

Friday 4 September 2020

Pourchaire pips Zendeli to pole by 0.4s in frantic Monza Qualifying session

Théo Pourchaire claimed his first ever FIA Formula 3 pole position in a chaotic Qualifying session at Monza. The ART Grand Prix driver made the most of the tow to finish four tenths faster than Trident's Lirim Zendeli. Pourchaire's ART teammate Alex Smolyar finished in third, a further 0.036s back.

Track temperatures had risen from the low-20s to the mid-40s between Free Practice and Qualifying and the field seemed to be revelling in the heat. Jake Hughes was the first man to complete a flying lap, setting the benchmark at 1:38.243.

PREMA duo Oscar Piastri and Logan Sargeant had spent the opening 10 minutes of the session towards the bottom of the order, but lunged to third and fourth with their first proper laps of the afternoon.

David Beckmann briefly nicked P1 from Hughes, but the Briton found more time around the Autodromo Nazionale di Monza to reclaim top spot. Beckmann cooled down and had another go, finding just over a hundredth of a second more to stake an even stronger claim for provisional pole. Frederik Vesti, Matteo Nannini and Pourchaire were also able to improve and lunged ahead of Hughes.

The cars dived back into the pits for fresh boots, with no one choosing to run in the gap. They returned shortly after, but only briefly, as a red flag brought the session to a halt. Hitech had been in such a rush to get Liam Lawson back out with a good track position that they left the cooling fan on his car.

The session quickly went green again and the cars funnelled back out onto the tarmac. Provisional poleman Beckmann radioed to complain that he had been sent out first, without an opportunity to take a tow. Minutes later, he had lost P1 as Pourchaire nailed the final sector to steal the position.

Beckmann's teammate Zendeli meanwhile, had benefited from a tow and momentarily leapt to first, but Pourchaire found time in the middle sector to regain top spot. Smolyar and Lawson were able to improve, but could only managed third and fourth.

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Teams' Champions in waiting, PREMA Racing, were off the pace. Vesti was the fastest of the three, but could only manage P6, with Sargeant down in 10th and Piastri in P12.

Pourchaire retained P1 at the chequered flag, ahead of Zendeli, Smolyar, Lawson and Beckmann. Vesti was sixth, ahead of Nannini, Hughes, Calan Williams and Sargeant.

The Frenchman will be in search of his third F3 victory tomorrow, starting from pole when Race 1 gets underway at 10.25am (local time).

ENDS