

Sports

Hamilton claims 100th win amid high drama in Russia

Seven-time champion takes drivers' lead from Verstappen

SOCHI: Lewis Hamilton finally claimed his 100th Formula One success yesterday, the peerless Mercedes driver emerging triumphant amid high drama at the rain-hit Russian Grand Prix to retake the championship lead.

With a late downpour causing havoc Hamilton reached the unprecedented century after being stuck on 99 since the British Grand Prix in July. The 36-year-old Briton moved back to the top of the drivers' standings by two points from Max Verstappen, who finished second. After taking his 100th chequered flag 14 years after his first in Canada Hamilton told his team on the car radio: "Phew. That was hard work man!"

The seven-time champion had looked destined to come away for the fifth race in a row stuck on the 99 mark with McLaren's Lando Norris firmly in command up front. But with five laps to go, the rain that had been threatening the 15th round of the championship for so long arrived, causing mayhem.

With cars fitted with slicks starting to lose grip and coming in for intermediates Hamilton joined them, leaving Norris leading. But with three laps left and Norris a sitting duck and sliding all over the circuit Hamilton eventually hit the front to finally nail the magic number of victories.

After jumping out of his car he said: "The rain came, it was very opportunistic, the team did a great job, I'm grateful for the points. It's taken a long time to get to 100 wins. I wasn't even sure it would come. The team made such a good call at the end. I didn't want to let Lando go. I'm incredibly

grateful to all these men and women here and back in the factory. Wow, 100."

'So determined'

Hamilton had set off from the second row after a rare mistake in qualifying 24 hours earlier. "Going to bed last night, with the job that I did yesterday, there were subtle little mistakes. I was so determined to do the best job I could. It was tough."

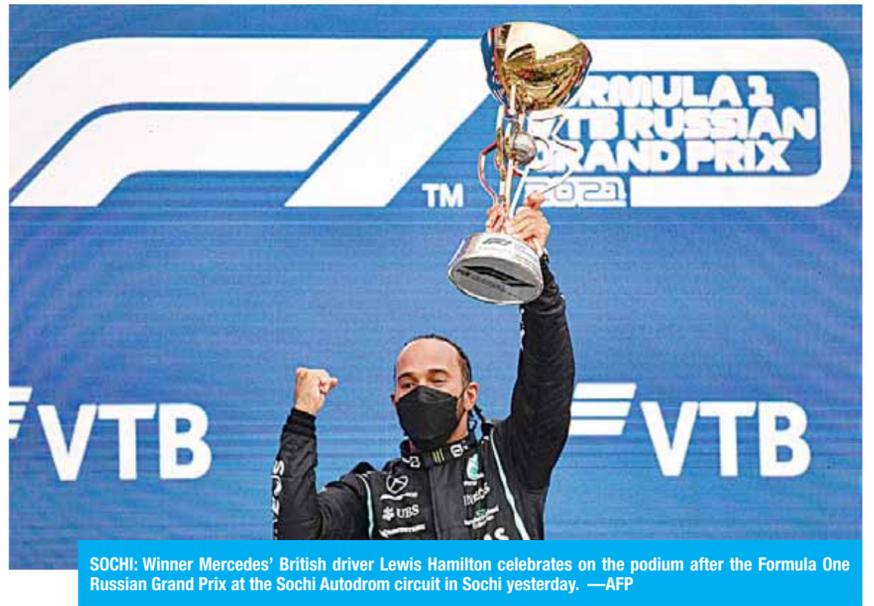
At the start, as flecks of rain began to appear on drivers' visors, a ballerina pirouetted on a grand piano at the back of the grid to add a surreal touch to the occasion. On lights out, Ferrari's Carlos Sainz won the long 900m sprint to the first turn from

Norris and George Russell in the Williams as Hamilton slipped from fourth to seventh.

Mercedes' tactical card with Valtteri Bottas — whose engine they had replaced so he would start near Verstappen near the back of the grid and try and hold him up — worked for all of seven laps when the Dutch driver

nipped past the Finn, to smug smiles from the Red Bull garage. On lap 13 Norris took to the team radio to say "Got him" after swooping past Sainz to regain the lead he lost at the start. Sainz pulled his Ferrari into the pits on the next lap to promote Daniel Ricciardo into second to leave McLaren racing first and second.

Approaching midway the top 10 had yet to pit, with Verstappen, up to sixth. Ricciardo was the first of the front runners coming on for a change of rubber, but a tardy tire change saw the Monza winner rejoining back in 14th, as Hamilton took advantage



SOCHI: Winner Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium after the Formula One Russian Grand Prix at the Sochi Autodrom circuit in Sochi yesterday. —AFP

of clean air to set a fastest lap.

The century-chasing man came in finally on lap 27, with Verstappen following suit, the pair dropping to ninth and 12th. Norris came in for a slick stop, the McLaren mechanics high-fiving in relief after Ricciardo's problematic visit.

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff took to the airwaves to tell Hamilton: "You can win this race". With 10 laps left, Norris had regained the lead,

Hamilton looming in the young Briton's wing mirror, around one second behind.

Then the rain came down. Cars began to come in for a change of rubber for better grip including Hamilton with Norris staying out on hards, 25 seconds clear now, as McLaren gambled. Fernando Alonso pirouetted like the pre-race ballerina and Norris followed to hand Hamilton the lead, and another slice of F1 history. —AFP

Hamilton — 'Wild and free' but fiercely focused on winning

SOCHI: Lewis Hamilton cemented his position as one of Formula One's true greats when he won his 100th Grand Prix in Sochi yesterday, another staggering achievement for a boy who grew up in modest circumstances.

Hamilton already held the record for most victories after breaking Michael Schumacher's mark of 91 in Portugal last October. His fifth victory in the Russian Grand Prix also put the 36-year-old Briton top of the driver standings and on course to break a tie (seven) with Schumacher for most driver titles. It has been quite a ride. The son of a black father and a white mother, whose parents separated in his youth, Hamilton grew up on a housing estate. His father Anthony at one time held down three jobs to fund his son's embryonic racing career in karting. It was clear from an early age that Hamilton had a gift for speed and the gutsy natural instincts of a born racer. In 1995, aged 10, and wearing a jacket and shoes borrowed from his predecessor as British Formula Cadet karting champion, he went to a glittering awards ceremony in London where he met McLaren's then-boss Ron Dennis. He asked for an autograph and told him "one day I want to race for you". Dennis replied: "Phone me in nine years and I'll sort you a deal."

Mercurial and tempestuous

Bold, determined and original, he almost won the title in his first record-breaking season as he reeled off nine successive podiums from his debut in Melbourne, astonishing with his speed and his style. On and off the track, he was fast, mercurial and occasionally tempestuous and the combination led to a fierce rivalry with team-mate and two-time champion Fernando Alonso at McLaren. He narrowly missed the 2007 title, but in 2008 grabbed fifth place on the final corner in Brazil to edge Felipe Massa by one point and at 23 become the youngest ever champion. Hamilton showed frustration as McLaren failed to deliver the speed to beat Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull, who reeled off four straight title triumphs from 2010 to 2013, by which time Hamilton had departed for Mercedes. Escaping the management regime of Dennis and his father, Hamilton found freedom at Mercedes alongside team-mate Nico Rosberg, his teenage karting friend and rival.

This enabled Hamilton to express himself with a headline-grabbing trans-Atlantic lifestyle, mixing with musicians and 'fashionistas'. He showed little love for conventions and, for many observers, gave his sport a welcome injection of freshness and diversity as champion again in 2014 and 2015. Rosberg broke Hamilton's supremacy in 2016 and then



SOCHI: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton steers his car to win the Formula One Russian Grand Prix at the Sochi Autodrom circuit in Sochi yesterday. —AFP

retired, leaving the Englishman to dominate. His former McLaren team-mate Jenson Button said Hamilton had pure speed. "For me, over one lap, I don't think there is anyone as quick as Lewis and I don't think there ever has been," Button said. That speed has in recent seasons been allied to a more mature attitude to his job as team leader.

'Only human'

Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff said of Hamilton: "He is never satisfied. He never settles. He is never happy with where he is as a racing driver and a human being." Having achieved so much as his sport's most high profile figure, Hamilton has expressed views on social issues more frequently. He began voicing his concerns for the environment and in 2019 used Instagram to declare the planet was "a messed-up place" and he felt he wanted "to give up". That commentary, including revelations about his vegan lifestyle, led to the man who frequently used private jets and competes in a sport hardly known for its green credentials being accused of hypocrisy. "I'm only human," he retorted. "Like everyone, we have up and down days. That's what I've been really trying to convey." Last year, following the death of George Floyd, he pressed for greater diversity in the paddock and vocally supported the Black Lives Matter movement. His belief in self-expression and freedom has shaped his advice for young drivers. "What I can definitely advise any kid that's out there trying to race is don't listen to people who tell you that you need a mental coach or you need someone to help control your mind," he said. "You need to let it run wild and free and discover yourself. It is all about discovery. And only you can do it." —AFP

Zain supports Jet Ski World Champions for 10th year

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership with the Kuwait National Jet Ski team for the tenth year. The team, part of the Kuwait Sea Sport Club, recently left Kuwait to take part in the upcoming second round of the World Jet Ski Championship 2021 to be held in October in Arizona, United States.

Zain is proud to partner with the World Champions for the past decade as part of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. The company wishes the team and staff all the best of luck on their upcoming participation in the training camp of the World Championship to be held in Arizona by the UIM (the international governing body of powerboating). Zain's support of the team for the past ten years comes to affirm its confidence in the talents of Kuwait's youth in representing the nation in internationally renowned championships.

The Kuwait National Jet Ski team is authorized by the Kuwait Sea Sport Club to officially represent Kuwait in regional and international Jet Ski championships. The champions won a number of prominent titles during their past participations in the biggest Gulf, Asian, and international competitions.

Some of the team's most prominent accolades include the recent achievement at the Europe Championship (the first round of the World Championship) held last year, where World Champion and title holder Mohammed Borubaye attained the first-place title in the Pro GP category. The team also attained seven medals (two golds, three silvers, and two bronzes) as part of their participation in the World Jet Ski Championship 2019, as well as the IJSBA World Championship 2018 title with total points.

Zain expressed its pride in all National teams that raise the Kuwaiti flag high by achieving top international titles, and it further confirms its commitment towards Kuwaiti champions, which resembles the company's endless confidence of the competencies of the country's athletes and their capabilities in excelling in different fields.

As a leading digital service provider in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti National teams and individual athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition they deserve.



KUWAIT: The World Champions leaving Kuwait International Airport.

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