Campbell and Evans third fastest in GTE-AM in WEC prologue

28/04/2021 Porsche 911 RSR factory and customer teams set the pace in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) season prologue

The prologue

The Porsche works team contesting the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) has successfully completed its preparations for the 2021 season. In the official two-day tests on the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium, the two Porsche 911 RSR covered a total distance of 2,977 kilometres. The main focus of the tests was on the setup and tyre use as well as optimising the procedures within the team. In the so-called prologue of the WEC, the two factory cars from Weissach impressed with fast and steady lap times. Works driver Kévin Estre from France turned the fastest lap in the GTE-Pro class in 2:12.916 minutes.

“The prologue was great,” says Alexander Stehlig, Head of Operations FIA WEC after two sunny, labour-intensive days in Belgium. “We ticked everything off our programme and there were no surprises. Our ideas for the setup worked positively out on the track. That was our priority on Monday. On the second day, we practically ran a full simulation of the race weekend, included qualifying and long stints. The lap times looked good, but they don't say much yet. All in all, we feel well prepared for the start of the 2021 season.”

The customer teams GR Racing, Project 1 and Dempsey-Proton Racing sent a total of five nine-elevens from 2019 to take part in the two-day tests on the 7.004-kilometre “Ardennes rollercoaster” racetrack. In the GTE-Am class this year, the campaigning of the latest generation Porsche 911 RSR is possible. The three teams used the prologue to familiarise themselves as much as possible with the new racing cars. All teams managed to collect extensive data and make significant progress in setting up their vehicles: Only Project 1 experienced a setback during the test drives: After an accident on Monday morning involving Anders Burchardt (Norway), the No. 46 car could no longer participate in the tests on the following day. Burchardt and his teammates Dennis Olsen from Norway and Axcil Jefferies from Great Britain will be unable to compete on the upcoming race weekend.

Round one of the World Endurance Championship (WEC) takes off on Saturday 1 May at 1:30 pm (CEST) and runs over a distance of six hours.

Drivers' comments on the prologue

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): “Two things were at the centre of our work – figuring out the

best possible vehicle balance and perfecting the interaction between the drivers and the new race engineer. We made noticeable progress in both areas. We've completed the planned programme and we feel well prepared. My teammate Richie put in a strong long run. It looks promising, but there are still a couple of things that could be improved in the lead-up to race day."

Neel Jani (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "The prologue ran really well for us. We drove a total of 220 laps with our number 92 car and tried a few new setup solutions. In the process, we learned a lot. Our simulated racing stints looked good, so we head to the start of the season this weekend feeling positive. We were extremely productive during the two days of testing and, for me personally, it was an important experience because I've never driven the Porsche 911 RSR at Spa-Francorchamps before."

Results

GTE-Pro class (all sessions combined)
1. Estre/Jani (F/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 2:12.916 minutes
2. Bruni/Lietz (I/A), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 2:14.214 minutes
3. Pier Guidi/Calado (I/GB), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 2:14.313 minutes

GTE-Am class (all sessions combined)
1. Lacorte/Sernagiotto/Fuoco (I/I/I), Ferrari 488 GTE Evo #47, 2:14.509 minutes
2. Perfetti/Cairoli/Pera (N/I/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 2:14.736 minutes
3. Ried/Evans/Campbell (D/NZ/AUS), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 2:14.872 minutes

The preview

The Porsche works team tackles the opening round of the FIA World Endurance Championship at Spa-Francorchamps on 1 May with two 911 RSR racers. For the six-hour race in the Ardennes region of Belgium, the factory drivers Gianmaria Bruni from Italy and Richard Lietz from Austria share the cockpit of the GT racing vehicle with the starting number 91. The crew in the identical No. 92 sister car has changed from previous years: this season, Frenchman Kévin Estre, the 2018/2019 WEC champion, shares the vehicle with Neel Jani. In preparation for his WEC mission with the Porsche 911 RSR, the experienced Swiss racer contested the final round of the 2020 IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Sebring and took part in extensive tests.

"We're thrilled that the management of the World Endurance Championship has succeeded in putting together a racing calendar with six events – despite the ongoing restrictions caused by the global pandemic. Our factory squad is ready to take up the hunt for the FIA WEC crown. I'm very much looking forward to the upcoming duels, especially between Porsche and Ferrari," says Fritz Enzinger, Vice President Porsche Motorsport.

The Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps is located in the far east of Belgium close to the German border.

Opened in 1921, the 7.004-kilometre course is the longest dedicated racetrack on the FIA WEC calendar. With 21 corners and several long straights, the track undulates through the Walloon countryside – not surprisingly, the circuit is also known as the 'Ardennes rollercoaster'. Fast passages like Raidillon/Eau Rouge and Blanchimont are as notorious as the La Source hairpin at the end of the start-finish straight.

"Our team has prepared meticulously for the 2021 season. With a top result at the opening round in Spa-Francorchamps, we'd like to send a clear signal from the very start that there can only be one goal for us: to win the world championship," says Pascal Zurlinden, Director Factory Motorsport. "Our class win in 2020 at the first round in Belgium clearly underlined that the latest version of the Porsche 911 RSR suits the special characteristics of the 'Ardennes rollercoaster' very well," adds Alexander Stehlig, Head of Operations FIA WEC. "During test drives at Hockenheim, among other venues, we gave our teams and cars the final touches. At the two-day prologue in Spa, we'll do our utmost to find the best set-up for the special characteristics of this track. We're ready to race!"

Before the start of the race weekend at Spa-Francorchamps, a prologue will be held at the venue. Porsche and its customer teams take part in the two-day test session on 26 and 27 April with a total of seven 2019-generation 911 RSR cars.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

In the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR, the works team relies on Gianmaria Bruni and Richard Lietz for the third year in a row. In 2019, the experienced pair won the season-opening round at Silverstone in the UK. Kévin Estre, who shares driving duties in the No. 92 car with Neel Jani, travels to Spa-Francorchamps as last year's winner. Last season the Frenchman also won the finale in Bahrain and concluded the year ranking third. Jani returns to the WEC after competing for the Porsche TAG Heuer Formula E Team.

The customer teams

Dempsey-Proton Racing fields two Porsche 911 RSR at the start of the WEC season. Works driver Matt Campbell from Australia joins forces with the team owner Christian Ried (Germany) and the former Porsche Junior Jaxon Evans from New Zealand. Andrew Haryanto from Indonesia, German Marco Seefried and Alessio Picariello from Belgium have been announced as the drivers in the No. 88 sister car. The German customer team Project 1 also campaigns two 911 RSR in all six events this season. The squad from the German town of Lohne in Lower Saxony tackles round one with the Norwegians Dennis Olsen and Egidio Perfetti as well as the Italians Matteo Cairoli and Riccardo Pera. The all-British driver crew, Michael Wainwright, Ben Barker and Tom Gamble, compete for GR Racing in the No. 86 car.

Drivers' comments before the race

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "We're all excited for the season opener on this wonderful racetrack. We've celebrated many successes there in the past. We're expecting a tough fight in Spa. This year we're working with a new engineer and a few new mechanics on our number 91 car. First we have to get used to each other. We made a lot of progress during our Hockenheim tests. Now we want to build on that in Spa-Francorchamps and win the class if possible."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "It's hard to imagine a more beautiful setting to start the season than Spa-Francorchamps. The racetrack is fantastic and is always good for action-packed racing. If you want to be fast in the spectacular and demanding passages, you must have a perfectly balanced car. This is exactly what we'll focus on at the two-day prologue. I'm really looking forward to finally getting started again."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "Spa is always a huge challenge. The track demands a lot from the tyres, so it's important to have a particularly good strategy. Plus, we know how the weather can be in the Ardennes: an unpredictable mix of cold and warm temperatures, rain, dry and sometimes even snow. It's critical to be well prepared for all thinkable conditions. Last year we saw that our Porsche 911 RSR is particularly strong at Spa. We're travelling there as last year's winners and we want to celebrate another success."

The schedule (all times CEST)

Thursday, 29 April
15:30 to 17:00 – Free practice 1

Friday, 30 April
9:30 to 11:00 – Free practice 2
14:00 to 15:00 – Free practice 3
18:20 to 18:35 – Qualifying GTE-Pro and GTE-Am

Saturday, 1 May
13:30 to 19:30 pm – Race

2021 WEC calendar

26/27 April – Prologue in Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium)
1 May – 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium)
13 June – 8 Hours of Portimão (Portugal)
18 July – 6 Hours of Monza (Italy)

21/22 August – 24 Hours of Le Mans (France)
26 September – 6 Hours of Fuji (Japan)
20 November – 8 Hours of Bahrain (Bahrain)

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