

Porsche heads to IMSA finale with a healthy points lead

23/09/2024 Porsche has wrapped up the six-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Indianapolis with great success: In the top GTP category, Porsche Penske Motorsport again climbed the podium in third place with the No. 6 Porsche 963. As a result, the works team heads to the final round of the season at Road Atlanta (12 October) with a substantial lead in the manufacturers', drivers' and teams' rankings.

In the two GT classes, the Porsche 911 GT3 R set the benchmark. Laurin Heinrich and Michael Christensen won the GTD Pro category in AO Racing's No. 77 car, with Wright Motorsports' No. 120 entry clinching victory in the amateur class.

The race

After high temperatures and bright sunshine on the two practice days, the weather on race day changed. Rain set in about 90 minutes before the start of the "Battle On The Bricks" and continued for

about three hours. During the first half of the race, the safety car was on track for almost 90 minutes. As a result, the race action was somewhat dampened during that phase. However, the situation in the second half of the six-hour race took a thrilling turn. After the track dried, fans were treated to typical IMSA thrills and spills. Taking centre stage: the four Porsche 963 in the top GTP class and five customer 911 racers in the two GT categories.

With about 90 minutes left on the clock, Englishman Nick Tandy turned heads with an inspired overtaking move that catapulted the No. 6 car to the front. While his teammate Mathieu Jaminet maintained this position for a short time after the final driver change, a different strategy saw him overtaken by two rival BMWs, which relegated last year's winners to third place. The No. 7 sister car put in a brilliant early performance: Felipe Nasr from Brazil promptly charged from seventh to the front of the field in the championship-leading hybrid prototype, only to be handed a drive-through penalty. More misfortune followed: a fault with the power steering saw Nasr, who shared the car with the American Dane Cameron, finish ninth in the GTP class.

“First of all, congratulations to BMW on a well-deserved one-two victory. We know very well from last year how great such a result feels,” explains Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. “Our works team put up a relentless fight. The reward is that we can now head to the big finale with a healthy championship lead. We’ll do everything we can at the ‘Petit Le Mans’ to wrap up this great IMSA season with major trophies. I also take my hat off to our customer teams AO Racing and Wright Motorsports, who won both GT classes with the Porsche 911 GT3 R.”

“It was a tough race for us, but the result in the end was pretty good,” says Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. “Our number 6 continued our podium streak and also made sure that we can travel to the finale in Atlanta with a very nice lead in the manufacturers’ championship. That was our goal – and we achieved it. Our number 7 didn’t have such a great day. Felipe needed his last ounce of strength to bring the car over the finish line. That was hard work. We must now look closely at what went wrong on his car and why. Congratulations to BMW on a well-deserved one-two victory and to our winning customer teams in both GT classes.”

“I have to compliment Felipe. The way he coaxed the number 7 over the finish line without power steering was impressive. We need to take a closer look at the fault,” explains Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. “Everything ran smoothly with the sister car. At the end of the day, we did everything in our power to earn as many points as possible towards the championship without risking too much. Now we’re turning our attention to Road Atlanta, where we’ll fight to scoop the entire GTP class title pool.”

Porsche now holds a 124-point advantage in the manufacturers’ championship. This means that as soon as a Porsche 963 earns points at the Road Atlanta finale, the title is safe. And this is already assured once the line is crossed at the start of the 10-hour race there. In the drivers’ championship, Porsche’s two duos Nasr/Cameron and Jaminet/Tandy are separated by a mere 14 points. At the finale, the two crews will go head-to-head for the drivers’ crown. Considering Porsche sits 164 points ahead of Cadillac, the chances of winning the team trophy are also very high.

The JDC-Miller MotorSports customer team celebrated a top result thanks to its Porsche 963 finishing fourth overall. Proton Competition impressively demonstrated the huge potential of the hybrid car. The Italian works driver Gianmaria Bruni turned the fastest lap of the entire race at the wheel of the No. 5 car in 1:16.229 minutes. The squad finished the 6-hour race in Indianapolis in seventh place.

Victory in the GT classes: AO Racing & Wright Motorsports' Porsche 911 GT3 R

In the GTD Pro category, AO Racing's so-called 'Rexy' 911 GT3 R once again shone. Although the 911 in dinosaur design started the race from the very back of the grid due to a post-qualifying penalty, it took former Porsche Junior Laurin Heinrich only a few minutes to charge through the GTD field to sixth place. With a perfect strategy and pitwork as well as works driver Michael Christensen's formidable lap times, AO Racing continued the chase. Ultimately, Heinrich notched up victory number three of the season for himself and his team. As a result, the German heads into the final as the leader in the GTD Pro class drivers' championship, with Porsche also leading the manufacturers' championship in that class.

Wright Motorsports also enjoyed success in Indianapolis, with the green and yellow 911 of the seasoned customer team winning the GTD class. The amateur driver Adam Adelson from the USA, his compatriot Elliott Skeer and Jan Heylen from Belgium put in a flawless drive under difficult conditions. The identical cars fielded by Kellymoss with Riley, MDK Motorsport and Andretti crossed the finish line at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in eighth, twelfth and 14th respectively.

The eleventh and final round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship will be contested at the Michelin Raceway Road Atlanta on 12 October. The ten-hour 'Petit Le Mans' race has been held since 1988 and is part of the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup alongside the endurance events in Daytona, Sebring, Watkins Glen and Indianapolis.

Drivers' comments after the race

Nick Tandy (Porsche 963 #6): "The fact that we've almost secured the manufacturers' title is a huge success for the entire team. It serves as a well-deserved reward for everyone who has worked hard and non-stop on this project. I'm proud to be a part of it. I would've liked to win today's race. At times it looked like we had a good chance. But in the end, we're very happy with third place and a podium finish."

Dane Cameron (Porsche 963 #7): "We've powered through the season brilliantly so far, dodging any major setbacks. That changed today: it's a shame that we only ended up scoring a few points. Now it comes down to Road Atlanta in terms of the drivers' championship. Let's see what's in store for us in the ten-hour 'Petit Le Mans'."

Alessio Picariello (Porsche 963 #5): "That was an intense race day for me. I only put in a few laps in the practice sessions. My last outing in the Porsche 963 was about six months ago, so I had to relearn a lot of things during the race. We set a great pace but struck a bit of misfortune with our strategy. That hampered us from achieving a better result."

Phil Hanson (Porsche 963 #85): "Things were looking great for us in the early stages of the race, but then we dropped back, initially due to a penalty. What a rollercoaster of a race. A lucky yellow got us back to the front. Fourth place is a solid result. Our pace was strong. However, we repeatedly had to solve some tricky issues throughout the six-hour race. I imagine it was the same for every team."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #77): "I'm immensely proud of our team and my teammate Laurin. That was an outstanding performance. Our 911 GT3 R's setup was perfect, and so was our strategy. We started last and simply did what needed to be done confidently. All in all, it was perfect teamwork."

Adam Adelson (Porsche 911 GT3 R #120): "What a race! We came here with the idea that we wanted to learn as much as possible for our outing with the 911 GT3 R in the Intercontinental GT Challenge race at the beginning of October at this same venue. Now we're class winners – unbelievable! It feels like a fairytale; I can't really believe it yet. I'm in my second year of GT3 racing and my first season in the IMSA series. This is unbelievable. I'm lucky to have the best team and the best drivers by my side."

Race result

GTP class:
1. Krohn/Eng (FIN/A), BMW #24, 219 laps
2. De Phillippi/Yelloly (USA/UK), BMW #25, + 1,647 seconds
3. Tandy/Jaminet (UK/F), Porsche 963 #6, + 2,947 seconds
4. Van der Helm/Westbrook/Hanson (NL/UK/UK), Porsche 963 #85, + 19.176 seconds
7. Bruni/Viscaal/Picariello (I/NL/B), Porsche 963 #5, - 1 lap
9. Cameron/Nasr (USA/BR), Porsche 963 #7, - 7 laps

GTD-Pro class:
1. Heinrich/Christensen (D/DK), Porsche 911 GT3 R #77, 208 laps
2. Tincknell/Rockenfeller (UK/D), Ford #64, + 12.527 seconds
3. Garcia/Sims (E/UK), Corvette #3, + 15.355 seconds

GTD class:
1. Adelson/Skeer/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #120, 207 laps
2. Foley/Gallagher/Walker (USA/USA/USA), BMW #96, + 2.465 seconds
3. Grenier/Koch/Skeen (CDN/USA/USA), Mercedes-AMG #32, + 10.940 seconds
8. Pedersen/van Berlo/Dickinson (USA/NL/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #90, + 29.473 seconds

12. Li/Fjordbach/Leitch (CHN/DK/NZ), Porsche 911 GT3 R #86, - 1 lap
14. Andretti/Chaves/Hargrove (USA/USA/CDN), Porsche 911 GT3 R #43, - 2 laps

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