

Saturday, July 11th 2020

Vesti soars to first win, as Race 1 is ended early due to wet conditions

Frederik Vesti is off the mark in Formula 3, taking his first victory in Race 1, but it's not quite how the Dane would have envisaged it, with the race ending nine laps early due to a hazardous downpour of rain.

With more than 25% of the race left to run, only half points will be awarded to the grid, leaving Vesti with a sense of frustration on a weekend where he has shown real pace.

Trident enjoyed their most successful race in the Championship with their driver trio proving their abilities in the wet, as Lirim Zendeli and David Beckmann took second and third for their first F3 podiums, and a late lunge from Olli Caldwell saw him earn his best finish of fourth.

It wasn't quite such a successful afternoon for the other two PREMAs, as Oscar Piastrri fell from fourth to fifth, and Logan Sargeant dropped from third to seventh.

AS IT HAPPENED

The weather was far from conclusive ahead of the race start. Patches of the track were wet, but the main straight remained dry with just drops of rain falling on the Red Bull Ring as the cars lined up for the formation lap.

This prompted plenty of discussion down the field as to which tyres to start on. The majority of the grid opted to air on the side of caution with the wets, but the likes of Federico Malvestiti and Cameron Das at the back were tempted to risk the slicks. The formation lap put this notion to bed, and they returned to the pits to switch to the wet Pirellis.

Poleman Vesti was pretty much untroubled off the line, but his teammates struggled with the conditions. The Tridents however revelled in them. Beckmann calmly hung on to second despite an attempted lunge from Piastrri down the left, before teammate Zendeli launched from P6 to P2 and into the rear-view mirror of the race leader, who suddenly had to go on the defensive, just clinging on to first.

The rain was getting fiercer and Max Fewtrell clearly wasn't happy, telling his team that he could barely see from 15th. The third Trident of Caldwell didn't appear to be having quite the same struggle, fighting well to pass Logan Sargeant and Theo Pourchaire.

Liam Lawson looked to have a handle on the conditions and eyed up Alex Peroni, but things got a little heated between the pair. Lawson made his move and the two tapped wheels. The overtake was clean, albeit aggressive, but the Kiwi wouldn't have minded too much as the position was his.

The conditions began to get too much tougher and Alex Smolyar was the first to fall foul of the downpour. The Russian lost grip on the final corner and spun into the barriers, bringing out the first safety car of the morning, but certainly not the last.

Vesti got away cleanly at the restart, with the field looking reluctant to risk a move in the conditions. Piastrri had brief glance down the side of Beckmann, but opted against it.

The safety car wasn't in the pits for long, as Clement Novalak lost control of his Carlin and suffered a puncture which sent him wayward.

Racing resumed and the front three remained firmly locked in place, with nobody wanting to take unnecessary risks. Those further back were slightly less wary and Caldwell made a late move on Piastrri for fourth, squeezing past him down the inside of Turn 2. Richard Verschoor also made up a position, tussling his way to sixth, for his fifth overtake of the morning.

The safety car would return for the final time the following lap, with Roman Stanek spinning wide and Sebastian Fernandez losing control down the main straight. This was enough for race control to wave the red flag and the decision was made shortly after to end the race early, with conditions only getting worse as the morning wore on.

That handed a Vesti a first win in F3, albeit in difficult circumstances. It confirmed a fantastic afternoon for Trident, who took their best ever finish, with Zendeli, Beckmann and Caldwell following Vesti in the order, ahead of Piastrri in fifth. Verschoor hung on to sixth, ahead of Sargeant, Lawson and Pourchaire. Jake Hughes will start on reverse grid pole for HWA RACELAB in Race 2 on Sunday, having climbed from 16th.

With only half points given, Piastrri remains first in the standings on 35 points, but is just half a point clear of Vesti in second. Lawson is joint third with Zendeli on 25 points, ahead of Beckmann on 21.5. In the Teams' Championship, PREMA are first on 90.5, ahead of Trident on 52.5. Hitech Grand Prix are third, ahead of MP Motorsport and Campos Racing.

CONTINUES

KEY QUOTE – FREDERIK VESTI (PREMA RACING)

“It was a race win for me on a very wet Red Bull Ring. I am very happy and pleased with the win and I would like to thank PREMA for doing a great job.

“Yesterday was dry and today was wet so it was a big change, but we managed to do well and I am very happy for the good points and a nice race, so thanks to PREMA and to my good sponsors.”

WHAT'S NEXT?

The HWA RACELAB of Hughes will start on pole for Race 2 tomorrow at 9.45am (local time) when conditions will hopefully be a tad drier around the Red Bull Ring.

ENDS