



F1 Singapore Blog – F1 at the Marina Bay Circuit

God, I love this track. I don't know if it's the circuit itself, the city of Singapore, or the softly fading light that makes Marina Bay so exceptional, but there is a magical quality here that I've not felt elsewhere, not even in the temples to F1 history that are Monza, Spa, and Silverstone.

And no, I didn't miss Monaco off that list – I just wasn't there in person, so can't comment.

Every F1 track has its own defining feel that is more than just the sum of its corners and straights. Monza almost personifies autumn. You arrive in the park as the early morning mists are rolling back through the trees, and the soft pink light gives everything a gentle aura. But Monza is the grand dowager of Formula 1 – that old woman who is loved, revered, respected, and feared in equal measure. She has wrinkles, and liver spots, but age cannot wither her majesty.

Silverstone, on the other hand, is definitely summer. And a young summer at that. Even in the endless British rains, there is an enthusiasm, a rough and tumble feel about the place. Silverstone is jolly japes and have-a-go-heroes; it is youthful jubilation and enthusiasm despite its long(ish) history.

Singapore's defining feel is slightly different. It's still summer, but late summer – those evenings where you have dinner outside, grab another bottle of wine or two to ease the conversation, and then discover that it's gone midnight and you were too busy talking, laughing, eating to notice. It's the point in the evening when the air is still warm on your skin, you can smell heat in the air, and possibilities abound.

But the real possibilities this weekend abound on track, and not in my excessively romantic imagination.

The title fight is as close as it's ever been, with a mere 24 points – less than one race victory – separating the five championship contenders. Championship leader Mark Webber will be looking to reverse his Singapore fortunes this weekend – the Red Bull driver has retired from the two races held here thus far, and he cannot afford a DNF at this stage in the run for the title.

But Webber is hardly unique in that respect. None of the contenders can afford a DNF – with only five races remaining, the battle for points is reaching its competitive peak, and a slip-up now could mean the end of a chance at the crown.

And slip-ups are easy enough on a street circuit, with the close walls and tight corners adding to the drama. The slightly damp track is another factor, although one unlikely to shape Sunday's race. The rain falls here like clockwork – there is one downpour between 11am and 1pm, and then another half-hour burst that starts at 4pm on the nose. None of the F1 sessions are scheduled during the rains, and a wet race on Sunday night would be highly unlikely.

That said, rain does always affect track conditions. Rubber laid down during the day is washed away each morning, and the levels of humidity means there's never a chance for the track to truly dry. The air here is so damp and thick it feels difficult to breathe, and in those conditions it's impossible for the track to ever really get bone dry.

Drivers have spent much of the weekend thus far talking about their concerns for a wet night race – in the past two years, Singapore has been run in the dry, and no one has experience of driving through the spray at night, with lights dazzling in the rain.

But during this early morning – for Europe, that is – practice session, such concerns have been pushed aside by the overriding need to tweak set-ups, trying to find that magical high-downforce combination that will lead to a decent points haul on Sunday.

As such, while the heavy hitters have all spent time on track this evening, none has set a time. The five men fighting for the championship are keeping a wary eye on each other, changing configurations in an endless effort to stay one step ahead of the competition.

This is par for the course on Friday, as well you know. Those with a remote chance of scoring points on Sunday set times as quickly as possible, leading to brief minutes where a Virgin, a Lotus, or a Toro Rosso occupies the top spot on the leaderboards. But as the closing stages of F1 draw ever

nearer, the battle for the top begins in earnest.

Without the usual pace setters on the board, lap times are hovering around the two minute mark, fifteen seconds slower than the best time set in 2008, and twelve seconds behind 2009's best effort, set on a slightly different circuit configuration, but essentially the one in use this year. The difference is in the track conditions – wet patches are still visible off line, and the track is greasy on the racing line.

With less than fifteen minutes remaining of FPI, Jenson Button is the only title challenger to have set a timed lap. But it is more of a feeler than anything else – the current champion is nearly ten seconds off the pace as he negotiates his way around the wet patches and through traffic, establishing the lie of the land. His second timed lap sees a five second improvement.

Sebastian Vettel's first timed lap is much the same as Button's – ten seconds off the pace of current leader Kamui Kobayashi, who has been high up on the timesheets throughout the session, often at the top. Kobayashi's 1:57.260s is exactly half a second faster than Felipe Massa in P2. But with less than ten minutes to go, the pits empty like a pub at closing time.

And it's chaos on track. Not chaos of the crash, bang, wallop type, fortunately, but traffic everywhere you look. A good time this evening (or morning in Europe) comes not necessarily from the best set-up, but from having the perfect combination of circumstances – timing a traffic-free run on the right tyres just as the track begins to dry out in earnest.

Michael Schumacher deserves special mention for his performances this evening – he was towards the top of the leaderboards throughout the session, on a track he's never raced before. In the closing stages of FPI, it looked as though the German legend would be top of the timesheets, until Mark Webber laid down one of his signature laps and sorted out the status quo. Nonetheless, the widely criticised Schumacher finished the first practice session nearly two seconds faster – and twelve places higher – than his teammate.

FPI times (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1:54.589s
2. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1:54.708s
3. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1:54.827s
4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1:55.137s
5. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1:55.160s
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1:55.333s
7. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1:55.510s
8. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1:55.523s
9. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1:55.672s
10. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1:55.914s
11. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1:56.090s
12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1:56.339s
13. Nick Heidfeld (Sauber) 1:56.458s
14. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1:56.598s
15. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1:56.603s
16. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1:56.615s
17. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1:56.840s
18. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1:56.884s
19. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1:57.760s
20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1:59.034s
21. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1:59.275s
22. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1:59.034s
23. Christian Klien (HRT) 2:03.424s
24. Fairuz Fauzy (Lotus) 2:05.694s

F1 Singapore Blog – FP2 at the Marina Bay Circuit

How quickly things change. By the time the first ten minutes of FP2 had passed, times had been set by nearly all the grid. But on a dry(ish) and improving track drivers are out to make the most of the opportunity to test their cars in what are likely to be race conditions, weather-wise.

The morning practice session – early evening here, of course – was characterised by some very unlikely placings on the timesheets. Those men who had been on the right set of fresh rubber as the track began to dry out were able to lose entire seconds from their earlier best laps, while those who waited in the pits for much of the session were not so lucky – traffic and badly timed runs were two of the oft-blamed culprits.

While it would take a massive stretch of the imagination to describe current weather conditions as cool, there is no doubt that the sticky oppressive heat has calmed down now that night has drawn in. The air temperature has dropped by nearly ten degrees since FPI, which will make life a lot more pleasant for those behind the wheel. But the dryish track is not helping matters – recent resurfacing work done to remove bumps has led to none porous areas of track surface that collect standing water and grease.

Lewis Hamilton appears to be having an uncharacteristically tough Friday here in Singapore. While his FPI performance could be attributed to traffic and a wet track, the McLaren driver has not fared brilliantly so far in FP2 – he is currently in P16, three seconds off the pace and nearly 1.5 seconds slower than his teammate, the figure against whom all F1 drivers are judged.

Hamilton is renowned for his ability to drive around problems with the car or set up, forcing the machinery to do his bidding in an impressive fashion. But issues with grip appear to be affecting the 2008 champion, who is under serious pressure this weekend to maintain his foothold in the

race for the title, following his early retirement from Monza.

The Ferrari drivers have been playing swapsies with their aero configurations in FP2 – both men are running different front wings this evening, and each has had his turn with the blown rear wing. Fernando Alonso began the session with it on his car, while Felipe Massa ran it towards the middle. Alonso has been noticeably faster than Massa so far, but the Brazilian to try any substantial running at this track with the blown rear wing.

And Lewis Hamilton has pulled it out of the bag, whatever 'it' is. The young British driver managed to shave over a second off his best time in the space of a single lap, and is currently sitting in P2 on the leaderboards, with a 1.48.334s, just over half a second down on pace-setter Sebastian Vettel. There's plenty of time left for the boards to change completely, but this marks the first time this weekend that Hamilton has been among the frontrunners.

Both Force India drivers appear to be having collisions with themselves, oddly. Tonio Liuzzi started the trend when he damaged his front wing, and then Adrian Sutil followed shortly after, smashing his left front suspension after going airborne over a kerb and stopping on track at Turn 18. With less than 45 minutes remaining, it is unlikely Sutil's car will be fixed in time to do any more running this evening.

And with twenty minutes remaining, P4 Fernando Alonso is out of FP3. The Spanish driver clipped a wall going into Turn 18 – not far from the scene of Nelson Piquet Jr.'s infamous 2008 crash – and drove into a convenient run-off area before climbing out of his car and wheeling it to safety. According to Ferrari, Alonso's engine stopped shortly after he hit the wall.

While a crash in free practice doesn't always mean much, this could prove to be bad news for Alonso, who has no new engines for the rest of the season. Ferrari have cleverly managed the Asturian's engine allotment so that race performance is not a matter of concern for the team, but Friday practice running is at risk, as the remaining used engines all have a limited shelf life. Should this engine have given up the ghost for good, Alonso is likely to see seriously reduced running on Fridays for the rest of the season.

Current reports suggest that Alonso stalled the engine, which would be a dramatic improvement on an engine failure, but that has yet to be confirmed by the team.

Lucas di Grassi deserves a special mention for his performance this evening. FP2 is the rookie's first attempt at the Marina Bay Circuit, as the team let test driver Jerome D'Ambrosio have a go in di Grassi's car in what would be the morning session anywhere else in the world. But despite this being the young Brazilian's first running on the track, he has managed to set times up to 2s per lap faster than Bruno Senna, Jarno Trulli, or Christian Klien. Not bad going for a first night run on a new track.

Although, to be fair to Klien, the same applies to him – first night race, first time in Singapore, and only his third practice session with HRT.

And with the session over, the top five spaces are occupied by the top five championship contenders. Whether or not that has any significance will remain a mystery until tomorrow's qualifying session. For the moment, all we know is that the Red Bulls look to be around a second faster than the competition in what are likely to be typical conditions this weekend.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.46.660s
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.47.287s
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.47.690s
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.47.718s
5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.47.818s
6. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.48.302s
7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.48.341s
8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.48.679s
9. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.48.855s
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.48.889s
11. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.49.153s
12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.49.438s
13. Nick Heidfeld (Sauber) 1.49.558s
14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.49.608s
15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.49.896s
16. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.49.984s
17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.50.191s
18. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.50.896s
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.51.878s
20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.52.150s
21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.53.431s
22. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.53.526s
23. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1.54.725s
24. Christian Klien (HRT) 1.55.542s

F1 Singapore Blog – FP3 at the Marina Bay Circuit

The name of the game is damp.

As the engines fire up for the final free practice session of the Singapore Grand Prix, humidity is at 81 percent, one of the key factors behind the

permanently greasy track on offer this weekend. While in a dry heat the lunchtime rains would have quickly baked away, the incessant stickiness in the air keeps everything damp, from the track to the towel used in your morning shower.

The recently resurfaced track isn't helping matters either – the porosity of the surface increases with time, no matter what drainage arrangements have been made, so the new tarmac/asphalt/bitumen (I've heard it called all three this weekend) is staying greasy. Ten minutes before FP3 began, the FIA officially declared the track to be wet and asked teams to comply with the attendant safety precautions.

Air and track temperatures are currently sitting at 28 degrees, but it feels much hotter outside. Cockpit temperatures are probably not far off 40 degrees, and this at 7pm.

The early part of the session is even quieter than normal, as teams wait for the track to dry out before making their first runs. The conditions are much as they were yesterday – it's too wet to get the most out of slick tyres, ruining sets in seconds, but it's far too dry to do anything except shred the inters.

In the press room there is talk of the spectacle, and how fans simply aren't given enough in practice sessions. The teams need to be strategic, but the fans are here to see cars on track, not harried discussions on the pitwalls. One journo proposed that the FIA require a minimum of four laps per driver in every fifteen minute segment of a practice session, an idea that would certainly give the fans more action.

By the time the session is half run, everyone except Sebastian Vettel has posted a time. The damp track conditions have muddied the waters, however, leading to more unlikely results – as I type, Michael Schumacher has just gone fastest with a 1.50.144s, although he was quickly pipped to the post by Nico Hulkenberg, who was in turn displaced by Lewis Hamilton, who has been having a tough weekend thus far.

Everyone is struggling, from the championship contenders to the backmarkers. Drivers are running wide, spinning off, and generally looking more like pucks in a game of air hockey than men in charge of high downforce racing beasts. No one has done any damage, either to themselves or to their cars, but grip is definitely in short supply this evening.

The lack of grip is almost certainly behind Ferrari's decision to abandon their F-duct for the weekend, despite Fernando Alonso's high praise yesterday. Alonso's FP2 came to an early end when the Spanish driver – who looked to be on a pace-setting lap – briefly clipped a wall, headed into the run-off area, and then suffered a mysterious engine failure "because an experimental component in the gearbox broke," according to chief track engineer Chris Dyer.

The decision seems to have worked for the team – Alonso has been in P1 and is currently in P2, while Felipe Massa has been in the top ten throughout the session, and currently stands in P7 six-tenths slower than his teammate. Sebastian Vettel is currently top of the standings with a 0.5s advantage over Alonso, and eight-tenths faster than Mark Webber.

In the final few minutes of the session, the pits empty as everyone heads out for a few final flyers on the soft tyres, trying to grab that headline setting time. McLaren driver Jenson Button is the only one of the championship contenders not currently in the top ten: reports from the garage say that he's yet to find the set-up sweet spot this evening. Button was consistently faster than his teammate on Friday, but fortunes appear to have reversed overnight.

Of particular note this evening is Christian Klien, who was half a second faster than teammate Bruno Senna after about ninety seconds behind the wheel. Or, without artistic licence, five practice sessions across the season, three of those this weekend. Recent recruit Nick Heidfeld was also marginally faster than Kamui Kobayashi, although the two Sauber drivers' times have been so tight all weekend that you couldn't separate them with a cigarette paper.

Nico Rosberg also deserves a special mention. The Mercedes driver was able to claim P5 – 1.03s off Vettel's blistering pace – in a car the team wrote off ages ago.

FP3 timings (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.48.028s
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.48.650s
3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.49.000s
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.49.023s
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.49.056s
6. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.49.212s
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.49.304s
8. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.49.520s
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.49.916s
10. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.49.949s
11. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.50.040s
12. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.50.053s
13. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.50.060s
14. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.50.067s
15. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.50.067s
16. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.50.868s
17. Nick Heidfeld (Sauber) 1.51.016s
18. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.51.027s
19. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.52.340s
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.53.146s
21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.53.297s
22. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.53.681s

23. Christian Klien (HRT) 1:54.826s

24. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1:55.367s

F1 Singapore Blog – Q1 at the Marina Bay Circuit

And qualifying is underway. Will this evening's results determine the course of tomorrow's race, or does Marina Bay have a little something up its sleeve to keep things interesting?

Based on the practice sessions, we should be in for a thrilling race tomorrow, no matter what happens in qualies. Most of the drivers on the grid have struggled with the varying grip levels on offer this weekend, and that is unlikely to change.

Temperatures have changed marginally since FP3 ended – the track is now at 27 degrees, the air at 29 degrees. Relative levels of humidity are still high, at 80 percent, and consequently there are still a few damp patches on track for the drivers to be wary of.

The top end of the timesheets is less interesting in this session – while it is always breathtaking to see a driver pull together a perfect lap, the focus is on those men likely to get left behind. Shaking up the qualifying result is Nico Hulkenberg, who has been issued with a five-place grid penalty for using a new gearbox despite not having run the previous one for the past four races.

Half-way through the session, Felipe Massa brings out the red flags when he stops his Ferrari at Turn 8, thanks to an engine problem. The likely engine failure will almost certainly see the Brazilian driver take a ninth engine, but any resulting penalty will be immaterial, as the Ferrari driver will now be starting Sunday's race from P24.

With the session now restarted, Ferrari are pondering a possible electrical fault with the engine, which appears to have decided it just didn't feel like playing any more. Ironically, Massa spent Thursday telling reporters that he didn't think he or teammate Fernando Alonso would suffer from the team's decision to use the drivers' eighth and final engines in Monza.

With Massa out of the running, Q1 has essentially been decided – the Brazilian driver will join the six men from the new teams in the dropout zone. The margin between P17 and P18 is a nearly insurmountable two seconds, not a margin that will be easily overcome. All that remains to be seen is the eventual order.

Up at the top end of the timesheets, the usual suspects are battling for supremacy. Alonso and Sebastian Vettel have broken into the 1.46s, with Mark Webber a nanosecond behind his teammate. Fernando Alonso has an impressive 0.4s gap over Vettel, showing the pace that was rudely cut short towards the end of FP2.

Dropout zone

18. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1:50.721s

19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1:50.915s

20. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1:51.107s

21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1:51.641s

22. Christian Klien (HRT) 1:52.946s

23. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1:54.174s

24. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) [no time set]

F1 Singapore Blog – Q2 at the Marina Bay Circuit

With Felipe Massa unexpectedly out and starting from the back of tomorrow's grid, the paddock waits with bated breath to see what surprises Q2 has in store. Air and track temperatures are unchanged from Q1, but the humidity levels have crept back up to 81 percent, fueling the rumours of rain to come.

While it wouldn't be fair to say that chaos reigned on track in Q2, there were certainly a number of mini dramas in the first few minutes, with Vitaly Petrov spinning on track at Turn 5 before coming to a halt, Fernando Alonso being recalled to the pits so Ferrari could remap his engine, and Tonio Liuzzi cutting the Singapore Slings.

Petrov was on the pace before his spin, but the Russian driver is now in P10 and almost certain to fall into the dropout zone before Q2 finishes. It is a tough mistake for the Renault rookie, who is under pressure to perform more consistently in qualifying to retain his seat. Petrov appears to have been taken by surprise by one of the remaining damp spots on track, a mistake that could happen to anyone.

Half-way through the session, Lewis Hamilton grabs P1 with a 1:46.042s, four-tenths faster than P2 Sebastian Vettel. Mark Webber and Fernando Alonso are a second behind, in Ps 7 and 8 respectively, but all that could change. With five minutes remaining, anything could happen, and Alonso is currently on a charge.

And on a charge he was, with the Spaniard crashing through the 1.46s barrier to set a 1:45.809s, roughly two-tenths faster than 2009 Singapore GP winner Hamilton. But Alonso's time at the top does not last long, as he is rudely displaced by Sebastian Vettel's mind-boggling 1:45.561s.

And the battle has ended. The dropout zone is made up of both Force India drivers, both Toro Rossos, Nick Heidfeld, Vitaly Petrov, and Nico Hulkenberg. Hulkenberg will actually start from a provisional P17, thanks to a five-place grid penalty issued as a result of a new gearbox.

Dropout zone

11. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.47.666s
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.47.647s
13. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.448.165s
14. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.48.502s
15. Nick Heidfeld (Sauber) 1.48.557s
16. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.48.899s
17. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.48.961s

F1 Singapore Blog – Q3 at the Marina Bay Circuit

And so it begins. The top ten shoot-out for Formula 1's best looking race is underway, and the level of competition is as fierce as it's been all season.

Jenson Button is the first man to get a time on the board, but milliseconds later teammate Lewis Hamilton crosses the line half a second faster than his teammate. But the Brit holds on to the top spot for the briefest of moments before Fernando Alonso finds nearly two-tenths on Hamilton's time.

Each of the five championship contenders is fighting tooth and nail for advantage at this circuit, and the battle will only get more intense as the season progresses. Vettel made an early mistake on his first lap but dominates the first two sectors, while Alonso seems to have sector three all sewn up.

Robert Kubica and Kamui Kobayashi are cutting it fine; neither man has posted a time and there are less than three minutes remaining of the session – possibly enough time for two laps, depending on how much of their out lap they've done before the clock hits two minutes remaining.

And with the session over, Fernando Alonso has claimed pole for Ferrari, breaking the lap record in the process. The two Scuderia drivers will now bookend the grid, with Alonso in P1 and Felipe Massa in P24. Sebastian Vettel will start tomorrow's race in P2, while the two McLaren drivers will line up side by side on the second row, together for the first time this season.

The surprise of the session was Mark Webber; the Australian was outqualified by both McLarens, and will line up on the third row, next to Rubens Barrichello in P6.

Provisional grid

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.45.390s
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.45.457s
3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.45.571s
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.45.944s
5. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.45.977s
6. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.46.236s
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.46.443s
8. Robert Kubica (Renault) 1.46.593s
9. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.46.702s
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.47.884s
11. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.47.666s
12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.448.165s
13. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.48.502s
14. Nick Heidfeld (Sauber) 1.48.557s
15. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.48.899s
16. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 1.48.961s
17. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 1.47.647s*
18. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.50.721s
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.50.915s
20. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) 1.51.107s
21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.51.641s
22. Christian Klien (HRT) 1.52.946s
23. Bruno Senna (HRT) 1.54.174s
24. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) [no time set]

*Hulkenberg was issued with a five-place grid penalty for using a new gearbox

F1 Singapore Blog – The post-qualifying analysis

Lewis Hamilton was right. Red Bull are beatable in Singapore. Unfortunately for the McLaren driver, however, it was not he who was able to overturn the seemingly endless dominance of the squad from Milton Keynes. That honour fell to Ferrari driver Fernando Alonso, who also claimed the honour of being the only non-Red Bull driver to score more than one pole position this season.

It was a day of mixed fortunes for the Scuderia, who will be bookending the grid with Alonso in P1 and Felipe Massa in P24 after the latter's car suffered a suspected engine failure in Q1, before the Brazilian was able to complete a timed lap. Or, as Charles Dickens probably wouldn't have said, it

was the best of times, it was the worst of times to be a Ferrari driver.

It does not appear to have been engine failure that scuppered Massa's chances this evening. Rather, the team were examining the possibility of a gearbox problem similar to that suffered by Alonso in FP2. The team's Friday press release cited an experimental gearbox component, raising concerns that the Scuderia have been a little too experimental at the cost of reliability.

While pole position in Singapore should mean a significant advantage in Sunday's race, the changing track conditions and daily downpours mean that anything is possible tomorrow. One thing for Alonso's title rivals to be aware of is the Spaniard's weak spot – sector 2. The Asturian double champion was outpaced by three of his four competitors in that sector, which also saw him very low on the list of maximum speeds.

It will be very strange for the Red Bull mechanics tomorrow evening, as neither set will be gathering around the car in P1. Sebastian Vettel was fastest in sectors 1 and 2 in qualifying, but the young German was unable to string together that perfect lap for pole, settling instead for a 1.45.457s, 0.067s slower than Alonso.

In his first run Baby Schumi got held up by the original Michael Schumacher; speaking after the session Vettel was confident that but for traffic in one lap and a flirtation with the wall in another, he would be the man lining up in front. Mark Webber was not so lucky, and will be lining up in P5, the last of the title contenders.

McLaren had their best combined qualifying result of the season, with the team's two drivers locking out the second row. The Woking outfit have been the most reliable off the start line so far, which means one of two things – either the status quo will continue, or the team's luck is about to run out, and both men will stall off the line while jumping the start.

While McLaren were hoping for a front row start from one of their men tomorrow, the team can take comfort in the fact that Lewis Hamilton was only one-tenth shy of Vettel's time, and not the twenty minutes it felt like at the Hungaroring. Either Red Bull have slowed down, or McLaren have sped up – or both. Either way, if qualifying remains this tight for the rest of the season, F1 fans around the world are in for a real treat.

Jenson Button was three-tenths slower than his teammate in the first sector, a difference that seems fairly inconsequential until you realise that those three-tenths separate P3 in the sector standings from P9. Elsewhere on track, the two were evenly matched. Should Hamilton get a better start than Button, however, it will be in sector 1 that the 2008 champion will pull away fastest.

Mercedes saw both drivers in Q3 for the first time since the early summer, an impressive feat when you consider that the team lost faith in the car long before their drivers did. Nico Rosberg has been doing an able job all year, impressing the paddock with his ability to consistently outpace his elder statesman teammate, but Michael Schumacher deserves credit for his performances this weekend.

The seven-time champion has had a challenging season, and the criticism has been particularly heavy of late. But the formerly Red Baron was able to deliver a decent qualifying result for the team at a double rookie event – this is his first time in Singapore and (consequently) his first night race.

Both Renault drivers had problems this evening. Vitaly Petrov crashed out of Q2 after going too deep in braking for Turn 5. The young Russian caught one of the remaining damp patches on track and wound up damaging his car on the wall. But Petrov is nothing if not a fighter, and a P12 start (promoted one spot by Nico Hulkenberg's grid penalty) should lead to some enthralling battles for fans. As far as Petrov is concerned, there are no tracks where you can't at least try and overtake, a refreshing attitude indeed.

Teammate Robert Kubica fared better, in that he was able to make it to Q3, but the Pole complained of grip problems, and said both front and rear were sliding. P9 is therefore a very respectable start, but it is not the result his fans will have been hoping for – before the teams arrived in Singapore, there was talk of Kubica reprising his successful Monaco weekend.

Were it not for Hulkenberg's aforementioned grid penalty, coming hot on the heels of a replacement gearbox, this would have been an excellent session for Williams. Rubens Barrichello has been impressive all weekend, and the Brazilian's P6-worthy qualifying lap was barely a second slower than Alonso's run for pole. It is interesting to note that Barrichello did the most laps of any driver in the three qualifying sessions, completing 20 where the other Q3 players did a maximum of 17.

Nico Hulkenberg's best Q2 effort was 1.4s slower than his teammate's Q3 result, but good enough for a solid P12 pre-penalties. The German will now line up in P17, assuming no other penalties are issued overnight.

Force India had a terrible qualifying session, and it all seems to be going wrong for the team in sector 3. Both Adrian Sutil and Tonio Liuzzi were setting respectable times in the first two sectors, mixing it with Petrov, the Toro Rossos, and the Saubers, but in sector 3 they were lapping closer to the three new teams. As a result, were it not for Hulkenberg's penalty, the two men would be starting from Ps 16 and 17.

Singapore's many corners and dearth of long straights are probably to blame. When it came to maximum sector speeds, the Force India drivers are near the top of the list. But the ability to go quickly is not what is needed to make the most of Marina Bay, which is a high downforce circuit requiring more grip, not less.

Nick Heidfeld had a decent return to Formula 1 qualifying, outpacing teammate Kamui Kobayashi in Q1, and qualifying in P15. Given that this is Heidfeld's first weekend behind the wheel of a current Formula 1 car in nearly a year, that is no mean feat. Kobayashi was even more impressive, however, making it into Q3. The Japanese rookie will start in P10, the last man on the grid not to have a choice of tyres. As long as the FIA declares the track to be dry, that is.

Toro Rosso had a particularly illuminating qualifying session, if the team's press release is anything to go by. According to Giorgio Ascanelli, "first in Monza and now here, the car has made a step forward. This is not because of new developments, but rather that we have worked out how to run it better." Jaime Alguersuari narrowly missed out on Q3, a testament to the team's continuing improvements. Sebastian Buemi was not as fortunate as his teammate, but the Swiss driver spoke of problems with grip, a common complaint this weekend. The two Toro Rosso drivers have been taking turns beating each other this weekend; by my count that means Buemi is due an impressive manoeuvre mid-race.

And then we come to the battle of the new teams. Virgin were celebrating Timo Glock's new team pole (apparently that's what they call P18 these days), and the German driver did an impressive job to outpace the competition in a car he said has not been easy to drive. Lucas di Grassi nearly squeaked into P19, before Heikki Kovalainen snatched it from him in the dying seconds of Q1.

But the biggest point of interest at the back of the grid is the HRT dynamics. Christian Klien beat teammate Bruno Senna by more than a second in his first full weekend in the car. Senna has been in the driver's seat every weekend barring Silverstone, and questions are now being asked about the Brazilian's driving prowess.

While he was able to consistently beat Sakon Yamamoto, the Japanese driver is not known for being one of Formula 1's fastest men. Nor for that matter is Klien, but the Austrian was able to return from the F1 wilderness, scrape the rust off, and deliver an impressive performance in an unimpressive car. Senna must up his game, and quickly.

F1 Singapore Blog – The Grand Prix Skype commentary

So much for rain shaking up play. The levels of humidity have dropped 20 percent since yesterday's qualifying session, and are currently hovering around 61 percent. Air temperature is 30 degrees, while track temperature is at 31 degrees, a weekend peak.

Jaime Alguersuari is currently stuck in the pits with a rumoured water leak. The Toro Rosso driver had qualified in 11th, and nearly made it into Q3, so this is bad news indeed for the young Spaniard. He will begin the race from the pits, assuming the team can fix his leak in time.

This is good news for Felipe Massa, who will now essentially be starting from P23. Not, as I read online earlier, from Changi Airport, funny though that might have been.

The engines are growling below our feet, the grid is now empty of hangers on, and the lights are nearly ready to go out. Green for the installation lap, and only seconds away from the race beginning in earnest. This is going to be a crucial race for the championships, with the five WDC contenders lining up in the first five spots on the grid. With no rain forecast and a dry track, the start will be key.

[20:01:25] Kate Walker: And they're off!

[20:01:53] ... For the formation lap, that is.

[20:04:01] [redacted]: and now they're off for real

[20:05:29] Kate Walker: No action gong into the first corner.

[20:05:39] [redacted]: rubbish

[20:05:44] Kate Walker: But Kob lost a place to Pet.

[20:05:59] ... Yellow flags out then in again.

[20:06:42] ... Yellows back out, I think for Hei.

[20:07:05] ... Alo already has a lead on Vet of 1s, with Ham 1s behind Vet.

[20:07:39] ... Mas pits for new tyres already, shouldn't need to stop for the rest of the race. Playing the long game, there.

[20:08:01] ... Hei has pitted for a new nose and fresh rubber, very slow stop.

[20:08:21] ... And the yellows are out again, this time for Liu who is hobbling around the track.

[20:09:07] ... Liu's come to a stop on track at Turn 10.

[20:09:52] ... Alo got a good start and is staying purple, but the SC is out.

[20:09:57] ... This could change everything.

[20:10:12] [redacted]: why

[20:10:14] Kate Walker: Lap 3. How long till the SC catches Alo?

[20:10:34] ... Because Liu's stopped on track. Need to clear the car.

[20:10:54] [redacted]: ah

[20:11:10] Kate Walker: Web pits from P9.

[20:11:22] ... And the pits are filling up with nearly everyone.

[20:11:26] [redacted]: a bit early

[20:11:43] Kate Walker: But on the hard tyres they can do the rest of the race w/o stopping.

[20:11:49] [redacted]: i suppose coz of the safety car

[20:11:57] Kate Walker: Xactly.

[20:13:07] ... Is that Glo in P10? I know he didn't pit, but go Virgin!

[20:15:00] ... SC still out, hopefully will be called in for Lap 7.

[20:15:11] ... Deffo not in this lap; no announcement from the FIA.

[20:15:38] ... How fab does the track look all lit up? Singapore is an incredible racing environment, make no mistake.

[20:16:03] ... FIA just announced SC in this lap. Here's looking at the restart...

[20:16:03] [redacted]: it looks really cool

[20:16:55] Kate Walker: No change to order after SC in, just reduced gaps as expected.

[20:18:06] ... So, will this be a pretty procession, or will we get some action? Pet's unlikely to make a move on Web, and he's one of the best bets for gung-ho manoeuvres.

[20:18:22] ... Alo and Vet are already pulling away from the McLarens.

[20:18:30] ... Alo goes purple again, lap 7.

[20:18:51] ... Web/Kob are AWESOME.

[20:19:44] ... Cowboyashi lives up to his name with the Webber overtake.

[20:21:26] ... Pity he couldn't fend off the Aussie, but it's not the last we'll see of him this race.

[20:21:46] ... Tru's early pit was due to a puncture; he's back in P23.

[20:22:13] ... Vet is eating away (slowly) at Alo's lead. But the gap to Ham in P3 is growing.

[20:22:29] ... Mas up to P14 already, a ten place improvement.

[20:24:12] ... Alg in a respectable P17, given his pitlane start.
[20:25:03] ... Glo has a Trulli train going on behind him. How long till Sut makes his move?
[20:25:49] ... Vet just went purple in sl, chipping away at the gap to Alo. Ham's on a personal best, and slightly closer to Vet than he was.
[20:26:47] ... And Web takes Schu. The Aussie's race is looking up.
[20:28:28] ... Kli is ahead of Sen, as he has been all weekend. This is not looking good for the young Brazilian.
[20:30:45] ... Hul runs wide, Mas misses the chance to pass him. Oops.
[20:33:00] ... Alo now has massive 2.6s gap to Vet. Without another SC, this could be a procession at the front, with drama in the middle of the pack.
[20:33:34] ... Vet goes purple, O.ls better than Alo's fastest.
[20:34:31] ... Massive gap between Ham and But in P3/4 - 4.2s!
[20:35:52] ... Sut finally passes Glo.
[20:36:03] ... Hul now past Glo too.
[20:36:10] ... Mas next to try.
[20:36:21] [redacted]: shouldn't be too hard
[20:36:52] Kate Walker: Made it with ease.
[20:37:00] [redacted]: thought he might
[20:37:15] ... good move by hulk
[20:37:19] Kate Walker: Looks like Glo damaged when the train got past.
[20:37:32] [redacted]: oops
[20:38:15] Kate Walker: Want to see some action at the front, but the gaps are getting silly. Alo/Vet 3.ls, Vet/Ham 6.2s, Ham/But 5s.
[20:38:41] ... Web's 1.2s behind Bar, and still trying to charge up the field.
[20:39:28] [redacted]: 7.2 between vet and ham now
[20:39:53] Kate Walker: Is But playing the long game, or is he having grip trouble?
[20:40:05] [redacted]: ?
[20:40:09] ... don't know
[20:40:26] Kate Walker: Heidi's under investigation for the lap 1 Liu incident.
[20:40:50] ... But was sliding around here yesterday, but the track's in better nick now.
[20:42:38] ... Think this could be a pretty staid race, all things considered. No likely changes at the front unless something happens in the pit stops.
[20:43:05] ... Ham is dropping away from the front 2, but increasing lead on But. Looks to have the track to himself at times.
[20:45:43] ... Kobs is closing on Schu...
[20:46:25] ... Sen is nearly 7s behind Klii.
[20:52:13] ... Web's fighting the two McL's for the podium. At least, he will be if he can get past Bar.
[20:52:29] ... Gap's now up to 2.6s, thanks to Web's wall flirtation.
[20:52:45] [redacted]: but he's miles behind
[20:52:59] ... ah the top lot haven't stopped have they
[20:53:14] Kate Walker: Not yet. Web was the only one in the top 12 to do so.
[20:53:36] ... Unless Alo/Vet have a crash or car failure, they're the only two P1 contenders.
[20:53:59] ... Sen's rubbish at being a backmarker. Can't even move aside properly.
[20:54:45] [redacted]: what is wrong with the mclarens
[20:55:06] Kate Walker: McL tyres are going off, But's faster than Ham's. Looks like But will lose places in the pits, whenever they happen.
[20:55:23] [redacted]: ah that makes sense
[20:55:36] ... a safety car would work well now
[20:55:52] Kate Walker: Who are you, Flav? :)
[20:56:34] ... The SC came out too early to have any real impact. But there's still half the race to have another one,
[20:57:46] ... Tru pits again! This is his 3rd one!
[20:58:24] ... Ferrari've got an experimental gerbox component that broke in Alo's car in FP2 and Mas's during Q1. Unless they've changed Alo's - which they haven't - there's a chance it could fail in the race.
[20:58:36] [redacted] looks like trulli might be out
[20:59:08] Kate Walker: Think so. Not sure why though.
[20:59:28] [redacted]: from the pictures i saw it might have been a brake problem
[20:59:41] Kate Walker: McL getting ready for a stop. Ham's coming in.
[20:59:46] [redacted]: mclaren mechanics in the pit
[21:00:22] ... according to my timing screen button was in 3 and 4
[21:00:25] Kate Walker: That was quick! But will he get out before Web?
[21:00:39] ... No. Looks like buh bye to P3 for Ham then.
[21:00:45] [redacted]: no
[21:01:20] ... red bull and ferrari stopping
[21:01:36] Kate Walker: Alo and Vet pit together, out together.
[21:01:47] ... But pits.
[21:01:58] ... No lead change there then.
[21:02:09] [redacted]: looks like a bad day for mclaren
[21:02:59] Kate Walker: Think they've lost the WDC this w/e, for either man.
[21:03:27] [redacted]: vettels antistall kicked in as he tried to pull away after his pit stop
[21:03:45] Kate Walker: Doh! Never goes right for him, does it?
[21:04:38] [redacted]: msc in pit
[21:05:04] Kate Walker: OOH!
[21:05:08] ... Bad pit exit for Schuey.
[21:05:41] ... Vet goes purple.
[21:05:55] ... Might have an SC out now.
[21:06:09] ... Kobs and Sen smash on track, block underpass.
[21:06:12] ... SC out, lap 32.
[21:06:25] [redacted]: hmmm
[21:06:37] ... race might get interesting

[2:07:08] Kate Walker: Kobs stopped, Senna parked in his side.
[2:07:55] ... Kubs and Bar pit under SC.
[2:08:23] ... Maybe Senna thought that the white Sauber was the light at the end of the tunnel.
[2:08:31] [redacted]: hahaha
[2:08:57] Kate Walker: Klien is really putting Sen to shame.
[2:09:34] [redacted]: just saw the replay
[2:09:42] ... what a numpty
[2:09:42] Kate Walker: Kobs' car is MUSHED.
[2:10:02] [redacted]: very mushed
[2:10:04] Kate Walker: Klien's out too. Why?
[2:10:13] [redacted]: not sure
[2:12:20] ... should make for a exiting race
[2:12:46] ... when the sc comes in
[2:13:31] ... i love how all the roads that cross the track are still open
[2:13:44] ... it looks really cool from the helicam
[2:13:52] Kate Walker: Course they are! This is a bustling metropolis.
[2:13:59] ... looks really cool though.
[2:14:13] [redacted]: any news on SC coming in yet
[2:14:14] Kate Walker: Poor Ham - his drinks bottle is bOrked, so no fluids for the next hour. In this heat!
[2:14:28] ... Not yet - takes a while with two cars to clear.
[2:14:42] [redacted]: it seems like they are already gone
[2:14:52] ... it looked that way anyway
[2:15:01] Kate Walker: Just said in this lap.
[2:15:14] ... SC in!
[2:15:18] [redacted]: thought it might be soon
[2:15:53] Kate Walker: Looks like the backmarkers are trying to take out the front runners. This is chaos.
[2:16:26] ...Ham's race is over. So's his chance at the WDC this year.
[2:16:28] [redacted]: hamilton is out
[2:26:38] Kate Walker: Vet's on a charge, doing purple after purple.
[2:27:43] [redacted]: so i guess nothing is happening about web/ham
[2:28:09] Kate Walker: It takes time, you know.
[2:28:17] ... Heid/Schu now under investigation too.
[2:28:17] [redacted]: suppose
[2:28:39] ... webs tyres are getting quite old now though
[2:28:52] Kate Walker: They need to get radio feeds, telemetry, photos, and film footage from onboards, track cams, helicopter, etc. Don't expect a decision to take less than 20mins.
[2:28:57] [redacted]: so button might have a chance
[2:29:16] ... sounds like vettel might be having problems with his brakes
[2:29:39] Kate Walker: Feeling is Web won't get penalised as it's a racing incident, Ham took the outside line and left too little room.
[2:29:56] ... Vet's closing the gap to Alo, which could be a lack of brakes, lol.
[2:31:29] ... But can't catch Web, even though the master of tyre preservation is on newish rubber while Web's are nearly 40 laps old.
[2:31:36] ... What about that smooth prowess, eh?
[2:32:02] ... And where's the aggressive driving he promised in pre-race interviews?
[2:32:20] ... Vet goes purple again, trimming the gap to Alo.
[2:33:37] ... If Vet goes any more purple, he'll become royalty.
[2:34:11] ... Still no word from the stewards on either charge.
[2:34:25] ... Kubs pits, not long since his last stop.
[2:35:13] ... Vet's trimming a tenth off a lap, could overtake Alo at this rate.
[2:35:19] ... Or crash into the side of him.
[2:35:46] ... Alo goes purple, extends lead by 0.4s.
[2:36:58] [redacted]: what a surprise. no further action
[2:37:39] Kate Walker: Vet purple again.
[2:37:46] ... Nope. No further action.
[2:38:07] ... How long will it take them to decide to do nothing about Schu/Heid?
[2:38:22] [redacted]: might do it by the end of the race
[2:38:28] Kate Walker: Or by Korea.
[2:38:40] [redacted]: hahaha
[2:39:28] ... hamilton does not look happy
[2:40:17] Kate Walker: Would you be? He's going to be 3rd in WDC now, behind Web and Alo. Couldn't afford another DNF, but he's got one. 3 rets in past 4 races.
[2:40:29] ... Impressive he's still 3rd in WDC, really.
[2:40:43] [redacted]: i suppose
[2:42:29] [redacted]: kub had a puncture
[2:42:42] Kate Walker: Look at Schuey mixing it with the backmarkers - P15 of 17.
[2:42:53] ... Yup, that's why they brought Kubs in, poor guy.
[2:43:14] ... 10 laps to go, this is beginning to look like a foregone conclusion.
[2:43:15] [redacted]: kubs over buemi now
[2:43:47] Kate Walker: Will he crash into him, bringing out another SC?
[2:43:56] [redacted]: maybe
[2:44:25] Kate Walker: Glo's about to retire, Virgin say on Twitter.
[2:44:36] [redacted]: any idea why
[2:44:49] Kate Walker: Nope. Because that would be useful.

[2:45:02] ... No further action on Schu/Heid either.
[2:45:32] [redacted]: kub past bue
[2:45:56] ... jenson has been told to race webber to the flag
[2:46:44] ... glock gone now
[2:46:45] Kate Walker: Plus, eating a 2.8s lead in less than 10 laps? As if!
[2:47:03] ... 1/3 of the field now ret.
[2:47:24] ... Kub took Pet.
[2:47:28] [redacted]: stranger things have happened in singapore
[2:47:47] ... like winning from 15th
[2:47:48] Kate Walker: Bue pits.
[2:48:41] [redacted]: button web down to 1.7 now
[2:49:02] Kate Walker: Go Kubs!
[2:49:08] ... Taking Mas from behind, ooerr.
[2:49:18] [redacted]: go kubs indeed
[2:50:14] Kate Walker: He's on a charge and a half.
[2:50:25] [redacted]: kubs going for hulk now
[2:50:53] Kate Walker: And he takes him!
[2:50:58] [redacted]: got him
[2:51:18] ... i have to say this is a very impressive drive from kub
[2:51:35] ... he's absolutely flying
[2:51:48] Kate Walker: He's on fire (not literally).
[2:51:51] [redacted]: he'll have sutil to soon
[2:52:05] ... here he goes
[2:52:08] Kate Walker: Press room applauds kubs on sut
[2:52:09] [redacted]: got him
[2:52:19] Kate Walker: Driver of the race, methinks.
[2:52:19] [redacted]: awesome piece of driving
[2:52:25] ... me too
[2:53:53] Kate Walker: HK must hold off Schu.
[2:54:09] [redacted]: not much chance kubs will catch ruebens though
[2:55:14] Kate Walker: Was joking in press room that if we had enough laps Kubs would take Alo.
[2:55:33] ... i was thinking that too
[2:56:42] Kate Walker: Would love to see Kubs in a consistently fast car for a change.
[2:57:16] [redacted]: would be nice
[2:59:12] Kate Walker: That was a car on fire, methinks.
[22:00:01] [redacted]: who is on fire
[22:00:15] Kate Walker: HK
[22:00:19] ... Badly.
[22:00:28] ... He's out, thank god.
[22:00:34] ... Car is a goner.
[22:00:40] ... HK is spraying his own car.
[22:00:44] ... SC on final lap?
[22:00:55] [redacted]: i think he's trying to get an extinguisher
[22:01:00] Kate Walker: He's got one.
[22:01:08] [redacted]: good job hk
[22:01:11] Kate Walker: Race will end under yellows.
[22:01:25] ... Vet's as close as he's been all race.
[22:01:30] [redacted]: i can't believe heikki had to put out his own car
[22:01:51] Kate Walker: Hitting traffic...
[22:02:04] [redacted]: but not soon enough
[22:03:00] Kate Walker: Alo won by 0.2s.
[22:03:13] ... Now we've got 20 mins before the rest turn up. Or 30s, whatever. Alo wins, followed by Vet and Web. WDC now Web, Alo, Ham, Vet, But.

F1 Singapore Blog – Where they stand post-penalties

The stewards have spoken, and the official race classification of the Singapore Grand Prix has now been released. There is no change at the top, but Felipe Massa has been promoted to a P8 finish, an impressive result from a P24 start.

Nico Hulkenberg was found to have gained advantage on the first lap of the race, having left and rejoined the track. No action was taken during the race; the Williams driver was only investigated following a protest by Force India, who had also been issued with a penalty for gaining advantage.

Both men were given 20 second time penalties in lieu of the drive-throughs they would have received during the race.

Singapore Grand Prix race results

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
4. Jenson Button (McLaren)
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)

6. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
7. Robert Kubica (Renault)
8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
10. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams)
11. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
12. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
13. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
14. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso)
15. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin)
16. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)

Not classified

- Timo Glock (Virgin)
- Nick Heidfeld (Sauber)
- Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
- Christian Klien (HRT)
- Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
- Bruno Senna (HRT)
- Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
- Tonio Liuzzi (Force India)

World Drivers' Championship standings

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 202pts
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 191pts
3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 182pts
4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 181pts
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 177pts
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 128pts
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 122pts
8. Robert Kubica (Renault) 114pts
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 47pts
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 46pts
11. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 39pts
12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 21pts
13. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 19pts
14. Nico Hulkenberg (Williams) 17pts
15. Tonio Liuzzi (Force India) 13pts
16. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso) 7pts
17. Pedro de la Rosa (Sauber) 6pts
18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 3pts
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) Opts
20. Karun Chandhok (HRT) Opts
21. Lucas di Grassi (Virgin) Opts
22. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) Opts
23. Bruno Senna (HRT) Opts
24. Timo Glock (Virgin) Opts
25. Sakon Yamamoto (HRT) Opts
26. Nick Heidfeld (HRT) Opts
27. Christian Klien (HRT) Opts

World Constructors' Championship standings

1. Red Bull-Renault 383pts
2. McLaren-Mercedes 359pts
3. Ferrari 319pts
4. Mercedes 168pts
5. Renault 133pts
6. Force India-Mercedes 60pts
7. Williams-Cosworth 56pts
8. Sauber-Ferrari 27pts
9. Toro Rosso-Ferrari 10pts
10. Lotus-Cosworth Opts
11. HRT-Cosworth Opts
12. Virgin-Cosworth Opts

Fernando Alonso may have won the Singapore Grand Prix, but the man of the race was Renault's Robert Kubica, who was – figuratively – on fire during the closing stages. Unlike Heikki Kovalainen, whose race ended when the Finn's car literally caught fire.

Sunday's race was looking very processional for the first thirty laps, with some drama in the middle of the pack but not much action up ahead. All that changed on lap 32, however, when Kamui Kobayashi and Bruno Senna conspired to bring out the second Safety Car of the evening.

First to go was Kobayashi, who had just overtaken Michael Schumacher and was pushing too hard on bald tyres. In his own words: "It was clearly my mistake. After I overtook Michael Schumacher I knew I had to push very, very hard to score a point, but meanwhile the tyres were completely gone. I misjudged this in that corner and crashed into the barrier. Then Bruno Senna crashed into my car as well."

Senna's exit from the race was bewildering. There were yellow flags out on track, and Kobayashi had not crashed on a blind corner. But the Brazilian rookie ploughed into the Sauber driver as though he had no drive, no steering, no choice.

In HRT's post-race press release, Senna said that the crash was inevitable, given the amount of time he had to react to the crashed car ahead. "As soon as I came out of the corner and into the braking area the flags came out, but it was too late and there was no way to avoid the accident. The marshals were just too late and I didn't have any notice of what was going on. It's just one of those days."

Whatever the cause of the double retirement, it set the scene for a thrilling second half of the race. The second Safety Car of the evening came out, and when the race restarted on lap 35, chaos abounded.

Mark Webber got caught up with the backmarkers, and Lewis Hamilton saw his opportunity to pounce. But the window of opportunity was not as big as the British driver had first thought, and Hamilton was out of the race with a blown tyre. Speaking after the race, the McLaren driver explained the incident from his point of view.

"I'm still not exactly sure what happened with Mark and me," Hamilton said. "But, telling it from my point of view, I saw that he'd made a mistake, and had got caught up with the backmarkers, so I was in position to slipstream him. I was on the outside going into Turn Seven, and he was in my blind-spot, just behind me. I thought I'd got sufficiently past him, though. I braked, turned in, and tried to leave enough room for him on the inside – and the next thing I knew I'd got clipped, my tyre was blown, and that was it. But, as the saying goes, I guess that's motor racing."

The incident was a serious blow to Hamilton's championship campaign. He is now behind Alonso in the WDC standings, and has suffered three DNFs out of the past four races. The fact that Hamilton has only lost one place in the championship standings despite scoring only 25 points in the past four races is impressive, but one more DNF will mean the end of his chances this year.

One man who's not in with a chance at this year's drivers' title is Renault pilot Robert Kubica. The talented Pole is a firm favourite with fans, thanks to a succession of impressive drives in the early part of the season. But Renault do not have the deep pockets of the frontrunners, a fact that harms them during the development arms race.

Kubica got a good start in Singapore, and drove a steady pit stop-free race until the second Safety Car. The Pole then headed for the pits under the Safety Car, and began to work his way up through the ranks once the track was reopened for racing. But on lap 45 the Renault driver was forced to pit from P6 with a puncture, and it seemed inevitable that he would finish the race outside of the points.

Inevitable to everyone except Kubica, that is.

The dark horse of Formula 1 began to work his way up through the ranks like a man possessed, chewing up the opposition and spitting them out with a series of seemingly effortless overtakes. First to fall was Sebastian Buemi, then Renault teammate Vitaly Petrov. After making short work of those two, Kubica then proceeded to overtake what seemed like a man a lap. Felipe Massa was passed on lap 53, Nico Hulkenberg on lap 54, and Adrian Sutil on lap 55. The charge stopped there, as Kubica was faced with six laps in which to make up 30 seconds on Rubens Barrichello, an impossible task if ever there was one.

But for his impressive never-say-die charge, Kubica is my man of the match. He was far more modest about his achievements. "I had much fresher tyres than the cars in front in those last laps," he said, "but it's still not easy to pass in Singapore, so it was good fun picking them off one by one."

Kubica's on-track bravery was eclipsed only by Lotus driver Heikki Kovalainen, who ended the race in a flaming car. The Finnish driver was running in P14 in the final stages of the race, ably holding off an advancing Michael Schumacher. But then Schumacher got past on lap 57, and Sebastian Buemi began to close in on Kovalainen. Buemi's overtaking manoeuvre span the Lotus driver on track, which cracked a fuel line and started a major fire at the rear of Kovalainen's machine.

For a man who narrowly escaped being roasted like a potato, Heikki Kovalainen was remarkably chipper in the post-race press release: "That was not quite how I thought my race would end! Until the fire, I was having a really strong run and the car had felt good throughout. We were looking good for 15th, but then I had a coming together with Buemi towards the end of the race. I spun the car to get back onto the track which I think cracked the fuel tank pressure release valve and it looks like that caused an airbox fire. I didn't want to come into the pits as it definitely wasn't safe enough to do so, and pulled over on the main straight. A couple of guys from Williams gave me an extinguisher, so I put the fire out on my own – I told Tony and Mike that they maybe need to pay me more as I'm now a fireman as well..."

F1 drivers are multi-skilled beasts, of that there is no mistake. Until today I had no idea that one of those skills was acting as a fire warden.
