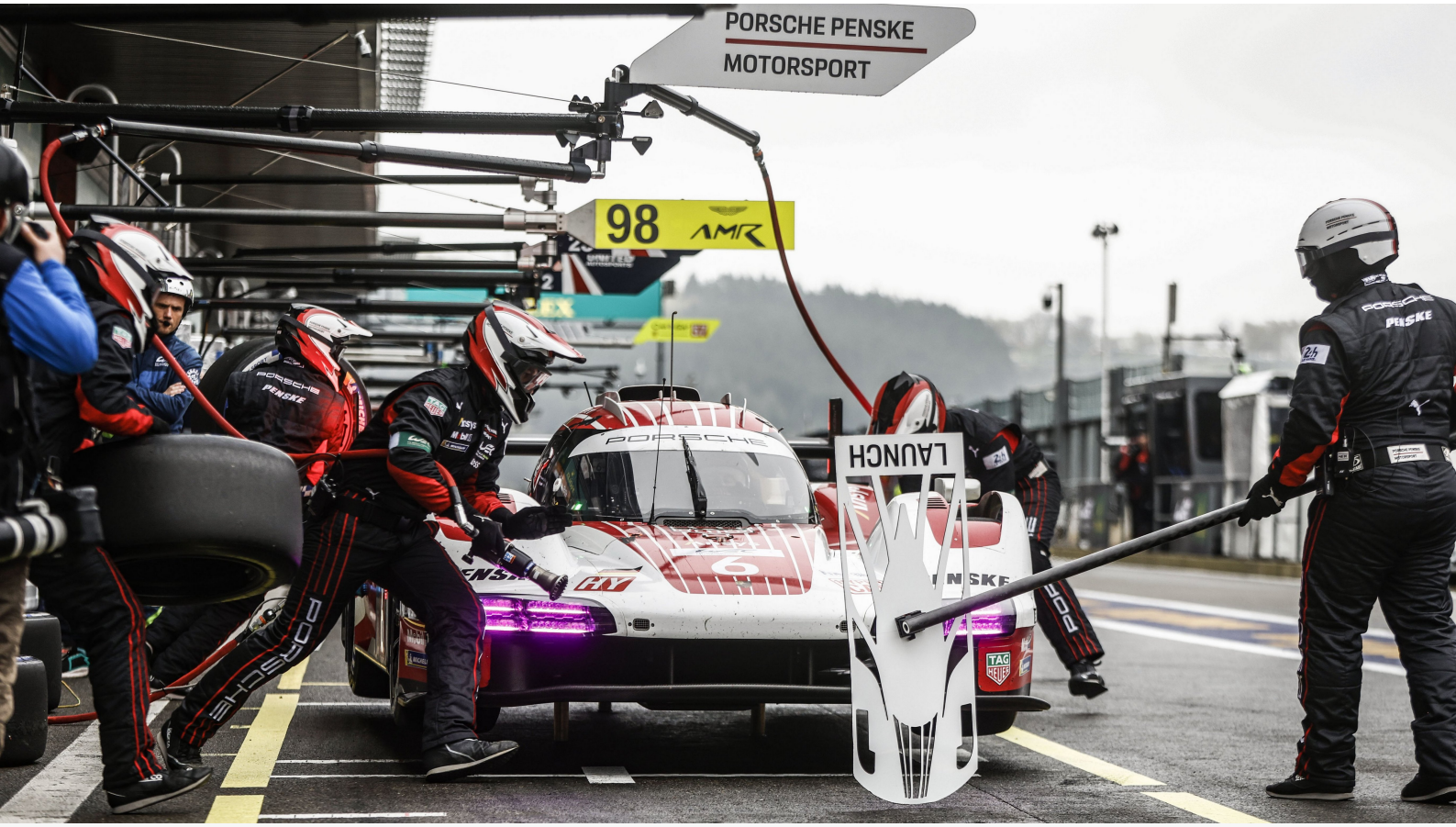

Best Porsche 963 tackles Le Mans final rehearsal from sixth grid spot

06/06/2024 Qualifying, FIA World Endurance Championship WEC, Round 3, Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium)

- Porsche Penske Motorsport qualifies in the midfield in Belgium
- Strong team effort from Hertz Team Jota at its first outing with the 963
- Iron Dames plants Porsche 911 RSR on P2 on the GTE grid
- Final rehearsal for the 24 Hour of Le Mans starts on Saturday at 12:45 pm

The No. 6 Porsche 963 will tackle the six-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps from the sixth grid spot. In qualifying for round three of this year's FIA World Endurance Championship WEC, Frenchman Kévin Estre was the fastest driver at the wheel of a hybrid prototype "Made in Flacht". His fellow countryman Frédéric Makowiecki qualified the sister car fielded by Porsche Penske Motorsport on the fifth grid row. The customer squad Hertz Team Jota gave a convincing performance in the hunt for top times in

Belgium with seventh place.

The Porsche Penske Motorsport works team experienced a disappointing 15-minute qualifying session at the Circuit Spa-Francorchamps. With an air temperature of 17 degrees Celsius and more clouds moving in, almost all teams struggled to get their Michelin tyres into the ideal operating window. As a consequence, there were many spins and an accident involving Brendon Hartley's Toyota, which saw the session red-flagged. In the remaining twelve minutes after the restart, Kévin Estre improved lap by lap at the wheel of his No. 6 car but ultimately had to settle for P6. Frédéric Makowiecki was unable to beat the time of his second flying lap and remained in P10.

“On paper, this result doesn't look convincing. We're still not where we want to be,” states Urs Kuratle. However, the Director of Factory Motorsport LMDh feels positive about the upcoming third round of the season. “The qualifying result doesn't mean a lot for the race. We need to make sure we continue to improve our setup to ensure a steady performance on Saturday. I'm very pleased with the result of our customer squad Hertz Team Jota. The crew competes with its Porsche 963 for the very first time this weekend, so seventh on the grid is a very strong result.”

“We'd hoped to do a little better but our car still lacks pace,” explains Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. “The weather and track conditions were extremely changeable over the first two days. Facing such conditions, trying to find an ideal setup was hard. Until race day, we still need to work on some improvements. Let's see what we can achieve in the six-hour race on Saturday.”

Hertz Team Jota customer squad qualifies in seventh place at its debut

Hertz Team Jota gave a convincing performance in the first qualifying session with Porsche 963 on Friday. Will Stevens from the UK posted the fastest lap time in 2:02.907 minutes, just half a second slower than the works driver Estre in the No. 6 car. “We're very pleased – not only with the qualifying result but also with the entire process this weekend,” beams Dieter Gass, team principal Hertz Team Jota. “We improved from session to session and that's simply great to experience. We're constantly learning and now we're keen to drive a solid race – if possible, without incidents.”

Best Porsche 911 RSR takes on GTE-Am category from position two

In the GTE-Am class qualifying, Sarah Bovy again put in a strong drive at the wheel of Iron Dames' pink Porsche 911 RSR. In a last-ditch attempt, the local star from Belgium put in a blistering lap and planted her No. 85 car on P2. Ryan Hardwick from the USA qualified just one place behind her in an identical model campaigned by Proton Competition. The 911 entries from Dempsey-Proton Racing, GR Racing, Iron Lynx and Project1-AO Racing tackle the race from positions ten, eleven, twelve and 14

respectively.

Round three of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC will be contested over six hours. The last race before the season highlight in Le Mans (10/11 June) gets underway on Saturday, 29 April at 12:45 pm local time.

During the FIA WEC weekend in Belgium, Porsche Penske Motorsport introduced a new partner. The global group Heller, which has its headquarters in Germany's Nürtingen, develops and produces state-of-the-art CNC machine tools and manufacturing systems for machining operations. Heller combines the tradition and experience of a medium-sized family-owned company with the integrated solution-based approach of a global player. The enterprise supports Porsche Penske Motorsport as an official technology partner.

Drivers' comments after the qualifying

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): "It was okay. The track was dry for my first qualifying laps, which wasn't easy. The car was fine but I didn't get it right in every corner. Plus I was missing some important information on our display. All in all, I'm happy to have found a bit of a rhythm. This is important for the race."

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 963 #5): "Overall, that wasn't very impressive. Our car was extremely hard to drive. The handling changed from corner to corner. Under such conditions, it's hard to find enough trust in the car as a driver. We need to take a close look at what's causing this. Hopefully, we can improve in the race."

Will Stevens (Porsche 963 #38): "The start of the first qualifying with Porsche 963 was like jumping in the deep end. And it was really very good considering. I was four to five seconds faster in qualifying than in the previous practice sessions. We hardly know the car and this was the first time we tried to push to the limit. It worked well. This result is a wonderful reward for our team, who are doing an incredible job this weekend. We're continuing to learn and we'll certainly keep improving."

Ryan Hardwick (Porsche 911 RSR #88):"This is my best qualifying result since I started in the FIA WEC. Third on the grid at the first outing on a tricky track like Spa-Francorchamps – that's simply fantastic. I learned more about how to drive here on every lap. Our Porsche 911 RSR is well prepared and I'm looking forward to the race. Spa is now my favourite racetrack!"

Qualifying result

Hypercar class:

1. Conway/Kobayashi/Lopez (UK/J/ARG), Toyota #7, 2:090.812 minutes

2. Fuoco/Molina/Nielsen (I/E/DK), Ferrari #50, 2:00.836 minutes

3. Pier Guidi/Calado/Giovinazzi (I/UK/I), Ferrari #51, 2:00.973 minutes

6. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 2:02.306 minutes

7. Félix da Costa/Stevens/Ye (P/UK/CHN), Porsche 963 #38, 2:02.907 minutes

10. Cameron/Christensen/Makowieki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 2:03.650 minutes

GTE-Am class:

1. Al Harthy/Dinan/Eastwood (OMN/USA/IRL), Aston Martin #25, 2:17.216 minutes

2. Bovy/Gatting/Frey (B/DK/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 2:19.150 minutes

3. Hardwick/Robichon/Heylen (USA/CDN/), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 2:19.481 minutes

10. Ried/Pedersen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 2:21.247 minutes

11. Wainwright/Pera/Barker (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 2:22.469 minutes

12. Schiavoni/Cressoni/Picariello (I/I/B), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 2:23.097 minutes

14. Hyett/Jeannette/Cairoli (USA/USA/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, no lap time

Porsche Penske Motorsport with best-placed LMDh prototype at Spa

- The No. 5 Porsche 963 just three seconds off third place
- Sister car runs second for long stretches thanks to perfect tyre strategy
- Hertz Team Jota as first customer team to field a Porsche 963
- Proton Competition finishes GTE-Am class fourth with the 911 RSR

Porsche Penske Motorsport wrapped up the six-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps in fourth place with the Porsche 963. Michael Christensen, Dane Cameron and Frédéric Makowiecki missed out on claiming a podium result by less than three seconds. This makes the hybrid prototype again the best-placed LMDh-compliant hypercar vehicle at round three of the FIA World Endurance Championship

WEC. The second racing car fielded by the works team had to retire shortly before the first driver change due to an electrical fault. The Hertz Team Jota squad brought the first customer-run Porsche 963 over the finish line in sixth place. In the GTE-Am class, Proton Competition came fourth with the Porsche 911 RSR.

Just 13 days after the success in Portimão, Porsche Penske Motorsport has narrowly missed out on claiming another podium result. Michael Christensen from Denmark, American Dane Cameron and Frédéric Makowiecki from France finished the six-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium in fourth place at the wheel of the Porsche 963 hybrid prototype. Cool asphalt temperatures and tricky conditions as well as multiple incidents on the 7.004-kilometre racetrack defined round three of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. As the first team to run a private LMDh vehicle, Hertz Team Jota concluded the race in the Ardennes in sixth place. For the Porsche customer team, works driver António Félix da Costa from Portugal, William Stevens from the UK and Yifei Ye shared the cockpit. The Chinese racer is the selected driver from Porsche Motorsport Asia-Pacific. In the GTE-Am category, Proton Competition achieved the best result for a Porsche 911 RSR in fourth place with its crew Ryan Hardwick from the USA, Canadian Zacharie Robichon and Harry Tincknell (UK).

“We only lost the podium spot on the very last lap and finished fourth – so that's very disappointing,” concludes Thomas Laudenbach after round three of the season. The Vice President of Porsche Motorsport adds: “The team did a good job. Our strategy was first class and we made the right tyre choice at the start. Still, we have to recognise that because of the current balance of power, things have been out of reach for us so far. We have to shake off today's result and continue working hard on further improvements.”

For the No. 5 Porsche 963, round three started with a handicap: the electric clutch control made work difficult for the first-stint driver Michael Christensen. At the first pit stop, the problem was solved by rebooting the system. The Dane then took up the chase and also benefitted from safety car phases caused by accidents. When he handed the car over to Dane Cameron, he was back in third place. With a good 100 minutes left on the clock, Frédéric Makowiecki as the third driver continued in sixth place. When the Porsche safety car was deployed for the fourth time a few minutes later, this played into the hands of the works-trio: they moved back up to third place. Makowiecki defended this spot until the last lap but had to allow a Ferrari to overtake due to the deteriorating performance of the rear tyres.

The sister car driven by Kévin Estre (France), André Lotterer (Germany) and start driver Laurens Vanthoor had to retire early. Despite cool track temperatures, the Belgian made perfect use of the team's bold tyre choice on the drying track: on slicks, he catapulted from sixth place to second within a few minutes. Shortly before the second pit stop, the No. 6 racer rolled to a stop at the start of the finish straight with an electrical problem on lap 54.

“That was a tough day in Spa,” concludes Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. “Our number 6 car retired due to a technical fault – now we have to fully investigate the cause. We did a good job with our number 5 vehicle and opted for an ideal strategy. However, we simply weren't fast enough. We have to see where we can improve and make further progress. On the

operational side, things ran perfectly."

The Hertz Team Jota squad impressed with its strong performance. Works driver António Félix da Costa managed to overtake three rivals in the first lap and advance to fourth place. Bad luck with the safety car phases at a later stage cost the Porsche customer squad a few positions. Thanks to their steady performance, the Portuguese racer and his teammates Yifei Ye and William Stevens still achieved a remarkable result with sixth place: Hertz Team Jota had only taken over the first privately-run Porsche 963 on Friday of the previous week and was thrown in the deep end, so to speak, at Spa-Francorchamps with the 500 kW (680 PS) hybrid prototype.

Best Porsche 911 RSR finishes GTE-Am category in fourth place

In the GTE-Am category, the 911 RSR fielded by the Porsche customer teams Iron Dames and Proton Competition fought for podium positions over long stretches: the all-female crew Sarah Bovy (Belgium), Rahel Frey (Switzerland) and Michelle Gatting (Denmark) spent stints in the lead, especially early on in the six-hour race. Ultimately, the Iron Dames clinched fifth in their class behind the 911 driven by Ryan Hardwick (USA), Zacharie Robichon (CDN) and Harry Tincknell (UK).

Round four of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC marks the highlight of the season: The 24 Hours of Le Mans will be contested on 10 and 11 June. This year, the traditional event celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Drivers' comments after the race

Dane Cameron (Porsche 963 #5):"After a difficult qualifying, we fought our way back in the race and did a great job as a team all in all. We encountered minor problems during the six-hour race, but we overcame them well. The balance of our car was markedly better today and our pace was noticeably faster. A podium result was within reach but unfortunately, we missed out at the very last moment. Next up is Le Mans. We'll do our absolute best to get even more performance out of our Porsche 963 there."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 963 #6): "As I drove through the last chicane, suddenly the entire electrical system failed. I ran through certain procedures to restart the system but unfortunately that didn't work. We still have to analyse what exactly happened. It's a real shame because our race was going really well up to that point. Our strategy played out perfectly, and the car felt great to drive. We made the right decision to opt for slicks, especially at the start."

António Félix da Costa (Porsche 963 #38): "We took possession of the car just a few days before this race weekend and basically jumped in the deep end. The fact that we could complete the six-hour race under these circumstances without any technical setbacks deserves huge credit. The team did an incredible job. We didn't even push the car to the limit – our priority was to turn as many laps as

possible and collect as much data as we could. Now we'll take a close look at everything, go testing and then head to Le Mans even stronger."

Zacharie Robichon (Porsche 911 RSR #88):"It was an exciting race – as always at Spa. The weather in the Ardennes always plays a major role. At the start, Ryan drove clean stints. Because we were able to get our Porsche's tyres up to temperature faster than some of our rivals, I even managed to take the lead in the GTE-Am class. But on the flip side, we struggled with deteriorating tyres at the end of our stints and lost time again as a result. We made the most out of it. Still, fourth place in motor racing is an extremely painful result."

Race result

Hypercar class:

1. Conway/Kobayashi/Lopez (UK/J/ARG), Toyota #7, 148 laps

2. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZ/J), Toyota #8, 148 laps

3. Pier Guidi/Calado/Giovinazzi (I/UK/I), Ferrari #51, 148 laps

4. Cameron/Christensen/Makowieki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 148 laps

6. Félix da Costa/Stevens/Ye (P/UK/CHN), Porsche 963 #38, 147 laps

DNF Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6

GTE-Am class:

1. Perez Companc/Wadoux/Rovera (ARG/F/I), Ferrari #83, 140 laps

2. Keating/Varrone/Catsburg (USA/ARG/NL), Corvette #33, 140 laps

3. Al Harthy/Dinan/Eastwood (OMN/USA/IRL), Aston Martin #25, 140 laps

4. Hardwick/Robichon/Tincknell (USA/CDN/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 139 laps

5. Bovy/Gatting/Frey (B/DK/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 139 laps

10. Ried/Pedersen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 138 laps

11. Schiavoni/Cressoni/Picariello (I/I/B), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 137 laps

12. Wainwright/Pera/Barker (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 136 laps

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