on Sunday to make up for the team's shortfall on Saturday.

The fact that Hamilton led the championship for much of the summer is nothing short of remarkable when you consider how much faster the RB6 is on Saturday. But McLaren were able to make the most of (almost) every opportunity given to them, whether it was taking the 1-2 finish in Turkey after Sebastian Vettel's retirement, or Jenson Button making borderline psychic tyre calls in Melbourne and Shanghai.

Where McLaren had the advantage over Red Bull was in reliability. Until Hungary, when Hamilton retired with a gearbox failure, the team's only retirement (technically) was Button's Monaco experience, when the driver was forced to retire through human error, when his car overheated thanks to a forgotten bung. Hamilton suffered wheel failure at the end of the Barcelona Grand Prix, but was classified as a finisher.

Between them, Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton have had 21 points-scoring finishes out of 24 opportunities. So have Red Bull teammates Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel. Ferrari are just behind – Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa have finished in the points 19 times.

Where Red Bull have had the advantage over McLaren – other than their blistering qualifying pace – is in their ability to finish in the points in every race where they did not retire. The team's lowest finish this season was Webber's P9 in Australia, whereas Hamilton's wheel failure in Barcelona led to a P14 for McLaren.

Red Bull's early season reliability issues cost the team a number of wins and podium finishes, but by and large the team's failures have been salvageable. Webber may have lost the lead in Turkey when Sebastian Vettel took him off track in an ill-judged overtaking attempt, but the Australian was still able to claim a podium finish from the race.

Whereas when McLaren have slipped up, it has been at the cost of serious points. Early on in the season, Lewis Hamilton suffered from a number of poor strategic calls that jeopardised his chances of podium finishes. In Barcelona, the Brit was running in P2 when his wheel failed and he was out of the points altogether.

Both Hamilton and teammate Button had bad weekends in Spa in 2009. A first-lap crash at Les Combes saw the two Brits retire, and neither man will want a repeat performance this year. To keep their 2010 championship hopes alive in light of Ferrari's resurgence and Red Bull's dominance, both McLaren drivers need to record decent points-scoring finishes this weekend.

Button's first F1 victory came in the rain, and Hamilton is an acknowledged master of the wet, so bad weather could play into their hands. But there are many on the grid who perform well in the rain, and others who are best at Spa. The weekend ahead promises surprises aplenty. The only undoubtable truth is that the drivers will brave weather that sends the rest of us diving for cover.

F1 Spa Blog – FP3 in dry, sunny (for now) Belgium

The paddock and press room are filled with members of the F1 circus looking to the skies and pinching themselves. No, we're not all dreaming. But no one can believe that the drivers will be going out onto a dry track, heading into direct sunshine.

Lewis Hamilton, ever the optimist, arrived in the paddock this morning wearing sunglasses. Several minutes later, the grey clouds began to lift – the sign of good things to come for the McLaren driver?

Jenson Button and Jessica Michibata strolled into the paddock arm in arm, and had the briefest of canoodles (by which I mean a chaste but sweet kiss) outside the McLaren Brand Centre before heading in for breakfast. It is the business of a model to look good, but vanity often wins out over practicality. Not so for Michibata, who is rocking a fine pair of Hunter wellies. Unfortunately they're in Ferrari red, but you can't win them all.

With the final free practice session of the weekend now underway, the footwear debate has moved from shoes to tyres. None of the cars have gone out in their wellies (inters or super-wets), but drivers are reporting occasional damp patches on track, especially where the trees have prevented the sun from doing its job.

Everyone is keeping an eye out for the predicted rain, but the running remains dry. There is no doubt in the paddock that the heavens will open at some point today, but no one's quite sure whether that will be during FP3 or qualifying. For now, the track is filled with cars trying to get as much running as possible under their belts in relatively good conditions.

And with that, the heavens have opened. The last 15 minutes of FP3 will be run in the wet, and everyone has piled into the pits for a change of rubber.

In a matter of moments the blue skies made way for the sort of rain designed to inspire a 21st century Noah to start collecting animals.

It is unlikely that anyone will be able to improve on previously set times in these conditions, and there are only ten minutes remaining in the session. Mark Webber is currently top of the leaderboard with a 1.46.106s, followed closely by Lewis Hamilton, Sebastian Vettel, and Jenson Button. Robert Kubica is in P5, just ahead of Ferrari drivers Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa.

Vettel may be in P3 this morning, but the young German was the highest-profile casualty of the session. The RB6 was seen slowly grinding to a halt before Vettel stopped the car in first gear. Red Bull have yet to confirm the source of the problem; theories include hydraulics issues, a problem with the airbox, and the as yet undiscovered. But Vettel was able to set a 1.46.396s in dry conditions before his car gave up the ghost, and that time was good enough to keep him in P3.

So what do the times below tell us? That will depend entirely on the weather during qualifying and the race. If we have a dry session this afternoon, times set this morning could be a likely indicator of grid position on Sunday. But if the heavens reopen, it's anyone's guess – Spa is a race often settled by track position when the rain begins to pour, and no one can predict that.

But there are some things that can be read from the three practice sessions. Renault have improved, and Robert Kubica ran well in every session. The team said before Spa that their aim for the weekend was progress, not victory, and that has certainly been achieved.

Mercedes are not having the best of weekends – development work on the car is non-existent, with the focus on next year's machine. Michael Schumacher is aiming for a podium finish this weekend, and while his optimism should be applauded, it is a highly unlikely result, even here in his "living room". Not only have the two Mercedes drivers failed to impress in the practice sessions, but the German champion will be hampered on Sunday by his 10-place grid penalty. The silver lining in Schumacher's cloud is the fact that he has beaten Nico Rosberg in all three practice sessions.

Special mention must be made of Bruno Senna's lap time, which saw him ahead of Heikki Kovalainen in the rankings for the first time this season. HRT have been in an uphill battle all season, and this morning's result is sure to put a well-deserved smile on the face of all those at the Spanish team.

Lap times (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.46.106s
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.46.223s
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.46.396s
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.46.397s
5. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.46.492s
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.46.627s
7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.46.962s
8. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.47.064s
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.47.160s
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.47.296s
11. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 1.47.388s
12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.47.406s
13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.47.512s
14. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.47.695s
15. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.47.837s
16. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.47.905s
17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.47.981s
18. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.48.692s
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.50.600s
20. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1.51.133s
21. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.51.384s
22. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.51.517s
23. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.51.699s
24. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 1.52.001s

F1 Spa Blog – The sun always shines on Q1

Maybe not. But the sun is shining for now, and that's what counts. As the teams prepare themselves for the first qualifying session of the weekend, air temperature is 15 degrees and track temperature is 22 degrees, some of the coolest that we've seen all season.

The ever-changing weather is causing tyre supply problems this weekend, and Bridgestone are concerned that the teams will run out of their allotment of four sets of intermediate tyres. Autosport are quoting Hirohide Hamashima as saying "in FP2 I was very surprised that everybody wasted one set of intermediates," said Hamashima, who thinks the worst case scenario is for mixed weather. "The majority of the opinion is that the intermediate performance was going down after five to ten laps. I am very worried that if they start the race with the intermediate and then rain comes ten laps in, performance will be not enough. So then tyre management will be very, very crucial."

The closer we get to qualifying, the greyer the skies are becoming. Rain will almost certainly fall at some point in the next hour, but there's no telling which of the sessions will be affected. Lotus are expecting it at the end of Q1, which could shake up the dropout zone.

It has just been announced that Nico Rosberg changed gearboxes after FP3, leading to a five-place grid drop for the young German. Mercedes teammate Michael Schumacher has already been issued with a ten-place grid drop for Spa, so the German outfit are unlikely to bring home many (any?) points this weekend.

Within seconds of the sessions starting, Renault driver Vitaly Petrov got the session red-flagged. The Russian rookie lost control of his car on a wet kerb just after Rivage, took a spin over the grass, and wound up parked dangerously in the corner without a name. Anonyme?

With rain now expected imminently, it looks like much of Q1 will now take place in the wet. Petrov was not hurt in the crash, and is heading back to the paddock, but his session is effectively over.

With the pitlane open once more, it's a race to get on track and set times on soft tyres before the rain arrives. The track has now hit half-and-half status, with rain at the top end of the track and dry skies elsewhere. Inters may well be the best choice, but the teams are caught between a rock and a hard place, balancing the need to set lap times and preserve the remaining sets of inters as much as possible.

As the rain gets heavier, the track is pure carnage. The approach to Stavelot is the scene of spins aplenty, with Jarno Trulli, Lucas di Grassi, and Adrian Sutil all spinning like tops. The stewards will be investigating the Turn 14 incident, but no judgement is expected until the end of Q1 at the earliest.

With the session half-run, surprises abound on the leaderboard. The Virgin of Timo Glock is in P10, while Sebastian Vettel is in P17. That could all still change, as there is plenty of time for the slower drivers to set improved times. Sakon Yamamoto is currently in P13, and Jarno Trulli has knocked Vettel into the dropout zone.

Rain really does change everything.

But not for long – Vettel's next lap saw the young German in P3, safely out of the dropout zone. With enough time remaining for two more laps apiece, the dropout zone is comprised of Petrov, di Grassi, Heikki Kovalainen, Jaime Alguersuari, Sebastian Buemi, Pedro de la Rosa, and Robert Kubica. But the Renault driver secures his place in Q2 with style, crossing the line in P1 with just under two minutes to go.

Both Sauber drivers crash out in the final minute of the session. Kamui Kobayashi goes out at Rivage, and about 30 seconds later de la Rosa plants his car in the gravel at Turn 14.

And with that, we have our dropout zone – a Lotus, two Saubers, two HRTs, a Virgin, and a Renault.

Dropout zone*

18. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 2.01.491s
19. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 2.02.284s
20. Bruno Senna (HRT) 2.03.612s
21. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 2.03.941s
22. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 2.05.294s
23. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 2.18.754s
24. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) [no time set]

* All times unofficial and recorded by a short-sighted journo.

F1 Spa Blog – Q2 not full of the usual suspects

The weather has gifted F1 fans with a grid shake-up not seen since Malaysia, when some of the front-running teams made possibly the worst weather calls in recent memory.

Thanks to a number of spins, crashes, and offs, the Q1 dropout zone was not made up of the usual new teams plus one that has been a feature of the season. The scalps claimed by Spa's barriers were not those of the high-profile title contenders, but the departure of Vitaly Petrov and both Sauber drivers means that Timo Glock and Heikki Kovalainen are now fighting for a place in Q3.

Lewis Hamilton claimed the top spot early on, and held it for the first third of the session, until he was dethroned by Robert Kubica. Kubica is quickly pushed into P2 by Michael Schumacher, whose reign at the top lasts for about four seconds. Sebastian Vettel crosses the line in P1 and pushes his countryman down the ranks.

With half of the session left to run, the dropout zone is comprised of Kovalainen, Glock, Tonio Liuzzi, Sebastian Buemi, Jenson Button, Rubens Barrichello, and Nico Rosberg. Kovalainen is the only driver yet to leave the pits in this session, but the Finn is expected to appear on track shortly.

The ever-changing conditions here at Spa are making tyre choice even harder than usual this afternoon. Those drivers who have been able to make the right tyre calls on the drying track are watching their lap times tumble like the stock exchange. Button was the first man to set a lap three seconds faster than the competition, but once that benchmark had been set Hamilton, Vettel, and Kubica attacked the track with added fervour, pushing Button down to P4.

But times change constantly in the closing seconds, with the favourable track conditions gifting the drivers with an opportunity to set new benchmarks. With the session over, Schumacher, Rosberg, Alguersuari, Liuzzi, Buemi, Kovalainen, and Glock are all knocked out.

Dropout zone

11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.47.874s*
12. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.47.885s**
13. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.48.267s

14. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.48.680s
15. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.49.209s
16. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.50.980s
17. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.52.049s

* driver has 10-place grid penalty on Sunday

** driver has 5-place grid penalty on Sunday

F1 Spa Blog – Q3 track conditions see improved times

F1 Spa Blog – Winging it

Rumour, gossip, and intrigue are as much a part of Formula 1 as speed, power, and aerodynamics. As with any closed community – or any gathering of people, really – chatter and speculation grease the wheels of communication. People theorise, proselytise, and scandalise.

There are currently two theories on Red Bull's flexi-wing doing the rounds of the paddock. The Milton Keynes-based team's front wing passed the FIA's new deflection tests with flying colours during the variety of inspections cars are subjected to during a race weekend, a fact that has led to much speculation.

It seems odd to say that Red Bull have lost their qualifying advantage when the team have just scored their twelfth pole of the season, but the difference between Mark Webber's P1 and Lewis Hamilton's P2 was a far cry from the 1.2 second lead Red Bull had in Hungary. It is this reduced gap that has set the pundits all aflutter.

But it's not just about the margins. The RB6's front wing did not appear to flex as much as it has done in previous qualifying sessions, which is where the theories come in.

The first explanation doing the rounds is that the RB6's qualifying advantage was cancelled out by the rain. The car is still the fastest on the grid, but the changeable track conditions and heavy rains present throughout the weekend have meant that neither Red Bull driver has really been able to open the throttle and let the car roar around the Ardennes track like a beast unleashed.

While the RB6 is undoubtedly fast, previous wet races have shown that the car is not as confident in the wet as the McLaren, and especially not on the intermediate tyres. The Red Bull is still fast enough that it can pip the MP4-25 to the post in wet conditions, but by holding back in the interests of safety, of preserving the lead. The (slightly) slower car does not experience the same cornering loads, meaning the front wing's flex is greatly reduced.

Logical as that explanation may be, it does not satisfy those in search of the aforementioned intrigue. Conspiracy theorists looking for a scandal in the hours before the race can take comfort from comments made by Red Bull's rivals, some of whom think that the front wing passed the tests because it's a modified version of the wing used earlier this season, or a revised set-up at the very least.

Martin Whitmarsh and Ross Brawn were the highest profile paddock critics of Red Bull's flexi-wing, and both men think that the wing used this weekend is visibly different to that which raced in Hungary.

Speaking in Saturday's post-qualifying melee, Whitmarsh told reporters "I wasn't that confident that [the flexi-wing issue] would be nailed, but I have to say ... the wings were of a different stiffness and positional domain than they had been in previous races. I think we could all see it, and the evidence that was collected yesterday showed that in regards to stiffness and position the front wing endplates of those cars appear to be in a different domain."

Ross Brawn was in agreement. "I think all of us can see that what was visible in the last couple of races doesn't seem to be the case here," he said. "I don't know what has happened but it looks visually to me to be different."

Meanwhile, Christian Horner has been sticking to the Red Bull line on the issue – the RB6 is completely legal, and the team are taking all investigations and additional tests as compliment to the team's hard work and engineering ingenuity.

The FIA is introducing further floor tests from Monza, but Red Bull are confident that their car does not contravene the technical regulations in any way.

F1 Spa Blog – The post-qualifying analysis and revised grid

Under typical circumstances, a qualifying session would be a good indicator of teams' relative performance. But there are no typical circumstances at Spa.

While having a Red Bull on pole is hardly the shock of the season, further down the grid there were all sorts of upsets caused by the weather. For some drivers, their grid position was determined less by their potential pace than by their position on track when the rain began to fall.

The worst of the rain fell in Q1, and the chaos it caused promoted Heikki Kovalainen and Timo Glock into Q2 for the second time this season. But the

rain might have been avoided entirely had Renault driver Vitaly Petrov not crashed within seconds of Q1 beginning. The Russian's date with the barriers saw the session red-flagged immediately, and the ensuing delay was long enough for the rain to arrive with a vengeance.

The restart brought further on-track carnage – Jarno Trulli, Lucas di Grassi, and Adrian Sutil all got caught out at Turn 14; Trulli knocked di Grassi and Sutil clipped the spinning car. Q1 ended with both Saubers crashing out, and the dropout zone was complete.

Both Mercedes drivers will be serving grid-drop penalties on Sunday, leading to further shake-ups on the start line. Michael Schumacher is starting from P21, thanks to his dangerous manoeuvre on Rubens Barrichello in Hungary, while Nico Rosberg needed a new gearbox after FP3 and has been demoted five places. Thanks to his teammate's penalty, however, in practice Rosberg has lost four spots and will be starting from P16.

Ordinarily having two Mercedes-powered cars would mean all manner of overtaking in the early part of tomorrow's race. But both Rosberg and Schumacher have appeared to struggle this weekend, and it is possible that neither man will finish in the points. Possible, not definite – safety cars are a common feature in Spa, and can change everything.

One of the most famous moments in Spa's recent history was the start of the 1998 Grand Prix, when David Coulthard span his McLaren in torrential rain and inadvertently caused a thirteen car pile-up at La Source. The weather predicted for tomorrow's race is light showers, not biblical downpours, but accidents can happen here in any conditions. The dry 2009 race saw four drivers – Lewis Hamilton, Jenson Button, Romain Grosjean, and Jaime Alguersuari – retire on the first lap, thanks to a pair of accidents at Les Combes.

With a number of drivers qualifying out of position it is possible that the early laps will claim some high-profile scalps as faster cars compete for places with their slower compatriots. Vitaly Petrov, Rosberg, and Schumacher are all possible candidates, as are the two Sauber drivers. Kamui Kobayashi's kamikaze style could work to the Japanese driver's advantage tomorrow, but it is that hell for leather attitude that cost him dearly this afternoon, as the young rookie pushed too hard on slick tyres and wound up in the barriers.

Further up the field, Fernando Alonso will be a man to watch. The Spaniard – fastest man on track in both of Friday's sessions – qualified in P10, and will be eager to march to the front as quickly as possible. The Ferrari driver can taste a potential third title, but knows he needs to score well in the next seven races, winning at least two and finishing on the podium as often as possible to keep his WDC hunt alive.

Hirohide Hamashima, Bridgestone's director of motorsport, thinks that the results of Sunday's race will be determined by both weather and tyre strategy. "The first consideration is the weather. If there is any rain tomorrow, teams will have to evaluate the usable wet and intermediate tyres they have left from their allocations for the weekend and decide which will be best for the conditions. If there are many rain showers in the race it will be difficult in terms of tyre management because a drying track wears the wet and intermediate tyres very quickly.

"If the track is damp, a set of previously used intermediate tyres could be the best solution for the conditions. With such a long lap here, it is very difficult for everyone to make the correct choice, and the penalty for being on the wrong tyre is amplified by the length of the lap. If it is dry tomorrow, there will be the interest of which dry compound performs best. As we have had so little dry running so far there is little performance data so teams will have to be very reactive in their strategies. I will be very surprised if we have a dull race tomorrow."

Without a crystal ball to predict the weather, it is impossible to make any realistic calls about tomorrow's race. While the order of the top ten might be unusual, there are no completely unexpected cars lining up on the first five rows. The middle and back of the pack are more varied than has been typical this season, which should lead to some great battles for position in the first few laps.

In recent minutes it has been confirmed that Timo Glock has been issued with a five-place grid penalty for impeding Sakon Yamamoto in Q1. A revised provisional grid is below, but the move demotes Glock to P20, and promotes Yamamoto, Bruno Senna, Kobayashi, Trulli, and Rosberg.

Revised provisional grid

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.45.778s
 2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.45.863s
 3. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.46.100s
 4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.46.127s
 5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.46.206s
 6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.46.314s
 7. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.46.602s
 8. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.46.659s
 9. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.47.053s
 10. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.47.441s
 11. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.48.267s
 12. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.48.680s
 13. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.49.209s
 14. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.50.980s
 15. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.47.885s
 16. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 2.01.491s
 17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 2.02.284s
 18. Bruno Senna (HRT) 2.03.612s
 19. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) 2.03.941s
 20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.52.049s
 21. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.47.874s
 22. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 2.05.294s
 23. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 2.18.754s
 24. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) [no time set]
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F1 Spa Blog – The wings are all right

Better late than never, right? The weather has dominated the news here in Spa, and the hot button issues of the summer break have slipped into the background now that racing has restarted in earnest.

While the flexi-wing debate has been overshadowed by the torrential rains, the FIA have done as promised and upgraded the front wing tests to ensure that everyone is playing fair. Red Bull and McLaren have both passed muster, but Ferrari's wing has yet to be retested.

The weather conditions put paid to Red Bull's qualifying advantage on Saturday afternoon – Mark Webber scored the team's 12th pole of the season, but the gap between Webber and Lewis Hamilton in P2 was a mere tenth, not the 1.2 seconds on show in Hungary.

FIA technical delegate Joe Bauer tested the RB6 and MP4-25 on Friday afternoon, and reported that both wings were "found to be in conformity with 2010 FIA Formula 1 technical regulations."

The result will not have surprised anyone in the Red Bull camp – as with the ride-height adjuster debate at the start of the season, Red Bull have confidently asserted from day one that their wing will be found legal, whatever the test. The message has come from both drivers, from Christian Horner, and technical supremo Adrian Newey, all of whom have issued a litany of quotes on the issue.

While Ferrari have yet to see their wing subject to the specialised deflection tests, the team are not worried. Speaking to exclusively to Autosport, Ferrari technical director Aldo Costa said that the team's own tests showed that the F10 – wings, floor, and all – conformed to the FIA's technical regulations, and that all parts had been designed to flex only within the FIA's allowable parameters.

Costa does not expect the scrutineers to find anything wrong with Ferrari's challenger, either here in Spa or in Monza, when the FIA will introduce additional tests on the cars' floors.

During the summer break, FIA technical director Charlie Whiting informed all the teams that their cars would face more stringent tests to the floor from Monza. The exact nature of the revised floor tests has yet to be confirmed, but it is believed that the FIA will be looking at every potential flex points, from joints to the 'tea tray' on the chassis floor.

Regulations governing the skid blocks are also expected to be changed, to prevent any block-assisted flexing. When the teams arrive in Italy their skid blocks must be made of no more than two parts, with each part at least a metre in length.

On Friday, Ferrari driver Fernando Alonso told the media that his front wing had not been altered since Hungary, because the team were certain it would be found legal whatever tests were performed on it. "On our part we have not changed anything, we have the same parts as in Hungary," the Spanish driver asserted.

Both Ferrari and Red Bull hope that the flexi-wing debate will soon become a thing of the past. As the title fight intensifies, neither team can afford to be distracted by idle paddock chatter.

F1 Spa Blog – Whether the weather is wet

The question on everyone's lips here in Spa is 'will it rain before, during, or after the race?'

While the weather conditions in Belgium can be described as variable at best, it will almost certainly rain this afternoon. But how much and when? Lotus are confident that the race will start in the dry with rain falling an hour in, while nearly everyone else is hedging their bets and counting on rain from the start.

I lack the sophisticated forecasting software used by the teams, but using a little thing called the internet I discovered that light showers are expected around 2pm local time, when the race is due to start. The forecast is for 0.8mm of rain between 2pm and 5pm, and if that proves accurate then there won't be enough rain to really affect play.

The skies over Spa are overcast, but the clouds are not threatening much more than drizzle at the moment. The downpours we've suffered this weekend have been obvious from the rapidly darkening skies, but there is a certain brightness behind the clouds as the paddock prepares for lunch.

If the race does start in the dry, then Rubens Barrichello will be the only man in the top ten to start the race on the prime tyre compound; everyone else did their qualifying lap on the option, as has generally been the case this season.

But while tyre strategy will be key this afternoon, so too is set-up. Some of the drivers – notably Fernando Alonso, Michael Schumacher, and Nico Rosberg – have elected to count on rain and run a wet weather set-up, hoping to make up places in the rain. Both Williams drivers are expecting mixed conditions, and have set up their cars accordingly.

As I've been writing, dark clouds have begun to roll in. The residual brightness is being sucked out of the sky, replaced with a menacing heavy grey. Rain is now a certainty, but 'when' is still the question. With an hour and a half to go before the race, anything could happen. Air temperature is 14 degrees, with 73 percent humidity; the track is a very cool 16 degrees.

F1 Spa Blog – The Belgian Grand Prix as it happened

With just under half an hour to go before the lights go out at the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, the track temperature has climbed up to 21 degrees, with air temperature hovering around 15 degrees and humidity levels falling. In the past fifteen minutes we have seen rain, drizzle, blue skies, and sunshine, but over head conditions are grey once more.

This afternoon's race will take place over 44 7.004km laps, covering a total distance of 308.052km. Six-time Spa winner Michael Schumacher is starting from the back end of the grid, but he is not the only man with good memories of the circuit. Felipe Massa won here in 2008; Schumacher, Lewis Hamilton, Jarno Trulli, and Rubens Barrichello have all started the race from pole; Massa, Schumacher, Barrichello, and Sebastian Vettel have all set fastest laps.

Drivers are now lining up on one of the most chaotic grids in recent memory. All men out of the top ten will be starting in a different position to the one they claimed in qualifying, thanks to a host of penalties issued in the past 24 hours.

But Mark Webber is still on pole, with Hamilton in P2 and Robert Kubica in P3. The race to La Source will be a hard-fought battle, with all drivers warned not to use the run-off areas to gain places or face heavy punishment. Drama is expected across the grid, thanks to Saturday's rain-soaked qualifying session and penalty frenzy. Cars are out of position, something that often leads to chaos in the early laps as everyone jostles for supremacy.

With only two minutes remaining until the race start, the track temperature has increased by a degree. Rain is not expected for at least half an hour, but McLaren and Williams will be hoping for variable conditions. Their drivers each have three sets of intermediate tyres to use during the race, while everyone else has only two.

Droplets of rain are visible on the on-board cameras as drivers complete the formation lap.

And the lights are out! Mark Webber gets a terrible start off the line, and is overtaken by Lewis Hamilton, who leads into the first corner. Robert Kubica is in P2, with Jenson Button just behind.

[13:07:10] [redacted]: what the **** happened in that last corner
[13:08:03] ... safety car out
[13:08:41] Kate Walker: Too much debris.
[13:08:49] [redacted]: ah
[13:08:55] Kate Walker: Poor Bar - 297th start, 300th entry, and he's out.
[13:08:59] [redacted]: coming into those last corners
[13:09:23] Kate Walker: Terrible start for Webber.
[13:10:08] ... Likely penalties for But thanks to cutting La Source. FIA said they'd be heavy on penalties there.
[13:10:10] [redacted]: poor rubens
[13:10:32] Kate Walker: Not a great day to be Alonso, either.
[13:10:47] ... SC in this lap.
[13:10:51] ... End of lap 3.
[13:10:52] [redacted]: no day is a great day to be alonso
[13:11:08] Kate Walker: lol
[13:11:14] ... His fans would disagree.
[13:11:30] ... Kubica will cause trouble at the restart - watch out JB!
[13:11:45] ... Less trouble than I thought - he's lost his position!
[13:12:05] ... Ham got a good restart - nice gap to JB behind.
[13:12:22] [redacted]: sutil is doing well
[13:12:32] Kate Walker: That's because his car is better than Liuzzi's.
[13:12:38] ... Allegedly.
[13:12:56] [redacted]: hahaha
[13:13:00] Kate Walker: Rumour has it they're on difference downforce packages.
[13:13:11] ... Skies look awesome on TV. Just grey out the window.
[13:13:23] ... Kubs is looking to move on Vettel.
[13:13:52] ... Turn 19 incident under investigation by the stewards.
[13:13:52] [redacted]: alonso is gonna have to come back in again for dry tyres again
[13:13:59] Kate Walker: Alo pits again!
[13:15:05] ... Vet and Kub under investigation now.
[13:15:23] ... Gained advantage over JB, didn't cede place.
[13:16:00] ... But has minor front wing damage. Will it hold till he pits?
[13:16:33] [redacted]: they've told him to change some settings
[13:17:02] Kate Walker: He's purple in SL, so not doing too badly.
[13:17:08] [redacted]: senna is out
[13:17:26] Kate Walker: Not surprised after that spin.
[13:17:46] ... What's Ham saying on the radio?
[13:18:06] [redacted]: not sure
[13:18:12] Kate Walker: Can't believe it's L7 already.
[13:18:31] [redacted]: webber hit his anti stall off the line
[13:18:55] Kate Walker: Poor guy.
[13:19:05] ... Can't believe Alo is behind Glo and Yam.
[13:21:08] ... Not anymore, though!
[13:21:33] ... Ham is pulling out more and more of a lead - up to 5.5s now.
[13:21:43] ... But look at Kob - just taken 3s out of Schu.
[13:22:22] ... Vet is hanging on But's tail - could be a fight for P2 if But can't gold him off with the broken wing.
[13:22:53] ... Tru/Alo battle didn't last long enough.

[13:22:59] ... Rain now expected in 20 mins.
[13:24:15] ... No action in Kub/Vet investigation.
[13:24:45] ... Alo is on a charge.
[13:25:08] ... But pulled half a second out of Ham in the last lap.
[13:25:17] ... Gaining on Ham or pulling away from Vet?
[13:25:48] ... Is Kobs about to overtake Schu? Looks like it might happen soon.
[13:25:53] ... Mercs collide!
[13:26:03] ... Schu hit Britney - the powers that be won't be pleased.
[13:26:48] ... Wing damage for Rosberg, possible tyre damage for Schu.
[13:27:10] ... Alo/Bar crash to be investigated.
[13:28:00] ... No further action on Turn 19 lap 1 advantage.
[13:28:41] ... Vet is making more of a move on But now. Can he do it?
[13:28:51] ... Ham/But gap back up to 7.6s.
[13:29:48] ... Go Liu!
[13:29:59] ... Alo wants it, but Liu's not making it easy.
[13:30:39] ... But's got quite a train going on now as Ham pulls away.
[13:30:38] [redacted]: yeah
[13:31:30] ... i think the front wing damage has screwed the balance of his car
[13:32:11] Kate Walker: Ham/But gap's up to 8.3s. But's wing is looking awful.
[13:34:05] [redacted]: rosberg is screwed
[13:34:18] Kate Walker: Thanks to his teammate, who's now in the points.
[13:35:03] ... Alo has Liu. Took him long enough.
[13:35:12] [redacted]: possible rain in 10 min around about corner 14-15
[13:35:39] Kate Walker: That was more of a shove than an overtake.
[13:35:55] [redacted]: it was
[13:36:08] Kate Walker: But and Vet are screwed!
[13:36:15] ... Vet's done another Turkey,
[13:36:19] ... Oops.
[13:36:21] [redacted]: vettel is an idiot
[13:36:35] Kate Walker: Pit frenzy.
[13:36:42] [redacted]: how could he do that again?
[13:36:45] Kate Walker: But's going to have a job fixing that one.
[13:37:00] [redacted]: i think he might be done for the day
[13:37:01] Kate Walker: Good news for Web and Kub, though.
[13:37:09] [redacted]: yeah
[13:37:17] Kate Walker: But's out.
[13:37:45] ... Vet just lost it.
[13:37:51] ... And found But's car.
[13:38:31] ... Good lord. Schu's now up to P6.
[13:38:42] [redacted]: it was vettel being a bit gung ho and not paying attention to the weather
[13:39:13] Kate Walker: Oops.
[13:39:21] ... Too young, too hungry.
[13:39:39] ... Ham now has a lovely gap back to Kubs. Could nearly pit and hold the lead.
[13:39:57] ... Vet/But incident under investigation.
[13:40:09] ... Think it will be seen as a racing incident, as he did just lose control.
[13:40:13] ... Didn't look deliberate.
[13:41:21] [redacted]: they just said he might get a drive through for causing an avoidable accident
[13:41:28] ... only might though
[13:42:15] Kate Walker: Just been confirmed - d/t for Vet.
[13:42:21] [redacted]: drive through for vettel
[13:42:49] ... he won't be happy
[13:43:05] Kate Walker: Liu takes Vet!
[13:43:29] ... Can't believe the race is nearly half run and the front runners are all still on options.
[13:43:39] [redacted]: i know
[13:43:43] Kate Walker: Tyre strategy wasn't as chaotic as expected.
[13:43:51] [redacted]: no
[13:44:03] ... not as much rain as they expected though
[13:44:12] Kate Walker: Ham's pulled out nearly a second on Kubs since But retired.
[13:44:25] ... Vet pits for d/t.
[13:44:30] [redacted]: vettel in pits
[13:44:56] Kate Walker: Amazing how little he's suffered given But's out.
[13:44:59] [redacted]: that mclaren guy looked pissed off
[13:45:15] Kate Walker: Naturally. But's lost P4 in the standings, no question.
[13:45:20] [redacted]: stood there in the pit lane
[13:45:28] ... arms folded
[13:45:50] ... bet he was swearing in his helmet
[13:46:06] ... apparently there were 10 of them stood there
[13:46:06] Kate Walker: Sut pits from P5, promoting Schu.
[13:46:49] ... Not bad for Schu - P900 to P5, in half the race.
[13:46:50] [redacted]: that's ok vettel will catch him soon and then crash into him
[13:46:54] Kate Walker: lol
[13:47:04] ... Vet's setting purple sectors.

[13:47:23] ... Ham goes purple.
[13:47:23] [redacted]: the red mist has descended
[13:47:38] Kate Walker: Web pits.
[13:48:09] ... Very odd - they don't know about the weather yet, he might need to pit again.
[13:48:18] [redacted]: looked like the mclaren guys were trying to get in the way of webbers pit stop
[13:48:37] ... just stood as far out as possible
[13:48:43] Kate Walker: Really? That's not on.
[13:48:50] ... Vet's purple.
[13:48:54] [redacted]: i might be wrong
[13:49:13] ... ham hasn't pitted yet. has he?
[13:49:21] Kate Walker: Nope.
[13:49:30] ... Kubs and Mas pit.
[13:49:39] ... Schu's going to be in P3!
[13:49:47] ... Oh wait, no he's not.
[13:49:50] [redacted]: they might have been getting ready for ham
[13:50:09] Kate Walker: No sign of Ham pitting yet.
[13:50:53] [redacted]: he's only 15 seconds ahead as well
[13:51:02] ... not enough for a pit stop
[13:51:04] Kate Walker: And doesn't have a teammate to help out.
[13:51:08] ... Ham pits.
[13:51:12] [redacted]: ham in
[13:51:13] Kate Walker: Clean stop,
[13:51:41] [redacted]: still in front
[13:51:46] Kate Walker: Sut goes purple.
[13:52:04] [redacted]: maybe he will crash into msc
[13:52:11] Kate Walker: Sut's going for it.
[13:52:13] ... Has it!
[13:52:19] [redacted]: sutil is flying
[13:52:25] Kate Walker: Merc really are having aero problems, aren't they?
[13:52:29] [redacted]: flew up that hill
[13:52:39] ... like a rocket
[13:52:49] Kate Walker: He's got a Merc engine and working F-duct.
[13:53:05] [redacted]: working really well by the looks of it
[13:53:17] Kate Walker: Vet and Liu are on for round 2 of the battle.
[13:53:27] [redacted]: bbc talking to jenson now
[13:53:27] Kate Walker: Kubs goes purple.
[13:54:05] ... Liu pits AGAIN! Why?
[13:54:14] [redacted]: were gonna change but's wing in pit stop
[13:54:36] ... ripped out his radiator and completely lost drive
[13:54:55] Kate Walker: Vet's going to get in trouble again for slicing Liu like that.
[13:55:03] ... Tyre damage for Vet.
[13:55:05] [redacted]: liu lost his front wing endplate
[13:55:17] Kate Walker: Major tyre damage.
[13:55:18] [redacted]: vettel has a puncture
[13:55:43] Kate Walker: Less of a puncture than flailing rubber.
[13:55:50] [redacted]: trying to limp back to the pits
[13:55:56] Kate Walker: Mas goes purple.
[13:56:19] [redacted]: vet doing well
[13:56:31] ... nearly back i think
[13:56:32] Kate Walker: Ham has a nearly 10s lead over Kubs.
[13:56:49] ... Possible rain in 10 laps.
[13:56:58] [redacted]: actually i don't think he's anywhere near
[13:57:12] Kate Walker: Vet makes it to the pits.
[13:57:18] [redacted]: vettel is back
[13:57:41] ... mclaren were there again
[13:57:46] Kate Walker: What a chaotic race this has turned out to be.
[13:57:47] [redacted]: it has indeed
[13:59:24] ... vet in 20th place
[13:59:26] Kate Walker: Sut and Mas should be good to watch over the next few laps.
[13:59:30] [redacted]: that's got to hurt
[13:59:38] ... yeah
[14:00:13] Kate Walker: Looks like Vet's second crash has been viewed as a racing incident.
[14:00:29] [redacted]: i think so
[14:00:36] Kate Walker: Ham goes purple.
[14:00:48] ... Hope Kubs holds on to P2 till the finish.
[14:01:03] ... Would be great to see him on the podium again.
[14:01:05] [redacted]: hmmm looks like rain on the radar
[14:01:35] Kate Walker: Heavier rain expected in 10 mins.
[14:01:59] [redacted]: looked heavy on the radar - a big blob of blue
[14:02:03] Kate Walker: Ham's lost a second on Kubs since he switched to hards.
[14:02:46] ... Pulled out 1.5s in that lap, though!
[14:03:31] ... Kubs is doing well to keep Alo behind.

[14:04:24] [redacted]: yeah was just watching it. doing well
[14:04:56] ... can't believe vet is still in 20
[14:05:37] ... ham is only going to change when it is definitely ready for inters
[14:05:50] Kate Walker: Seems sensible.
[14:05:53] [redacted]: I.E heavy rain
[14:06:12] ... i assume
[14:06:12] Kate Walker: RBR are expecting heavy rain.
[14:06:27] [redacted]: ham purple
[14:06:32] Kate Walker: Ominous clouds there.
[14:06:50] [redacted]: helicopter has rain on the lens
[14:06:58] Kate Walker: Was that rain on Hul's on-board, too?
[14:07:10] [redacted]: not sure
[14:07:51] Kate Walker: Hul/Dlr looking tasty.
[14:07:57] ... So close!
[14:08:02] [redacted]: dlr past
[14:08:26] Kate Walker: RAIN
[14:08:37] [redacted]: raining now
[14:08:41] Kate Walker: Shower will be 20mins, nearly to end of race.
[14:08:48] ... Glo first to pit.
[14:09:35] ... Yam pits.
[14:09:43] ... Bue pits.
[14:09:51] ... Ham wobbles on track, doesn't pit.
[14:09:52] [redacted]: ham still going
[14:09:57] Kate Walker: Could be a major mistake.
[14:10:10] ... Frontrunners all staying out.
[14:10:20] [redacted]: web still going too
[14:10:30] Kate Walker: Getting worse out there.
[14:10:55] ... Ham should have pitted,
[14:10:55] [redacted]: i think ham is coming in
[14:11:00] ... ham gone off
[14:11:02] Kate Walker: Off at Rivage.
[14:11:24] ... Something just fell off Ham's car.
[14:11:42] [redacted]: really
[14:11:49] ... didn't see it
[14:11:56] Kate Walker: Rain's looking awful.
[14:12:04] ... Ham pits from lead, lap 45.
[14:12:10] [redacted]: ham just coming in
[14:12:29] Kate Walker: Front three all pit.
[14:12:36] ... Kubs pit stop goes wrong.
[14:12:41] [redacted]: kub overshot pit
[14:12:50] Kate Walker: Mas pits.
[14:13:06] ... Check out that rooster tail.
[14:13:19] [redacted]: yah
[14:13:29] Kate Walker: This is getting tense.
[14:13:32] [redacted]: go ham
[14:14:32] ... poor bobby kubs
[14:14:43] ... rain getting heavier here
[14:14:46] Kate Walker: If he can hold the podium...
[14:15:09] ... Alo/Vet incident under investigation.
[14:15:18] ... Big spin for Hul.
[14:16:05] ... New nickname for Kobs, btw - Cowboyashi.
[14:17:31] ... RBR are getting read with full wets for Vet.
[14:17:46] [redacted]: vet in pit
[14:18:04] Kate Walker: Alo stops, track yellow.
[14:18:05] [redacted]: alonso out
[14:18:14] Kate Walker: Alo climbs out, ret,
[14:18:19] [redacted]: possible sc
[14:18:19] Kate Walker: SC.
[14:18:27] ... Race will finish under SC, probs.
[14:18:40] ... SC deployed lap 38.
[14:19:05] ... Too much wet kerb, stalls car. Screws suspension.
[14:19:09] [redacted]: lost it on the astro turf
[14:20:57] ... looks like it's still rain there
[14:21:00] Kate Walker: Oops. He'll slip down the standings.
[14:21:04] ... Raining really hard.
[14:21:14] ... But dry in front of the press centre.
[14:21:35] ... Sun's coming out on track.
[14:21:36] [redacted]: alosnos car out of the way now
[14:22:01] ... i think sc will be in next lap
[14:22:04] Kate Walker: 5 laps to go.
[14:23:47] ... When is the bloody SC going in?
[14:24:00] [redacted]: i don't know

[14:24:16] Kate Walker: SC in this lap.
[14:24:18] ... At last!
[14:24:30] ... Race to restart on lap 41, in essence.
[14:24:46] [redacted]: yup
[14:24:54] ... it's gonna be tense
[14:25:05] Kate Walker: They are off!
[14:25:57] [redacted]: quite alot of water
[14:26:02] Kate Walker: Britney takes Schul
[14:26:38] ... Trulli's spin was terrifying.
[14:26:43] [redacted]: trulli off
[14:26:52] ... still going though
[14:27:03] Kate Walker: Mas: not bad for a number 2 driver.
[14:27:13] [redacted]: lol
[14:27:51] Kate Walker: 3 laps to go.
[14:28:21] ... Is Liu on full wets?
[14:28:30] [redacted]: sutil doing well
[14:28:38] ... not sure
[14:29:12] Kate Walker: 2 laps to go...
[14:29:24] ... DLR off, not ret.
[14:29:26] [redacted]: dlr off
[14:29:36] ... same place as ham
[14:31:11] Kate Walker: Last lap...
[14:31:20] [redacted]: nearly there
[14:31:26] Kate Walker: Definitely drying out there.
[14:31:31] [redacted]: looking alot drier now
[14:31:40] Kate Walker: Snap!
[14:32:06] ... When the flag goes I'm signing off, need to run for my lift.
[14:32:45] ... Ham will have 182, Web 179.WDC will be v close.
[14:33:02] ... Ham takes flag, with Web and Bobby Kubs just behind.
[14:33:16] ... Press room applaud.

F1 Spa Blog – I am the (number) one and only

After an absolute blinder of a race in the Belgian forest, all has changed once more at the top of the leaderboards. Where there were five, there are now two, thanks to some shockingly bad luck for Jenson Button, Sebastian Vettel, and Fernando Alonso, none of whom scored any points on Sunday.

But to blame it all on luck is lazy. McLaren driver Jenson Button was certainly the victim of bad luck, as his retirement came at the hands of Sebastian Vettel, when the young German lost control of his car under braking and parked it in the side of the Brit's machine. Vettel was lucky not to retire himself, but the Red Bull driver's day was spoiled by his subsequent drive-through penalty and further prangs.

Ferrari driver Fernando Alonso lost control of his car in the closing stages of the race, when the rain began to fall in earnest. The Spanish double champion caught his car on a wet kerb, lost control of it on the astroturf, and ended up spinning between Les Combes and Malmedy, stopping his car on track. Alonso's race was over, and the safety car came out to play.

Race winner Lewis Hamilton and second-placed Mark Webber have now pulled away from the three retirees at the top of the championship standings. While future retirements for either man are possible – and with six races remaining, anything could happen – for the time being, both Hamilton and Webber have a semi-comfortable margin in the points.

The season is now two-thirds complete, and teams are preparing for the final run to the championships. While Alonso knows that he is the keystone in Ferrari's bid for the titles, the events of Sunday in Belgium have given Webber and Hamilton a temporary advantage over their teammates, and one that could see both men promoted to number one driver status as Abu Dhabi draws ever nearer.

Both McLaren and Red Bull have been vocal about driver parity this season, with both Christian Horner and Martin Whitmarsh emphasising that neither man would be treated as number one until the other was numerically out of the championship. Neither Webber nor Hamilton have an unassailable lead over their teammate, and there are still 150 points available to race winners, but the time for a decision on number one status is fast approaching.

Lewis Hamilton now has a three point advantage over Mark Webber at the top of the drivers' standings. Sebastian Vettel in P3 is 28 points behind his teammate, 31 behind Hamilton. Jenson Button is in P4, 35 points behind his teammate and 32 behind Webber, while both Ferrari drivers have dropped further back. Number one driver Fernando Alonso is now 41 points behind Hamilton, while Felipe Massa is 32 points behind the Spaniard and 73 points shy of Lewis' lead.

The revision to the points system this season means that Hamilton and Webber's advantage is not as great as it seems. Both drivers have at least a one-race lead over the men behind, but that margin is nowhere near great enough to ensure eventual victory. Mechanical failures can happen to anyone at any time, and the best driver on the grid can see his race ended by another man's error.

But in the next few races – and almost certainly by Korea – McLaren and Red Bull will each need to decide on a number one driver with a better chance at the title. This increases the pressure on all four men, and is a probable explanation for Vettel's desperate driving in Belgium. Keen to assert himself as the team's de facto number one, the young German's race was riddled with errors that led to him being out of the points entirely.

Ferrari could be out of the race entirely. The team's decision to allot number one status to Alonso on-track at the Hockenheimring put Felipe Massa out of the title hunt. But on 8 September the Scuderia will be defending themselves against the accusation of violating the team orders rule at a World Motor Sport Council hearing. Should the WMSC choose to punish the team by stripping them of the points gained in Germany, Alonso will drop to 116 points, 66 behind current WDC leader Hamilton.

World Drivers' Standings (top 10)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 182pts
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 179pts
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 151pts
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 147pts
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 141pts
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 109pts
7. Robert Kubica (Renault) 104pts
8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 102pts
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 45pts
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 44pts

World Constructors' Standings (top 10)

1. Red Bull 330pts
 2. McLaren 229pts
 3. Ferrari 250pts
 4. Mercedes 147pts
 5. Renault 123pts
 6. Force India 47pts
 7. Williams 40pts
 8. Sauber 27pts
 9. Toro Rosso 11pts
 10. Lotus 0pts
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