

Zhou cries tears of relief after China GP

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Local Formula One driver Zhou Guanyu could not hold back his tears last Sunday when he emerged from his car's cockpit, squatting in front of the Grand Stand, releasing his emotions.

Zhou finished 14th in his maiden F1 Chinese Grand Prix. For him, being able to finish the race with no major mistakes in front of an expectant home crowd was an accomplishment.

"I really tried to treat this as a normal weekend, but it's so difficult to do that," the Kick Sauber driver said. "I gave everything I had today though we didn't get the points."

As a special honor, Zhou was given the privilege of having his car parked in front of the podium together with the top three finishers. He left the cockpit, waved to fans, and then burst into tears, overwhelmed by the cheers. "All the difficulties and hard work I experienced came to my mind then. For me it was a big release."

Zhou said he only cried twice in the past 10 years: the first was when he was informed of his entry into F1 three years ago, the second on April 21. "When I come back next year or the year after, I'll be a lot more experienced and more prepared. As for this season, I'm just doing everything I can to make my F1 career longer."

Red Bull's Max Verstappen put on a dominant performance in the race, converting pole into victory for this fourth win of the season.

McLaren's Lando Norris and Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez settled for second and third. They were followed by Ferrari duo Lando Norris and Carlos Sainz.

Mercedes' George Russel was sixth, followed by Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, who managed many overtakes in the latter part of the race.

Zhou's teammate Valtteri



Above: Kick Sauber's Zhou Guanyu greets fans during the F1 Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai.

Left: Zhou Guanyu in action during the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai on April 21. — All photos by Dong Jun

Bottas retired on lap 20 due to engine issues.

Starting from 16th with a new gear box, Zhou dropped one place after the start. He was then overtaken by Kevin Magnussen of Haas, Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton and RB driver Yuki Tsunoda to place 19th by lap three.

Zhou was among the first few drivers to pit on the ninth lap, changing to hard tires on a different strategy.

Bottas went off track on the 21st lap, bringing on the Safety Car. Zhou made his second pit stop and was 17th after the resumption.

The second Safety Car came out soon after a series of rear-end collisions that caused Tsunoda's tire puncture. Zhou went to 15th.

With little hope of catching Williams' Alexander Albon, Zhou made his third pit stop on the 41st lap and changed to soft tires.

His left front plate was damaged when overtaking Albon's teammate Logan Sargeant, thankfully it didn't cause too much trouble in the closing few laps and Zhou finished 14th.

"I knew if I hadn't made the



Fans of Lewis Hamilton are seen in the stands. — Dong Jun

decisions to do the pit stops, I probably won't have been there (in the standing)," said Zhou. "We decided to take the gamble."

Putting the results aside, the influence and change Zhou has brought to the F1 Chinese GP is huge.

For the first time, all available tickets for the race were sold out within 45 minutes at the beginning of the year. Last Friday, a working day, the Jiading District circuit also welcomed more than 70 per

cent visitors.

Many new fans have started following motor racing because of Zhou.

Tongji University student Zhang Zhitong was one of them. He even applied to become a volunteer at this year's Chinese GP. "I started watching F1 from 2022, because of Zhou."

He passed a language test and communication training before becoming a volunteer to provide services for teams on race weekend.

"I myself like driving," Zhang said. "I'm fascinated by how the F1 drivers use their skills to push the car to the limit. The way they use the track and the mental battles during the race are what attract me."

Over the past two decades, the Chinese GP has cultivated a group of veteran motor fans. Some have even made important life decisions out of their passion for the sport.

Jiang Xiaohang, who has a PhD in aeronautics and astronautics, attended the inaugural Chinese GP back in 2004. He has also helped organize local motor fan clubs since 2006.

"When I was watching F1 20 years ago, it was my hobby," he said. "Years later, it became a deciding factor when I was choosing my university major."

"My parents are in the ship building industry, so I was interested in hydromechanics and aerodynamic since childhood. I picked the same major as Adrian Newey (chief technology officer of Red Bull Racing)."

According to FIA's preliminary calendar for 2025, the Chinese GP will be held on March 21-23.