

= 2008 Belgian Grand Prix =

The 2008 Belgian Grand Prix (formally the LXIV ING Belgian Grand Prix) was a Formula One motor race held on 7 September 2008 at the Circuit de Spa @-@ Francorchamps near the town of Spa , Belgium . It was the 13th race of the 2008 Formula One season . The 44 @-@ lap race was won by Felipe Massa for the Ferrari team , after the initial winner , McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton , was penalised for cutting a chicane and gaining an advantage over Ferrari 's Kimi Räikkönen .

Hamilton started from pole position alongside title rival Massa . Hamilton 's McLaren teammate Heikki Kovalainen started from third next to the 2007 winner Kimi Räikkönen . Following a spin by Hamilton on the second lap , Räikkönen led most of the race , until rain fell on lap 41 and Hamilton performed the penalised pass . Räikkönen crashed on the following lap as the rain became heavier . Massa finished second on the road after Hamilton , followed by Nick Heidfeld of BMW Sauber .

Hamilton received a 25 @-@ second penalty , which demoted him to third place and advanced Massa and Heidfeld to first and second positions . McLaren appealed the decision at the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) International Court of Appeal . Their case , however , was declared inadmissible , with the Court ruling that 25 second penalties cannot be challenged . The penalty prompted global press discussion , primarily from the United Kingdom and Italy , with several former drivers questioning the decision . Massa 's retroactive victory , with Hamilton demoted to third , narrowed the gap in the Championship from six points to just two .

= = Report = =

= = = Background = = =

Heading into the 13th race of the season , McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton was leading the Drivers ' Championship with 70 points ; Ferrari driver Felipe Massa was in second place with 64 points . With 57 points , Ferrari 's Kimi Räikkönen was third , followed by Robert Kubica with 55 points . In the Constructors ' Championship , Ferrari led 121 points to McLaren 's 113 .

Following the 2008 European Grand Prix on 24 August , mid @-@ season testing took place at Italy 's Autodromo Nazionale Monza . Ferrari concentrated on their aerodynamic set @-@ up during tests on Monza 's long straights . Massa set the quickest times on the first day , ahead of McLaren driver Heikki Kovalainen . BMW Sauber 's Nick Heidfeld was quickest on the second day . Massa spun off into the gravel at the Ascari chicane , bringing a brief halt to testing . Hamilton was fastest on the third day . Kubica lost control of his car and drove off the track , limiting BMW 's testing time as minor repairs were performed on the underside of his car .

= = = Practice and qualifying = = =

Three practice sessions were held before the Sunday race ? two on Friday , and one on Saturday . The Friday morning and afternoon sessions each lasted 90 minutes ; the third session , on Saturday morning , lasted for an hour . The first session was held on a dry track under cloudy skies ; Massa was fastest with a time of 1 : 47 @.@ 284 , just quicker than his Ferrari teammate Räikkönen . The McLarens of Hamilton and Kovalainen , Alonso , Webber , Bourdais and Vettel completed the top eight . Light rain during the second session grew momentarily heavier half @-@ way through , forcing the teams to switch to their wet set @-@ ups . Hamilton led for most of the running , before Alonso , Massa and Kovalainen set faster times late in the session on a drying track . Räikkönen , Piquet , Coulthard , Bourdais and Webber all had off @-@ track excursions with little damage done ; a Fisichella spin at Stavelot forced the session to be halted for ten minutes while the debris was removed and water was cleared from the track . Conditions had not improved by the following morning for the start of the final period of practice , but a drying track late in the session allowed Heidfeld to record the best time , a 1 : 47 @.@ 876 , ahead of Kovalainen , Alonso , Hamilton , Massa , Vettel and Räikkönen .

Saturday afternoon 's qualifying session was divided into three parts . In the first 20 @-@ minute period , cars finishing 16th or lower were eliminated . The second qualifying period lasted for 15 minutes , at the end of which the fastest ten cars went into the final period , to determine their grid positions for the race . Cars failing to make the final period were allowed to be refuelled before the race but those competing in it were not , and so carried more fuel than they had done in the earlier qualifying sessions .

Hamilton clinched his fifth pole position of the season with a time of 1 : 47 @.@ 338 , ahead of Felipe Massa , who qualified second 0 @.@ 34 seconds behind his McLaren rival . A mistake @-@ free run allowed Kovalainen to take third place on the grid , alongside Räikkönen in fourth . Heidfeld took fifth , ahead of Alonso , Webber and Kubica . Bourdais ? after setting the quickest time in the first session ? took ninth , one place ahead of his Toro Rosso teammate Vettel . Toyota driver Jarno Trulli qualified 11th after he experienced problems generating heat into his tyres ; his teammate Timo Glock experienced similar problems and lined up from 13th behind Piquet . Coulthard and Rosberg took the next two grid spots , ahead of the Honda pair of Rubens Barrichello and Jenson Button , who both believed they had maximised the performance of their cars . Force India driver Adrian Sutil , Williams driver Kazuki Nakajima and Fisichella took the final three positions .

= = = Race = = =

Nelson Piquet was the only driver not to start with the softer compound dry @-@ weather tyres on a track which was still drying from morning rain , with the Brazilian opting for the harder tyre available . There was a strong chance of showers predicted during the race . Several cars were slow away on the slippery track , most notably Kovalainen . The main beneficiaries off the line were Piquet and Trulli , who each gained five places . Trulli was hit from behind at the first corner by Bourdais , who also had a quick start . The Toyota suffered diffuser and gearbox damage from the incident , spinning later in the lap . Kovalainen and Heidfeld also collided at the start . This allowed Alonso to gain several places . Sebastian Vettel locked his brakes and ran wide , losing two places . Fisichella collided with Nakajima on the first lap and had to pit to fix a broken front wing and punctures . Hamilton led from Räikkönen who managed to pass his Ferrari teammate Felipe Massa on the Kimmels straight .

On the second lap , Hamilton spun at La Source and lost his lead to Räikkönen on the next straight . Glock lost several places over the first few laps due to a lack of grip from his tyres . On lap ten , Heikki Kovalainen attempted to pass Webber at the Bus Stop chicane , but hit Webber on the side , causing the Australian to spin . Although the McLaren driver later dismissed the contact as " a racing accident " , he was given a drive @-@ through penalty , which he took on lap 14 , dropping him to 15th place .

By the ten @-@ lap mark , Räikkönen had opened a three @-@ second lead over Hamilton . Hamilton was the first of the leaders to pit , on lap 11 , followed by Räikkönen a lap later . Massa and Alonso pitted on lap 13 , with Heidfeld a lap after them . Heidfeld 's BMW teammate Robert Kubica pitted on lap 15 , along with Bourdais . Räikkönen maintained his lead over Hamilton after the round of pit stops , followed by Massa , Alonso and Bourdais .

Piquet retired on lap 13 , after spinning off and colliding with a wall . Following the race , the Renault driver blamed damp patches on the track for the incident , adding that " It 's a shame because I 'm sure we could have done something today . " On lap 17 , Rubens Barrichello retired with a gearbox problem , suffering from a failing sixth gear and engine over @-@ revving .

The first nine runners continued in the same order until Räikkönen and Hamilton both took their second pit stops on lap 25 , with Alonso pitting on lap 27 , Massa on lap 28 , and Heidfeld on lap 31 . Bourdais and Kubica pitted on laps 32 and 33 , respectively .

Following the second round of pit stops , Räikkönen was five seconds ahead of Hamilton , but Hamilton began to close in on Räikkönen during the last stint as a result of the tyres better suiting his McLaren Mercedes . Heavy rain began to fall on lap 41 . Hamilton closed the gap on Räikkönen to under a second , still six seconds ahead of Massa . Hamilton attempted to pass Räikkönen at the Bus Stop chicane , but he cut across the corner . Consequently , Hamilton led out of the chicane but

allowed Räikkönen to re @-@ pass him halfway down the straight . Hamilton then passed him again at the La Source hairpin under braking . Räikkönen tried to double @-@ back on Hamilton to regain the position but the line was defended , resulting in Räikkönen touching his front wing on Hamilton 's rear tyre . The rain started coming down more heavily and Nico Rosberg spun at Fagnes corner , rejoining in front of the two frontrunners and causing Hamilton to run onto the grass . At the next corner , Räikkönen spun and gave the lead back to Hamilton . Räikkönen then lost control of his Ferrari through the Blanchimont corner and collided with the barrier , ending his race .

Hamilton was first to finish the race , having cautiously driven his car to the line in very wet conditions , followed by Massa and Heidfeld . Heidfeld rose from ninth position during the final laps due to the superior grip of the intermediate tyres put on during a pit stop two laps prior to the end of the race . Fernando Alonso and Timo Glock similarly benefited from intermediate tyres , Alonso finishing fourth and Glock eighth , having passed Webber on the final corner . Conversely , Toro Rosso drivers Bourdais and Vettel , who were third and fourth with one lap to go , were pushed down to seventh and fifth positions due to the lack of grip of their dry @-@ weather tyres .

= = = Post @-@ race = = =

Timo Glock was handed a 25 @-@ second penalty for overtaking Mark Webber under yellow flags during the final lap of the race . The penalty pushed Glock from eighth to ninth place .

Hamilton appeared on the podium and subsequent press conference in the winner 's position . When questioned on the incident at the press conference , Hamilton defended his actions :

[Räikkönen] pushed me to the point where I would either have been on the kerb and crashed into him or have to go on the escape route , so I went on the escape route . I understood I had to let him past , so I did . I got in his tow and he was ducking and diving left and right and I did the same and managed to get back to the inside of him . But then he hit me at the apex of the corner but I think I was pretty much gone from there .

Two hours after the race , the FIA stewards for the race issued a statement announcing that Hamilton was guilty of contravening Article 30 @.@ 3 (a) of the 2008 FIA Formula One Sporting Regulations and Appendix L , Chapter 4 , Article 2 (g) of the International Sporting Code , which both state that cutting a chicane and gaining an advantage is subject to a drive @-@ through penalty . As the race had finished , a 25 @-@ second penalty was added to Hamilton 's time instead . As a result of this penalty , Massa was promoted to winner of the Grand Prix , and Hamilton was dropped down to third position .

On 9 September , McLaren lodged an official complaint with the FIA about the incident . In the appeal hearing on 22 September , McLaren alleged that they had twice been advised by race director Charlie Whiting that Hamilton had correctly returned the position to Räikkönen . Furthermore , they presented telemetry evidence suggesting that Hamilton had not only crossed the finish line after Räikkönen , but that he was travelling 6 @.@ 7 km / h slower at the time .

As drive @-@ through penalties are not admissible for appeal , McLaren 's lawyer Mark Phillips QC attempted to convince the court that since the penalty was in the form of time added on , the case was valid . They presented the previous case of Vitantonio Liuzzi at the 2007 Japanese Grand Prix , specifically the FIA 's claim that the presiding chief steward at the race , Tony Scott Andrews , had admitted fault in awarding the penalty to Liuzzi . Andrews denied the FIA 's allegation . McLaren went on to use the case as a precedent for the Spa incident . The Court stated that this analogy was invalid , since in Liuzzi 's case the admissibility of his appeal was not contested .

On 23 September , the Court of Appeal issued its decision , ruling that the appeal was inadmissible .

= = Reaction = =

Other Formula One drivers believed that Hamilton had gained an advantage . Sébastien Bourdais of Toro Rosso said that " the penalty is really rough but in the end it 's up to you to give the position back or not . Pretty straightforward " . The view was reiterated by his fellow drivers Nico Rosberg

and Jarno Trulli . Trulli believed that " Hamilton got an advantage by cutting the chicane " , saying , " Had he stayed on the road , he wouldn 't have had the speed to overtake the Ferrari . In the same way at Monza someone could cut the first chicane , catch a rival 's draft , and overtake him under braking at Roggia " .

Former world champion Niki Lauda said that he did " not understand this completely wrong decision " , adding " It 's unbelievable how the best driver in yesterday 's race makes no mistakes and only gets six points " . He called for the formation of permanent race stewards , instead of the temporary steward system currently in place . He called it " the worst judgement in the history of F1 " , saying , " It 's absolutely unacceptable when three [stewards] influence the championship like this " . Three @-@ time world champion Jackie Stewart said that " F1 attracts the largest capital investment in sport , but it ? s being overseen by people who are not doing it full @-@ time and we get inconsistent decisions " .

The original penalty received mixed reactions in the world press . Byron Young in Britain 's Daily Mirror said that it was the stewards ' decision " that mars sport and turns fans away , that ruins the efforts of even the best competitors , taints the day and leaves fans wondering what exactly they are ' fans ' of " . The Finnish daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat noted that though the Grand Prix had " crushed " Räikkönen 's championship dreams , Hamilton had adhered " with the rules of racing " in giving the position back . The newspaper put Räikkönen 's disappointment down to his crash , rather than the chicane incident . In Italy , La Gazzetta dello Sport declared that the decision was justified , stating that Hamilton " should have waited at least another turn rather than attacking so soon " .

The incident and subsequent court hearing led to a clarification by the FIA , saying that drivers must wait one further corner after cutting a chicane before attempting another overtaking manoeuvre . Formula One driver and a director of the Grand Prix Drivers ' Association Mark Webber said that the clarification had made the issue much clearer :

Lewis would probably never ever have had a crack at Kimi around the outside at the first part of the Bus Stop without knowing he had the option of going onto the asphalt part . I think we 've got to get on top of the chicanes going forward , and we 're not too far away from that at the moment , where drivers know that if you gain a position or gain an advantage , you have to give it back a bit more .

= = Classification = =

= = = Qualifying = = =

= = = Race = = =

^ Hamilton given a 25 @-@ second penalty for cutting a chicane and gaining an advantage , losing first place .

^ Glock given a 25 @-@ second penalty for overtaking Webber under yellow @-@ flags , losing eighth place .

= = Championship standings after the race = =

Bold text indicates who still has a theoretical chance of becoming World Champion .