

FORMULA 1 MEXICO CITY GRAND PRIX 2021

TRACKSIDE REPORT • SUNDAY RACE

VERSTAPPEN MAXES OUT HIS TITLE CHANCES

Checo makes history with Mexico podium

Max Verstappen took his third win at the Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez and Sergio Pérez made Formula 1 history as a brilliant team performance in Sunday's Mexico City Grand Prix saw Red Bull take command of the 2021 title race.

A superb start catapulted Verstappen into the lead on the first corner of the 71-lap race and the 24-year-old Dutchman streaked home to beat Mercedes title rival Lewis Hamilton by 16.555 seconds.

It was Verstappen's ninth win of the season and the 19th of his career, stretching his lead to 19 points with just four races to go.

'That was great, guys,' yelled a jubilant Verstappen, the first driver to win three times in Mexico. 'Unbelievable pace in the car – let's keep this up.'

For Mexican fans – all 140,000 of them – the story of the day was their local hero. A huge banner in the equally huge crowd said 'Tu puedes Checo!' and Sergio Pérez certainly could.

Pérez became the first Mexican driver ever to stand on the podium in his home Grand Prix, taking his third successive top-three finish and easily winning the battle of the number two drivers in the top two teams as pole-winner Valtteri Bottas could finish only 11th in the second Mercedes.

After the mid-race pit stops Checo was also the first Mexican to lead his national race. 'Thank you, guys,' Pérez told his team. 'I'm so happy we won in my country. Time for some tequila!'

Bottas had the minor consolation of stealing fastest lap of 1:17.774, an average speed of 199.223 km/h, on lap 69 to deny Verstappen an extra point, which means that Red Bull are now just a single point behind Mercedes in the fight for the constructors' title.

'Third is not amazing but it's better than starting second,' Verstappen had said after missing out on pole position, and he was proved right: Bottas and Hamilton got away well from the front row but they were powerless to resist the Red Bull as it went round the outside into Turn 1 and into the lead before Ricciardo's late-braking McLaren tagged Bottas and dropped the pole-sitter to 18th.

When the Safety Car was deployed for an incident that eliminated Yuki Tsunoda's AlphaTauri on the opening lap, Verstappen then timed the restart to perfection to sprint clear of Hamilton and build an unbridgeable gap.

For Hamilton it was a case of damage limitation, the seven-time champion using all his experience to keep Pérez at bay as the Mexican hunted him down in the closing stages. 'These guys are too fast for us,' he admitted. 'I gave it everything, I just didn't have the pace.'

Behind the top three came Pierre Gasly in the AlphaTauri, the 25-year-old Frenchman producing another outstanding race weekend to hold off the Ferraris of Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc to take his sixth top-six finish of the year.

But Ferrari still swept past McLaren into third place in the constructors' standings as Ricciardo could not recover from his first-lap tangle with Bottas and teammate Lando Norris was 10th after starting from the back of the grid.

Three world champions came home behind the Ferrari duo: Sebastian Vettel for Aston Martin, Alfa Romeo's retiring veteran Kimi Raikkonen, and Fernando Alonso in the Alpine.