

Difficult dress rehearsal for 24 Hours of Le Mans

10/05/2025 The Porsche Penske Motorsport factory team has wrapped up round three of the FIA World Endurance Championship at the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps.

The best-placed Porsche 963 hybrid prototype shared by Kévin Estre, Laurens Vanthoor and Pascal Wehrlein took the flag in ninth place. The sister car driven by Michael Christensen, Julien Andlauer and Nico Müller finished the six-hour race in twelfth. In the LMGT3 class, the two Porsche 911 GT3 R racer cars fielded by Manthey 1st Phorm and the Iron Dames team collected world championship points.

The turbulent six-hour race on Belgium's 7.004-kilometre Grand Prix circuit was marked by three safety car deployments and numerous yellow flags. Under sunny summer skies and in front of nearly 100,000 spectators, the event delivered thrilling, hard-fought battles for position across the entire field.

The No. 6 Porsche 963 got off the line well and initially charging from twelfth to seventh. After the first pit stop, the hybrid prototype had slipped to eleventh. In the final hour, it reclaimed a position in the top

six, only to lose ground after a late refuelling stop shortly before the end, and ultimately, finished ninth. Three world champions shared the No. 6 cockpit at the Circuit de Spa: Kévin Estre of France and local Belgian driver Laurens Vanthoor are the current defending champions in the FIA World Endurance Championship, while their teammate Pascal Wehrlein was crowned the 2024 FIA Formula E champion. The German will drive a third 963 from the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory team at Le Mans, alongside Englishman Nick Tandy and Felipe Nasr of Brazil.

Round three of the season began with a setback for the No. 5 Porsche, with a rival car sending starting driver Julien Andlauer into a spin off the track on the opening lap. The Frenchman was forced to rejoin the field from P18 at the back of the hypercar field from where he launched his charge. By the time he stopped to refuel on lap 25, the former Porsche Junior had reached twelfth place. After the third pit stop, the racing car, now with Swiss driver Nico Müller at the wheel, had advanced to seventh. The Porsche factory driver normally competes for Team Andretti in the FIA Formula E World Championship. With just an hour left on the clock, a quick splash-and-dash stop catapulted the 963 into third place. This tactic, however, required another pit stop, during which Denmark's Michael Christensen took the wheel for a second time. The trio ultimately crossed the finish line in twelfth place.

"That was another disappointing result for us and not what we expected," concluded Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport.

"The team put in another good effort, even if we may not have done everything perfectly. Still, the drivers and the crew fought until the very end, and I want to thank them very much for that. Quite simply, we need to acknowledge that the conditions for a better result weren't there. As always, we will analyse why, especially since the 24 Hours of Le Mans is up next. But I think there is also a massive need for action outside of our organisation. The race speaks for itself."

The 963 fielded by Porsche's customer team Proton Competition was forced to retire on lap 22 due to a transmission problem. The hybrid prototype had previously made its way back to the pits operating solely in electric mode.

LMGT3 class: Porsche customer teams score points with both 911 GT3 R

After winning its class at the previous WEC race in Imola, Manthey 1st Phorm's 911 GT3 R temporarily led the LMGT3 field at Spa, despite starting driver Ryan Hardwick being nudged into a spin by a rival early in the six-hour race. As a result, the American, who shares the blue Porsche with Italian Riccardo Pera and factory driver Richard Lietz from Austria, initially dropped from seventh to twelfth place. After the first pit stop, he was back in second place with the 911 GT3 R. The trio ultimately took the flag in seventh place, securing valuable world championship points.

The Iron Dames squad also made a strong start to the race. Célia Martin quickly swept from 13th on the

grid into the top ten. After the first fuel stop, the French driver was already running in seventh. With teammates Rahel Frey of Switzerland and Denmark's Michelle Gatting, Martin even briefly challenged for the lead. The team's Porsche 911 GT3 R ultimately finished tenth, earning the Iron Dames their first world championship point of the 2025 WEC season.

The fourth round of this year's FIA World Endurance Championship also marks the highlight of the endurance racing calendar: the 24 Hours of Le Mans will be contested on 14–15 June at the legendary Circuit des 24 Heures.

Drivers' comments after the race

Nico Müller (Porsche 963 #5): It was a real highlight for me to drive for Porsche Penske Motorsport here at Spa. The race didn't go as we'd hoped, and we can't sugarcoat that. We simply weren't fast enough. From a strategic standpoint, luck wasn't always on our side, but this race definitely taught us a lot for our Le Mans preparations. As long as we learn the right lessons from it, I'm okay with that."

Pascal Wehrlein (Porsche 963 #6): It was great to get more race laps with the Porsche 963 and to work with Porsche Penske Motorsport for the first time. I've gained a lot of valuable experience. However, the result certainly didn't meet our expectations. We were significantly off the pace and struggled with tyre wear. Now, we'll shift our focus to identify areas for improvement over the coming weeks."

Rahel Frey (Porsche 911 GT3 R #85): Our race had its highs and lows but we're happy to take home our first championship points for tenth place. At one point, we were even leading the race, but we then dropped from the front to the back. Once you lose your position on track and get stuck in traffic, it's incredibly difficult to recover, especially here at Spa. Overtaking wasn't one of our strong points today."

Riccardo Pera (Porsche 911 GT3 R #92): Overall, I'm satisfied with our performance. We were in the lead for a while, but we couldn't hold off the strong competition. Seventh place was the best we could manage today. Now, it's all about preparing for Le Mans – I'm really looking forward to racing there."

Race result

Hypercar class:
1. Pier Guidi/Calado/Giovinazzi (ITA/GBR/ITA), Ferrari #51, 150 laps
2. Fuoco/Molina/Nielsen (ITA/ESP/DNK), Ferrari #50, +4.229 seconds
3. Gounon/Makowiecki/Schumacher (FRA/FRA/DEU), Alpine #36, +5.148 seconds
9. Estre/Vanthoor/Wehrlein (FRA/BEL/DEU), Porsche 963 #6, +1.01.871 minutes
12. Andlauer/Christensen/Müller (FRA/DNK/SUI), Porsche 963 #5, +1.27.554 minutes
DNF Jani/Pino/Varrone (SUI/CHL/ARG), Porsche 963 #99, 22 laps

LMGT3 class:
1. Heriau/Mann/Rovera (FRA/USA/ITA), Ferrari #21, 137 laps
2. Gattuso/Levorato/Olsen (ITA/ITA/NOR), Ford #88, +40.230 seconds
3. Flohr/Castellacci/Rigon (SUI/ITA/ITA), Ferrari #54, +42.104 seconds
7. Hardwick/Lietz/Pera (USA/AUT/ITA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #92, +1 lap
10. Frey/Gatting/Martin (SUI/DNK/FRA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #85, +1 lap

Full results and championship standings https://fiawec.alkamelsystems.com.

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