

Porsche Coanda Esports wins championship title in the virtual Le Mans Series

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15/01/2023 Second place at the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans has handed the Porsche Coanda Esports works team the title in the virtual Le Mans series. Despite several setbacks, Joshua Rogers, Mitchell deJong, Ayhancan Güven and Laurin Heinrich were just 21 seconds off the winner. Their team colleagues in the No. 23 LMP racing car came sixth.

The race

The Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team has won the 2022/2023 virtual Le Mans Series. Works drivers Joshua Rogers (Australia) and Mitchell deJong (USA) secured second place with the former

Porsche Juniors Ayhancan Güven (Turkey) and Laurin Heinrich (Germany) at the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans. Despite two drive-through penalties and time losses due to server connection problems, the quartet crossed the finish line on the digital Circuit des 24 Heures a mere 21.1 seconds behind the victorious LMP2 vehicle fielded by Team Redline. This result was enough for the No. 20 car of the Porsche Coanda factory squad to move to the top of the leaderboard at the fifth and final round on the rFactor 2 simulation platform. Driving the sister car, Mack Bakkum (Netherlands), Dayne Warren (Australia), Morris Schuring (Netherlands) and the new Porsche Junior Bastian Buus (Denmark) were also hampered by unfortunate setbacks during the race. They ultimately crossed the finish line in sixth place.

“The virtual Le Mans Series is one of the most prestigious championships in sim racing – so with this in mind, winning the title is incredible. It shows how hard we’ve worked throughout a season that had a rocky start for us,” states Philip Stamm, team principal at Porsche Coanda Esports Racing. “It’s a shame, of course, to finish a 24-hour race in second with a gap of just 21 seconds behind the winner. Still, we’re at the start of a new year and we hope that there’ll be many more great successes to come.”

The virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans represents the highlight and the finale of the virtual Le Mans Series. A special feature of this championship: seasoned professionals from real-life motorsport share driving duties in the digital racing cars with sim racing experts.

Both Porsche Coanda racing cars started from the first grid row

Already in Friday evening’s qualifying, the Porsche sim racing works team underlined its competitiveness: Joshua Rogers posted a commanding top time almost three-quarters of a second ahead of the second-fastest competitor. Like his teammate Mack Bakkum in the second Porsche Coanda racing car, the Australian made it into the hyperpole session with a top-six result. There, the two clinched a perfect grid spot for the 24-hour race: Rogers set pole position, with Bakkum lining up beside him on the first grid row.

The race got off to a turbulent start on Saturday at 2:00 pm: With an ambitious manoeuvre in the first chicane, current Formula 1 world champion Max Verstappen swept into the lead. First stint driver Laurin Heinrich defended his second place with the No. 20 car, with Porsche Supercup driver Morris Schuring running in fourth place. A little later, Heinrich made a counterattack and reclaimed the lead spot.

After a good 3.5 hours of racing, the sister car suffered an unexpected setback: A technical problem threw Dayne Warren off the server. The No. 23 racing car initially fell back to 23rd place but was later handed a time bonus of 250 seconds. He returned to the top 10 and was back in the same lap as the top group. Further server glitches on the simulation platform in the early evening resulted in the race being interrupted for long periods. The virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans resumed regular operations from 9:30 pm.

The No. 20 entry faced special challenges during the night. Ayhancan Güven came under pressure from

the two Redline cars however he vehemently defended his lead lap after lap. At around 11:30 pm, the Porsche Junior from 2020 and 2021 was handed a drive-through penalty. This relegated Güven back to ninth place. Almost two hours later, the car, now with Laurin Heinrich at the wheel, was back in second place. Due to an 'unsafe release' at the following pit stop, the race director handed the No. 20 car another driver-through penalty. Heinrich rejoined the race in sixth place from where he launched another pursuit.

But the streak of bad luck did not end there. As the sun came up, the two Porsche Coanda racing car, among others, again experienced server problems, which increased the gap to the leaders to over two minutes. However, the competition wasn't immune either: Shortly before 7 am on Sunday morning, the leading car driven by Max Verstappen lost ground and retired 90 minutes later. With a good two hours of racing to go, the No. 20 car had reclaimed second place. The No. 23 entry was running in fourth place, a minute behind. It then received a drive-through penalty for exceeding the track limits and ultimately finished in sixth. Thanks to a spirited charge through the field, especially in the last two hours, Rogers, deJong, Güven and Heinrich halved the gap to the Team Redline's No. 2 car but were unable to close the gap completely. In the end, they crossed the finish line in second place.

Strong drive from Proton Coanda Esports in the GTE class goes unrewarded

Six digital Porsche 911 RSR took on the 24-hour challenge in the GTE category. As the best competitor, the racing car fielded by Project 1 by Dörr Esports took the flag in fourth place after 322 laps. The Hungarian Norbert Kiss and his German teammates Marc Gassner, Moritz Löhner and Leonard Krippner were just one lap behind the class winner. Raoul Hyman (South Africa), Alexander Tauscher (Germany), Bryn Collins (United Kingdom) and the Dutchman Kevin van Dooren secured fourth place with the No. 88 car run by Proton Coanda Esports, despite an accident and a 90-second pit stop for repairs. The 911 RSR campaigned by Oracle Red Bull Racing concluded the virtual 24-hour race tenth in its class. At 2:00 am in the morning, Proton Coanda's second car had to retire with a defect. Until then, Loek Hartog (Netherlands), Jefferson Giassi from Brazil, Paschalis Gkergkis (Greece) and most notably Charlie Collins from the UK gave an impressive performance in the GTE class with blistering lap times.

Comments on the race

Mitchell deJong (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #20):"We're wrapping up the season as the champions but obviously we also wanted to win Le Mans. Still, we had a great race. It went back and forth, I'm thinking mainly of the penalties that were imposed on us but we kept fighting as a team. Ultimately, we managed to slash the gap to 21 seconds – so it was very close. At the end of the day, it was only enough for second place."

Laurin Heinrich (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #20):"It was a very, very long and mentally

demanding race – not least because of the red flag interruptions. A very interesting dynamic unfolded from this, from which some benefited more than others. Such things are sometimes out of your hands. Still, I'm satisfied with this result. We came second and also won the championship. That's worth a lot. We were actually the fastest car on the track today but to win a 24-hour race, you also need luck on your side."

Mack Bakkum (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #23):"Obviously we're disappointed with how things turned out in the end. We lost a lot of time without being able to do anything about it. That's always annoying. Everyone encountered problems, some were affected more than others. I'm really very proud of the team and how we worked together. That's the most important thing at the end of the day. Hopefully, we can do better in the race next year."

Bastian Buus (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #23): "Porsche Coanda Esports put a huge amount of work into this project – more than I actually expected. It was fantastic to be part of this and to get the chance to learn. Looking ahead, I'm certain that I can take what I've learned from this endurance experience into the real world. The result was a bit unfortunate. A couple of situations that were out of our hands stopped us from achieving a better result. All four of us did a great job as drivers. All in all, I think things could have gone better, but they could also have been much worse."

Results

1. Bennett/Drugovich/Lulham/Rosenqvist (UK/BR/S), Team Redline #2, 356 laps
2. DeJong/Güven/Heinrich/Rogers (USA/TR/D/AUS), Porsche Coanda Esports #20, -21.109 seconds
6. Bakkum/Buus/Schuring/Warren (NL/DK/NL/AUS), Porsche Coanda Esports #23, -2:49.418 minutes

Results GTE class

1. Andonovski/Andrews/Jajovski/Smolyar (MKD/AUS/MKD/RAF), R8G Esports #888, Ferrari 488 GTE, 323 laps
4. Gassner/Kiss/Krippner/Löhner (D/H/D/D), Project 1 by Dörr Esports #11, Porsche 911 RSR, 322 laps
5. B. Collins/Hyman/Tauscher/van Dooren (UK/ZA/D/NL), Proton Coanda Esports #88, Porsche 911 RSR, 322 laps
10. Conwright/Jordan/Kasdorp/Stevenson (USA/D/NL/UK), Oracle Red Bull Racing #99, Porsche 911 RSR, 320 laps
11. Li/Li/Lu/Lobato (VRC/VRC/VRC/P), Inspeed Racing #25, Porsche 911 RSR, 319 laps

The preview

The Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team will field two LMP2 racing prototypes at the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans this Saturday. The factory squad is determined to clinch its first overall win at the season highlight of the Le Mans Virtual Series and aims to grab its chances in the fight for the championship title.

Porsche has notched up 19 overall victories at the real 24 Hours of Le Mans. This makes the sports car manufacturer by far the most successful brand at the world's most famous endurance race. This coming weekend, the fledgling Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team (PCERT) works team aims to build on this success story in the digital world. At the first edition of this virtual 24-hour race in 2020, the international squad from Gronau in Germany's Münsterland region clinched first place in the GTE class. Last year, the 911 RSR achieved second place.

PCERT now contests the top LMP2 category for the first time on the rFactor 2 simulation platform with Oreca 07 prototypes. The two top-class cockpit crews have set themselves the ambitious goal of climbing to the top podium step in the overall ranking and have their eye on the championship title in the Le Mans Virtual Series. The endurance highlight takes off on the virtual Circuit des 24 Heures on Saturday (14 January) at 2:00 pm CET.

“Sim racing is another important topic for Porsche Motorsport and we put a lot of emphasis on it,” states Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. “In 2019, we established the Porsche TAG Heuer Esports Supercup. This series has long enjoyed a special status in the scene and has produced some great talent. Last year we joined forces with Coanda Esports to create our own factory squad. This is the first time we pursue overall victory at the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans and we're also determined to have a say in the title decision. Just like in real racing, success depends on meticulous preparation and flawless performances at the highest level. Of course, we also hope we have that little bit of racing luck on our side.”

Sim racing experts share the cockpits with real racing professionals

The virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans represents the highlight and the finale of the Le Mans Virtual Series. A special feature of this championship: seasoned professionals from real-life motorsport share driving duties in the digital racing cars with sim racing experts. The PCERT works drivers Joshua Rogers, Dayne Warren (both Australia), Mitchell deJong (USA) and Mack Bakkum (Netherlands) for instance, receive backing from the two Porsche contract drivers Ayhancan Güven (Turkey) and Laurin Heinrich (Germany) as well as the newly-appointed Porsche Junior Bastian Buus from Denmark and Morris Schuring. In 2022, the Dutchman tackled the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup and the Porsche Carrera Cup Germany.

The grid line-up includes many other well-known names from the motorsport scene, most notably the reigning Formula 1 world champion Max Verstappen (Netherlands), the former Grand Prix driver and

current IndyCar star Romain Grosjean (France), the ex-DTM champion Bruno Spengler (CDN), the three-time world touring car champion Andy Priaulx (UK) and many more.

Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team has championship title chances

Five rounds make up the 2022/2023 season of the virtual Le Mans Series. The season kicked off on 17 September with an eight-hour race in Bahrain and continued with the 4 Hours of Monza on 8 October, the 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps on 5 November and the Sebring 500 on 3 December. After a mediocre start, the Porsche Coanda Esports Racing works team managed to turn the tide in the LMP2 class with a one-two victory at Sebring. After 134 laps, Rogers, Bakkum and Heinrich crossed the finish line first in the No. 23 Oreca 07-LMP2 racing car, 2.785 seconds ahead of the No. 20 sister car driven by deJong, Tommy Østgaard (Norway) and Güven.

Heading to the final round on the digital Circuit des 24 Heures, the No. 20 car fielded by PCERT ranks third with 58 points behind the Team Redline with 78 points. The No. 23 Porsche Coanda car lies fourth with 46 points. With 50 points awarded to the winner of the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans, both vehicles have very real chances to clinch the title.

To increase the chances of claiming the first overall victory in the digital version of the endurance classic and the championship title, Team Principal Philipp Stamm has reorganised the driver line-up: Rogers and Heinrich switch to deJong and Güven in the No. 20 car. Bakkum shares the sister car with Buus and Schuring plus Warren as a new addition. For the first time, the Australian replaces Østgaard as a Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team works driver.

“The one-two result at the 500 Miles of Sebring has given the team a huge boost in motivation. After a short break over the festive season, we launched into preparations early for Le Mans. We’re sure we’ve drawn the right conclusions from the previous races. Our preparations are running to schedule,” said Stamm. “Still, a 24-hour race is always something special. Anything can happen. For this reason, the main thing for us is to find an answer to every scenario.”

Six digital Porsche 911 RSR tackle the GTE class

Similar to the real 24 Hours of Le Mans, the field also includes a virtual version of the GTE class comprising a total of 45 vehicles. The Porsche 911 RSR is the most popular model in this category, with six digital racing cars competing. Proton Coanda Esports campaigns two RSR: The No. 77 car is helmed by Loek Hartog (NL) and Jefferson Giassi (BR) with the sim racers Charlie Collins (UK) and Paschalis Gkergkis (GR). Sharing the No. 88 entry are Raoul Hyman (ZA) and Germany's Alexander Tauscher with Bryn Collins (UK) and Kevin van Dooren (NL).

Project 1 by Dörr Esports competes with drivers Marc Gassner (D) and Norbert Kiss (H) joined by

Germans Moritz Löhner and Leonard Krippner. Inspeed Racing from China is represented by Wenlong Lu, Xiayufei Li, Yanzhe Li and Rafael Lobato from Portugal. Dennis Lind from Denmark and Ayumu Iwasa from Japan compete for the Oracle Red Bull Racing team with Dennis Jordan (D) and Yuri Kasdorp (NL). P1 Sport combines the Danish trio Frederik Schandorff, Oliver Rasmussen and Rasmus Busk with Turkka Häkkinen from Finland.

The schedule (all times CET)

The virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans begins on Saturday, 14 January 2023, at 2:00 pm local time. The joint qualifying for GTE and LMP vehicles starts today (Friday, 13.1.) at 7:10 pm. The 15-minute Hyperpole session gets underway for both vehicle classes at 8:30 pm. A two-hour warm-up begins at 10:00 am on Saturday. The race finish is scheduled for 2:00 pm on Sunday.

How to watch the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans live and at Porsche

Porsche will report on the 24 Hours of Le Mans live from 1:30 pm on Saturday. At the event area of the state-of-the-art PCERT racing centre in Gronau, the eight factory squad drivers take turns in the simulators. Rounding off the programme are interviews with experts and competitors, analyses and background reports, which will be aired until 2:30 pm on Sunday. The event will be streamed on Porsche's Twitch channel. As always, Porsche posts the latest racing information on its Twitter account @PorscheRaces. Live timing is available on the Porsche Motorsport-Hub.

Several social media channels offer a live stream of the virtual Le Mans endurance race on the rFactor 2 simulation platform, for instance, YouTube (www.YouTube.com/traxiongg and www.YouTube.com/user/FIAWEC) and Twitch. The event organiser will also post the latest news on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at @lemansvirtual.

Comments before the race

Joshua Rogers (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #20): "The one-two win at Sebring unified our team even more. Next up is Le Mans. We performed well at the last two outings there. We now want to score the first overall victory for Porsche at this virtual 24-hour race. Our preparations are running superbly: we're doing everything in our power to set the course for the best possible outcome – in terms of strategy and from the drivers' and engineers' point of view."

Dayne Warren (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #23): "I've always dreamed of racing for a brand like Porsche Motorsport one day. This dream is now coming true for the first time at the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans. The goal is to claim a historic first outright win for Porsche at his event. Our preparations are going in the right direction – our real-life pro racers are also becoming increasingly competitive. Let's see what we can achieve this coming weekend."

Bastian Buus (Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team #23): "It's a great feeling to be part of the Porsche Coanda Esports Racing Team. It's a lot of fun seeing how it prepares for the virtual 24-hour Le Mans highlight. The most striking difference between esports and real motor racing is probably the unlimited testing opportunities – we test as much as possible in the lead-up to the event. For me at the moment, it's about catching up with the fast guys. I think I can manage this between now and the start of the race."

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