

The Chequered F1ag



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Gambles pay off for Vettel

SEBASTIAN Vettel took his fifth victory of the season after a thrilling Monaco Grand Prix. The reigning world champion now leads the title chase by 58 points after six races but the German's dominance is only skin deep in what is actually an intensely competitive season thus far.

In Monaco Vettel managed to win after a mammoth stint on the harder prime tyre saw him leapfrog Jenson Button at the front of the field after the Englishman made his second pit stop. Button, who qualified second, had a superb weekend and had put himself into prime position to take the victory before an untimely safety car nullified his mid race advantage.

At the opening round of pit stops, when Button put the super-soft compound "option" tyres onto his car, there was panic in the Red Bull pit area and Vettel was delayed before the team put on the harder "prime" tyre. This was to be instrumental in winning the race but amazingly after the race the team admitted that in the confusion of the stop they had put the wrong tyres onto the car and that Vettel was actually supposed to be serviced with the option tyre.

This error let Button take the lead and the McLaren driver quickly started to set a series of fast laps and opened a 14s lead at the front of the field before pitting for the second time, taking the option tyre once more. Within minutes of Button's stop the first safety car of the day was brought out and suddenly Button's advantage was nullified.

While Vettel was expected to dive straight into the pits for his second and final stop the German surprised everyone by staying on the track. While it seemed that Vettel would still make another stop, along with Button who still needed to use both compounds, the race developed with Button pitting again and Vettel trying to eke out the life of his Pirelli tyres.

Button, and Alonso, were quick to close in on Vettel with the race entering its final stages. The leading three were nose to tail with eight laps to go as they came across a gaggle of cars about to be lapped. Suddenly chaos ensued ahead of Vettel with Adrian Sutil hitting the wall in his Force India and his rivals trying to funnel past into the Swimming Pool corner.

Lewis Hamilton backed off slightly and Jamie Alguersuari ran into the back of the former world champion leaving Vitaly Petrov with nowhere to go except into the barriers. The Russian was running in the points but the accident, while relatively innocuous looking had left Petrov shaken up and in need of assistance to get out of his Renault. With an ambulance needed at the scene the race stewards felt the need to wave the red flag and stop the race with just a handful of laps to go.

With the drivers forming up on the starting line Vettel was given the lifeline of being allowed to change to fresh option tyres for the final stint. The German's biggest threat to winning the race, his incredibly worn tyres, was now removed from the equation and suddenly it was clear that no one would be able to challenge him for the win.

Without the race stoppage Alonso and Button would have faced a struggle to get past the Red Bull but it was clear that they were enjoying the benefit of a much faster car and while overtaking has generally been impossible in Monaco this year's race saw numerous successful overtaking moves.

Under pressure Hamilton feeling the strain

Lewis Hamilton was at the centre of attention post race following numerous unsuccessful attempted moves. The former champion was involved in wheel banging incidents that led to the retirements of Felipe Massa and Pastor Maldonado. Hamilton was clearly enraged after qualifying when an a mid session red flag cost him the chance of qualifying on the front row but in the race the red mist clearly came down and he made numerous "optimistic" overtaking moves.

Maldonado had a superb race for Williams and had been running in the points scoring positions after qualifying in the top ten. The Venezuelan had the measure of experienced teammate, Rubens Barrichello, and it was very disappointing for him to end his race in the barriers at the first corner. After the race Hamilton was brought in front of the stewards to explain his incidents and was handed a 20 second penalty.

After the race Hamilton clearly showed that he is feeling the stress and strain of the season with numerous comments made about the race stewards but the Englishman can take solace in that the next race will be in Canada, a circuit he has won twice in the past.

Simoncelli will once again upstage title favourites

With MotoGP returning from a three week break this weekend Marco Simoncelli will once again be the focus of his on track rivals.

Following his clash with Dani Pedrosa at Le Mans the Gresini Honda rider will be exceptionally determined to finally step onto the MotoGP rostrum in Barcelona. The Le Mans incident cost Simoncelli dearly on track but it has, once again, strengthened his reputation as a hard charging racer which will once again give his rivals reason to think twice before making a 50:50 move into any corner.

At the time of writing it is still unclear whether Pedrosa will race this weekend following his surgery on his broken collarbone. The Spaniard has been in superb form in 2011 but the challenge facing him is now immense and it seems that the title will be contended between Jorge Lorenzo and Casey Stoner.

This weekend will be key in the title battle with Stoner clearly enjoying the benefit of a slightly superior bike to the Yamaha of Lorenzo but the reigning champion has the advantage of incredible consistency. If Lorenzo can win this weekend on a circuit that should be advantageous for Stoner's Honda a crucial blow will be struck in the Spanish heartland of MotoGP.

GREYHOUNDS Dundalk Stadium

Televised fare is the big attraction as fans stay away

By Joe Carroll

IT was an unequal battle, and Saturday night's meeting at Dundalk Stadium was always likely to miss out.

Competing with the Champions League final, the clash of Armagh and Down in the Ulster Championship and the William Hill English Derby third round, all of them televised, racing at Dowdallshill came up short, attracting only a meagre attendance.

Last week's headline-makers, Danny Cawley and Ann Baxter, wouldn't have been too perturbed, however. This owner and trainer combination had a runner in each of the Fairways Hotel 525 semi-finals, and as happened seven days earlier, a double was the outcome.

Off Your Rocker and Haveitall Mayo both had to work hard for their victories. The former, fastest in the opening round, was again best in the time-test, and is likely to go off favourite for this Saturday night's decider.

The son of Honcho Classic and Shateen Lass went away fast from trap five, but was beaten to the bend by Live Life, running from the inside. But the Baxter runner was never too far off the one dog, and he took over early in the home straight.

Any Questions also got involved at that stage, but Off Your Rocker proved the better stayer, getting

home a length-and-a-half ahead of Live Life, with Any Questions a further neck back, giving trainer Francie Murray a runner in the final.

Haveitall Mayo had the red sheet in the second semi-final, but a tardy break had the Droopys Kewell dog struggling to get a good pitch rounding the opening bend. But he was equal to it, and with some jostling going on in a packed field, he was first to enter the back straight.

The favourite, Equaliser, was close up, were locked together after that, and it was right on the line that Haveitall Mayo edged clear, winning by a head, with Torrac, who did his best work in the second half of the race finishing third, a half-length back.

This race's clock, 29.05, compared with the 29.86 recorded by Off Your Rocker.

Disappointed to miss out in the Peggy Kelly Sprint final at Harolds Cross on Friday night with Chasing Willyjoe, the Cawley/Baxter axis goes into this €1,000-to-the-winner final with a very strong hand. Off Your Rocker, drawn in four, can provide connections with some compensation.

On the graded part of the card, Impetuous made it two from two, taking full advantage of his inside berth to win over the 400 in convincing fashion.

This lad runs for Niall and Kitty

Win for Gray

Dundalk teenage jockey Shane Gray had a night to remember at Down Royal on Saturday night.

This was his first visit to the track and the 16-year-old scored on Blue Dahlia who won the five furlongs race for Tommy Stack.

Gray, who was scoring under rules for the third time in his career, said: "I used to be a pony riding champion and had 75 winners. My first win on the flat was with Blue Dahlia at the Curragh and I also had a winner at Dundalk, so I've now had three successes under rules and feel good."

O'Donnell, and of all the dogs he has handled over the years, coursers as well as trackers, this one is giving the Dundalk-based, Clonmel-born Niall the greatest satisfaction. That's because he bought the son of Hondo Black and Posh Sally, along with two of his comrades, from Eamon McCrave, shortly before his great pal died at a young age a couple of years ago.

"Eamon bred them, and they're very special to me and Kitty," said Niall.

Impetuous took up the running from Sharp Move to win by almost

a couple of lengths in 21.99.

The runner-up, owned by Belfast's John McCallin, is a February '10 son of Multibet and Quick And Easy, and this is a lad who probably won't be seen at his very best until the days get short.

Former Castletown lad, Gerry McInerney, now living in Banbridge, took the only 600 on the card with Killaculla Boy. His charge looked to be in a hopeless position – like several of the others – as Beltra Teeko opened up a substantial lead going down the back.

But Killaculla is no stranger to this distance, and slowly but surely he began to haul back the one in front. As if guided by a jockey, the Westmead Hawk dog got to the front right on the line, winning by a half-length in 33.49. None of the others counted.

Athlaca Alarm looks as if he'll prove himself a bargain-buy for Dowdallshill's Arthur Boyle. The former Limerick tracker is only a matter of weeks up in these parts, and has scored twice from two outings, his latest win coming on Friday night.

The Kinloch Brae dog took over at the bend in a sprint and went on from there to win by almost four lengths, recording an excellent 21.54.

Come Back King won on the same night for Colm Farrelly, the home-bred staying on resolutely to win by a length in 29.51.

CYCLING Cuchulainn Cycling Club



Cuchulainn Cycling Club's Dermot Keelan, on far right, winning in Emyvale last weekend.

LAST weekend in the small Co Monaghan village of Tydvanet, Cuchulainn's Dermot Keelan took the first win of his cycling career.

Dermot was racing in the A4 race, which was held over four laps of an eight mile circuit. The race has proved a popular hunting ground for Dundalk rider's in the past with Aidan Cunningham winning here a few years back.

The A4 race was fast throughout with a number of riders attempting to break away, however starting the last lap the bunch remained together.

The long straight uphill finish was deceiving for a lot of rider's as to when to time their kick for the finish line. On each lap Dermot kept his eyes opened and had picked the best spot to go.

Sure enough on the last lap he timed his acceleration to perfection, beating off Ryan McDermot of West Tyrone Wheelers, with enough time to raise an arm in celebration. This result will see Dermot move up to the A3 category having accumulated enough points over the course of the season so far.

In the mountain bike league

Keelan storms to first victory

the big guns were out with Alps bound Gary Shiels taking the win, powering his way from Group Five to the head of affairs. John Sharkey decided to move from Group Two back to Three as he was happy with his progression and this is definitely the case as he was second home on the night.

Sharkey had to work hard to hold off fast charging Group Four members Chris Quinn in 3rd and underage sensation Aaron McCann in 4th. Another rider showing excellent progress is Sandra O'Hagan who came home next to round out the top five.

The third round of the Ulster

Mountain Bike League moved to Lady Dixon Park on Sunday and the club picked up a number of results.

In the main race Aiden McDonald took a very creditable 4th position. Meanwhile in the second category race Johnny McCabe was 2nd, only a mere four seconds behind the winner.

In the senior three race Cuchulainn had three men in the top 10 with Gary Shiels, Stephen Kelleher and Daire Mc Caughley. In the Under 16s Aaron McCann took his 3rd podium of the year when he came home in 3rd place.

Round Seven of the FPM Accountants Summer Cycling

League was a 10 mile time trial and it was total domination for Bryan McCrystal coming home over 90 seconds ahead of Gerry McCabe. Newry's Kevin Lynch rounded out the top 3. Geraldine Gill was first lady home, beating Celine McPhilips by 18 seconds.

In the An Post Rás both former Cuchulainn riders Tony Brady and Derek Finnegan had great racing. Derek was 4th amateur rider overall.

The race was won by Lithuania's Gediminas Bagdonas, who rides with the Irish Professional An Post Cycling Team, based in Belgium. Irish riders had a very good race, winning the last two stages.