



# THE WINNERS & THE LOSERS

## The tenacious Honey Badger

Daniel Ricciardo is almost always smiling. But that sunny demeanour has been put to the test of late. Heading to China, he had retired from four of the last six races he has entered.

An engine problem meant his Bahrain Grand Prix was over pretty much as soon as it started. Then in China, a turbo failure in final practice meant he almost missed qualifying.

And even in the race, his prospects looked bleak. He lay sixth after the first round of pit stops, the last of the leading pack, while his team mate Verstappen was starring in third.

But then everything changed when the Safety Car was deployed. Ricciardo fitted fresher tyres, took advantage of Verstappen's mistake and then delivered an overtaking masterclass.

## Nico Hulkenberg – Mr Consistency

Nico Hulkenberg is arguably driving at his highest level right now. The German has outperformed his highly-rated team mate Carlos Sainz in every race this season.

The Renault project is still a work in progress, but in Hulkenberg's hands, they are getting the most out of the car, as he proved once again in China.

## McLaren's fighting Spaniard

McLaren have been solid but not spectacular so far this season. In China, Racing Director Eric Boullier admitted the team may not have been as ambitious as they could have been with targets for the 2018 car.

But while they battle to add more performance to the MCL33, at least they are scoring points, with Fernando Alonso, slightly under the radar, continuing to deliver at a tremendously high level.

The Spaniard made up for another poor qualifying with a bullish race that saw him gain six places from his grid slot – including three on a typically charging opening lap (above) and another with a bold pass on a struggling Vettel to snatch seventh late on. That's even more impressive when you consider all but one car reached the flag.

## The reigning world champion

Lewis Hamilton? Are you quite sure he belongs in the winners' section?' - we can hear you all asking. The answer is yes – just hear us out. Ok, so the world champion was off-colour most of the weekend - uncharacteristically spinning off in practice, beaten by his team mate again in qualifying, unable to make any headway in the race.

But – and it's a big but – he emerged from Shanghai having taken more points out of Sebastian Vettel's championship lead – eight – than he would have done had he been victorious and the Ferrari driver finished second. In the circumstances a BIG win.

## Red Bull's strategists and pit crew

There has been a feeling so far this season that while Red Bull may not quite have the car to challenge in qualifying, they have a race day package that can win Grands Prix. In the first two races of the year they couldn't put it all together, and for much of the race in China, it looked like they would finish third best again.

But then their strategists came into their own, rolling the dice and opening the door for a stunning result.

First they managed to double-stop both cars at the first round of pit stops (above). Then they reacted to the Safety Car by doing it again, bringing both drivers in on the same lap for fresh tyres.

That gave Ricciardo and Verstappen an overwhelming performance advantage over their rivals and ultimately provided the conditions for the team's first win of the season.

## Sebastian Vettel and Ferrari

Sebastian Vettel delivered a staggering qualifying lap to snatch pole from his team mate Kimi Raikkonen at the death and then at the start made a solid getaway before quietly building a gap at the front.

But then he and Ferrari got caught out and what looked like being a great day unravelled. Valtteri Bottas pitted and while Vettel responded the next lap, it was too late. The lead was lost. Vettel admitted the team don't yet understand what happened, although a slower (and safer) pit stop than usual looked to have played its part.

## Toro Rosso's communication

Last Sunday, Toro Rosso were ecstatic as they celebrated a brilliant weekend for the team in Bahrain that culminated in a deserved fourth place for Pierre Gasly.

But they came crashing down to earth on arrival in China. All weekend, the team were hunting pace. The STR13 was tricky to handle. Come race day, things didn't get much better. Both drivers lost positions at the start. Then when running 18th and 19th, Gasly and Hartley got their wires crossed. Hartley was instructed to let Gasly through as they were running different strategies.

## The not-so-sparkling Silver Arrows

Shanghai had previously belonged to Mercedes. Heading to the venue, they had four straight wins and six straight poles. And that dominance looked set to continue after their form in Friday practice.

But it all went downhill on Saturday as Ferrari romped to a front-row lockout. Mercedes just couldn't understand the tyres when it was clear there was only a narrow window to hit the sweet spot.

## Max Verstappen

Max Verstappen should have won the Chinese Grand Prix. It's that simple. The Safety Car came at the perfect time for the Dutchman, as he was just approaching the pit lane exit.

Smooth work from the Red Bull pit crew put him back out in fourth and ahead of Ricciardo who mirrored the Dutchman's strategy.

But as his boss Christian Horner admitted later, Verstappen was too impatient. Rather than wait until the hairpin to pass Hamilton, he tried around the outside at Turn 7 and paid the price. (*Formula1*)

