

F1 – Webber Pips Vettel to Pole in Japan Qualifying



After a series of dominant qualifying sessions by Sebastian Vettel, who has claimed three consecutive pole positions in the last three races, it was Red Bull team mate Mark Webber who prevented the German from making it four in a row with a great lap to ensure his place at the front of the grid for the first time this season. It also marks the first time this season that Webber has outqualified his team mate, and although Vettel was disadvantaged with a KERS failure in Q3, Webber made the most of the opportunity to take pole. Webber said that the triumph felt somewhat hollow, given his team mate's troubles, but he will no doubt welcome his best opportunity of the season to get a win before he retires from F1 at the end of the year.

The Mercedes of Lewis Hamilton will start on the second row alongside Romain Grosjean, who once again outqualified team mate Kimi Raikkonen who could only manage a disappointing ninth. Fernando Alonso, who remains the only driver who can still mathematically catch Vettel, had a similarly disappointing qualifying, ending up just ahead of Raikkonen in eighth while Ferrari team mate Felipe Massa managed a more respectable fifth. Alonso knows that if he finishes ninth or lower and Vettel wins, then the championship will be lost, so the Ferrari driver will be looking to make one of his trademark starts to jump up the field and prolong Vettel's wait for at least another race.

Towards the back of the field there were many changes to the positions on the grid after qualifying, thanks in part to a number of grid penalties. Jean Eric Vergne missed out on Q2 after the brakes of his Toro Rosso overheated and caught fire,

causing the session to be red-flagged while the fire was dealt with. Adrian Sutil could only manage seventeenth, but a five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change due to a crash in practice means that the Force India driver will start from the back of the grid, behind Charles Pic and Jules Bianchi who picked up grid penalties last weekend. Pic has also incurred a drive-through penalty which must be served within the opening five laps of tomorrow's race, due to his failure to stop at a red light in the pit lane. Bianchi's team mate Max Chilton outqualifies him for only the second time this season, putting his Marussia over half a second ahead of rival Caterham's Giedo van der Garde.

It was happier news for Paul di Resta, who missed out on Q3 by less than two-tenths but was still satisfied with twelfth place on the grid, his highest qualifying position since Spa back in August. Speaking after qualifying, Di Resta said: "Given where we started yesterday, I think we should be pretty happy with P12. Slowly but surely we've made the car more drivable and in qualifying it felt quite good. I'm feeling upbeat about the race because the long runs have looked consistent and we are well placed to fight for points with a free choice on tyre strategy."

The Scot will be hoping to end his barren run outwith the points, and may find himself in a good position to do so in tomorrow's race. However most of the attention will be focused on the front of the grid and the battle between Webber and Vettel to determine not only the winner of the race, but perhaps also the championship.

Full Qualifying Results

1. Mark Webber (1:30.915)
2. Sebastian Vettel (+0.174)
3. Lewis Hamilton (+0.338)

4. Romain Grosjean (+0.450)
5. Felipe Massa (+0.463)
6. Nico Rosberg (+0.482)
7. Nico Hulkenberg (+0.729)
8. Fernando Alonso (+0.750)
9. Kimi Raikkonen (+0.769)
10. Jenson Button (+0.912)
11. Sergio Perez (Q2)
12. Paul di Resta (Q2)
13. Valtteri Bottas (Q2)
14. Esteban Gutierrez (Q2)
15. Pastor Maldonado (Q2)
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Q2)
17. Adrian Sutil (Q3) *
18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Q3)
19. Max Chilton (Q3)
20. Charles Pic (Q3)**
21. Giedo van der Garde (Q3)
22. Jules Bianchi (Q3)***

*5-place grid penalty, will start 22nd

**10-place grid penalty, will start 20th

***10-place grid penalty, will start 21st