

FIA FORMULA E CHAMPIONSHIP
Buenos Aires ePrix

Argentina extends a warm welcome to Formula E ...and the MICHELIN Pilot Sport EV tyres lap it up

Heat was an ever-present factor in the Buenos Aires ePrix.

First of all, there was the warmth generated on a human level. The promoters had covered the city in posters, and the inhabitants of the Argentine capital duly responded. According to organisers' reports, some 20,000 spectators filled the grandstands. Motorsport fans, families and those who were merely curious about the event were rewarded with a breathless spectacle, which took place beneath a blazing sun and in ambient temperatures of 30°C.

Indeed, it was the sun that was the catalyst for the second kind of heat – that which could be felt in the air and emanating from the circuit's asphalt. Transformed into a furnace with its surface exceeding 50°C, the Buenos Aires ePrix track put men, machines and Michelin's tyres to an extremely stern test.

In such a demanding situation, the drivers pushed themselves to the limit. Following the two free practice sessions, qualifying took place at midday. Switzerland's Sébastien Buemi (e.dams-Renault) claimed pole position courtesy of his lap time of 1:09.134 in Q1, with Q2 pace-setter Jamie Alguersuari a scant 27 thousandths-of-a-second adrift for Virgin. Venturi's Nick Heidfeld completed the top three after stopping the clocks in Q3 with a time of 1:09.367, narrowly seeing off the second Virgin entry of Sam Bird. The Q4 group did not affect the leading positions.

The lights went out to mark the start of the race at 16:04, and the action was fast and furious from the very first corner, when Heidfeld went all the way around the outside of Alguersuari to steal second. The German subsequently deployed his 'FanBoost' to close in on leader Buemi, who was endeavouring to break away. The order thereafter remained stable until lap seven, when Lucas Di Grassi (Audi Sport ABT) overtook Alguersuari for third place, going on to relieve Heidfeld of second at the end of Lap 13.

Things then settled down once more for a couple of laps, before Karun Chandhok's Mahindra Racing single-seater made contact with the wall, obliging the race director to bring out the yellow flags and ultimately the safety car. With the order temporarily frozen and the field circulating at a reduced pace as Chandhok's stricken car was being removed, the drivers took advantage of the brief lull to head for the pit-lane to switch cars.

When the race resumed five laps later, Buemi immediately sought to stretch his legs, but in the heat of the action, he touched the wall with his front-right wheel and broke his suspension. With the e.DAMS car out of the equation, Di Grassi and Heidfeld found themselves embroiled in a battle for the top spot, before Bird came along to join the party.

The next drama came on Lap 27, when the rear-right suspension on Di Grassi's car broke, promoting Heidfeld to the head of the field in the Buenos Aires ePrix, hotly pursued by Bird.

It was at this moment that the race director announced a 'drive-through' penalty for the Englishman for having ignored the pit exit lights during the safety car period. Bird's misfortune left Heidfeld with a comfortable four-second margin over Amlin Aguri rival Antonio Felix Da Costa – and Lady Luck at last seemed to be shining upon the German and the Venturi team.



That was until Lap 32, when the Monaco-based outfit was informed that its driver had been found guilty of a pit-lane speeding infringement, and the accompanying penalty cost him all hope of victory. Da Costa inherited the lead, as the dust finally looked to be settling on a frenetic few laps.

Nicolas Prost, however, clearly hadn't read the script. At that stage, the e.dams-Renault driver occupied fifth position, but he was far from satisfied.

With just a single lap separating competitors from the chequered flag, Daniel Abt harpooned Alguersuari, enabling Prost – who had been closely shadowing the pair – to snatch third place. With a clear track ahead of him and countryman Jean-Eric Vergne in his sights, he chased his Andretti Autosport adversary through the following two corners before forcing his way through into second position. Vergne tried to fight back, but in so doing he overshot a corner, opening the door to a grateful Nelson Piquet Jr (China Racing).

The Buenos Aires ePrix podium therefore welcomed race-winner Da Costa (Amlin Aguri), flanked by second-placed Prost (e.dams-Renault) and Piquet Jr (China Racing) in third.

At the end of the race, **Nicolas Prost** was quick to praise the qualities of his Michelin tyres: *“I sincerely think that Michelin has done a superb job in the development of these tyres. In such extreme conditions as those we experienced in this race, we put them to a really serious test and yet they consistently provided a very high level of performance and durability, notwithstanding the suffocating heat. We must not forget, either, that these tyres are very special, since they were designed to work equally well on both dry and wet surfaces, so once again I say congratulations to Michelin!”*

The next round of the FIA Formula E Championship will take place in Miami (USA), on March 14, 2015.