

Round 2, Chengdu, Qualifying : a corner too far!

Today, A1 Team France took part in qualifying for the second round of the 2008-09 World Cup of Motorsport Championship on the Chengdu circuit in China. Nicolas Prost was feeling confident after a good free practice session. The son of the 4-times F1 world champion looked on course to set pole when an unforeseen incident a few hundred metres from the finishing line dashed his hopes.

In the A1 GP Championship the first 2 qualifying segments determine the grid positions for the Short race, and next two establish the starting order for the Feature event. In the first segment A1 Team France adopted a cautious approach deciding not to use its new tyres until the following one. Unfortunately, this was cancelled and the team had to make do with sixth place.

In the third segment, Nicolas was held up by another car and could only set the tenth-fastest time. So his qualifying position depended on his final run. The Frenchman set off with the bit between his teeth and set the quickest time in the first and second sectors on his flying lap with a marvellous display of controlled aggression. He looked set to take pole with a few tenths in hand until he came upon a car crawling along in the final corner. It was the second time he'd been baulked in the two sessions and once again his hopes were dashed.

Tomorrow, A1 Team France will start from sixth and twelfth places. Once the team had got over its initial disappointment they were delighted with Nicolas's performances, and know they can count on a highly-skilled second driver.

The 2 races tomorrow will be shown in France on AB Moteurs (Sprint race at 14h00) and NTI (Feature race at 15h00).

Olivier Panis, sporting director: "Nicolas was bitterly disappointed when he got out of the car a few minutes ago. We have to see the positive side of his performance. Since first getting behind the wheel he's amazed the whole team and has been consistently among the front-runners. The performance he looked set to achieve in the fourth segment was incredible, and pole position was well within his grasp. We've now got to put this disappointment behind us and tackle the race in a calm frame of mind. We can score points, and the championship is so closely-fought that every position gained will count at the end of the season."

Nicolas Prost: "I would so much have liked to start from pole in my first race with A1 Team France. I was bitterly disappointed after qualifying but we've now got to concentrate on the two races tomorrow. Today, I showed that we have the speed to fight at the front. My aim will be to try and overtake on this twisty circuit in the Short race and use an aggressive strategy for the Feature event. Overall, I'm satisfied with my performance so far. Things would have been different but for that last-corner incident. But that's motor racing!"