

Race Weekend Recap: Chinese Grand Prix and Sprint Race Feature

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Mixed weather and a Sprint Race feature made for an all too interesting weekend as Formula 1 returned to China for the first time in five years.

Practice

Free Practice 1 was especially important this weekend as it was the only one that drivers had before jumping into respective qualifying and races for the sprint and grand prix. Some upgrades were in store for Alpine and RB, with a new chassis and floor for Esteban Ocon and a new chassis for Daniel Ricciardo, respectively. Ricciardo also reported feeling more confident in the car due to his upgrades, which was reflected in his top ten finish on the timesheets.

Said timesheets had interesting results as Max Verstappen only went third fastest instead of his usual first. Aston Martin's Lance Stroll took that spot with McLaren's Oscar Piastri 0.327 seconds behind in second place.

An early red flag was also brought out due to a strange track fire. A section of the grass into Turn 7 ignited, but soon dealt with, costing five minutes of track time.

Qualifying and Sprint Race

Another fire broke out during SQ1, this time in Turn 5. It was suspected that intense winds were blowing sparks from the track onto the grass. Since this was at the end of the session, no red flag was waved, but SQ2 was minorly delayed. The drivers eliminated at the end and thus taking 16th-20th positions on the starting grid were Gasly, Ocon, Albon, Tsunoda, and Sargeant, respectively.

Clouds had been present for most of the afternoon, but the rain didn't start until only 2 minutes remained in the second qualifying session. As drivers were struggling to find grip in their tires, another five got eliminated: Russell, Magnussen, Hülkenberg, Ricciardo, and Stroll, making up places 11-15.

Action really picked up along with the rain during SQ3. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc slid into the barriers, and Red Bull's Max Verstappen ran off the track twice (without crashing) due to the wet conditions. There was also a lot of drama regarding Lando Norris's lap time. The McLaren driver had set the fastest lap of the session, but during the lap he had slightly slid into the gravel. The stewards argued that all four tires had left the track, hence breaching track limits and deleting his

lap time. This moved Lewis Hamilton into pole position. However only a few minutes later, the lap time was reinstated and Norris moved back to the front row, pushing Hamilton to p2.

As the actual Sprint Race got underway, Hamilton made a great getaway and was soon wheel to wheel with Norris, fighting for first place. Norris was brave into the early corners, but a combination of the battle and a slippery track forced him wide off the track and he dropped to seventh. Verstappen was able to make his way up through the ranks from fourth and took the lead on lap 9. On lap 16, there was a fantastic battle between Carlos Sainz in the Ferrari and Fernando Alonso in the Aston Martin, only for an opportunistic Sergio Perez to sneak past them both. On the following lap, Alonso made a surprising pit stop and ended up retiring due to a front right puncture. Verstappen was able to snatch yet another victory, followed by Hamilton in second and Perez in third.

Qualifying and Grand Prix

After a fantastic drive during the Sprint, it baffled everyone that Lewis Hamilton was knocked out of Q1. Zhou Guanyu also didn't escape the bottom five, which was disappointing in front of his home crowd. Williams's Logan Sargeant also suffered a brief spin that brought out the yellow flag, ruining his chance of setting a better lap time. Places 16-20 on the starting grid were as follows: Zhou, Magnussen, Hamilton, Tsunoda, and Sargeant.

Another flag was waved during Q2, but this time it was red after Carlos Sainz ended up in the barrier. The Ferrari found itself with two wheels in the gravel, causing the car to spin and hit the wall. The driver was able to limp back to the pits without a front wing, but everything was able to be replaced and fixed before the race. At the end of the session, places 11-15 were taken by Stroll, Ricciardo, Ocon, Albon, and Gasly, respectively.

Q3 had some surprise appearances by Haas's Nico Hülkenberg and Sauber's Valtteri Bottas, both of whom drive for midfield teams that rarely make it to the final session. Max Verstappen took yet another pole position, his fifth of the year, making him the first person to take five consecutive poles at the beginning of a season since Mika Häkkinen in 1999.

Overall, the grand prix itself was full of more fantastic overtakes, wheel to wheel battles, but also drama. Alpine's Pierre Gasly had a terrifying pit stop when he was given the green light to exit the pit box, but it quickly switched to red again due to his right rear tire being improperly fitted. The driver hadn't moved more than a couple meters before realizing his mistake, but not without knocking over one of the mechanics. The mechanic is alright, but the team was issued a hefty €10,000 fine for an unsafe pit stop.

Valtteri Bottas suffered engine issues on lap 24, causing him to retire and for the safety car to be brought out while marshals worked to get his car off the track. It wasn't until lap 26 when the

track was clear that the green flag was waved, only for Lance Stroll's Aston Martin to crash into Daniel Ricciardo's RB, causing the latter to retire on lap 34 because of damage. Lap 27 wasn't much better as Haas's Kevin Magnussen clipped RB's other driver, Yuki Tsunoda, causing him to spin and puncture the rear-right tire. This forced him to retire, and resulted in a double-DNF for the team. Both Stroll and Magnussen were given ten second penalties for causing a collision, but that didn't stop them from battling it out on lap 34, giving viewers an exciting full lap of wheel to wheel action and switching places.

In more positive news, Red Bull had some very impressive pit stop times for both of their drivers, ranging from 1.9 seconds to 2.1, Fernando Alonso had an excellent save from the gravel trap, and Lewis Hamilton steadily made his way from 18th to 9th position, scoring him an additional two points in the championship. The crowd went absolutely crazy for Zhou Guanyu as he made history as the first ever Chinese F1 driver, and thus the first to ever race at home. He was even given his own parking spot for [parc fermé](#), complete with a board with his face, name, and team colors. He waved to the main grandstand crowd before crouching on the track, head in his hands, overwhelmed with emotion.

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