



Ugo Ugochukwu wins Race 1 and keeps the title fight alive

The American triumphs in Race 1 with an exceptional start, narrowing the gap from Pole Sztuka, who finishes third on the podium behind Tuukka Taponen

Vallelunga, Saturday, October 14th, 2023 – The first race in Vallelunga ignited the atmosphere this morning in the final round of the Italian F.4 Championship. Ugo Ugochukwu, McLaren Junior from Prema Racing, triumphed in Race 1. The American started from the third row on the grid and immediately launched into the lead battle with an exceptional start, bringing him side by side with Kacper Sztuka, starting from pole position. After a short battle, Ugochukwu took the lead and held it until the checkered flag. With his third victory in the series, the Prema driver closes the points gap, now sitting in second place, 8 points behind the leader. In the valid points count (the best 16 results will be counted for the title), the gap slightly increases. Tuukka Taponen, Ferrari Driver Academy from Prema Racing, starting from the front row, was the unexpected variable in the top fight. The Finn lost his position at the start due to Ugochukwu's perfect launch, then found himself battling with Sztuka, who he passed in the early stages with an exciting overtaking maneuver at Tornantino. Taponen also tried to take the lead in the early stages of the race, then ended up chasing his teammate, seeking his second win of the season. Thus, Kacper Sztuka's positive streak, which came from 6 consecutive wins in the previous 2 rounds, was interrupted in Vallelunga. The Pole celebrated on the third step of the podium, however, with a good point-haul. The race at Vallelunga was complex, requiring a significant effort for the Pirelli tires, Sztuka, in Race 1, suffered from several blocks. The situation is still positive for the US Racing Polish driver, who maintains the Championship lead, with 2 more pole positions to capitalize on during the weekend.

The fourth place in Race 1 went to the Maltese-Filipino driver from US Racing, Zachary David, who also climbed to the second step of the Rookie podium behind Taponen. Fifth was the Prema driver James Wharton, Australian with Ferrari Driver Academy insignia, skillfully climbing from the 9th starting position. Sixth place for Arvid Lindblad, Red Bull Junior driver from Prema Racing, who stays in the thick of the title fight after a qualifying session that forced him to chase in the race. For the London-based driver, the challenge is not over yet, with a gap in points still narrow, third by only 1.5 points from Ugochukwu, but still virtually second in the count of the best 16 results.

Ariel Elkin had an excellent race, finishing seventh for Jenzer Motorsport, thus achieving the best result of the season. Following him was the Italian Brando Badoer, representing Van Amersfoort Racing, also involved in an incident with Akshay Bohra (US Racing) in the early stages of the race, an episode that saw him lose several positions but still be able to finish the race. For Bohra, then forced to return to the pit-lane and retire from Race 1, a post-race penalty of 2 grid positions was imposed for the next race. Ninth place went to Tuscan driver from Prema Racing, Nicola Lacorte, followed by PHM Racing's James Egozi.

In the women's competition, the victory in Race 1 went to Aurelia Nobels, Ferrari Driver Academy driver from Prema Racing, followed by Tina Hausmann from AKM Motorsport and Victoria Blokhina from PHM Racing. In the points standings, Victoria Blokhina is still ahead with 298 points, followed by Tina Hausmann at 292. However, in the valid points count, the Swiss driver from the Team led by Marco and Andrea Kimi Antonelli is now favored, as she



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could seal the deal already tonight if she finishes Race 2 ahead of Victoria Blokhina. Despite the victory, Aurelia Nobels is now out of the title race.

Ugo Ugochukwu: *“I had a very good start. Right at the first corner, I managed to take the lead. From there, I was pushing as hard as possible to extend the gap. We still have two races, Sztuka will start from pole position again, but we are in the fight for the Championship. I saw that today the pace is very good. We are positive for the next two races; let’s see what we can do. The races are long; we will try to climb from P3.”*

Tuukka Taponen: *“The start was definitely not good. Me and Sztuka had a bit of a poor start, Ugo had a mega start. Ugo got the lead, so he was able to defend on Sztuka and I did a really nice overtaking in the lap 1. Then I tried to challenge Ugo, at the beginning of the race, but I started to overheat the tires a bit. I lost the grip, I lost the front tires to stay close, so I was defending more toward the end of the race and managing the tires for the rest of the weekend. Definitely I want to have a better start in the next races, I’ll try to be on the podium and I hope I could win also one race.”*

Kacper Sztuka: *“The start was not so good from my side, I lost 2 positions. Ugo did a very good start and launched very well. In the first lap I wanted to keep it safe, so I lost 2 positions. Then I was just settling into the race, there are no many opportunities to overtake here. I was just stuck in P3 till the end of race. We are still leading the Championship, so it is not too bad, good points, we will fight today and tomorrow. We have a good pace for sure, we just need to make a better start. The launch was not perfect, we just improve this and I think we can stay in P1.”*

Another race today, Saturday, October 14th, starting at 16:45 (30' + 1 lap). Finally, on Sunday, October 15th, a winner will be crowned, with the Italian F.4 Championship 2023 reaching the grand finale of Race 3, starting at 11 (30' + 1 lap).

The three races of the weekend will be visible live with English commentary on the Italian F.4 Championship's YouTube and Facebook pages and on Motorsport TV (<https://eu.motorsport.tv/>); airing with Italian commentary on ACI Sport TV (Sky channel 228 and 52 TV Sat), on www.acisport.it, and on the Facebook page @acisporttv.

Free tickets for access to the event are available after registration on the official circuit website: <https://ticket.vallelunga.it/en/arw-settembre2023/individual-registration>



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