



Ghirelli puts the pressure on series leader Sato

AUTO GP SERIES HUNGARORING (H), MAY 4-5, RD 3/8

Sato denies Ghirelli a double

CHAMPIONSHIP LEADER KIMIYA SATO'S qualities became further defined in Hungary last weekend. Missing ultimate pace, the Japanese seized his opportunities to narrowly deny Vittorio Ghirelli, the weekend's dominant force, a maiden car racing victory in race one.

Fasano teenager Ghirelli made significant strides at the Hungaroring, surpassing a previous best front-row start in Formula Renault ALPS by taking a career-first pole position. Ghirelli's Super Nova car was on target for a comfortable victory in the feature race until delayed by a jammed left-rear wheel at his mandatory pitstop. That breakthrough win would materialise in race two after a flawless surge to the front of the field.

The teenager's Super Nova predecessor, outgoing champion Adrian Quaife-Hobbs, had dominated at the Mogyorod venue last year. Despite 2013's aero-kit overhaul, Ghirelli still clearly possessed a superbly sorted package.

Auto GP organisers flamed local interest by

assisting Tamas Pal Kiss's return to racing. Unable to secure a full-time drive, Kiss advertised his abilities by qualifying the MLR71 car on the front row for race one on his third single-seater outing at the venue in nine months.

Expecting the start lights to dim in sequence, Kiss was wrong-footed when the red bulbs switched off in unison. Sato, in contrast, produced a flying getaway from third, and squeezed through a narrow gap to lead.

Ghirelli hounded Sato, who reported a handling imbalance in the early laps, before producing a confident dive around the outside of the Euronova driver into Turn 1 on lap two. Once uncorked, Ghirelli created an enviable advantage with minimal apparent effort.

But an uncooperative left-rear tyre during a late mandatory pitstop four laps from home would wipe out Ghirelli's 8s-plus lead. Rejoining on cold tyres, and with less than a car length's advantage over Sato, a frustrated Ghirelli was helpless to

prevent Sato drawing along the outside into Turn 2, smoking his fronts and sweeping into the lead. Short on laps to offer a response, Ghirelli contended with the distraction of 2013 double victor Sergio Campana's imposing presence in his mirrors to finish just 0.356s behind the victor.

Kiss maintained contact with Sato during an early fight for third before suffering his own slow pit turnaround, dropping to fifth behind Italian F3 champion Riccardo Agostini.

Recent grand prix driver Narain Karthikeyan's patience was tested by an unspecified handling issue in qualifying and a master-cylinder problem in the first race, but he picked up reversed-grid pole following a late tangle between Zele Racing team-mate Luciano Bacheta and Robert Visoio.

Karthikeyan led the opening laps of race two from Manor MP pair Daniel de Jong and Meindert van Buuren. But van Buuren's promising run ended when he suffered a burst radiator on the second lap, and de Jong's adoption of team-mate Agostini's set-up failed to yield dividends.

The dramas hastened Ghirelli's journey to the front. On lap eight he found an opening on Karthikeyan at Turn 2 to snatch the lead and head an all-tricolore podium, as Campana shadowed Ghirelli for pace to take second from Agostini.

Sato complained of a loose front wing and off-putting vibrations that limited his progress to sixth, and is just five points clear of Campana ahead of round four at Silverstone in June.

● Peter Mills

RESULTS

Race 1 Kimiya Sato (Euronova Racing), 19 laps in 30m55.139s; 2 Vittorio Ghirelli (Super Nova International), +0.356s; 3 Sergio Campana (Ibiza Racing Team); 4 Riccardo Agostini (Manor MP Motorsport); 5 Tamas Pal Kiss (MLR71); 6 Meindert van Buuren (Manor MP). **Race 2** Ghirelli, 19 laps in 31m11.327s; 2 Campana, +7.994s; 3 Agostini; 4 Narain Karthikeyan (Zele Racing); 5 Kiss; 6 Sato. **Points** 1 Sato, 97; 2 Campana, 92; 3 Ghirelli, 83; 4 Agostini, 51; 5 Luciano Bacheta, 45; 6 Karthikeyan, 33.



Karthikeyan takes early lead in reversed-grid race