

## The Chequered Flag



A Formula One blog by Stephen English  
www.stephenenglish.ie

The 2013 Australian Grand Prix will be remembered for being one of the most eventful race weekends in MotoGP history. With Bridgestone, and Dunlop in Moto2, failing to produce tyres that were capable of dealing with the high temperatures and new track surface the premier class race was reduced from 27 laps to 19 laps.

The tyres were blistering badly, both on the surface and within the carcass, and it meant that riders were only able to ride ten laps on any rear tyre before the problems meant that the tyres ran the risk of "chunking" and losing rubber. Some riders and bikes were affected worse than others, with the Honda riders having the most visible issues, but Bridgestone confirmed that all of the prototype bikes suffered from internal blistering.

Being limited to just ten laps on each rear tyre meant that for the first time in MotoGP riders were forced into making mandatory pit stops. As a result the regulations were changed on Saturday to allow riders to pit and change bikes and leave with the same type of tyre. Traditionally the flag to flag rules have forced riders to change tyres from one type to another, for example from dry tyres to wet tyres. The rule change on Saturday came as a result of an emergency change of regulations that effectively gave Race Direction the discretion to change any rule over the course of a race weekend.

With the race reduced to 19 laps it would become a two stint sprint for the riders and one of the most interesting that anybody could remember. The media, the fans and the teams had no idea of what to expect but it meant that there was a sense of anticipation when the field made its way to the grid. With the knowledge that riders would pit it meant that there was never an opportunity to rest and riders would be on the limit throughout. It might have come about as a result of a major error on the part of Bridgestone, Dorna, MotoGP and the Safety Commission but it would provide a unique Grand Prix.

Jorge Lorenzo qualified on pole position for the third time this season ahead of Marc Marquez with Valentino Rossi joining them on the front row. Dani Pedrosa and Cal Crutchlow would start from the second row of the grid.

When the lights went out Lorenzo made his trademark flying start and converted his pole position into the lead with Marquez and Pedrosa falling into line behind him as they accelerated out of the first corner with a fast starting Bradley Smith in fourth position. While Smith was making a fast start Irishman Michael Laverty was relegated to the back of the field. The PBM rider made a good start from 18th on the grid but heading into turn four, the Honda Hairpin, he had to take evasive action from a wayward Luca Scassa and it scuppered any chance of a strong race: "I made a nice start and then Scassa came barrelling down into Honda Hairpin and knocked me off and I was back to last," said Laverty. "I had no brakes for the first two or three laps and it took time for



# MotoGP Round 16 Australian Grand Prix

## Lorenzo claims Philip Island farce



Jorge Lorenzo claimed the 50th victory of his career after an action packed Australian Grand Prix opportunity to rest during the shortened race. *everything to come and I got stuck behind Pesek and Staring and when I got through them I was getting into my rhythm and going faster each lap but then I had to make the pit-stop.*

On the first lap the action was intense, the riders knew it was crucial not to allow any gap to open in front of them, and at MG Corner Rossi managed to barge past Smith for fourth with the Englishman trying to slipstream past the factory Yamaha rider on the home straight before Alvaro Bautista took advantage of Smith running slightly wide at turn two. The Tech3 rider was on the limit and spinning up the rear tyre with his teammate, Crutchlow, waiting for an opening.

After the first flying lap Lorenzo was immediately at lap record pace and opening a gap of a second to Marquez and Pedrosa. The speed from the leaders was immense but with the second bikes warming up on pit lane it meant that there was never an opportunity for anyone to rest. It was imperative to be consistently on the limit because with the pit window opening on lap nine there was never an

opportunity to rest during the shortened race. The sense of anticipation around the Philip Island circuit was incredible. There was no concept of just how dramatic the pit sequence would be. All the riders would be forced onto the narrow pit road at the same time and would jump from one bike to the other as quickly as possible and accelerate straight back into the pitlane. There were genuine safety concerns but Nicky Hayden dismissed them as saying, "We're professional riders so doing 60 in the pitlane was no big deal."

On lap nine the pit window opened and Dani Pedrosa was the first of the leaders to dive into the pits. The Spaniard making a strategic decision to try and vault himself into the lead of the race:

*"I was trailing in the beginning because I had a big slide and almost crashed. I was trying to get back to [the leaders] before the pitstop and I was getting close and I managed to do that. I was in third place and I decided to stop first, I could see that Marc and Jorge were keeping going so I said that I would pit now when there is no traffic. My pitstop was not too bad and I was quite fast on the outlap with cold tyre."*

Pedrosa was joined in the pits by Bautista, Crutchlow and the Ducati's of Iannone and Dovizioso. It presented an opportunity for Rossi to jump onto the podium and for Hayden to take over as lead Ducati. The American had faster pace than his fellow Ducati riders but the layout of Philip Island makes it very difficult to break away from groups of riders with the high speed straights bringing riders back together. "The pit strategy probably worked out in my favour," said Hayden. "I had been stuck racing with Dovi and Iannone but I couldn't get away from them because of the draft so I waited and did the opposite of what they did. When they came into the pits I just put my head down and a really quick in lap and was able to pull a good gap."

The real drama however would play out on lap ten with Lorenzo diving into the pits and Marquez inexplicably staying out for one lap more. The regulations were clear that riders had to pit on lap nine or ten, if they were making a single stop, and the championship leader failed to do

so. He made his way to the pits on the following lap but it was clear that he would be disqualified for failing to stop during the pit window. It was a rare mistake from Repsol Honda and after Marquez admitted that they had miscalculated the situation, see separate story right. As it was Marquez came out of the pits still battling with Lorenzo for the lead and the pair clashed at the pit exit after Lorenzo braked too deep and ran wide. The contact was quite heavy between the pair and marked the second race in a row that they had clashed.

Afterwards Lorenzo dismissed it as a racing incident:

*"I don't know what happened exactly to Marc, whether it was a mistake from his team or he didn't see the board," said Lorenzo. "I only know what I did and I made a mistake with the braking [when they touched] and I was too late for the corner and too open but also he didn't look for who was coming. This time it was 50/50 but obviously when you exit the pits you have to have a little look to see who is coming. The rider who is already on the track should have the priority."*

Marquez was not the only Repsol Honda rider to feel the wrath of the stewards with the Spaniard penalised for crossing the pitlane exit line. He was forced to give up his second position to Marquez but obviously with his teammate retiring from the race the opportunity did not present itself. There were some claims that Pedrosa should have dropped back to the group behind him but luckily Race Direction used their discretion and Pedrosa was able to race on and fight with Lorenzo.

Once the pitstops finished the race settled down with riders spread out as a result of the pitstops and once Marquez was black flagged and retired it promoted the battle between Rossi, Bautista and Crutchlow to one for the final step on the rostrum. Rossi would eventually come out on top and claim his sixth podium of the season by the slimmest of margins from Crutchlow. Fourth place for the Tech3 rider marked his best result since the German Grand Prix.

"I liked that race. Maybe it was a little easier because you could divide the race into two parts," said Rossi. "I'm happy because we managed to do good work in the pits and I

think that it's my first flag to flag race. The second part of the race I enjoyed more because I was faster and I had a big battle with Cal on the last laps. I'm so happy to be back on the podium at Philip Island because it's always a great atmosphere and for me I'm so proud. Now we have to continue to work and I look forward to Motegi next Sunday."

Philip Island 2013 will be remembered for the fiasco of tyre blistering but also producing a fantastic Grand Prix that was truly unique. We won't see riders making pitstops during dry races in future but even the most purist and sceptical of paddock regulars felt that the race offered something intriguing with the "sprint" element of the race clearly something that produced far more excitement than has been the norm of late in MotoGP.

Even so the positives of the race were outweighed by the negatives as far as safety is concerned. Afterwards Lorenzo echoed the thoughts of most riders: "It's not a good option [to have pitstops] without doubt," said Lorenzo. "The pits have many bikes enter and exit and when you come back your front brake is too cold and everything is worse than in a normal race. First of all I think that Bridgestone must pay more attention to all the things that can happen. In this case the tarmac was changed and maybe a test before the race would be a good option. I also believe that this type of race is too dangerous for the riders."

### Race Direction had no alternative

The decision to run the Australian Grand Prix as a flag to flag was fuelled by badly blistering Bridgestone tyres failing to adapt to the new track surface and hotter than expected conditions at Philip Island. Throughout the weekend once Bridgestone cut open their tyres they saw evidence of bad blistering inside the tyre even though on most occasions there was little physical evidence of problems. Most riders did not have issues with blistering on the surface or could not even feel the tyre performance dropping off.

However with Bridgestone confirming the issue race direction felt that it had no choice but to take action. The options available to them were to run the race over half distance like they decided to do in Moto2, run the race in two parts as an aggregate race or change the flag to flag rules and allow riders to leave the pits with the same type of tyre as entered. Of these options the only suitable solution was to run the race as a flag to flag race. An aggregate race would have been very complicated for fans at the track to understand and a half distance Grand Prix would have resulted in lots of negative publicity from fans unhappy to only see a 14 lap Grand Prix.

When asked after qualifying about his tyres throughout the weekend Cal Crutchlow admitted that he did not have any issues with blistering

throughout the weekend and in fact his biggest problems had occurred while using the ultra-hard compound tyre on Saturday. Given the option Crutchlow would have in fact started the race on the soft tyre:

"If I had my choice I'd probably still run the soft tyre," said the Tech3 rider. "The problem is with the hard tyre and not the soft as far as I am aware. No tyre had any problem except the extra hard that they gave me."

"I did all day yesterday and this morning on different tyres to that and had no problems at all so I think we should be allowed to run what we want but I don't think that will be the case and everyone will be made to run a certain tyre. It's very difficult because Bridgestone haven't been here and it's the same in Moto2 [for Dunlop]," Nicky Hayden echoed Crutchlow's view with the Ducati rider having no issues this weekend with tyre wear. The American in fact wanted to see the inside of his tyres just to find out exactly how bad the blistering had been:

"I'd like to see my tyre because I don't have any problems with tyres," said Hayden. "I think it's tough to penalise some guys [and make them use the hardest compound] but safety is the highest thing and we've got a responsibility to put on a show for the fans and for TV so it's a tricky situation. I haven't blistered any tyres." While Hayden and Crutchlow were amongst the riders without tyre woes Dani Pedrosa spoke for many that had issues over the weekend with Pedrosa's the most serious. The Repsol Honda rider said that all of his tyres were "losing pieces."

Pedrosa also spoke about the effect of the higher temperatures at Philip Island, track temperature reached 40C during Saturday's running: "Today because it was warm the grip was working but all the tyres were losing pieces; no matter which bike or rider and also in Moto2," said Pedrosa. "The asphalt has more grip and in this temperature the tyre does not cool down enough. But at the moment we used all the specifications and pressures that Bridgestone have said and nothing was lasting long enough."

That Bridgestone hadn't tested at Philip Island came under fire from many within the paddock and that this situation had happened as a direct result. Many cited cost cutting as the reason for the lack of testing but even in an era where there was no cost restrictions it was still common practice for World Championships to race at



resurfaced tracks with no prior testing. Apart from the cost of having to fly to Australia to test the tyre surface another key issue would have been finding a common consensus for a team to assist Bridgestone with this test. Given the competitive instincts of the paddock it is highly unlikely that Yamaha or Honda would have agreed for the other manufacturer to test at Philip Island. As a result even if there had been a desire to test here the actual chances of the test happening would have been very unlikely. It has been a massive PR disaster for the Japanese tyre manufacturer and shows once again the perils of being a single tyre supplier.

**Honda takes blame for Marquez DQ**  
Marc Marquez put on a brave face in the aftermath of his shock disqualification from Sunday's Australian Grand Prix. The MotoGP title leader's race was ended after he retired outside the designated pit window during Sunday's race.

Australia was the first opportunity for Marquez to win the title and become the first rookie since Kenny Roberts to claim the premier class crown. What went from a foregone conclusion when the MotoGP paddock arrived in Philip Island has now become increasingly tense with 18 points separating Marquez and Jorge Lorenzo in the championship standings.

Due to overheating tyres, caused by a new track surface and high temperatures, the race was reduced from 27 to 19 laps and included

mandatory pit stops for the riders. Before the race it was announced that "No rider was 'permitted to make more than 10 laps' without pitting for their fresh rear tyres due to the tyre safety concerns. The document distributed also added: 'In normal circumstances this means that the rider must change machine only at the end of lap 9 or lap 10'.

At the front Jorge Lorenzo, Marquez and Repsol Honda team-mate Dani Pedrosa were all close to one another when the pit window approached with Pedrosa diving into the pits on lap nine and leader Lorenzo on lap ten. Marquez however remained out on track.

Honda released a statement after the race: "The team made a mistake, understanding [Marquez] was able to complete ten [full] laps and come back in before completing lap eleven, and the 'box' instruction on his pit board was therefore one lap late."

Unaware that he had a mistake Marquez swapped bikes and emerged from the pits in second position and clashed with Lorenzo on the pit exit at turn one. The 20 year old Spaniard was running second when the black flags appeared shortly after and he returned to pitlane and retired from the race."

After the race Marquez spoke to the media: "We made a big mistake in the plan with the team," admitted a composed Marquez speaking to the media post race. "It was a big confusion because we thought that we could [stop before the end of the eleventh lap] and I followed what the team said with the pitboard and when they said 'box' I went in, but it was too late. We thought it was possible to go on that lap but we'll learn from that and go on to Japan."

"It was the whole team so you can't blame one person. We made the plan together with three or four guys. The biggest problem was that we thought that it was possible to pit on that lap. The positive thing is that we were there and fighting for the victory. When I saw the black flag and 93 it was difficult to understand why. I thought that maybe I was too fast on pit entry or maybe I crossed the white line on the pit exit."

"The penalty, maybe it was very tough but in the end it was the decision. I think that it was possible to give other penalties, maybe some seconds or a ride-through penalty," he said. With his title lead cut now cut significantly Marquez will travel to Motegi still able to win the championship but with reigning world champion, Lorenzo, looking to apply even more pressure with just two rounds remaining. What seemed like a routine end of season is now anything but. Marquez however is an experienced championship contender despite his age and has been involved in title scraps for the last three seasons in 125s and Moto2. The Spaniard was robbed of a potential title two years ago due to an eye injury and that experience is helping him now:

"I know that the championship is so long, I have experience from 2011 [in Moto2], but we feel strong and on the second bike I was so fast and I could fight for the podium. So we're in a good position and we'll keep going like that."

