



Sato, here passing
Michela Cerutti, made
rapid progress in race one

AUTO GP NURBURGRING (D), AUGUST 16-17 RD 7/8

Sato comes from behind to take the title

39

KIMIYA SATO HAD A CHALLENGING weekend in Germany, but his win and third place were enough to crown him Auto GP champion.

The drama started in qualifying, when the Euronova driver realised he had a brake problem as he ventured out for the first session, in which he needed to complete a time to make it into the top-10 shootout.

Sato recounts the story: "I had a brake failure on my out lap, and went off at the chicane. I brought it to the pits and with a couple of minutes left they said 'it's OK, go for a time'.

"It was not OK! I smashed into the barrier at turn one on my first timed lap. It was quite a big hit."

Not only did Sato take a chest bruising that made for an uncomfortable race weekend, but he would have to start race one in 11th and last position.

The Auto GP field's diminutive size and his own relentless raceday pace made it entirely possible for him to overcome all this strife and still take the win.

Super Nova driver Markus Pommer had high hopes starting from pole in his home race, but he lost out to a lightning start from Kevin Giovesi. Pommer then braked too deep into turn one and thus also lost second place to Tamas Pal Kiss.

The early laps turned into a great fight between Giovesi, Kiss and Pommer, but Sato was coming for



them. Meanwhile, at the end of lap two, Salvatore de Plano beached his car at the last corner, bringing out yellow flags that would have profound consequences for the race.

Sato was fourth, within sight of the leaders, by lap seven. At this stage Pommer pitted, followed a lap later by Kiss. The latter retained his lead over the former, while Giovesi and Sato battled away up front.

Giovesi pitted on lap 12 of 27, just as Sato became a serious threat, emerging clear of Kiss and Pommer. Sato now led, and seemed master of his own destiny. Until a raft of mid-race drive-through penalties was announced for drivers who had sped past the yellow flag.

This included every frontrunner bar Kiss, and all served their penalties within a couple of laps. It meant Sato kept his growing lead over Kiss, but he still needed to make his mandatory pitstop.

He set about pulling out over a second a lap clear of the Hungarian,

but fell well short of inflating enough of a cushion. After Sato received the trophy for second, though, officials decided that Kiss had also been among the guilty. One 25-second penalty later, Sato was the winner after all, and Kiss only fourth. When all was said and done, the entire field had been penalized one way or another, and the fastest man did win.

Sato's progress on Sunday was less rapid despite starting three places higher. Kiss started well from fifth, and took the lead from Francesco Dracone (who jumped the start) on lap two. The Virtuosi UK driver was effectively never headed, shaking off the attentions of second-placed Pommer after the pitstops.

Sato nearly caught Pommer at the end, but reined himself in once he

was in a title-winning position. He was circulating minus the bodywork covering the front dampers after it flew off mid-race, and his radio communication was also affected. None of the weekend's troubles put him off his stride, though, and he goes to the Estoril finale in October already crowned.

● Richard Asher

RESULTS

Race 1 1 Kimiya Sato (Euronova Racing), 27 laps in 37m06.445s; 2 Kevin Giovesi (FMS Racing, +7.854s); 3 Markus Pommer (Super Nova International); 4 Tamas Pal Kiss (Virtuosi UK); 5 Andrea Roda (Virtuosi); 6 Michela Cerruti (Super Nova). **Race 2 1 Pal Kiss**, 23 laps in 31m22.578s; 2 Pommer, +10.002s; 3 Sato; 4 Roda; 5 Cerruti; 6 Giovesi.

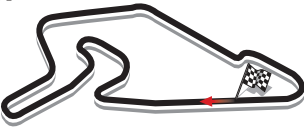
Points 1 Sato, 221; 2 Kiss, 170; 3 Pommer, 157; 4 Giovesi, 155; 5 Roda, 153; 6 Cerruti, 113.



ALL PICS: PHOTO-4/AUTO GP

Euro F3 Nurburgring (D)

August 15-17



Round 9/11

RESULTS

RACE 1: 23 LAPS, 51.866 MILES

1	MAX VERSTAPPEN (NL)	35m35.010s
Van Amersfoort Racing Dallara-Volkswagen F314; Qualifying: 1st-1m37.036s		
2	ANTONIO FUOCO (I)	+3.275s
Prema Powerteam Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 5th-1m38.262s		
3	ANTONIO GIOVINAZZI (I)	+3.789s
Carlin Dallara-Volkswagen F314; Qualifying: 7th-1m38.501s		
4	JORDAN KING (GB)	+6.650s
Carlin Dallara-Volkswagen F312; Qualifying: 11th-1m38.831s		
5	TOM BLOMQVIST (GB)	+11.650s
Carlin Dallara-Volkswagen F312; Qualifying: 8th-1m38.610s		
6	ESTEBAN OCON (F)	+18.918s
Prema Powerteam Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 4th-1m38.153s		
7	LUCAS AUER (A)	+22.352s
Mucke Motorsport Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 6th-1m38.375s		
8	FELIX ROSENQVIST (S)	+24.972s
Mucke Motorsport Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 10th-1m38.735s		
9	SANTINO FERRUCCI (USA)	+33.207s
EuroInternational Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 3rd-1m38.079s		
10	EDWARD JONES (UAE)	+33.767s
Carlin Dallara-Volkswagen F312; Qualifying: 2nd-1m37.685s		

Winner's average speed: 87.456mph. Fastest lap: Blomqvist, 1m23.786s, 96.916mph.

RACE 2: 25 LAPS, 56.376 MILES

1	GIOVINAZZI	34m39.329s
Qualifying: 3rd-1m21.864s		
2	BLOMQVIST	+0.771s
Qualifying: 1st-1m21.650s		
3	OCON	+1.404s
Qualifying: 4th-1m21.923s		
4	FUOCO	+3.294s
Qualifying: 5th-1m21.939s		
5	AUER	+4.674s
Qualifying: 7th-1m22.092s		
6	KING	+5.101s
Qualifying: 8th-1m22.153s		
7	ROSENQVIST	+7.078s
Qualifying: 6th-1m22.051s		
8	JONES	+15.488s
Qualifying: 9th-1m22.244s		
9	TATIANA CALDERON (CO)	+18.511s
Jo Zeller Racing (Mucke) Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 15th-1m22.735s		
10	NICHOLAS LATIFI (CDN)	+19.100s
Prema Powerteam Dallara-Mercedes F314; Qualifying: 11th-1m22.461s		

Winner's average speed: 97.606mph. Fastest lap: Blomqvist, 1m22.259s, 98.691mph.

RACE 3: 24 LAPS, 54.121 MILES

1	AUER	35m28.675s
Qualifying: 7th-1m22.237s		
2	BLOMQVIST	+0.476s
Qualifying: 1st-1m21.771s		
3	VERSTAPPEN	+3.623s
Qualifying: 2nd-1m21.795s		
4	FUOCO	+4.945s
Qualifying: 3rd-1m22.001s		
5	KING	+5.238s
Qualifying: 8th-1m22.319s		
6	ROY NISSANY (IL)	+17.415s
Mucke Motorsport Dallara-Mercedes F312; Qualifying: 12th-1m22.57s		
7	FELIX SERRALLES (USA)	+18.599s
Team West-Tec Dallara-Mercedes F314; Qualifying: 11th-1m22.481s		
8	CALDERON	+19.434s
Qualifying: 15th-1m22.802s		
9	JAKE DENNIS (GB)	+20.175s
Carlin Dallara-Volkswagen F312; Qualifying: 10th-1m22.451s		
10	JULES SZYMKOWIAK (NL)	+20.770s
Van Amersfoort Racing Dallara-Volkswagen F314; Qualifying: 16th-1m23.129s		

Winner's average speed: 91.530mph. Fastest lap: Blomqvist, 1m22.091s, 98.893mph.

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1	OCON	402	6	GIOVINAZZI	173
2	VERSTAPPEN	325	7	KING	172
3	BLOMQVIST	315	8	ROSENQVIST	154
4	AUER	283	9	DENNIS	154
5	FUOCO	237	10	LATIFI	108

POINTS SYSTEM EXPLAINED In each race: 25-18-15-12-10-8-6-4-2-1 to top 10 finishers.

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Verstappen won race one but later engine failure may be costly

New Red Bull junior shows seniority in face of penalty

WHOEVER WRITES THE SCRIPTS FOR THIS

championship needs a medal for their work at the Nurburgring. This race weekend had more twists and turns than the mighty Nordschleife.

The short version of events on the not-so-mighty short GP circuit is this: Max Verstappen won a race and outscored winless Esteban Ocon over the weekend. So Red Bull's latest junior chipped away at the points gap, but there's a hangover from this meeting that would make a Verstappen title run one the motorsport stories of the season.

The longer version of the story is more of a rollercoaster, and one of which lady luck seemed to be the mistress. Verstappen was superb in the wet-dry conditions that marked Friday and Saturday, taking pole on a drying track and then winning a testing first encounter in which he led the damp early going on slicks, lost the lead to the wet-shod Spike Goddard, then got back in front when the track dried up.

Verstappen then led a high-speed train in the dry second race, looking on course for victory until five laps remained. Then, coming through the kink on the back straight, his Volkswagen engine let go big time, handing victory to Carlin Motorsport's Antonio Giovinazzi.

But it was Verstappen's fortunes that had tongues wagging, because this blow-up looks set to be a massive turning point in the season. Not only did he lose 25 points, but the championship's tough rules on engine changes meant he would be slapped with a 10-place grid penalty for the next three races.

For a man whose charge was gathering

momentum, it was a momentous moment.

Especially as Ocon seemed to have no answer to the Van Amersfoort man's stellar form. The Prema driver had only mustered a scrappy sixth after a bad start from the wet side of the grid in the first race, followed by third in the second, the latter a race that showcased rather well the difficulty of overtaking in an F3 car around the 'Ring.

But then, in race three, came a tiny offering of hope for Verstappen. Several cars came to grief at the first corner, but of key interest was Ocon's demise at the hands of enthusiastic braker Giovinazzi. After demotion from second to 12th on the grid, Verstappen was up to fifth again. He then proceeded to show that you could overtake in the dry if you tried hard enough, passing both Jordan King and Antonio Fuoco to reach the podium. Ocon could only watch from the sidelines, seeing his race-two points gain neatly cancelled out by events in race three.

Lucas Auer took the honours in that one after some skilled dry-weather overtaking of his own. The Mucke Motorsport man duked it out with early leader Tom Blomqvist at the restart following the early clean-up at Turn 1, going side by side with the Carlin driver through the entire stadium section before sealing the deal at Turn 4.

Blomqvist was a little glum after failing to convert another pole position. He'd beaten Verstappen fair and square in dry qualifying for races two and three, but made a poor start in race two and got stuck behind Giovinazzi in the procession. Fastest laps in both the second and third races showed just what might have been if only his starts and restarts had been better.

Fuoco will also be ruing a mistake after he led Verstappen for the first five laps of race one. The Prema driver had a little off at Turn 1, though, which gifted the place to Max. Once Goddard's wet-shod cameo at the front was over, Verstappen pulled away for a three-second win.

Ultimately it was that damp race-one drive that earned Verstappen his little bite out of Ocon's lead last weekend. Overcoming a 77-point deficit when he'll start two of the last six races no higher than 11th is a huge ask. But never say never in this series: there could be more twists to come.



Auer (I) duked it out with Blomqvist for finale win

XPB/LAT

IN THE PADDOCK

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IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE reported on a major Formula 3 meeting. So I arrived at the Nurburgring with no preconceptions. That's why I must take the impression left by Max Verstappen so seriously.

I'm too young to have seen his old man race in F3, but paddock sages were happy to remind me that it does Max a disservice to suggest that his F3 progress parallels that of 1993 category destroyer Jos. Max's trajectory is steeper.

It was the detail stuff that caught the eye. How he positioned himself in qualifying to ensure a clear road, or the best use of a drying track at the death. His consistent starts. Even his ruthless blocking of Esteban Ocon in qualifying which, although unacceptable, showed a certain awareness reminiscent of multiple world champs.

He showed a full array of race skills. In race one, under attack from a driver whose tyres weren't going to last much longer, he saw the bigger picture and didn't fight Spike Goddard. In race two, he wasn't the quickest, but produced the mistake-free driving needed to stay ahead on a dry track that was proving very tough for overtaking. Yet in race three, coming from behind, he showed that dry overtaking could be done.

The average 16-year-old, fresh into car racing, up against an excellent field, might be expected to overdrive. The new Red Bull signing didn't. The Eifel weather also tested him with tricky conditions this weekend – but that's exactly where he stood out.

It's rare for a paddock to rave about a driver, but this paddock is. And judging by last weekend, Helmut Marko should, too.



Verstappen (r) soon vanquished Goddard

Ocon calm despite strife

ESTEBAN OCON IS REMAINING

cool after losing more championship-points ground to Max Verstappen in Germany.

Until Verstappen broke down in race two, though, there was some evidence that the Prema Powerteam man was beginning to get rattled by his much-hyped fellow teen.

Ocon got away poorly from the wet side of the grid in race one and didn't show the drying-track progress expected of a champion-elect, battling to sixth and at one point rudely pushing Santino Ferrucci into the pitlane entry.

Verstappen's blatant blocking tactics in qualifying for races two and three would have done little for Ocon's mood the next day, and might have explained his careless pitlane speeding in the same session, which earned him a €450 fine.

But he was sanguine about it all after Verstappen's subsequent breakdown, which led to a 10-place grid penalty for race three and the first two races at Imola.

"It's clear what happened in qualifying,"



Ocon kept his cool despite losing ground to Verstappen

said Ocon. "He did it at Hockenheim too. It was dangerous, but I don't want to talk about that any more.

"We've both had problems this year. Now I've just got to focus on getting maximum points with the package I have. The good thing is we've always found something in

the car as the weekends go on."

Ocon even kept a lid on things after he got punted out by Antonio Giovinazzi at the first corner of race three, in which he hoped to cash in on Verstappen's grid penalty. He contemplated things behind the barriers, looking like a man keeping his head.

West-Tec rookie Chang
ran as high as fifth



Chang makes a bang on debut

BRITISH F3 RACER ANDY CHANG had a chance to shine when he gambled on wet tyres in his first race, the Team West-Tec recruit rising as high as fifth before the track dried out and he faded.

It was Chang's first appearance in

the latest-generation Formula 3 car. He will turn out for West-Tec again in the Hockenheim finale as he looks for mileage ahead of his home race at the Macau Grand Prix.

Chang will not continue in the British championship.



DRIVERS PENALISED

Jo Zeller Racing's Tatiana Calderon and Carlin's Sean Gelael received drive-through penalties in race one. These were issued for causing a collision (with Jules Szymkowiak, above) and pitlane speeding respectively.

JONES BACKS OUT

Carlin Motorsport driver Ed Jones withdrew from race three after feeling intense pain in his back during race two. It was a recurrence of the vertebra injury he sustained at Pau earlier in the season. He will seek specialist opinion before the next round at Imola.

QUALIFYING DELAYED

Qualifying for races two and three had to be postponed from Saturday evening to Sunday morning, after an accident in the preceding Scirocco R-Cup race left a barrier needing to be repaired.

DUO LOSES GRID SLOTS

Antonio Giovinazzi (Carlin) will lose three grid spots in race one at Imola after he took out Prema's Esteban Ocon at the start of race three. Spike Goddard (T-Sport) will lose five slots after forcing Felix Rosenqvist off the road in the same race.

BIG NUMBER

30

The total number of grid places Max Verstappen will lose as the result of the penalty enforced for a single engine change.

Van Amersfoort: penalty is harsh

VAN AMERSFOORT RACING BOSS

Frits van Amersfoort says there is no way Max Verstappen could have avoided the triple 10-place grid penalty he received for changing the Volkswagen engine that blew in race two.

"There was an option to skip race three and try to repair the engine for Imola," he said. "But after careful consideration we were forced to change the engine. There was enough damage that there was no other decision for us to take. Let's just say it was a very big mechanical failure!"

"The grid-penalty rule is harsh, and tough,



Verstappen landed a hefty penalty

because what happened was nothing to do with misuse of the engine. The small chance Max had in the championship is gone now. But it's there in the regulations. And as a motorsport man, I know this is a technical sport."