

Saturday 19 June 2021

Smolyar takes second F3 win from sixth in Le Castellet thriller

In one of the greatest Formula 3 races in recent memory, ART Grand Prix's Alex Smolyar clinched a dramatic Race 1 victory at Le Castellet from a starting position of sixth, beating out MP Motorsport's Victor Martins, who was up from tenth himself.

In third, reverse polesitter Calan Williams recovered from losing the race lead to take not only his first points in F3 but his first podium as well.

The podium trio were three of five different race leaders, with Logan Sargeant spending a brief period in P1, before dropping back to fourth, while Ayumu Iwasa also enjoyed a spell at the front, before a 5s time penalty relegated him to eighth.

Rivalling the top two for drive of the day was PREMA Racing's Arthur Leclerc, the Monegasque recovering from his Qualifying retirement to climb from 30th to 12th, earning himself reverse grid pole for Race 2.

AS IT HAPPENED

Starting from pole in F3 for the first time in his career, Williams had said that he was aiming for a clear head when the lights went out, and it seemed as if the Australian had achieved it, hauling his Jenzer off the line and into the lead at Turn 1.

Attempting to make Williams think was Sargeant, who followed in tow having made light work of David Schumacher off the line for second. The Trident racer dropping back to sixth, with Iwasa, Juan Manuel Correa and Smolyar also all getting past the stuttering Trident.

A brief Virtual Safety Car was required at the end of the first lap as Johnathan Hoggard was forced into a disappointing retirement on his debut, pulling over onto the side of the track and clambering out of his Jenzer.

Clément Novalak matched the top five by getting past Schumacher when racing resumed, while Martins made a move on the third Trident of Jack Doohan for P8. The home hero then picked off Schumacher a lap later.

CONTINUES

At the front, Williams had been unable to pull away from Sargeant, who remained within DRS range of the Jenzer. There was a wide moment for the Charouz in the final sector, which very nearly allowed Iwasa through from third. Composing himself, the American used the mistake as motivation to finally get past Williams for the lead.

Iwasa had retained momentum from his early attempt on Sargeant and followed the Charouz past Williams to take second at Turn 11.

Making it second time lucky, the Hitech Grand Prix driver made a daring move on Sargeant for the lead, diving past the Charouz and into first. Though, there were question marks over the legitimacy of the overtake, with the Hitech placed under investigation for leaving the track and gaining an advantage.

Behind them, Smolyar and Martins were continuing their charge to the podium, both of them picking off Correa for fourth and fifth. It took two attempts, but Smolyar eventually muscled his way through to third, wrestling the final podium place off Williams. Meanwhile, Novalak had stolen sixth from Correa, as his teammate Schumacher fell out of the top 12.

An astonishing final few laps saw the race completely turn on its head, begun by the sudden struggle of Sargeant, who fell to P5. That was followed by a stunning lunge from Smolyar on Iwasa for the lead, who was then smacked with a 5s time penalty for his earlier move on Sargeant. The Hitech dropping to P8 once it was applied.

But Smolyar held the lead for just two frenetic laps, Martins completing overtakes nine and 10 to become Race 1's fifth different leader. Yet, it was far from over. Smolyar would not be denied and regained the lead on a dramatic final lap.

Williams reclaimed a place on the podium due to Iwasa's penalty, which also promoted Sargeant, Novalak, Correa and Doohan. PREMA duo Hauger and Caldwell were up to ninth and 10th, while Jak Crawford had nabbed 11th, after starting P16.

Completing the most overtakes overall was the third PREMA of Arthur Leclerc. The Monegasque had been forced to retire from Qualifying and started from the back of the grid but finished the day in 12th after a brilliant drive.

CONTINUES

THE KEY QUOTE – ALEX SMOLYAR (ART GRAND PRIX)

“A second win for me this season and a mega race from sixth to P1. It was a great battle with Victor (Martins) for P1 on the last lap. Definitely a really good race, I was not expecting the race to be like this, but I had a lot of fun.

“Hopefully Race 2 will be as fun as this one. My team did a really good job to make a great car and I hope we can also fight for some points in Race 2.”

THE CHAMPIONSHIP VIEW

Hauger retains his grip of the Drivers’ Championship for now, tied on 36 points with Martins, but ahead on countback. Novalak sits third with 34 points, with Caldwell on 33 and Smolyar on 32.

In the Teams’ Championship, PREMA are first on 69 points with ART Grand Prix second with 62 and Trident third on 61. MP Motorsport are fourth with 56 and Charouz Racing System fifth with 18.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Following his stunning overtake-fuelled drive, Leclerc will start from the opposite end of the reverse grid in Race 2, which takes place this afternoon at 4.40pm local time.

CONTINUES

2021 FIA FORMULA 3 CHAMPIONSHIP – ROUND 2 RACE 1 PROVISIONAL CLASSIFICATION

	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Alexander Smolyar	ART Grand Prix
2	Victor Martins	MP Motorsport
3	Calan Williams	Jenzer Motorsport
4	Logan Sargeant	Charouz Racing System
5	Clément Novalak	Trident
6	Juan Manuel Correa	ART Grand Prix
7	Jack Doohan	Trident
8	Ayumu Iwasa	Hitech Grand Prix
9	Dennis Hauger	PREMA Racing
10	Olli Caldwell	PREMA Racing
11	Jak Crawford	Hitech Grand Prix
12	Arthur Leclerc	PREMA Racing
13	Caio Collet	MP Motorsport
14	Lorenzo Colombo	Campos Racing
15	Frederik Vesti	ART Grand Prix
16	David Schumacher	Trident
17	Oliver Rasmussen	HWA RACELAB
18	Pierre Louis Chovet	Campos Racing
19	Reshad de Gerus	Charouz Racing System
20	Kaylen Frederick	Carlin Buzz Racing
21	Enzo Fittipaldi	Charouz Racing System
22	Ido Cohen	Carlin Buzz Racing
23	Matteo Nannini	HWA RACELAB
24	Filip Ugran	Jenzer Motorsport
25	Rafael Villagómez	HWA RACELAB
26	Roman Stanek	Hitech Grand Prix
27	Amaury Cordeel	Campos Racing
28	Jonny Edgar	Hitech Grand Prix
29	Tjmen Van der Helm	MP Motorsport
DNF	Jonathan Hoggard	Jenzer Motorsport
Fastest lap	Jack Doohan	Trident 1:52.742 (Lap 18)

ENDS

Cohen handed post-Race 1 penalty

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Ido Cohen has received a time penalty following today's Race 1 at the Circuit Paul Ricard after it was found that he had forced Rafael Villagomez off track at Turn 11.

The Stewards determined that the Carlin Buzz racer and the HWA RACELAB driver negotiated Turn 10 alongside, but that Cohen made a full exit to the very outside edge of the track at the exit of that corner, with Villagomez still being fully alongside. This forced the Mexican off track in Turn 11.

As a consequence, 5s have been added to Cohen's total race time. He had originally crossed the line in P22. This penalty drops him to 24th in the final classification.