

# Emotional Antonelli wins maiden grand prix with Mercedes 1-2 in China

Nineteen-year-old converts record pole into maiden victory ahead of Russell and Hamilton

● Verstappen retires with issues

● McLaren cars fail to start

AFP | Shanghai

An emotional Kimi Antonelli won a grand prix for the first time yesterday in China ahead of Mercedes teammate George Russell and Lewis Hamilton, who made his maiden podium for Ferrari.

The 19-year-old Antonelli converted being the youngest pole-sitter in Formula One history into victory after both McLaren's dramatic failure to start the Shanghai

race.

Antonelli briefly lost the lead at the start but once he got back in front he controlled the pace to cruise home to the chequered flag by more than five seconds from Russell. Charles Leclerc was fourth in the second Ferrari.

"I'm speechless, I'm about to cry to be honest," said Antonelli as he choked back tears.

"Thank you to the team for helping me to achieve this dream."

It was an almost flawless drive from the youngster, apart from one heart-fluttering moment when he locked up at the hairpin on his penultimate lap.

But he recovered to avoid anything more damaging than a

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**At 19 years, six months and 18 days, Antonelli is placed second on the youngest race-winners list, behind Max Verstappen, who won in Spain in 2016 at the age of 18 years, seven months and 15 days**

small excursion off track.

"I really wanted to bring Italy back to the top and we did today. Even if I gave myself a little bit of a heart attack towards the end a flat spot," Antonelli added.

Early championship leader Russell was full of praise for his young teammate after the dominant Mercedes team secured a one-two for the second race running.

"A huge congratulations to Kimi because it's always very special to win your first race," said Russell, whose lead has been cut to four points by Antonelli.

The Italian replaced Hamilton at Mercedes and the seven-time world champion said he could not be more pleased for the teenager and his old team.

"I'm so so happy for you buddy, and I'm so honoured to be able to share this moment with him," said Hamilton.

"He took my seat obviously, at this great team. So big congratulations to Mercedes."

"They're really pulling ahead at the moment. We've got a



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli celebrates his victory

lot of work to do to try and keep up."

Hamilton, as he had done in Saturday's sprint, got a great start and had taken the lead by the time the teams emerged from the first complex of turns.

Leclerc also launched brilliantly and managed to get past Russell, who started second on the grid.

The top four swapped places multiple times before a safety car on lap 11 brought them all into the pits.

### McLaren, Red Bull woe

Once the dust settled and they went racing again, Antonelli led from Hamilton, with Leclerc third and Russell fourth.

By lap 29 Russell had got past both Ferraris and up to second and set off trying to catch his young Italian teammate, who was by now more than seven seconds up the road.

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen continued Red

**"I'm so so happy for you buddy, and I'm so honoured to be able to share this moment with him. He took my seat obviously, at this great team. So big congratulations to Mercedes. They're really pulling ahead at the moment. We've got a lot of work to do to try and keep up"**

LEWIS HAMILTON

Bull's poor start to the new season when he was told to retire his car on lap 46.

Oliver Bearman was fifth in the Haas, followed home by Pierre Gasly (Alpine) and Liam Lawson (RB).

Rounding out the top-10 points scorers were Isack Hadjar (Red

Bull), Carlos Sainz (Williams) and Franco Colapinto (Alpine).

Current world champion Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri both failed to start because of separate issues that left McLaren without a car in the race.

Norris had an electrical problem that prevented him getting to the grid.

Piastri did get round to the grid but was pushed back into the garage a few minutes later with a different problem.

"Unfortunately we identified separate issues on both cars which prevented them from starting the Chinese GP," said McLaren in a statement.

It has been an awful start to the season for the constructors' world champions.

Last weekend only one McLaren took part in the opening race in Melbourne after Piastri crashed on his way to the grid, meaning the Australian is yet to race in a grand prix this season.

## Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix will not take place in April

Manama

It has been confirmed that, after careful evaluations, due to the ongoing situation in the Middle East region, the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix will not take place in April.

While several alternatives were considered, it was ultimately decided that no substitutions will be made in April. The Formula 2, Formula 3 and F1 Academy rounds will also not take place during their scheduled times. The decision has been taken in full consultation with the FIA and respective promoters.

Stefano Domenicali, President and CEO of Formula 1, said:

"While this was a difficult decision to take, it is unfortunately the right one at this stage considering the current situation in the Middle East. I want to take this opportunity to thank the FIA as well as our incredible promoters for their support and total understanding as they were looking forward to hosting us with their usual energy and passion. We cannot wait to be back with them as soon as the circumstances allow us to do so."

Mohammed Ben Sulayem, FIA President, said:

"The FIA will always place

the safety and wellbeing of our community and colleagues first. After careful consideration, we have taken this decision with that responsibility firmly in mind. We continue to hope for calm, safety and a swift return to stability in the region, and my thoughts remain with all those affected by these recent events.

"Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are incredibly important to the ecosystem of our racing season, and I look forward to returning to both as soon as circumstances allow. My sincere thanks to the promoters, our partners, and our colleagues across the champi-

**"We fully support the decision by Formula 1, and we are grateful to them and to the FIA for their support and enduring partnership. We look forward to welcoming fans from all around the world back to Bahrain when F1 returns"**

SHAIKH SALMAN BIN ISA AL KHALIFA

onship for the collaborative and constructive approach that has led to this decision."

Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa, Chief Executive of the Bahrain International Circuit said:

"We fully support the decision by Formula 1, and we are grateful to them and to the FIA for their support and enduring partnership. We look forward to welcoming fans from all around the world back to Bahrain when F1 returns. On behalf of all of us at BIC, I take this opportunity to offer our sincere thanks to all those in the F1 community who have taken the time to send us

messages of support."

HRH Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al-Abdullah Al-Faisal, Chairman of the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation (SAMF) and Chairman of the Saudi Motorsport Company (SMC), said:

"The Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation respect the decision taken by Formula 1 regarding the 2026 race calendar. Fans across the Kingdom were once again looking forward to the Formula 1 STC Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in Jeddah this April, but we understand the considerations behind this decision and remain in close partnership with Formula 1."