Wright Motorsports' strong performance goes unrewarded

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28/06/2021 At round five of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Watkins Glen, a late caution phase prevented Wright Motorsports from securing a well-deserved podium spot.

The race

In a final sprint over 37 minutes, the team from the US state of Ohio finished in eighth place, directly behind the car of the Porsche customer team Pfaff Motorsports. After a gripping final phase, Hardpoint EBM finished tenth in the GTD class with its Porsche 911 GT3 R. In the GTLM class, the Porsche 911 RSR fielded by WeatherTech Racing had to retire from the six-hour race after just three laps.

"Watkins Glen has once again shown just how quickly the tide can turn in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship," concludes Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. "Wright Motorsports delivered a very strong performance and took maximum points for the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup after three hours in the lead, but in the final hour, a safety car phase reshuffled everything. Different strategies as well as the unlucky timing of the safety car deployment pushed the competition to the front. For us, it was then a case of damage control and to keep all three 911 GT3 R in the top ten."

In sunny conditions and temperatures of around 30 degrees Celsius, Trent Hindman was the first to take the limelight at the wheel of the No. 16 car. Driving for Wright Motorsports, the American had taken up the race from the second grid spot. He quickly snatched the GTD-class lead and successfully fended off all overtaking attempts during his two stints. Belgium's Jan Heylen also defended the lead spot and handed the car off to works driver Patrick Long about two hours before the end of the race. Due to a different strategy, the American fell back to second place and was on a steady course for a podium finish. However, the fourth and final full-course yellow shattered the podium dream.

Different pit stop tactics resulted in six rival vehicles passing the blue 911 of the Ohio-based team. After the last pit stop service, three Porsche 911 GT3 R launched a final sprint over 37 minutes. At the flag, works driver Laurens Vanthoor beat his brand teammates in Pfaff Motorsports' No. 9 car. The Belgian, who shared driving duties with Porsche's development driver Lars Kern from Germany and the Canadian Zacharie Robichon, ultimately crossed the finish line in seventh place ahead of Long/Heylen/Hindman. Katherine Legge achieved tenth place after a gripping final spurt. For the Watkins Glen race, the British racing driver teamed up with Americans Rob Ferriol and Andrew Davis in

the cockpit of Hardpoint EBM's No. 88 vehicle.

Despite the mediocre result in Watkins Glen, Porsche and its customer teams have defended the lead in the manufacturers' classification of the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup. Like the classics at Daytona, Sebring and the ten-hour event at Road Atlanta, the six-hour Watkins Glen classic counts towards the Cup.

For the Porsche 911 RSR fielded by WeatherTech Racing, the event in the US state of New York was over after just three laps. Starting driver Cooper MacNeil from the USA, who shared the cockpit of the No. 79 Porsche with works drivers Mathieu Jaminet (France) and Matt Campbell (Australia), hit the barriers at Turn 9. The resulting damage caused a fire in the rear of the ca. 515 PS GTLM-class vehicle. Despite the quick response to extinguish the fire in the pit lane, the Sebring class winners were unable to continue their race.

Round six of the 2021 IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship will be contested again in Watkins Glen this coming Friday, 2 July. The second event within just five days on the storied racetrack in the US state of New York runs over 2:40 hours.

Drivers' comments on the race

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "About halfway through the race we couldn't quite match the pace of the frontrunners. So we opted for an alternative strategy. Unfortunately, the safety car was deployed at a very inopportune moment for us. When the field went green again shortly before the finish, we were far behind. I made it up to seventh place – but I couldn't do more."

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "We were in front with a Lexus the whole time, and like our main rival, we chose a tactic that didn't take a caution phase into account. Unfortunately, it turned out very differently. Our plan came to nothing. At the restart, we were behind a big pack of other GT3 cars. It was very tight, but overtaking was really difficult. That's how it goes when a lot of cars are at the same level. We were unlucky and we have to live with that."

Katherine Legge (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "We're a new team and we learned a lot over these six hours at Watkins Glen. We made a few mistakes, and the car didn't have an optimal setup. We'll compete on this track again in a few days. Until then, we have some work ahead of us."

Cooper MacNeil (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "My mistake. I'm so sorry for the team. At the beginning of the weekend, we struggled with the car's twitchy rear end. We changed the setup for the race and suddenly we encountered severe understeer. I hit the barriers on the exit of Turn 9, and that caused the fire. It's my fault. I hope we can get the Porsche 911 RSR ready in time for the next race this coming Friday."

Results

Result GTLM class
1. Garcia/Taylor (E/USA), Chevrolet Corvette #3, 187 laps
2. Edwards/Krohn/Farfus (USA/FIN/BR), BMW M8 GTE #24, 187 laps
3. De Phillippi/Eng/Spengler (USA/A/CDN), BMW M8 GTE #25, 187 laps
DNF. MacNeil/Campbell/Jaminet (USA/AUS/F), Porsche 911 RSR #79, 3 laps

Result GTD class
1. Auberlen/Foley/Read (USA/USA/AUS), BMW M6 GT3 #96, 179 laps
2. Sellers/Snow/Lewis (USA/USA/USA), Lamborghini Huracan GT3 #1, 179 laps
3. Gunn/De Angelis/James (GB/CDN/USA), Aston Martin Vantage #23, 179 laps
7. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern (CDN/B/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, 179 laps
8. Long/Hindman/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 179 laps
10. Ferriol/Legge/Davis (USA/GB/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88, 179 laps

The qualifying

The Porsche customer team Wright Motorsports has secured an excellent starting position in the qualifying for the six-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Watkins Glen. American Trent Hindman planted his No. 16 Porsche 911 GT3 R on the second grid spot of the GTD class. For the young amateur driver, this was the first qualifying session at the wheel of the 911 built to comply with the FIA GT3 regulations. At round five of the season, the identical vehicles fielded by Pfaff Motorsports and Hardpoint EBM take up the GTD class from positions 9 and 13. In the GTLM category, the American Cooper MacNeil qualified WeatherTech Racing's Porsche 911 RSR on position five.

"So far, the weekend has been difficult for us, but we're working on making more progress. I'm convinced that the Porsche 911 RSR will be better sorted for the race," explains Steffen Höllwarth, Head of GTLM Operations. The reason for choosing the amateur driver Cooper MacNeil for the qualifying was tactical. In the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, the drivers who qualified their respective vehicles must be the starting driver in the race. For this reason, MacNeil will contest the first stint on Sunday before making way for works drivers Matt Campbell (Australia) and Mathieu Jaminet (France), who will then attack in the decisive second half of the race. This tactic paid off at Sebring in March and resulted in a sensational class win.

Since the beginning of the 2021 season, the GTD-class qualifying has been divided into two sections. In the first part, amateur drivers compete for grid positions; in the second 15 minutes, professionals fight for points towards the championship. During the Watkins Glen qualifying, the Wright Motorsports' drivers gave impressive performances in both disciplines. First, Trent Hindman planted the No. 16 Porsche 911 GT3 R on the second starting position, then in the second session, works driver Patrick Long (USA) earned 30 championship points for third place. At the wheel of the No. 9 car fielded by Pfaff

Motorsports, Zacharie Robichon achieved the ninth fastest time, with works driver Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium harvesting 25 points for sixth place. Rob Ferriol from the USA and Britain's Katherine Legge qualified the No. 88 entry of Hardpoint EBM on P13 and P12.

Round five of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Watkins Glen gets underway on Sunday, 27 June, at 10:40 am local time (4:40 pm CEST) and runs over six hours.

Qualifying quotes from the drivers

Cooper MacNeil (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "We came testing here in Watkins Glen a few weeks ago. The Porsche 911 RSR ran perfectly during the two days. So we assumed we'd roll the car out of the transport truck and immediately be in full swing. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case at all. We need to do more work on the setup. The team is working hard to make these improvements. Under these circumstances, the qualifying was okay."

Trent Hindman (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "The car was very good in the qualifying. We've made decent progress so far this weekend and we'll definitely have a strong car for the race. Let's see where we'll end up after six hours. The grid position is good. Second place at my very first qualifying in the Porsche 911 GT3 R is pretty impressive. The team is feeling confident."

Zacharie Robichon (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "We had several setbacks during the practice with technical hiccups and an accident. The car was repaired in time for the qualifying, but unfortunately, I made a few mistakes on every lap. It could have gone better. Still, the race is six hours long, so nothing is lost yet. We'll go all-out on Sunday."

Rob Ferriol (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "The qualifying was difficult. The conditions during the session were slightly different than in the morning practice because it was significantly warmer. I did my best under these circumstances. More important than the grid positions is the pace over the whole race distance. I hope that we'll be a little stronger in this respect."

Grid positions GTLM class

1. Garcia/Taylor (E/USA), Chevrolet Corvette #3
2. Tandy/Milner (GB/USA), Chevrolet Corvette #4
3. De Phillippi/Eng/Spengler (USA/A/CDN), BMW M8 GTE #25
5. MacNeil/Campbell/Jaminet (USA/AUS/F), Porsche 911 RSR #79

Grid positions GTD class

1. Kirkwood/Hawksworth/Telitz (USA/GB/USA), Lexus RC F GT3 #14

2. Long/Hindman/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16
3. Conwright/Yount/Plattala (USA/USA/B), Audi R8 LMS GT3 #42
9. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern (CDN/B/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9
13. Ferriol/Legge/Davis (USA/GB/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88

The preview

Porsche's customer teams head to the six-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship at Watkins Glen with high expectations.

In the GTLM division, WeatherTech Racing fields one Porsche 911 RSR. In the GTD category for racing vehicles complying with FIA GT3 regulations, the customer teams Wright Motorsports, Hardpoint EBM and Pfaff Motorsports each field a 911 GT3 R. Like the classics at Daytona, Sebring and Road Atlanta, round five of the North American sports car series counts towards the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup (IMEC). Porsche currently leads the manufacturers' classification in the GTD class of this fiercely competitive endurance championship.

The racetrack with the name Watkins Glen International, often called "The Glen", has a long and illustrious history. The first race was held in 1948 in the dense forest around Seneca Lake after a motorsport-mad law student won the support of the local Chamber of Commerce. The result was a 10.6-kilometre circuit that has been extensively modified, shortened and modernised in recent decades. The current circuit length is 5.472 kilometres. From 1961 to 1980, Watkins Glen hosted Formula One, with the first endurance event for sports cars contested in 1968. Last year, the event was cancelled due to strict quarantine restrictions at that time in the US state of New York.

"The break since the last race was very long because our vehicle class – including WeatherTech Racing's Porsche 911 RSR – didn't compete at Mid-Ohio," explains Steffen Höllwarth, Head of Operations GTLM. "Two races will be held at Watkins Glen within eight days: first the classic over six hours, then a week later, the race over two hours 40 minutes. There are a lot of points to be won. We've prepared for the upcoming challenge during two days of testing and we're feeling well positioned. After our victory at Sebring in March, we're heading to Watkins Glen feeling very confident."

"Our perfected GT3 car has clearly underlined its potential with the one-two result at Sebring. We're very well prepared for the major endurance races in the USA," reports Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. "Our teams have worked systematically in preparing for round three of the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup. With our customer teams, we'd like to score more successes, preferably as early as next week."

The Porsche drivers and customer teams

The works drivers Mathieu Jaminet from France and Matt Campbell from Australia team up with

American amateur driver Cooper MacNeil in the cockpit of WeatherTech Racing's Porsche 911 RSR. At the wheel of their No. 79 car, the trio scored a sensational win at the Sebring 12-hour race against tough opposition from manufacturer teams. Thanks to this impressive achievement, the team travels to the race in Watkins Glen ranking second in the overall standings.

In the GTD class, the American factory pilot Patrick Long (USA) joins forces with his compatriot Trent Hindmann and Belgium's Jan Heylen in the No. 16 cockpit. The 911 GT3 R fielded by Wright Motorsports ranks third in the championship with 874 points. Pfaff Motorsports lies fourth just two points behind. Works driver Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium, the Porsche development driver Lars Kern from Germany and Canadian Zacharie Robichon share driving duties in the No. 9 car decked out in a lumberjack livery. The three won their class at the Sebring classic in March. The two Americans Rob Ferriol and Andrew Davis as well as Katherine Legge from Great Britain crew the No. 88 Porsche 911 GT3 R run by Hardpoint EBM.

Drivers' comments before the race

Mathieu Jaminet (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "My teammate Matt and I are particularly excited because we've never driven at Watkins Glen. A lot of drivers say great things about the circuit and the setting. So I can't wait to experience it all. We have our great Sebring success as motivation and that alone makes us very optimistic. We'd be keen to compete with the frontrunners in the fight against rival manufacturers. A podium spot would be great, the one at the very top would be perfect."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "Watkins Glen is one of my all-time favourite events – not just because of the circuit but also because of the stunning surroundings. At our last race in Mid-Ohio, we struggled a bit and only achieved sixth place in the fierce GTD-class competition. The team has used the break since then to undertake a major test. We're excellently prepared for the six-hour race and our main goal is to win the championship. That means we have to earn a lot of points at the next race."

Jan Heylen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "Porsche leads the overall standings in the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup and our team is in second place. Our goal at the upcoming race in Watkins Glen is to earn maximum points. Wright Motorsports has tested intensively to prepare for the event. That was important because we're facing different conditions at the Watkins Glen six-hour race compared to Daytona and Sebring. It'll be very warm during the race weekend. We have to be ready for this. I'm sure that the team, drivers and car will be in top form."

Katherine Legge (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "I'm very much looking forward to 'The Glen', as the event is often called. For me personally, it's one of the most beautiful circuits in the world – of course, that's probably because I've won there before. The main goal at Watkins Glen is to climb to the top step of the podium again. It'll be hard work, but I think we're picking up a lot of momentum as a team."

Live streaming of the race

The six-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Watkins Glen gets underway on Sunday, 27 June, at 10:40 am local time (4:40 pm CEST). The entire race can be viewed live outside the USA and Canada on www.imsa.com. Live timing is available at scoring.imsa.com.

The schedule (local time, CEST -6 hours)

Friday, 25 June
16:20 – 17:20: Free practice 1

Saturday, 26 June
08:00 – 09:50: Free practice 2
11:50 – 12:30: Qualifying GT

Sunday, 27 June
08:00 – 08:20: Warmup
10:40 – 16:40: Race

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



Holger Eckhardt

Spokesperson Motorsports LMDh, GT, Customer Racing
+49 (0) 170 / 911 4982
holger.eckhardt@porsche.de

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