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Lewis Hamilton claimed pole position for Sunday's 67-lap Japanese Grand Prix with a final flying lap in dry conditions this afternoon at Fuji Speedway. The championship leader stopped the clocks in 1:18.404s, over two-tenths of a second clear of nearest rival Kimi Raikkonen.

Hamilton's sixth pole of the season, the 12th of his career, will have been made all the sweeter as title rival Felipe Massa will start from fifth position after a poor final lap in qualifying. Kimi Raikkonen came alive when it counted and lines up on the front-row of the grid in his Ferrari with Heikki Kovalainen starting third in the second McLaren Mercedes, four-tenths off team-mate Hamilton.

An impressive final lap from Fernando Alonso saw him post the fourth fastest time and therefore starts on the second row of the grid in his Renault alongside Kovalainen. For Massa, the final run in qualifying was disappointing as he dropped 1.5 seconds from his best lap recorded with virtually no fuel in the second round of qualifying. In contrast, Hamilton and Raikkonen were in the region of a second slower indicating that Massa either has a heavy fuel load or simply did not put together a good clean lap.

Robert Kubica remains a championship contender mathematically at least and lines up sixth in his BMW Sauber while it was a solid session for the Toyota team with Jarno Trulli and Timo Glock starting seventh and eighth.

Both Sebastian Vettel and Sebastien Bourdais made it into the final round of qualifying for Toro Rosso and start the Grand Prix from ninth and tenths respectively.

David Coulthard lines up 11th in the leading Red Bull Renault and in starting outside of the top ten is now able to choose whatever fuel strategy he likes for Sunday's race. Team-mate Mark Webber starts 13th in the sister RB4 admitting that he was just not fast enough on this occasion. Nelson Piquet split the two Red Bull drivers in the second Renault completing just one run in the second round of qualifying that may have hurt the Brazilian's chances.

Local knowledge seems to have helped Kazuki Nakajima this weekend as he starts 14th ahead of Williams Toyota team-mate Nico Rosberg.

Nick Heidfeld rewarded the BMW Sauber team for his new 2009 contract with a poor run to 16th position on the grid. Heidfeld, who has struggled mightily in qualifying this year, was unable to make it into the second round of qualifying. In fairness, the German veteran was only just over a tenth slower than team-mate Kubica in the first round of qualifying but now only starts ahead of the Honda duo of Rubens Barrichello and Jenson Button while Adrian Sutil and Giancarlo Fisichella brought up the rear with Force India Ferrari.

With a pole position and a seven point advantage in the championship, things are looking pretty good this Saturday afternoon at Fuji Speedway.

Source - F1-Live

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