

# Bezzecchi flies but it's Bagnaia who bags it

**MOTOGP**  
**ASSEN (NLD)**  
**25 JUNE**  
**ROUND 8/20**

You only need to think back to 2020 to find a time when Ducati Corse and its lead rider were barely talking, when you wondered how well the team might do if it could only get along with its star.

Three summers on from Andrea Dovizioso pulling the plug on his increasingly acrimonious time with the Italian manufacturer, we have the answer. Francesco Bagnaia's Dutch TT victory took him past Dovizioso's tally of 14 wins for Ducati. Only Casey Stoner, with 23, still has more to his name.

While Bagnaia certainly has an advantage in terms of a harmonious environment and a bike that is the best everywhere, he also has a lot more Ducatis to defeat than Dovizioso or Stoner ever did. This time, it was the turn of the VR46 team's Marco Bezzecchi to give him the most trouble.

Bezzecchi was the fastest man over the weekend, topping all the practice sessions, snatching pole position and holding off Bagnaia to win the sprint race on Saturday. But when it came to the long, hot main event, when a harder rear tyre was called for, Bagnaia and the factory squad had the best combination over 26 laps of Assen.

KTM's Brad Binder shot into the lead of the race at the start, ahead of Bagnaia and Bezzecchi. World champion 'Pecco' then brushed the South African aside at Stekkenwal on lap three. Binder had been adventurous with his tyre choice, picking a soft rear, and proved a tough nut for Bezzecchi to overtake. The curly-haired 'Bez' took until lap 17 to get by.



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The championship leader was only a second up the road at that point, but by now Bezzecchi was facing a vibration on the rear that made him "scared to lose a podium". He therefore settled for second, with Binder, Aleix Espargaro (Aprilia) and Jorge Martin (Pramac Ducati) all keeping him honest to the finish.

Binder did well to keep it together on that soft rear, with a bike Espargaro observed to be "sliding everywhere in the last laps". A couple of inches too much, in fact: Binder touched the green paint at Stekkenwal on the final tour and was demoted a place after the flag for the track-limits transgression.

This completed a curious double for Binder, after he had also lost third place for the same crime in the sprint. While the KTM man lamented being "f\*\*\*ing brain-dead", Espargaro gratefully accepted his first podium of the season and Aprilia's first since the opening round. Having run

the entire distance with a broken front wing following a first-lap brush with Luca Marini (VR46), Espargaro was smiling to have finished what he described as "a stressful race" so well.

If anywhere was going to deliver some joy for Yamaha this year, then it was Assen. But given the team's season so far, it could hardly have dared dream that Fabio Quartararo would even qualify fourth. Or that, helped along by Binder's three-second penalty after the flag in the sprint, Quartararo would pick up a third place.

While most neutrals were surely pleased to see the 2021 world champion back in the thick of the action, the pleasure was only fleeting. Quartararo had a disastrous start on Sunday, then ended up landing in the gravel alongside fellow Frenchman Johann Zarco (Pramac Ducati) on lap three.

MotoGP's other troubled Japanese manufacturer, Honda, enjoyed no such relief



Binder leads  
 Espargaro and Martin

Bagnaia has stretched his championship advantage to 35 points



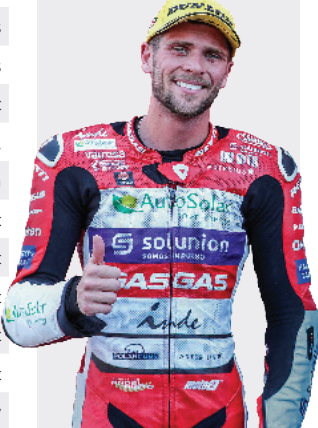
**RESULTS ROUND 8/20, ASSEN (NLD), 25 JUNE (26 LAPS - 73.379 MILES)**

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	<b>Francesco Bagnaia</b> (ITA)	Ducati	40m37.640s
2	<b>Marco Bezzecchi</b> (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+1.223s
3	<b>Aleix Espargaro</b> (ESP)	Aprilia	+1.925s
4	<b>Brad Binder</b> (ZAF)	KTM	+1.528s
5	<b>Jorge Martin</b> (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	+1.934s
6	<b>Alex Marquez</b> (ESP)	Gresini Ducati	+12.437s
7	<b>Luca Marini</b> (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+14.174s
8	<b>Takaaki Nakagami</b> (JPN)	LCR Honda	+14.616s
9	<b>Franco Morbidelli</b> (ITA)	Yamaha	+29.335s
10	<b>Augusto Fernandez</b> (ESP)	GasGas Tech 3 KTM	+33.736s
11	<b>Lorenzo Savadori</b> (ITA)	Aprilia	+35.084s
12	<b>Raul Fernandez</b> (ESP)	Aprilia RNF	+39.622s
13	<b>Stefan Bradl</b> (DEU)	LCR Honda	+42.504s
14	<b>Jonas Folger</b> (DEU)	GasGas Tech 3 KTM	+45.609s
R	<b>Fabio Di Giannantonio</b> (ITA)	Gresini Ducati	18 laps-accident
R	<b>Iker Lecuona</b> (ESP)	Honda	14 laps-technical
R	<b>Miguel Oliveira</b> (PRT)	Aprilia RNF	12 laps-injury pain
R	<b>Enea Bastianini</b> (ITA)	Ducati	6 laps-accident
R	<b>Maverick Vinales</b> (ESP)	Aprilia	3 laps-accident
R	<b>Fabio Quartararo</b> (FRA)	Yamaha	2 laps-accident
R	<b>Johann Zarco</b> (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	2 laps-accident
R	<b>Jack Miller</b> (AUS)	KTM	1 lap-accident
NS	<b>Marc Marquez</b> (ESP)	Honda	injury

**WEEKEND WINNERS**

**MOTO2 ASSEN (NLD)**  
Jake Dixon (below)  
GASGAS Aspar Team (Kalex)

**MOTO3 ASSEN (NLD)**  
Jaume Masia  
Leopard Racing (Honda)



**Winner's average speed** 108.368mph. **Fastest lap** Martin 1m33.065s, 109.172mph.

**QUALIFYING 2** 1 **Bezzecchi** 1m31.472s; 2 **Bagnaia** 1m31.533s; 3 **Marini** 1m31.630s; 4 **Quartararo** 1m31.671s; 5 **Binder** 1m31.704s; 6 **Espargaro** 1m31.812s; 7 **Vinales** 1m31.837s; 8 **Zarco** 1m31.881s; 9 **A Marquez** 1m31.898s; 10 **Martin** 1m32.170s; 11 **Oliveira** 1m32.174s; 12 **Miller** 1m32.715s.

**QUALIFYING 1** 1 **Zarco** 1m31.993s; 2 **Oliveira** 1m32.087s; 3 **Di Giannantonio** 1m32.185s; 4 **Nakagami** 1m32.497s; 5 **Morbidelli** 1m32.530s; 6 **R Fernandez** 1m32.671s; 7 **M Marquez** 1m32.672s; 8 **Bastianini** 1m32.844s; 9 **Savadori** 1m33.008s; 10 **Bradl** 1m33.040s; 11 **A Fernandez** 1m33.082s; 12 **Lecuona** 1m33.088s; 13 **Folger** 1m33.300s.

**SPRINT RACE (13 LAPS - 36.689 MILES)**

1 **Bezzecchi** 20m09.174s; 2 **Bagnaia** +1.294s; 3 **Quartararo** +1.872s; 4 **Espargaro** +2.245s; 5 **Binder** +4.582s; 6 **Martin** +5.036s; 7 **Vinales** +5.876s; 8 **Bastianini** +10.102s; 9 **A Marquez** +10.525s; 10 **Marini** +10.556s; 11 **Miller** +11.191s; 12 **Nakagami** +11.473s; 13 **Zarco** +15.439s; 14 **A Fernandez** +17.754s; 15 **Morbidelli** +19.508s; 16 **Savadori** +19.664s; 17 **M Marquez** +19.916s; 18 **R Fernandez** +20.583s; 19 **Oliveira** +24.269s; 20 **Lecuona** +24.727s; 21 **Folger** +32.056s; 22 **Bradl** +35.372s; R **Di Giannantonio** 3 laps-accident.

**Winner's average speed** 109.233mph. **Fastest lap** Bezzecchi 1m32.353s, 110.014mph.

**RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 **Bagnaia** 194; 2 **Martin** 159; 3 **Bezzecchi** 158; 4 **Binder** 114; 5 **Zarco** 109; 6 **Marini** 98; 7 **Miller** 79; 8 **Espargaro** 77; 9 **Quartararo** 64; 10 **A Marquez** 63.

**CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 **Ducati** 285; 2 **KTM** 153; 3 **Aprilia** 121; 4 **Honda** 89; 5 **Yamaha** 82.



from its ongoing misery. Marc Marquez slammed into the back of Ducati's Enea Bastianini in a moment of inattention during qualifying, leaving him 17th on the grid. After finishing the sprint in the same spot, the injuries he'd picked up at the previous round in Germany led to a painful night and he elected to withdraw from Sunday.

Martin, who had won both races in Germany, saw his hold on second in the championship trimmed to just one point by Bezzecchi in the Netherlands. The Spaniard lined up 10th on the grid after a low-speed fall interrupted his qualifying, then struggled to sixth in the sprint despite running with the leaders early. He came within 0.009s of sneaking past Espargaro at the finish on Sunday, but Binder was wedged between them in the revised classification and Martin stayed fifth.

Will it be Martin or Bezzecchi who leads the chase of Bagnaia in the second half of the season? With Bagnaia 35 points ahead, it won't be an easy task for either of them to prevent 'Pecco' taking an unprecedented double world title for Ducati.

**RICHARD ASHER**

**NEXT REPORT**  
**BRITISH GP 10 AUGUST ISSUE**