

Friday 4 June 2021

Vips beats Boschung to P1 in opening session at Baku

While a lot of the field were still getting to grips with the Baku City Circuit, Jüri Vips was finding its limits, the Hitech Grand Prix racer going more than seven-tenths faster than Campos Racing's Ralph Boschung and over a second quicker than ART Grand Prix's Théo Pourchaire to finish Free Practice in first.

Less than two weeks on from the challenges of the tight and twisting Monte Carlo circuit, the class of 2021 were arriving at a different type of street track, tackling the long, wide straights of Baku.

For many, it was a first experience of the Baku City Circuit and they took their time adjusting to the new surroundings. MP Motorsport duo Lirim Zendeli and Richard Verschoor led the field around the streets but were well-off representative times in the opening five minutes.

Ending the session in fifth and sixth, Oscar Piastri and Marcus Armstrong had initially traded fastest times when the tarmac began to warm up. The latter had set the initial standard at 2:00.851, before two incidents on track brought running to a halt.

Marino Sato skidded against the wall and destroyed his front right tyre, while Lirim Zendeli went off track and got stuck in the run-off area at Turn 16, bringing out a Virtual Safety Car.

The times tumbled when running resumed as Jack Aitken – who won the 2019 Feature Race in Baku – broke the 2m barrier with a time of 1:57.840. But the HWA RACELAB driver wasn't at the top for long, as Dan Ticktum shaved 0.115s off his fellow Briton's laptime to take the lead.

Aitken overstepped the limits and clipped the wall on his next attempt at going fastest, but Ralph Boschung had already managed the feat, going first with 1:57.517. Robert Shwartzman briefly stole P1, but the Swiss swiftly regained his advantage, breaking the 1m 57s barrier to retake first. Shwartzman's attempts to take the lead continued, but the PREMA racer ended the morning in fourth.

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With just minutes to go, it looked as if Boschung was in control, but both Pourchaire and Vips suddenly found more time. Running outside of the top 10, the latter took a tow to go more than a second faster than anyone else. Boschung responded but couldn't find the time and fell 0.7s short of the Estonian, settling for second ahead of Pourchaire.

Action was brought to a premature end as Roy Nissany spun and struck the wall. Bringing out a red flag, Nissany clambered out of his DAMS safely, but his crash had signalled the end of the session.

Bent Viscaal had said ahead of the session that it was "just a matter of time" before he was scoring points, and the Dutchman got off to a great start, running seventh fastest ahead of David Beckmann. Despite his early pace, Ticktum had fallen to P9 by the end of the session, with Christian Lundgaard completing the top 10.

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**2021 FIA FORMULA 2 CHAMPIONSHIP – ROUND 3 FREE PRACTICE PROVISIONAL
CLASSIFICATION**

	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Jüri Vips	Hitech Grand Prix
2	Ralph Boschung	Campos Racing
3	Théo Pourchaire	ART Grand Prix
4	Robert Shwartzman	PREMA Racing
5	Oscar Piastri	PREMA Racing
6	Marcus Armstrong	DAMS
7	Bent Viscaal	Trident
8	David Beckmann	Charouz Racing System
9	Dan Ticktum	Carlin
10	Christian Lundgaard	ART Grand Prix
11	Liam Lawson	Hitech Grand Prix
12	Guanyu Zhou	UNI-Virtuosi
13	Jack Aitken	HWA RACELAB
14	Richard Verschoor	MP Motorsport
15	Felipe Drugovich	UNI-Virtuosi
16	Jehna Daruvala	Carlin
17	Roy Nissany	DAMS
18	Guilherme Samaia	Charouz Racing System
19	Matteo Nannini	Campos Racing
20	Alessio Deledda	HWA RACELAB
21	Lirim Zendeli	MP Motorsport
22	Marino Sato	Trident

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