

Porsche defends its lead in the GTE-Pro world championship

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07/05/2022 The Porsche GT Team has concluded the six-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps in second and fifth place with the two 911 RSR. With this result at round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC, the sports car manufacturer defended its lead in the classification – in the manufacturers' as well as in the drivers' categories.

The race

The Porsche customer team Dempsey-Proton Racing won the GTE-Am class with the No. 77 car. At the end of an eventful race in Belgium, Christian Ried from Germany and his British teammates Sebastian Priaulx and Harry Tincknell crossed the finish line first in the 911 from Weissach.

“We're a little disappointed. In fact, more was possible because we had a great car,” states Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. Concerning the early contact between the factory team's two 911 RSR, Laudenbach added: “In the very first corner the two cars touched. Unfortunately, that meant our No. 91 car was no longer among the frontrunners. All in all, it was a crazy race with a lot of interruptions and constant changes in the class rankings. Congratulations to our customer squad Dempsey-Proton Racing on winning the GTE-Am class. Spectators were certainly given a treat today.”

The six-hour race got underway in sunny conditions on the Spa-Francorchamps Formula 1 circuit. Both works-911 took up the race from the first grid row. At the wheel of the No. 92 car, Frenchman Kévin Estre immediately attempted to squeeze past his Porsche teammate Gianmaria Bruni (Italy). In doing this, the left rear wheel of the No. 91 pole-setting car was hit. Bruni had to slowly return to the pits to repair the damage. As a result, the team lost a lap to the leaders and was thus out of contention for a class win.

“We started from the first two grid spots and had the speed for a major success, so we're disappointed,” outlined Alexander Stehlig, Director Factory Motorsport FIA WEC. “The fact that our cars collided at the start should not have happened. In a chaotic race with lots of rain and red and yellow flags, ultimately it just wasn't enough for a class win – that's a shame!”

Estre defended his lead in the early phase until the first heavy shower arrived in the forested Ardennes region of Belgium. Due to the wet track surface, the officials interrupted the race for the first time after just over an hour. More downpours resulted in the event being red-flagged two more times. Many incidents led to the frequent deployment of the safety car, and caution phases often bunched the field together. In the turbulent game of strategy, the No. 92 car fell back to third place. The Dane Michael Christensen then worked his way up to second place in the final phase, only narrowly missing out on clinching class victory in the very last metres by a mere 0.523 seconds. The No. 91 car crossed the finish line in fifth place.

In the GTE-Am category, Porsche's customer teams gave strong performances. The squads from Dempsey-Proton Racing and Project 1 spent long stretches in the lead. Only in the last hour was the battle for victory decided. In the final laps, Harry Tincknell successfully fended off attacks from his rivals to cross the finish line first in the No. 77 car. The No. 88 sister car concluded the six-hour race in ninth place. The two 911 RSR fielded by Project 1 took the flag in positions five and 13, with the identical model campaigned by GR Racing achieving sixth place.

Next up on the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC calendar is the big highlight of the year: the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The 90th running of the long-distance classic in France will be contested on 11/12 June. The official pre-test – the only chance for a shakedown on the 13.6-kilometre course – will be held on 5 June. Porsche tackles the classic as the leader of the manufacturers' classification. Kévin Estre and Michael Christensen rank first in the drivers' standings.

Driver's comments on the race

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "It was an extremely difficult race with all conceivable conditions. The state of the track changed constantly. For long periods it was all about keeping the car on the track. Ultimately, I worked my way up the field quite well but it wasn't enough to win. I don't particularly like the word luck, but today we didn't have much of it..."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "Gimmi and I got away well off the line. Unfortunately, I made a mistake while braking on cold tyres. I slid straight ahead and slightly nudged the No. 91 car. At the exit of the corner, three cars were side by side and there was hardly any room. Our two cars touched again. It was definitely not handled well on my part. I want to apologise to my teammates in the sister car. It was my mistake. Unfortunately, we weren't able to earn maximum points for Porsche today."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "Kévin missed the braking point while approaching the first corner, veered too wide and collided with me while merging. Our rear left tyre blew out – game over. It's a shame because we missed out on a lot of points for Porsche today. As the race progressed, the conditions turned crazy at times. We battled with serious aquaplaning because we'd set the tyre pressure lower expecting a dry patch. The rear of my car got twitchy maybe 20 times – on the straight in third gear. That was insane!"

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "Our qualifying was good and we started from pole position but then the incident happened. Such things happen in motor racing. We lost a lap as a result. We tried to fight our way back during the safety car phases, which looked promising at times, but ultimately didn't work out. All in all, it was a race to forget."

Christian Ried (Porsche 911 RSR #77): "What a wild race with interruptions and many incidents. At the start I first had to avoid a Ferrari, then Gimmi's works-911. Once everything had finally sorted itself out, I found a decent rhythm. Sebastian then did a great job in the rain and Harry brought it all safely home. As a team, our strategy worked perfectly. It was anything but easy. I'm delighted with our class win."

Race result

GTE-Pro class

1. Calado/Pier Guidi (GB/I), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 102 laps
2. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 102 laps
3. Fuoco/Molina (I/E), Ferrari 488 GTE #52, 102 laps
4. Tandy/Milner (GB/USA), Corvette C8.R #64, 101 laps
5. Bruni/Lietz (I/A), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 100 laps

GTE-Am class

1. Ried/Priaulx/Tincknell (D/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 99 laps

2. Keating/Chaves/Sörensen (USA/P/DK), Aston Martin #33, 99 laps
3. Dalla Lana/Pittard/Thiim (USA/GB/DK), Aston Martin #98, 99 laps
4. Leutwiler/Cairoli/Pedersen (CH/I/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #46, 99 laps
6. Wainwright/Barker/Pera (GB/GB/I), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 98 laps
9. Poordad/Heylen/Lindsey (USA/B/USA), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 96 laps
13. Iribe/Barnicoat/Millroy (USA/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 93 laps

Full results and standings here.

The qualifying

The Porsche GT Team has continued its impressive streak of pole positions in the FIA World Endurance Championship. In the hunt for top times on the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium, works driver Gianmaria Bruni planted the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR on the first grid spot.

Setting a lap time of 2:14.481 minutes, the Italian, who shares the car with Austria's Richard Lietz, was the fastest GT driver on the 7.004-kilometre racetrack. The No. 92 sister car driven by Kévin Estre (France) and Michael Christensen (Denmark), the winners of the season opener in Sebring, take up the race from position two. For the last two years, the 911 from Weissach has proven unbeatable in the GTE-Pro class qualifying.

"Positions one and two – you can't do better than that," smiles Alexander Stehlig, Director Factory Motorsport FIA WEC. "I'm thrilled that the guys in the No. 91 car have secured pole position. It was an exciting qualifying, with lap times repeatedly cancelled when cars exceeded the track limits. Our No. 91 entry got caught out on the second attempt, so Gianmaria drove another flying lap. That was the one. Both cars on the front grid row: tomorrow's race will definitely be exciting!"

In sunny conditions and spring temperatures of 19 degrees Celsius, conditions were perfect in Belgium's Ardennes region. At the start of the 10-minute qualifying session, both 911 RSR waited in the pits. The aim was to wait for a clear run without being hampered by traffic. This tactic worked for Michael Christensen in the No. 92 car. The Dane immediately planted his Porsche at the top of the timesheets. His brand teammate Bruni had initially crossed the white track demarcation lines. When his fastest lap was cancelled, the Italian had to pull out all stops. In the very last second, Bruni bumped the sister car off first place.

In the GTE-Am category, the gentleman driver Brendan Iribe put in a strong effort. Driving the 911 RSR for the first time on the so-called "Ardennes rollercoaster", the successful American businessman posted the third quickest time in class in the No. 56 Project 1 car. The sister car fielded by the customer squad from Germany's Lower Saxony takes up the race from the fifth grid spot. The two 911 racing cars campaigned by Dempsey-Proton Racing achieved positions six and nine, with the identical model entered by GR Racing starting from P12.

Round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC takes off on Sunday, 7 May at 1.00 pm. The six-hour race is considered a rehearsal for the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The highlight of the season will be contested on 11/12 June on the legendary 13.6-kilometre road course in the west of France.

Driver's comments on the qualifying

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "The car's balance was great. I got a clear run and everything came together. I love the track at Spa and I've always had great fun driving here – especially when everything goes so smoothly. We earned an important point today, but tomorrow the game starts from scratch. Anything can happen in the race. Rain is forecast. Whether the rain is heavy or not, the race over six hours will certainly be exciting."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "That was an eventful session! On my way back to the pits, I was still at the top of the timesheets. I was hampered a bit by traffic, however my lap time was good – but not good enough. The grip on the racetrack improved as time went on. Both 911 RSR start from the first grid row. It doesn't get much better than that before the start of the race."

Qualifying result

GTE-Pro class

1. Bruni/Lietz (I/A), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 2:14.301 minutes
2. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 2:14.481 minutes
3. Tandy/Milner (GB/USA), Corvette C8.R #64, 2:14.606 minutes
4. Calado/Pier Guidi (GB/I), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 2:15.102 minutes
5. Fuoco/Molina (I/E), Ferrari 488 GTE #52, 2:15.443 minutes

GTE-Am class

1. Keating/Chaves/Sörensen (USA/P/DK), Aston Martin #33, 2:17.408 minutes
2. Dalla Lana/Pittard/Thiim (USA/GB/DK), Aston Martin #98, 2:18.912 minutes
3. Iribe/Barnicoat/Millroy (USA/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 2:19.700 minutes
5. Leutwiler/Cairoli/Pedersen (CH/I/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #46, 2:20.937 minutes
6. Ried/Priaulx/Tincknell (D/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 2:21.027 minutes
9. Poordad/Heylen/Lindsey (USA/B/USA), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 2:22.622 minutes
12. Wainwright/Barker/Pera (GB/GB/I), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 2:24.384 minutes

Full results and standings: fiawec.alkamelsystems.com

The preview

Porsche heads to round two of the season leading the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. After

clinching a class win at the season opener in Sebring (USA), the factory squad now aims to follow up with another victory at the six-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps. The latest generation of the Porsche 911 RSR remains unbeaten on the Formula 1 racetrack in Belgium. In the 2019/2020 and 2021 seasons, the 911 dominated the GTE-Pro class on the Ardennes circuit. Porsche is eager to continue this streak this coming weekend.

"After our big win recently in Sebring, where we clinched first and third place, and last year's victory at Spa, our goal is clear: We want to win there again. Our greatest desire this year is to secure the title with the 911 RSR. To do this, we have to earn maximum points this weekend," declares Alexander Stehlig, Director Factory Motorsport FIA WEC. "We started the season well in Sebring, but there's still room for improvement. Most notably, we want to keep working on our pit stops. If we manage this, and everything runs smoothly in the race, we should be able to bring home a one-two result. That would be the perfect rehearsal for the 24 Hours of Le Mans, which is coming up in June."

The Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps lies in the far east of Belgium, not far from the German border. The racetrack, which opened in 1921, measures 7.004 kilometres – the longest permanent circuit on the FIA WEC calendar. Featuring 21 corners and several long straights, the storied racetrack rolls uphill and down dale through dense forest – hence its nickname the "Ardennes rollercoaster". The fast passages like Raidillon/Eau Rouge and Blanchimont are as notorious as the famous La Source hairpin. For the 2022 season, the venue has undergone extensive renovations and expansions. While new gravel beds and grandstands have been installed at several corners, nothing has changed in terms of the length and layout of the circuit.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

Richard Lietz from Austria and Italy's Gianmaria Bruni join forces in the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR, with Kévin Estre and Michael Christensen sharing the sister car. In March, the race drivers from France and Denmark won the season-opening round in Sebring at the wheel of the No. 92 car and currently lead the championship. Porsche heads to round two of the season at the top of the manufacturers' classification.

The customer teams

The accomplished German customer teams Project 1 and Dempsey-Proton Racing each field two Porsche 911 RSR racers at the second WEC round of the season. Matteo Cairoli from Italy competes for Project 1. At Dempsey-Proton, team owner Christian Ried joins forces in the No. 77 car with the two British racing drivers Harry Tincknell and Sebastian Priaulx. The No. 88 sister car is shared by Americans Fred Poordad and Patrick Lindsey with Belgium's Jan Heylen. The British GR Racing outfit relies on the British drivers Michael Wainwright and Ben Barker as well as Riccardo Pera from Italy.

An overview of teams and drivers

GTE-Pro class
Porsche GT Team #91 – Richard Lietz (A) / Gianmaria Bruni (I)
Porsche GT Team #92 – Kévin Estre (F) / Michael Christensen (DK)

GTE-Am class
Team Project 1 #46 – Matteo Cairoli (I) / Mikkel Pedersen (DK) / Nicolas Leutwiler (CH)
Team Project 1 #56 – Brendan Iribe (USA) / Oliver Millroy (GB) / Ben Barnicoat (GB)
Dempsey-Proton Racing #77 – Christian Ried (D) / Harry Tincknell (GB) / Sebastian Priaulx (GB)
GR Racing #86 – Michael Wainwright (GB) / Riccardo Pera (I) / Ben Barker (GB)
Dempsey-Proton Racing #88 – Fred Poordad (USA) / Patrick Lindsey (USA) / Jan Heylen (B)

Drivers' comments before the race

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "After Spa-Francorchamps underwent modifications, there are more gravel traps there again. That makes me curious to see how this will affect the driving style. It looks good on the videos, but we'll only get a real idea in free practice on Thursday. I hope that the characteristics of this legendary track haven't changed. I expect fierce competition from all of the cars in our GTE-Pro class at our first European race of the season."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "Spa has been a regular fixture on the calendar since the FIA WEC was founded – for me, it's an absolute highlight of the season. The track is a lot of fun, especially in the Porsche 911 RSR. We want to harvest maximum points. A lot of the course has been redesigned. I'm excited to see what impressions we'll get during the shakedown on Thursday. Let's see if the newly paved sections make a big difference. In recent years we've had it all at Spa: sunshine, rain and even snow. The weather in the Ardennes always has a few surprises in store."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "In many places where there used to be asphalt run-off zones, there are now new gravel beds. Let's see if we have to take a different line through the famous Eau Rouge. All in all, I'm really looking forward to the upcoming race weekend. The track is unique and challenging, and the grandstands are finally open for the many fans. That creates a great atmosphere. Last year we enjoyed a perfect weekend at Spa: pole position and class win. The Porsche 911 RSR drove beautifully in both qualifying and the race. There's no reason this year should be any different. But we have to keep our wits about us: the competition will be tough."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "We've always done well at Spa-Francorchamps. I hope that'll be the case next weekend, too. Another victory is the clear goal. If we can do that, we'll not only be in a great position in the championship but it also gives us additional motivation ahead of the Le Mans highlight. With this in mind, the upcoming race in Belgium is critical for us. I can hardly wait to get back on the track there."

The schedule (all times CEST)

Thursday, 5 May
15:30 – 17:00: Free practice 1

Friday, 6 May
9:05 – 10:35: Free practice 2
14:00 – 15:00: Free practice 3
18:20 – 18:30: Qualifying GTE

Saturday, 7 May
13:00 – 19:00: Race

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Video

https://newstv.porsche.com/porschevideos/211221_en_3000000.mp4

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Subline: The 911 RSR #56 fielded by Team Project 1

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