



F1 Canadian GP 2026: Russell Grabs Sprint Pole As Mercedes Dominate Montreal With Major Upgrade

Description

George Russell silenced his doubters and stamped his authority on the 2026 F1 Canadian Grand Prix weekend by claiming sprint pole position at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, edging out Mercedes team-mate Kimi Antonelli by a mere 0.068 seconds in a breathless Sprint Qualifying session on Friday evening. The F1 Canadian Grand Prix 2026 sprint is shaping up to be an absolute thriller and Russell is leading the charge.

Russell Delivers On Sprint Qualifying Pole and Never Doubted Myself

After a frustrating weekend in Miami where championship leader Antonelli took yet another victory, Russell arrived in Montreal with a point to prove. And prove it he did. Setting a benchmark time of 1 minute 12.965 seconds in SQ3, Russell was imperious across the final segment going fastest on his opening run before improving further when the pressure was highest.

It obviously feels great after a tough Miami but I never doubted myself. I knew what I could do, said a composed Russell after the session. This is an amazing circuit high-grip, feels like you're driving a proper Formula 1 car around here, which is how it should be. I'm glad today came together.



Source: Formula 1 official website (formula1.com)

Antonelli, who heads into this fifth round of the 2026 season with a 20-point championship advantage, had to settle for second on 1:13.033 — just 0.068s adrift. It was his first time failing to top a qualifying session this year, and it handed the front row of the Sprint grid to a resurgent Russell who looks every inch the driver ready to claim his first win of the season.

McLaren In The Hunt: Norris And Piastri Lock Out Row Two

McLaren continue to be the most consistent threat to the Silver Arrows this season, and Lando Norris underlined that pedigree by qualifying third, 0.315 seconds off Russell’s pole time. Norris was philosophical: “P3 behind the Mercedes is a very good result — the car felt good and we’re right

in the fight for the Sprint.â?• Oscar Piastri completed a strong McLaren afternoon in fourth, 0.334 seconds off the pace.

The Ferrari duo of Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc rounded out the top six â?? Hamilton showing particular promise at various stages of Sprint Qualifying and arguably having the pace for a higher result on a cleaner lap. Max Verstappen could manage no better than seventh in the Red Bull RB22, ahead of team-mate Isack Hadjar in eighth, while Racing Bullsâ?? Arvid Lindblad and Williamsâ?? Carlos Sainz completed the top ten.

Drama In SQ1: Alonso Crash, Lawson And Albon Miss Out

The session was far from smooth sailing. Before a wheel was turned in anger, Williams confirmed that Alex Albon would not participate in Sprint Qualifying at all â?? his car too damaged after a collision with a groundhog during Free Practice 1. Racing Bullsâ?? Liam Lawson also sat out after a hydraulic leak in practice left his VCARB 03 unable to compete.

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Source: Formula 1 official website (formula1.com)

Fernando Alonso then brought out the red flags with under two minutes remaining in SQ1 after locking up and hitting the barriers at Turn 3 in his Aston Martin. The interruption left several drivers scrambling to get a lap in when the session resumed at 1659 local time with Sergio Perez, Lance Stroll, Pierre Gasly, and Valtteri Bottas all failing to reach the line in time. Gasly's exit was particularly surprising for a driver of his experience.

Mercedes Upgrade Package Changes The Game

The dominant theme of this Canadian weekend is Mercedes's first major upgrade package of the 2026 season. The Silver Arrows have been the class of the field since the new technical regulations

kicked in, but the updates on show in Montreal have visibly extended their advantage in the high-speed, high-grip conditions of Circuit Gilles Villeneuve. With Russell on pole and Antonelli alongside, the Mercedes 1-2 grid position for the Sprint tells its own story.

The Sprint race gets underway at 1200 local time on Saturday (00:00 SGT Sunday), with the main Grand Prix race on Sunday. After three consecutive Sprint wins from Antonelli, can Russell finally put the Mercedesâ?? full potential to use at the front of the field? The signs from Friday nightâ??s qualifying are extremely encouraging.

Catch up on all our F1 coverage this season â?? read how [Mercedes set up this sprint weekend in our race week preview](#), and revisit [Antonelliâ??s dominant Miami victory](#). For all our motorsport and sports stories, head to the [Sports section](#).

F1 Canadian GP 2026 Sprint Qualifying Results

| Pos | Driver | Time |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | George Russell (Mercedes) | 1:12.965 |
| 2 | Kimi Antonelli (Mercedes) | 1:13.033 (+0.068) |
| 3 | Lando Norris (McLaren) | 1:13.280 (+0.315) |
| 4 | Oscar Piastri (McLaren) | 1:13.299 (+0.334) |
| 5 | Lewis Hamilton (Ferrari) | 1:13.326 (+0.361) |
| 6 | Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) | TBC |
| 7 | Max Verstappen (Red Bull) | TBC |

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