

Sparks fly as Di Grassi wins first electric race

September 14 2014, by Neil Connor



Audi Sport Abt Formula E Team driver Lucas di Grassi of Brazil takes a turn during the Formula E race at the circuit near the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing on September 13, 2014

A spectacular crash at the last corner that ended leader Nicolas Prost's race and sent ex-F1 driver Nick Heidfeld flying into the fencing gave Brazil's Lucas di Grassi victory in the first ever Formula E electric race in Beijing Saturday.

The Frenchman, son of four-time Formula One champion Alain, led the

gripping race until the final moments.

But Heidfeld made contact with the left side of Prost's E.Dams Renault shortly before the finish outside the Bird's Nest stadium in the Chinese capital and went barrelling into the air.

The German wriggled out of the wreckage of his vehicle and appeared to confront Prost, who looked to be gesturing his innocence.

Prost told AFP after the race: "I would not have expected for him to have attempted a suicide move at the end of the race.

"My victory was stolen. It is really hard."

Heidfeld, racing for the Venturi team backed by Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio, had clawed his way up from 17th on the grid to push Prost in the final few laps.

But the crash left the way open for Brazilian Di Grassi, who was racing for Audi Sport ABT.

"When I realised that they were off, yeah it was like a dream come true," he said.

"I was alone and have won the race, and I am really, really happy to be in this position."

"I was very lucky, to be lucky you also need to be in the right place."



Lucas di Grassi of Brazil (left) celebrates after winning the Formula E race at the circuit near the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing on September 13, 2014

Frenchman Frank Montagny from the Andretti team finished second, while Briton Sam Bird of Virgin Racing, the team backed by British tycoon Richard Branson, took third.

Bruno Senna—the nephew of Ayrton Senna, a huge rival of Alain Prost's—suffered a miserable afternoon after the front left side of his axle appeared to give way after he collided with another car in the first lap.

He has earlier failed to record a lap time in qualification after having problems with his battery, and started the race near the back of the grid.

Green credentials

With alternative, environmentally-friendly fuels on the rise, the symbolism of the new formula's debut in Beijing—a city regularly blanketed by choking pollution—was unmistakable.

The cars, which can reach speeds of 150mph (225kph), are powered solely by electricity, and organisers of the Formula E say it has received high-level support on the back of its green credentials.

Alejandro Agag, the chief executive of the company behind the series, said the first [race](#) also proved that electric cars are safe.

"We had the big drama at the end on the last corner of the last lap with that horrendous crash," he said.

"The most important thing today is to say that the safety is always first, that we have proven today that [electric cars](#) are safe.



Audi Sport Abt Formula E Team driver Lucas di Grassi of Brazil reacts as he takes the chequered flag during the Formula E race near the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing on September 13, 2014

"I don't think we can get a bigger crash to the one we got today," he added.

Chinese fans packed the main grandstands around the emblematic stadium that hosted the 2008 Olympics.

Some lined the tracksides, carrying children on their shoulders as the futuristic whine of the cars sounded across the track, and techno music added to the atmosphere.

Many fans were upset that Senna went out early.

"It is such a shame to see his car being lifted off the track," said one female fan, surnamed Zhao.

"Motorsport is not that popular in China yet, but a lot of people have heard of Ayrton Senna," she added.

The Formula E series will see 10 races on different street circuits around the world involving 20 drivers from 10 different teams.

Nelson Piquet Junior, also the son of a former motor sport great, finished eighth.

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