Porsche wins the top GT class in Sebring, drama for the LMDh Porsche 963

19/03/2023 The Porsche 963 narrowly missed out on securing its first triumph in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship due to an accident. In the bid for overall victory, Mathieu Jaminet in the No. 6 car and Felipe Nasr in the No. 7 sister car collided with an Acura and retired just 18 minutes before the end of the 12-hour race. The two drivers of the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team escaped unharmed.

The Race

The hybrid prototype shared by Frenchman Jaminet and his teammates Nick Tandy from the UK and Dane Cameron from the USA came third. In the GTD-Pro class, the Pfaff Motorsports customer squad notched up the first class victory for the new Porsche 911 GT3 R.

The 71st edition of the endurance classic in Florida (USA) was packed with thrills and spills. Despite numerous setbacks due to collisions, penalties and minor technical woes, the two Porsche 963 fielded by Porsche Penske Motorsport were running with the frontrunners in the decisive phase. After the twelfth and final full course yellow, the race was given the green light for the final 30-minute sprint to the flag. The two new hybrid prototypes from Weissach were locked in battle with the No. 10 Acura when Jaminet and his rival Filipe Albuquerque (Portugal) collided. Both cars slid out of control onto the grass area. Felipe Nasr was unable to avoid the resulting chaos and, through no fault of his own, hit his brand colleague's Porsche 963. All drivers escaped the accident uninjured.

"First and foremost, I'm relieved that all drivers walked away unscathed. We were so close to claiming our maiden win with the Porsche 963 and our Porsche Penske Motorsport factory squad," concludes Thomas Laudenbach. The Vice President of Porsche Motorsport explains: "We underlined today that we're capable of scoring overall victories in the IMSA series. A Sebring win would have been a great reward for the hard work of the entire team, our partners and our development squad in Weissach. We want to make up for this as quickly as possible. Despite the gripping and tense competition in Florida, we mustn't forget one thing: we have homework to do – on the vehicle's performance and on the operational side of the team. Congratulations to Pfaff Motorsports on winning the GTD-Pro class!"

"I'd like to pay our team a huge compliment. The car covered the long distance with virtually no technical hiccups," said Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. "Like in yesterday's FIA WEC race, we had zero defects in the spec components. Thanks to our relevant suppliers. I'd also like to thank our chassis partner Multimatic. Today, we showed that we can achieve anything with our new Porsche 963 in the IMSA series. We have a good platform with great potential. We're feeling confident about the future because we now know that we can win through our own efforts."

Pfaff Motorsports' Porsche 911 GT3 R wins the GTD-Pro class

The race in the GTD-Pro category was no less exciting than the battle for overall victory at Sebring. Right up until the last safety car phase, the lead changed every half hour. With a flawless team effort, a perfect strategy and strong performances by the drivers, Pfaff Motorsports achieved their first victory with the new Porsche 911 GT3 R. The team's two seasoned drivers Klaus Bachler from Austria and Patrick Pilet from France were supported in the 12-hour race by Belgian works driver Laurens Vanthoor, who had been behind the wheel of the Porsche 963 in the FIA WEC the day prior. The defending champions from Canada secured a class victory after twelve hours with a 2.7-second lead.

In the GTD class, in which professionals share the cockpit with ambitious amateurs, the new GT3 customer team Kelly-Moss with Riley put on an impressive show. Frenchman Julien Andlauer claimed third place in a thrilling finale and celebrated alongside his teammates David Brule and Alec Udell (both USA). The sister car and the two 911 GT3 R cars from Wright Motorsports finished sixth, seventh and eighth. The bright green "Rexy" nine-eleven fielded by AO Racing finished the race 16th in its class.

Round three of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship season takes place on April 15 on the

streets of the Californian port city of Long Beach.

Driver's comments after the race

Mathieu Jaminet (Porsche 963 #6): "I would like to apologise to the entire Porsche motorsport family and the Porsche Penske Motorsport team for the accident. In the close finale on the pitch-black Sebring track, sadly such incidents can happen sometimes. I wanted to go all-out and take advantage of a small gap – unfortunately, that resulted in a big accident. My teammate Felipe had nothing to do with it but he was thrown out of the race, too. It was just a huge stroke of bad luck. And so, a great race had a terrible end. Still, I'd like to focus on the positives: The team did a fantastic job, the car was very strong in the race."

Matt Campbell (Porsche 963 #7): "It's such a shame that this race came to such an end. Both our Porsche 963s could have finished on the podium, but then came this accident. It was a very unfortunate chain of events. Nevertheless, we must say that our team did a great job. We clearly underlined our potential and will try to turn this into our first win at Long beach."

Klaus Bachler (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "I'm truly at a loss for words. Yesterday I lost control of the car due to a small mistake and slid into the track barrier. That was tough for the team and also for me because that's the worst thing that can happen in qualifying. But the team did an incredible job and fixed the car. I was thrilled that we were able to race again today. We went for a strategy that worked out perfectly. The team is really good at such things. We allowed ourselves no margin for error and we won the 12 Hours of Sebring. It's quite the roller coaster of emotions..."

Julien Andlauer (Porsche 911 GT3 R #92): "To be honest, we wouldn't have made any bets on a podium finish today. The competition was super close with 20 mostly very competitive cars in our class – anyone who finished in the top 10 could have won. But we never gave up, even when we were two laps down. That made the difference. Thanks to our great strategy and the right decisions on the pit wall we managed to fight our way back. That's why I'm really happy about this podium finish. The Porsche 911 GT3 R went like a rocket, even if we were a touch short of the BMW. There were some very tough duels, bumper to bumper, nobody backed off. Sometimes we overtook two or three cars at once across the grass. But it was almost always fair. This result is well deserved because everybody worked hard for it. I don't think we could've done any better today."

Race results

GTP class:

1. Derani/Sims/Aitken (BR/UK/UK), Cadillac #31, 322 laps
2. Yelloly/De Philippi/Derani (UK/USA/BR), BMW M Hybrid V8 #25, 322 laps
3. Tandy/Jaminet/Cameron (UK/F/USA), Porsche 963 #6, 315 laps
6. Campbell/Nasr/Christensen (AUS/BR/DK), Porsche 963 #7, 315 laps

GTD-Pro class:
1. Bachler/Pilet/Vanthoor (A/F/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, 303 laps
2. Hawksworth/Barnicoat/Kirkwood (UK/UK/USA), Lexus #14, 303 laps
3. Juncadella/Gounon/Engel (E/F/D), Mercedes-AMG #79, 303 laps

GTD class:
1. Sellers/Snow/Lewis (USA/USA/USA), BMW M4 GT3 #1, 301 laps
2. Gallagher/Foley/Dinan (USA/USA/USA), BMW M4 GT3 #96, 301 laps
3. Brule/Udell/Andlauer (USA/USA/F), Porsche 911 GT3 R #92, 301 laps
6. Hardwick/Heylen/Robichon (USA/B/CDN), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 301 laps
7. Metni/van Berlo/Evans (USA/NL/NZ), Porsche 911 GT3 R #91, 301 laps
8. Brynjolfsson/Hindman/Root (USA/USA/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #77, 301 laps
16. Hyett/Jeannette/Priaulx (USA/USA/UK), Porsche 911 GT3 R #80, 285 laps

The Qualifying

The No. 6 Porsche 963 fielded by the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team takes on the second round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship from position four on the grid. Frenchman Mathieu Jaminet turned a lap time of 1:46,426 minutes in qualifying for the 12 Hours of Sebring. His teammate Matt Campbell, however, had bad luck: In his No. 7 car, the Australian slid into the tyre wall in Turn 1, bringing his hunt for top times in Florida to an abrupt halt. Klaus Bachler experienced the same fate in the No. 7 Porsche 911 GT3 R of Pfaff Motorsports in the qualifying sessions of both GTD classes.

Mathieu Jaminet's lap time in qualifying for the new top GTP class was significantly faster than all other laps achieved by the Porsche 963 in the practice sessions. With temperatures hovering around 20 degrees Celsius and bright sunshine, Campbell was determined to tap the full potential of the new hybrid prototype. However, early in the sixth lap, the rear of the Australian's car hit the barriers on the inside of Turn 1. At the exit of the fast left-hander, his Porsche 963 slid off the track and into the tyre wall. Since Campbell was responsible for the red-flagging of the qualifying, his two fastest lap times were voided. The No. 7 car will tackle the race from seventh on the GTP grid.

"Matt's fine and that's by far the main thing," says Urs Kuratle. The Director of Factory Motorsport LMDh adds: "Now we need to see how badly damaged the rear of the car is. We'll only be able to assess this when the vehicle is brought back to the garage. It's a shame. The drivers are fighting hard with our car here, as we've clearly seen in this case. The gap to our rivals was about the same as in yesterday's FIA WEC qualifying, although the track was a bit faster this morning. I hope we can join the frontrunners in the race."

Best Porsche 911 GT3 R tackles the GTD class from position five

The qualifying sessions for both GTD classes had to be red-flagged after Klaus Bachler's accident. The Austrian also lost control of Pfaff Motorsports' No. 9 car in Turn 1 and crashed into the tyre barrier. Bachler was unhurt in the accident. His Canadian team starts the race from P7 in the GTD-Pro class. In the GTD category, Jan Heylen was the fastest Porsche driver. The Belgian planted the No. 16 entry from Wright Motorsports on grid position four. The other customer cars fielded by Kelly-Moss with Riley, AO Racing and Wright Motorsports head into the second round of the season from further down the field.

The "Super Sebring" weekend continues on Friday, 17 March, with the 1,000-mile race of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. At the season opener, Porsche Penske Motorsport campaigns two Porsche 963, with six 911 RSR fielded by five customer teams. The race kicks off at noon local time (5 pm CET). The 12-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship begins on Saturday, 18 March, at 10:10 am local time (3:10 pm CET).

Qualifying quotes from the drivers

Mathieu Jaminet (Porsche 963 #6): "Fourth place was the best we could do today. I made a minor error on my flying lap, although it didn't make much difference. The car did better in qualifying than in the free practices, and our team did a great job there. We're not yet where we want to be because we're still a bit behind but we're making progress. This was evident in the qualifying session. It's great to see our IMSA and FIA WEC teams working closely together and sharing so much information. It's a shame about Matt's accident."

Matt Campbell (Porsche 963 #7): "That was far from ideal. I made a small mistake in Turn 1 which unfortunately had a big impact. I'm really sorry for the team. The car doesn't seem to be too badly damaged. Our guys will fix it before the start of the race – then we'll attack."

Klaus Bachler (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "I went a little wide in the first corner. The rear of the car became unstable on a bump and I wasn't able to save it. I hit the tyre wall, but not as hard as it looked at first. Unfortunately, our team now has to repair the damages. Luckily we have some time before the start of the race. Tomorrow we want to launch our charge through the field."

Jan Heylen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "The red flags certainly didn't play into our hands but that also prevented others from improving their times. On this track, it takes quite a long time to get the tyres into the ideal temperature window. One or two more laps would've been much better. Still, we have to live with it, especially since I probably wouldn't have achieved the time of the fastest qualifiers anyway. Things are going much better than in Daytona but we still have a lot of work ahead of us. Let's see what we can do in the race."

Qualifying results

GTP class:

1. Derani/Sims/Aitken (BR/UK/UK), Cadillac #31, 1:45.836 minutes
2. Bourdais/van der Zande/Dixon (F/NL/NZ), Cadillac #01, 1:45.923 minutes
3. Taylor/Albuquerque/Deletraz (USA/P/CH), Acura #10, 1:46.100 minutes
4. Tandy/Jaminet/Cameron (UK/F/USA), Porsche 963 #6, 1:46.426 minutes
7. Campbell/Nasr/Christensen (AUS/BR/DK), Porsche 963 #7, 1:46.851 minutes

GTD-Pro class:

1. Garcia/Taylor/Milner (E/USA/USA), Corvette #3, 1:59.315 minutes
2. Hawksworth/Barnicoat/Kirkwood (UK/UK/USA), Lexus #14, 1:59.582 minutes
3. Juncadella/Gounon/Engel (E/F/D), Mercedes-AMG #79, 1:59.635 minutes
7. Bachler/Pilet/Vanthoor (A/F/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, no lap time

GTD class:

1. Marcelli/Formal/Harrison (CDN/CR/USA), Acura #93, 1:59.714 minutes
2. Ellis/Ward/Dontje (D/USA/NL), Mercedes-AMG #57, 1:59.834 minutes
3. Montecalvo/Telitz/Thompson (USA/USA/CDN), Lexus #12, 1:59.944 minutes
4. Hardwick/Heylen/Robichon (USA/B/CDN), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 2:00.022 minutes
14. Metni/van Berlo/Evans (USA/NL/NZ), Porsche 911 GT3 R #91, 2:01.927 minutes
16. Brynjolfsson/Hindman/Root (USA/USA/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #77, 2:02.612 minutes
17. Hyett/Jeannette/Priaulx (USA/USA/UK), Porsche 911 GT3 R #80, 2:02.678 minutes
19. Brule/Udell/Andlauer (USA/USA/F), Porsche 911 GT3 R #92, 2:04.555 minutes

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Video

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Title: Klaus Bachler, Patrick Pilet, Laurens Vanthoor, l-r, IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, Sebring, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Pfaff Motorsports' Klaus Bachler, Patrick Pilet, and Laurens Vanthoor

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