

Narain Karthikeyan @ Telefonica Nissan Series

Narain makes India proud by storming to the podium at Zolder

Race One Qualifying

Montagny 1.38.227
Gene 1.39.010
Sarrazin 1.39.347
Karthikeyan 1.40.415
Lienders 1.40.551
Jouanny 1.40.905

Race One - Zolder

Narain Karthikeyan leads in an action-packed race

Tata Carlin team mates **Narain Karthikeyan** and Bruce Jouanny lined up in 4th and 6th positions on the grid for the first of two races today in the World Series Nissan Championship at Zolder in Belgium.

The weather played a crucial part in this weekend's event, as it did at the first round in Jarama, Spain, with qualifying held in full wet conditions. Karthikeyan and Jouanny had proved themselves to be the pace makers during Friday's dry free practice with a commanding 1st & 2nd fastest laps and with the first race of the day being held in dry conditions, hopes were high for the Tata Carlin pairing.

At the lights, Franck Montagny held the lead from pole with Jordi Gene holding station in second place. Narain Karthikeyan had a perfect start moving up to 3rd in front of Stephan Sarrazin, harassing Gene for second spot whilst team mate Jouanny dispensed with Bas Lienders for 4th place.

Such was the pace that race leader Montagny caught himself out, overdriving and spinning off the track and out of contention, handing the lead to Gene and promoting Karthikeyan into 2nd place with Jouanny 4th. Typically, the young Indian was not about to settle for second place and Williams Formula 1 test driver, Jordi Gene, was clearly holding him up and on lap nine, when Gene made a mistake at the second chicane, Karthikeyan was right under the Spaniard's gearbox.

Karthikeyan grabbed the opportunity to take the lead and dived inside but now found himself off line on a dirty part of circuit, still wet from yesterday's rain. Braking hard, on the slippery surface, Karthikeyan's car got out of shape and lost momentum, allowing first Gene to recover the lead and then Sarrazin to get through.

Bruce Jouanny now took up position behind Karthikeyan, with the two Tata Carlin cars running 3rd and 4th. A poor exit at the next corner from Narain allowed Bas Lienders to draw closer and the three cars raced for the chicane side by side. **Bruce Jouanny** takes up the story, *"After Montagny went off, Gene was holding us all up and when Narain got a bit out of shape, I was able to draw up close enough to go for him at the chicane.*

Unfortunately, Lienders was trying to do the same thing and at the chicane - well, three into one chicane just doesn't go! I was on the outside and I couldn't turn in without contact so I was forced to take to the grass. Even in the dry it's hard to control the car when you have two wheels on the grass but it was soaked from yesterday's rain and I spun."

Unfortunately, the spinning Jouanny clipped his team mate Karthikeyan and he also spun a full 360 degrees. Jouanny was unable to restart and the safety car was brought out to clear the debris. Karthikeyan recovered to hold 6th place behind Paolo Villamil.

On the rolling restart, Sarrazin overtook Gene for the lead before the start line and although he led the race from then on, he received a 25 second penalty for the infringement and dropped out of contention.

Meanwhile, Karthikeyan took Villamil for 5th place on the road. The final finishing places were Sarrazin, Gene, Lienders, Seidler and Karthikeyan but with Sarrazin's time penalty, Karthikeyan was awarded 4th place for his Tata Carlin Team.

A crowd of thousands watched the frantic action in a race where Narain Karthikeyan at some stage held every position from 1st down to 6th. After the race, a resigned **Karthikeyan** was philosophical. *"I led the race - really I had no choice but to take the lead from Gene. I was quicker than him and settling for second place would have put me in danger from the cars behind. When I consider that I had two spins and still managed to finish 4th in the points, I guess it wasn't a bad result. OK, I finished in the same place that I started but it's not as though I was just holding station. It was great racing out there today and I'm sure that the spectators won't easily forget seeing the Nissan cars here for the first time. "*

Final standings of Race One

1st Jordi Gene
2nd Bas Lienders
3rd Norbert Seidler
4th Narain Karthikeyan

Race Two Qualifying

Montagny 1.38.966
Gene 1.39.274
Ravier 1.39.585
Kovalinnen 1.39.684
Jouanny 1.39.755
Bernoldi 1.40.025
Karthikeyan 1.40.598 9th position

Race Two Zolder

Narain Karthikeyan takes a podium finish at Zolder for race two

The second race at Zolder is a longer 26 lap event with mandatory pit stops for tyre changing which adds pressure for the drivers and pit crews who have to emulate the rapid stops that are an integral part of modern Formula One racing. The drivers can pit anywhere from lap 5 but they have to complete their stop before the end of lap 18. Team engineers use strategy to try and bring their drivers in at a beneficial time in the race order and this is further complicated by the threat of changing weather conditions.

Tata Carlin driver Bruce Jouanny started the race in 5th place with Franck Montagny and Jordi Gene taking the front row as they did for race one whilst his team mate Narain Karthikeyan started from 9th on the grid after a fraught second qualifying session.

The drama started from the very beginning with Bruce Jouanny stalling his car on the green flag lap and he was forced to relinquish his hard earned 5th place on the grid and start the race from the back. Narain Karthikeyan was determined to make up places and made this easier on himself by having another great start and quickly passing other cars.

The Tata Carlin crew had decided to bring Narain in for his pit stop early and leave team mate Jouanny out as long as possible to gain as many places as possible whilst others pitted. Narain's pit stop was good but not good enough to stop Bas Leinders overtaking him and Narain was forced to charge after him to try and make up for the ground he had lost.

Karthikeyan was visibly quicker than Leinders and was up on his gearbox within a lap but losing downforce through the fast corners as he hounded the slower car. Whilst Franck Montagny led with ease, a snake of cars with F1 driver Jordi Gene at the head, Karthikeyan at the tail and Jean Christophe Ravier and Bas Leinders in the middle wound its way round the track battling for 2nd 3rd 4th and 5th places. Narain Karthikeyan's pace was pushing the group along and putting immense pressure on Leinders.

At the second chicane on the very last lap, Leinders and Ravier touched and Leinders car was thrown into Jordi Gene causing them both to spin out of the race. Ravier survived to finish second to Montagny and Karthikeyan brought his Tata Carlin Dallara home in third place for a well earned podium position.

To the absolute delight of the Tata Carlin crew, team mate Bruce Jouanny more than made up for his earlier problem finishing 5th overall after a tremendous drive from the back of the field.

After the race a delighted **Narain** said. *"That was pretty good. To get a 4th and 3rd place here in the two races against some of the best drivers in the world and spinning twice along the way is a solid result with some very valuable points. I felt my car was well set up and I was able to push really hard to put maximum pressure on the guys in front. I was a bit unlucky in the first race but made it back in the second jumping from 5th to 3rd on the last lap. I can't wait for the next race. Who knows, maybe we'll get a full weekend without rain !"*

Final Standings of Race Two

1st Franck Montagny
2nd Jean Christophe Ravier
3rd Narain Karthikeyan