

Porsche wins the turbulent Le Mans rehearsal in Belgium

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15/08/2020 The Porsche GT Team has scored its second win of the season at round six of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. The reigning GTE-Pro world champions Kévin Estre from France and Michael Christensen from Denmark took the flag in first place at the wheel of the No. 92 Porsche 911 RSR at Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium.

The race

In a chaotic race with heavy rain and three safety car phases, the factory squad kept cool at all times. Implementing a perfect tactic and with a strong driving performance, the successful team of the sports car manufacturer from Stuttgart won the race from pole position. Italy's Gianmaria Bruni and his Austrian teammate Richard Lietz achieved fifth place in the sister car with the starting number 91. In

the GTE-Am category, the experienced Dempsey-Proton Racing customer squad finished the race in second place.

Shortly before the start of the rehearsal for the upcoming season highlight in Le Mans, the sky over the Belgian Ardennes opened its floodgates. Heavy rain flooded the racetrack to such an extent that the six-hour race had to start behind the safety car. When the race finally went green, the rain eased off but the works drivers found that their two Porsche 911 RSR offered barely any grip. Only when the track began to dry the two crews could catch up. Another heavy shower in the first half of the race resulted in a second safety car phase. Again, the two GT racers from Weissach lost ground. When the sun reappeared after three hours of racing, the strengths of the new 911 RSR also emerged. Christensen and Estre drove consistently fast stints and their team's clever tactics helped them return to the front. Bruni and Lietz were unable to improve significantly in the close battle between the manufacturer teams.

In the overall standings, the second-placed Porsche factory squad managed to reduce the gap to the top. In the drivers' championship, the defending champions Estre and Christensen advanced to second place.

In the GTE-Am class, the customer team Dempsey-Proton Racing claimed its first podium result of the season. Christian Ried (Germany), the Italian Riccardo Pera and Porsche works driver Matt Campbell (Australia) achieved second place. The young Australian put in a particularly impressive drive against tough competition. Campbell launched a renewed attack in the final phase of the race and mobilised the full potential of the 2017-spec version of the Porsche 911 RSR. At the flag, he was only 2.898-seconds off securing the first win of the season. The two nine-elevens fielded by the Project 1 team finished on positions four and six, with the second 911 RSR run by Dempsey-Proton Racing taking the flag in fifth. Gulf Racing concluded round six of the 2019/2020 FIA WEC season on position ten.

The FIA WEC contests round seven on 19/20 September at Le Mans, France, where the 88th edition of the legendary 24-hour race will be held on the 13.6-kilometre circuit at the Sarthe.

Comments on the race

Pascal Zurlinden (Director Factory Motorsport): "Congratulations to the entire team at the track and to our development squad in Weissach. The Porsche 911 RSR proved extremely competitive in all sessions. In the race, the team's and drivers' wealth of experience paid off once again. The tactics were perfect in difficult conditions, our works drivers pushed the car to the limit at all times and brought them over the finish line unscathed. This win gives us an addition boost for the upcoming 24 Hours of Le Mans in September. We're ready for the big highlight!"

Alexander Stehlig (Head of Operations FIA WEC): "For us, this was a perfect restart after the 172-day enforced break in the WEC. Pole position on Friday, victory on Saturday – it couldn't be better. Spa always throws huge challenges at us. Snow last year, torrential rain this year. We had some difficulties

on the wet track but as soon as it dried up, we were back. Overall, it was extremely thrilling. The fight against Aston Martin and Ferrari was fun. We couldn't have wished for a better dress rehearsal for Le Mans."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "It was a rollercoaster of emotions. With the changing conditions, it became really hard to always make the right decisions. Once again, our team did it perfectly. Only in this way we could manage to drive to victory after a few setbacks on the extremely wet track – simply brilliant!"

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "What a wonderful weekend! We were fast in practice, we claimed pole position and won the race. The team put in a tactically strong performance. The second half of the race was on a dry track. It was precisely in this critical phase that we were back in full force and able to call on the full potential of our Porsche 911 RSR. We've taken an important step forward in the overall standings. At Le Mans, we aim to pick up exactly where we left off and go all-out."

Race result

GTE-Pro class
1. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 135 laps
2. Sorensen/Thiim (DK/DK), Aston Martin Vantage #95, 135 laps
3. Lynn/Martin (GB/B), Aston Martin Vantage #97, 135 laps
4. Calado/Pier Guidi (GB/I), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 135 laps
5. Lietz/Bruni (A/I), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 135 laps
6. Rigon/Molina (I/E), Ferrari 488 GTE #71, 135 laps

GTE-Am class
1. Perrodo/Collard/Nielsen (F/F/DK), Ferrari 488 GTE #83, 134 laps
2. Campbell/Ried/Pera (AUS/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 134 laps
3. Yoluc/Eastwood/Adam (TR/IRL/GB), Aston Martin Vantage #90, 134 laps
4. Perfetti/Hörr/Cairoli (N/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 134 laps
5. Giraudi/Sanchez/Legeret (I/MEX/CH), Porsche 911 RSR, 134 laps
6. Keating/Fraga/Bleekemolen (USA/BR/NL), Porsche 911 RSR #57, 134 laps
10. Wainwright/Barker/Watson (GB/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 134 laps

The qualifying

In qualifying for the six-hour race of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC in Spa-Francorchamps, the Porsche GT Team has secured a solid starting position.

In the hunt for top times in Belgium's Ardennes, Michael Christensen from Denmark and the Frenchman Kévin Estre initially planted the Porsche 911 RSR (#92) on pole position, only to eventually lose it.

According to race officials, Estre had breached regulations by exceeding the track limits during his flying lap. His lap time was voided and the vehicle was relegated to the last position. In the No. 91 sister car, his works driver colleagues Gianmaria Bruni (Italy) and Richard Lietz (Austria) scored position three in the fiercely contested GTE-Pro class. In the GTE-Am category, three Porsche 911 RSR (model year 2017) fielded by the customer teams Dempsey-Proton Racing and Project 1 locked out the first three grid spots. Christian Ried from Germany, factory driver Matt Campbell (Australia) and the Italian Riccardo Pera will take up round six of the 2019/2020 FIA WEC on Saturday from position one.

In sunny conditions in Belgium's Ardennes region, the reigning World Endurance Champions gave an impressive performance in the works-run RSR with the starting number 92. At the beginning of the critical session, Christensen topped the timesheets with a lap time of 2:14.223 minutes. His teammate Estre then promptly undercut this mark by 0.032 seconds. After analysing video footage, the race stewards concluded that all four wheels of the Frenchman's car had veered off the racetrack during his fast lap. With that, the seemingly secure fourth pole position of the season was lost. Bruni and Lietz employed a tactical approach on the 7.004-kilometre rollercoaster circuit. In contrast to most of their rivals, the pair in the number 92 car saved a set of fresh tyres in order to have a strategic advantage for the endurance race on Saturday. The durability of the Michelin tyres is an important factor in the fight for class victory.

The qualifying in the GTE-Am category

In the GTE-Am category, the customer squads clearly demonstrated the strengths of the 2017-spec Porsche 911 RSR. Factory pilot Campbell lapped the "Ardennes rollercoaster" in the No. 77 vehicle in 2:15.300 minutes, and promptly posted the fastest time. Team owner Ried later managed to beat the identical models of the customer team Project 1. The second 911 fielded by Dempsey-Proton Racing will take up the race from P8. The Gulf Racing outfit qualified on tenth.

The six-hour race of the FIA World Endurance Championship in Spa-Francorchamps gets underway on Saturday (15 August) at 1:30 pm (CEST).

Qualifying quotes

Alexander Stehlig (Head of Operations FIA WEC): "It was an almost perfect start after the six-month break due to the coronavirus pandemic. Kévin and Michael posted extremely fast lap times and planted the car on position one – unfortunately their time was cancelled. Allegedly, Kévin left the track in the first corner. We have to analyse this and assess it for ourselves. Gimmi and Richard were strong, as well. We opted for different strategies with our two Porsche 911 RSR to cover all bases. We'll go all-out on Saturday and our aim is to earn as many points as possible. Congratulations to our customer teams who managed to achieve equally impressive results in the qualifying. After such a successful qualifying session, I'm really looking forward to the race."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "Our Porsche 911 RSR was simply fantastic in qualifying! My aim was to pull out all stops in my first flying lap. It may not have been perfect here and there, but the time was really good. Then Kévin pulled it all together in the first lap – but unfortunately, he may have briefly left the track. We're looking ahead and we still have high expectations for the six-hour race."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "My lap was perfect, but now I'm surprised that they say I veered off the track in a corner. Personally, I'm convinced that I drove within the track limits at all times on my fast lap. Our car is great. Despite starting from sixth place, I'm feeling confident that we can still achieve a top result."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "We head into the race from P3 and still have a fresh set of tyres. That's the ace we have up our sleeve for race day. If it stays dry on Saturday, the tyres will play a key role. We hope to get the chance to turn our tactical advantage into success."

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "Our car performed well in qualifying with solid lap times. We'll have to wait and see if our tactics will pay off. Changeable weather is forecast for race day. We hope it stays dry because then we have a fresh set of tyres at our disposal, which could give us a decisive advantage in the close competition. It's a game in which the winner is only known after six hours."

Matt Campbell (Porsche 911 RSR #77): "We worked systematically on the car setup during the three practice sessions: with great success as the qualifying result clearly shows. I managed a clean and really quick lap, Christian then finished the job. We're well prepared for the race and are determined to finally score our first victory of the season. I'm feeling very optimistic."

Qualifying result

GTE-Pro class

1. Lynn/Martin (GB/B), Aston Martin Vantage #97, 2:14.635 minutes
2. Sörensen/Thiim (DK/DK), Aston Martin Vantage #95, + 0.008 seconds
3. Lietz/Bruni (A/I), Porsche 911 RSR #91, + 0.288 seconds
4. Rigon/Molina (I/E), Ferrari 488 GTE #71, + 0.721 seconds
5. Calado/Pier Guidi (GB/I), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, + 0.748 seconds
6. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #92, no time

GTE-Am class

1. Campbell/Ried/Pera (AUS/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 2:16.519 minutes
2. Perfetti/Hörr/Cairoli (N/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, + 0.130 seconds
3. Keating/Fraga/Bleekemolen (USA/BR/NL), Porsche 911 RSR #57, + 0.626 seconds
8. Giraudi/Sanchez/Legeret (I/MEX/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #88, + 2.322 seconds
10. Wainwright/Barker/Watson (GB/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #86, + 2.428 seconds

Full results: http://fiawec.alkamelsystems.com

The preview

The 2019-2020 season of the World Endurance Championship resumes after a break of more than 24 weeks due to the coronavirus crisis. On 15 August, round six of the World Endurance Championship WEC will be held at Spa-Francorchamps. Porsche tackles the six-hour race with two of the latest 911 RSR racers. The defending world champions Michael Christensen (Denmark) and Kévin Estre (France) share the cockpit of the No. 92 car, with their teammates Richard Lietz (Austria) and Gianmaria Bruni (Italy) joining forces in the No. 91 Porsche. The factory squad returns to Belgium with positive memories: last year, Porsche claimed an early world championship title in the GTE-Pro manufacturers' classification. Currently, the title defender ranks second in the GTE-Pro class after five races. The customer teams Dempsey-Proton Racing, Project 1 and Gulf Racing field five of last season's 911 RSR in the GTE-Am class.

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 racetrack, featuring 21 corners, 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.

The Porsche 911 RSR

The current Porsche 911 RSR-19 contests its maiden WEC season. The engineers in Weissach were able to further improve the vehicle after the extremely successful predecessor model, most notably in areas such as drivability, efficiency, ergonomics and serviceability. About 95 per cent of all components are new. The 911 RSR is powered by a 4.2-litre, six-cylinder boxer engine.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

After scoring second place at four of the five rounds so far this season, the reigning WEC champions Michael Christensen and Kévin Estre rank third in the WEC drivers' classification. Richard Lietz and Gianmaria Bruni, the winners of the season-opening round in Great Britain, lie fifth. The latest Porsche 911 RSR underlined its potential at the previous races of the 2019/2020 season with pole positions in Japan, China and Bahrain.

The customer teams

At the WEC restart, Dempsey-Proton Racing fields two Porsche 911 RSR from the 2017 model year. At

the wheel of the No. 77 car is Porsche works driver Matt Campbell (Australia), team owner Christian Ried (Germany) and the Italian Riccardo Pera. Vutthikorn Inthraphuvasak (Thailand), Ricardo Sanchez (Mexico) and Lucas Legeret (Switzerland) share the cockpit of the No. 88 sister car. The German customer team Project 1 also campaigns a pair of 2017-generation 911 RSR. The No. 56 cockpit is shared by Laurents Hörr (Germany), Egidio Perfetti (Norway) and Matteo Cairoli (Italy). Ben Keating (USA), Felipe Fraga (Brazil) and Jeroen Bleekemolen (Netherlands) drive the No. 57 car. Gulf Racing entrusts the No. 86 vehicle to the all-British crew of Michael Wainwright, Ben Barker and Andrew Watson.

The schedule (all times CEST)

Thursday, 13 August

4:25 to 5:55 p.m. – Free practice 1

Friday, 14 August

9:30 to 11:00 a.m. – Free practice 2

2:00 to 3:00 p.m. – Free practice 3

6:00 to 6:20 p.m. – Qualifying GTE-Pro and GTE-Am

Saturday, 15 August

1:30 to 7:30 p.m. – Race

The race on TV and on the Internet

Round six of the FIA WEC will be televised in full length on www.sport1.de and www.motorsport.tv. Eurosport 2 broadcasts the entire race on free TV. On the pay-TV station Sport 1+ the race is aired live from Spa-Francorchamps from 1:00 to 8:00 p.m. Sport 1 shows the final phase live on free TV from 5:15 p.m. For a fee, the FIA WEC app offers live streaming and live timing.

Comments before the race

Pascal Zurlinden (Director Factory Motorsport):"The wait for the next round of the World Endurance Championship is now over, as well. I'd like to pay a big compliment to the WEC organisers on successfully laying the foundations for the restart. In the upcoming races, we still have the best chances to defend our titles. Preparations for the final rehearsal before the 24 Hours of Le Mans went

well. We're aiming to score our second win of the season at Spa-Francorchamps."

Alexander Stehlig (Head of Operations FIA WEC): "We were able to use the compulsory coronavirus-related break to work through many details and we've also completed successful test drives. We've further improved the drivability and the balance of the 911 RSR and honed the team's processes. In the first race after the long break, it's important that we get back to our usual routine quickly. We want to earn as many points as possible in Belgium and we aim to win."

More comments can be found in the press release ("Downloads").

The Sports Car World Endurance Championship WEC

In the Sports Car World Endurance Championship (WEC), which was first contested in 2012, sports prototypes and GT vehicles compete in four classes: LMP1, LMP2, GTE-Pro and GTE-Am. They all compete together in one race but are classified separately. The Porsche factory squad contests the GTE-Pro class as the reigning world manufacturers' champions, while the customer teams Dempsey Proton Racing, Project 1 and Gulf Racing fight for honours in the GTE-Am class.

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