

Sebastian Vettel took the lead from Lewis Hamilton on the opening lap of the 2013 Formula 1 Shell Belgian Grand Prix at Spa-Francorchamps on Sunday, and the manner in which his Red Bull imperiously swept ahead of the Mercedes on the climb up towards Les Combes set the tone for a dominant race in which the reigning world champion was never troubled. As Vettel checked out, Hamilton was unable to hold off the fast-starting Fernando Alonso who bullied his Ferrari through the field from ninth on the grid to second place, but the Spaniard was 16.8s adrift of Vettel's RB9 after the 44 laps.

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Hamilton held on for third, another 10.8s further back and 2.1s ahead of Mercedes team mate Nico Rosberg, who made a welcome return to the points. At one stage the German was under threat from Red Bull's Mark Webber, who made another poor start and spent the afternoon fighting back, but towards the end the Australian began to lose pace and was 3.9s behind Rosberg at the flag. Jenson Button had a more competitive run for McLaren and led very briefly during the pit stops on the 15th lap, but Vettel was back in front before the lap was over.

Thereafter Button lost ground to the really quick runners, but held on to a decent sixth. Ferrari's Felipe Massa finally overcame Lotus's Romain Grosjean on the 40th lap to claim seventh, as a feisty run from Adrian Sutil earned Force India two more points. Toro Rosso's Daniel Ricciardo was also quick towards the end, passing Nico Hulkenberg's Sauber and team mate Jean-Eric Vergne to claim the final point.

The other McLaren of Sergio Perez was 11th after serving a drive-through penalty for squeezing Grosjean into a momentary off at Les Combes while relieving him of 10th place on the eighth lap. Vergne, who finished behind him, did not get a similar penalty despite appearing to do the same to Nico Hulkenberg as they battled later at Les Combes. Behind, the Sauber driver's team mate Esteban Gutierrez's path to 14th saw him get a drive-through penalty for gaining an advantage by leaving the track limits. Valtteri Bottas was Williams higher placed runner in 15th after Pastor Maldonado was clipped by Sutil exiting the Bus Stop chicane on the 27th lap, then turned into Paul di Resta's Force India after he appeared to belatedly try to get into the pit lane after he had passed the entrance.

The Venezuelan received a 10-second stop-go penalty, which was no consolation to the angry Scot. Giedo van der Garde drove his heart out for Caterham in the closing laps to keep Maldonado at bay for 16th, with the Marussias of Jules Bianchi and Max Chilton taking 18th and 19th. Besides Di Resta and Charles Pic, whose Caterham faded early, the only other retirement was Kimi Raikkonen. The Finn's amazing run of 27 consecutive points finishes ended with an apparent brake problem after his Lotus was seen emitting black dust from its wheels throughout the race.

That lost him two places in the title fight, as Vettel extended his tally to 197 points from Alonso, who jumps to second with 151, and Hamilton, who takes third with 139 to Raikkonen's 134. Webber is fifth with 115. In the constructors' stakes, Red Bull have 312 points to Mercedes' 235, Ferrari's 218, and Lotus's 187, while McLaren move back ahead of Force India with 65 to 61. **
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