



Racing Engineering - GP2 Italy Feature Race – Giorgio Pantano wins the 2008 GP2 Drivers Championship

In a race made very difficult by heavy rain that fell just before the start Giorgio Pantano was only able to finish 10th but with his main rival, the Brazilian Senna, unable to score enough points to keep up his challenge to the Racing Engineering driver, Giorgio became the 2008 GP2 Drivers Champion.



Shortly before the start of the race heavy rain fell on the Monza track and there was frantic activity on the grid as the teams switched to wet tyres and modified the set up of their cars. Although the rain had stopped by the start of the race there was a lot of standing water around the track and it was decided to start the race behind the Safety Car. At the end of three laps the Safety Car pulled back into the pits and Giorgio took the lead into the first chicane as the race got under way. Giorgio was immediately flying in his Repsol and Telefónica backed car and at the end of the first flying lap he had a lead of over two seconds ahead of di Grassi and Buemi.



Over the next few laps the gap between Giorgio and di Grassi varied between one and three seconds as the cars slid their way around the treacherous track surface. So bad were the conditions that on two successive laps Giorgio had to cut across the first chicane as his car lost grip on the wet tarmac. Most of the teams were delaying their mandatory pitstops for as long as possible to see if the track would dry enough to fit slicks and by lap 20 Giorgio was looking for the wet areas of the circuit in order to cool his tyres.



With eight laps to go Giorgio dived into the pits and the Racing Engineering team quickly fitted a set of slicks as these were now the faster option. Giorgio was quickly on his way again but as he left the pit road he was trying to avoid the puddles of water on the right of the track and in doing so he inadvertently put his wheels over the white line that marks the pit exit. Within three laps the Stewards announced that Giorgio would have to serve a drive-through penalty for this infringement and with four laps to go Giorgio pulled into the pits, resuming the race in 9th place. Although he was to lose another place as he got back up to speed again, 10th at the chequered flag was enough to secure a delighted Giorgio the 2008 Championship.



For Javier Villa it was a disappointing race. Starting from ninth on the grid, as the young Spaniard braked for the chicane on the first racing lap the visibility was so poor he was unable to see the car of Zuber ahead and he made heavy contact with the Austrian putting both cars out of the race. As a consequence of the accident the Stewards have excluded Javier from tomorrow's Sprint Race.



For tomorrow's Sprint Race Giorgio will be starting from near the middle of the grid but with no pressure on the new Champion, he can afford to enjoy himself and please the Italian fans.

Once again the Racing Engineering team have given their two drivers very competitive cars and as everybody has come to expect from the Spanish team there have been no mechanical failures. This has been true for the whole of the 2008 season and has been a vital element in Giorgio's success.

Alfonso de Orleans Borbón (team principal): *"This championship was one with a lot of work from everyone in the team.*

Giorgio did a fantastic job and we are all extremely happy, especially as he could make it at his home track. The boys' fantastic work during the entire season was the base that allowed us to achieve this title and I am very happy to have a team of such professionals."

Javier Villa (driver car 11): *"It was a complicated race because there was a lot of water on the track. I couldn't see the car in front at the start of the race and hit Andreas. I am sorry for him and also for Vitaly, as they were affected by my mistake."*

Giorgio Pantano (driver car 12): *"I am not happy about the mistake I made by crossing the line at the pit exit, but I was under a lot of pressure as the conditions during today's race were very delicate and required full attention. We went from wet to dry and I didn't want to take too much risk. But we also saw that under wet conditions we were very good. Anyway, the penalty was correct, although I am obviously not happy having lost this victory."*