



## Races to Remember – Brazil 2003

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Hello, and welcome to a new miniseries from Sidepodcast – Races to Remember. The premise is simple, we run through what happened at notable Grand Prix weekends. They don't have to be groundbreaking races, but ones that were enjoyable, and should be remembered. We're starting with the first race I ever watched – which, ironically, I can't remember – Brazil 2003.

The weekend of the Brazilian Grand Prix in April 2003 was wet. We're talking serious torrential rain that saw the drivers petition for Friday qualifying to be cancelled. Back then, a single low-fuel lap was completed on Friday to determine the running order for Saturday. The same single-lap run would take place on Saturday, only with race fuel in the car, and the fastest laps made up the grid. The 2003 regulations also meant that teams could only have one wet weather tyre option, and both Michelin and Bridgestone had only brought the intermediates rather than full wets.

The petition didn't get round all the drivers, and qualifying went ahead on both Friday and Saturday, by which time the weather had cleared up slightly. Barrichello took pole position in the Ferrari, happy to be leading the pack at his home race. Coulthard was behind him in the McLaren, with Webber's Jaguar placed in third.

Sunday dawned with more wet weather, and the FIA decided teams had to be allowed to change their car setups to meet the conditions. Even with this allowance, the race had to start behind the safety car. When the action got going, it wasn't long before the retirements started.

Seven drivers ended up in the wall at the same corner – Turn 3. Even when the track began to dry, drainage issues meant that corner was still hazardous and many drivers were victims – including Montoya, Button and Schumacher. Barrichello lost his pole position at the start, although made up some good places during the first few laps. Unfortunately for him, the Ferrari developed a fuel problem, and he was out of the race. Altogether ten drivers were classified as retired, with the worst crash handed to Alonso.

Webber had managed to smash up his Jaguar, and as Alonso, in the Renault, was passing under waved yellows, he hit one of the Jaguar's errant wheels. Alonso was later transferred to hospital and kept in overnight, although was ultimately unhurt. The carnage was such that the race was red flagged – after 54 of the scheduled 71 laps. That's where the trouble started. The regulations state that if 75% or more of the distance has been completed – which it had – then the race finishes when the leading car crossed the line two laps before the red flag was shown. At the time, the stewards believed Fisichella, who was leading in the Jordan thanks to a change in strategy, had just started his 55<sup>th</sup> lap, which in turn meant lap 53's leader was the winner. That was Kimi Raikkonen. Fisichella came second, and Alonso third, despite his crash. The Jordan was in the pit lane, at the time, and as the confusion reigned, the yellow car overheated and burst into flames.

Just three short days later, the FIA looked at the data a bit closer, and discovered they might have made a mistake. The case went to the World Motorsport Council and they looked at all the evidence. It turns out that Fisi had been on his 56<sup>th</sup> lap, thus the results were wrong. In fact, no one who had stood on the podium had been in the right place. Fisichella and Jordan were declared winners, and before the next race began, at Imola, Kimi Raikkonen and Ron Dennis had to make a show of handing the trophies they had picked up in Brazil over to their rivals.

The official timekeepers Tag-Heuer admitted they were surprised by the FIA's findings, although the governing body said they had evidence the timings were inaccurate. The company later made a quiet exit from the sport at the end of the season.



That's all for this first episode. If you remember this race, unlike me, and have any thoughts or feedback, please feel free to leave a note in the comments on Sidepodcast.com, or email me [christine@sidepodcast.com](mailto:christine@sidepodcast.com). I will be back tomorrow with another Race to Remember.

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