

Max masterclass in Bahrain!

Formula 1 kicks off 2023 season with thrilling F1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2023 at Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir

● Verstappen leads Perez as Red Bull claim dominant one-two

● Alonso takes impressive third in debut GP with Aston Martin

● Sainz fourth for Ferrari, Hamilton fifth for Mercedes

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Max Verstappen was in a class of his own as he powered defending world champions Red Bull Racing to spectacular one-two finish last night in a hugely thrilling Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2023, kicking off the new F1 season in front of a massive sold-out crowd at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) in Sakhir.

The reigning F1 double world champion started from pole and made the most of the clear air ahead of him, taking his two-stop strategy to his first-ever



Max Verstappen celebrates with the winner's trophy on the podium



Max Verstappen crosses the finish line as Red Bull team members celebrate on the pit wall

victory in Bahrain while building a comfortable lead ahead of teammate Sergio Perez.

Fernando Alonso, also a two-time F1 world champion and three-time winner at BIC, joined the Red Bull pair in the top three in his maiden grand prix weekend with Aston Martin.

Verstappen commented after his win: "You never really know what will happen later on in the race, so very happy to finally win here in Bahrain. I think we have a good race package, we can definitely fight with this so a big thank you to the team."

A magnificent fireworks display brilliantly lit up the night sky as the chequered flag came down after 57 laps of intense action, waved by Italian multi-time grand prix motorcycle world champion Giacomo Agostini.

Presenting the winner's trophy to Verstappen in the post-race podium ceremony was Supreme Council for Youth and Sports First Deputy Chairman, General Sports Authority President and Bahrain Olympic Committee President, His Highness Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Also on the podium for the prize-giving and handing out the other awards were Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) President Mohammed Ben Sulayem, Gulf Air Chairman of the Board Zayed R Alzayani, Minister of Youth Affairs Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfiqi, and Bahrain Motor Federation President and FIA Vice-President for Sport for MENA Shaikh Abdulla bin Isa Al Khalifa.

The F1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2023 was the first of 23 rounds in this year's FIA F1 World Championship. It was the 19th running of the world-famous desert race and the 10th time it was held as a night event. Verstappen won last night's

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F1 spectacle in a total race time of one hour 33 minutes 56.736 seconds. He made a quick getaway at the start while Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was able to overtake Perez at turn one to go second.

The Red Bulls maintained their strong pace throughout with Verstappen finishing a comfortable 11.987 seconds ahead of Perez.

But the challenge of Leclerc and Ferrari teammate Carlos Sainz faded as the race entered its closing stages. After starting alongside one another on row two, Leclerc, last year's winner at BIC, was forced to retire on lap 39 after stopping on the track, while Sainz gave up his potential place on the podium to Alonso on lap 45.

Alonso capped a fantastic weekend in Bahrain with his final classification in third, 38.637s from Verstappen.

Sainz salvaged fourth place for Ferrari 48.052s from the

winner, while seven-time F1 world champion and Bahrain record-holder with five wins in Sakhir, Lewis Hamilton, was classified fifth 50.977s back for Mercedes.

Lance Stroll marked his impressive comeback from a pre-season injury by taking sixth for Aston Martin 54.502s adrift, while Mercedes's George Russell followed in seventh 55.873s from the victor. Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo was eighth 72.647s behind, while completing the top 10 and the race's points-scorers were Pierre Gasly (+73.753s) of Alpine, who had a superb result after starting from 20th on the grid, and Williams's Alexander Albon (+89.774s).

Yuki Tsunoda came 11th for AlphaTauri 90.870s from first, while classified one lap behind from 12th through 16th, respectively, were Logan Sargeant of Williams, Kevin Magnussen of Haas, Nyck de Vries of AlphaTauri, Nico Hulkenberg of Haas, and Alfa Romeo's Zhou Guanyu, who clocked the race's fastest lap of 1:33.996.

McLaren's Lando Norris completed the classification in 17th with a two-lap gap from Verstappen.

Joining Leclerc as non-finishers were McLaren rookie Oscar Piastri, who had a disappointing start to his F1 career after being forced to retire 13 laps into the race, and Alpine's Esteban Ocon, who was given a slew of penalties but then retired on lap 41.



Sparks fly as the F1 field battle for positioning at the start

Max Verstappen claimed his first-ever victory in the F1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix last night after finishing as runner-up twice in the past

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