



Hamilton sweeps away rivals in



KEVIN GARSIDE
IN MONTE CARLO

McLaren driver rides luck in the wet to claim victory and the lead in title race

HE SAID he wanted to win like Ayrton Senna, in the rain, destroying the opposition. Senna disciples might quibble about the early skirmish with a barrier, but that aside, even the great man would have to acknowledge that the gods were riding with Lewis

Hamilton in Monaco. As a boy devout in his worship of Senna, Hamilton nurtured the idea that one day he would do as his hero did, prove himself on the most treacherous stretch of asphalt on the grand prix calendar.

He didn't want it easy. No pole-to-flag procession for him. He wanted to feel the spray in his face, water lapping his wheels. He had all of that and more yesterday, bouncing off the Armco with a puncture in the earlier laps, then riding through the debris of scattered cars to post his sixth career win.

Senna won here six times. Hamilton just beginning his march through the Formula One record book. He won here in Euro F3 and GP2. He might have won last year on his F1 debut. Yesterday there was no political dimension to block his way. No instruction to pit early to maintain the status quo. He was off the leash and

smoking. The portents were building as the drivers made their way to the grid in light rain. By the time they came around Rascasse to complete the opening lap it was pouring, turning the circuit into a roulette wheel. Hamilton, starting on the second row in third, was up the inside of Kimi Raikkonen and past on the run to St Devote.

Jenson Button was the first to suffer, clobbering Nick Heidfeld through the chicane at the end of the swimming pool section. The blueprint was loading. On lap six Hamilton hit the river of water flowing across Tabac and nicked the barrier with his rear right tyre, enough to rip it off the rim as he entered the pits.

With Felipe Massa seemingly on rails in front, Hamilton's chances appeared holed. This was a time for cool heads. The forecasters were telling the McLaren pit wall that the rain would

ease. They filled Hamilton with extra fuel and returned him to the maelstrom urging caution. Restraint is not a quality naturally given to men of speed, who are wired to rip through the ether on the limit of human possibility.

Hamilton dutifully dropped into ice mode, trailing the leaders, waiting for them to make the errors. Fernando Alonso, in fourth, obliged on lap eight, clipping the wall at Mirabeau. On the same lap David Coulthard and Sebastien Bourdais came together on the run-up to Casino Square to bring out the safety car.

Fate was playing its part. The gap to the leading group, Massa, Robert Kubica and Raikkonen, had shrunk to nothing. Lady Luck had not finished paying her dividend. Raikkonen was ordered into the pits for a drive-through penalty for failing to have his tyres properly fitted at the three-minute

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