

MotoGP: Rossi gets pole without turning a wheel in qualifying

Following the ding-dong battle under the flood lights in Qatar, MotoGP has moved to Japan where there was little light and lots of flood. With Qualifying abandoned, Rossi is set to take pole based on who has the quickest time from their fastest laps free practice.

It's raining in Japan. And in particular its raining in Motegi.

Although this morning's practice took place in the wet, it was as nothing compared to the downpour that washed out qualifying.

With the track too wet to dry even if qualifying was delayed, the grid has been determined with reference to free practice times.

The switch from hot and dusty Qatar to wet - and very cold - Motegi has left teams struggling to work out how to best set tyre pressures - and how best to set up the bikes to take account of those pressures. After just one race, and mainly hot-weather testing during the winter months, the Motegi weather is challenging the teams to think on their feet: they have little data to help them in these conditions.

Friday was cold but dry, and so it is Friday's times that have fixed the grid. Usually, Friday is not a day for going flat out: it's for checking out the track, and experimenting with set up. That Rossi and Stoner were fastest on Friday, and therefore start tomorrow's race in the reverse order of how they finished in Qatar, is largely due to the fact that they always practice flat out.

The fastest in this morning's wet session was Colin Edwards: he will start from fourth

Rossi's finish in Qatar - seven seconds behind Stoner - took Yamaha by surprise. And Ducatti had not expected such a huge advantage either. Rossi, who sandwiches, with team mate Jorge Lorenzo, Stoner on the front row, does not intend to allow the same to happen tomorrow.

But much will depend on the weather.