Porsche scores vital points on the way to a possible title win

16/09/2019 The Porsche GT Team has claimed positions seven and eight at the penultimate round of this year's IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship.

The race at a glance

In an uneventful race without any caution phases, the factory drivers Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) and Earl Bamber (New Zealand) had to grapple with a lack of grip in the No. 912 Porsche 911 RSR, as did their brand colleagues Patrick Pilet (France) and Nick Tandy (Great Britain) in the No. 911 sister car. Heading to the season finale at Road Atlanta (USA), Porsche still holds a convincing lead in the manufacturers' classification. In the GTD class, Porsche has won the Sprint Cup title.

On race day at the Laguna Seca Raceway, the teams and drivers encountered different weather conditions compared to the previous two practice days. The sun barely pierced the thick fog, and the maximum temperature hovered around 20 degrees Celsius. Under these changed conditions, the Porsche 911 RSR lacked grip and thus pace. With a view to the championship, the Porsche GT Team opted for a low-risk strategy. After a flawless performance from the teams and drivers at Laguna Seca, Porsche tackles "Petit Le Mans", the final round of the season, with a 15-point lead in the manufacturers' classification. In the drivers' championship, Bamber/Vanthoor have increased their lead over their brand colleagues Pilet/Tandy to twelve points.

Meanwhile, in the GTD class, Porsche has won the manufacturers' classification of the IMSA Sprint Cup. The two Canadians Zacharie Robichon and Scott Hargrove concluded the race in the No. 9 Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by Pfaff Motorsports on fourth place. With this result, Robichon, who is contesting his first IMSA season, has secured the drivers' title in the Sprint Cup, which consists of the seven shortest GTD races of the year. The race at Laguna Seca marks the final round of this Sprint Cup, with the final ten-hour race at Road Atlanta ("Petit Le Mans") no longer included in the series. Park Place Motorsports with factory drivers Patrick Long (USA) and his compatriot Patrick Lindsey was unable to contest the race due to an accident in qualifying.

Comments on the race

Pascal Zurlinden (Director Factory Motorsport): "The race in the GTLM class was the worst we've experienced with our factory cars this season. For once we weren't competitive and for the first time in twelve months we didn't finish on the podium. Fortunately, this doesn't affect our bid for the championship, as we're heading to the finale at Road Atlanta as the big favourites. We won the Sprint

Cup classification in the GTD class with the brand new Porsche 911 GT3 R. Congratulations to Zacharie Robichon on winning the title and a big thank you to our team at Weissach for developing a great GT3 car."

Steffen Höllwarth (Head of Operations IMSA Championship): "We struggled today to maintain a steady pace over a full stint and we could do little against our competition this time. Because there were no safety car phases in the race, our strategic options were also very limited. Under these conditions, we couldn't do better than seventh and eighth. Luckily, at the end of the day, we got off lightly. Our main rivals in the championship also had problems to deal with. The current situation in the title fight looks good for us as we head to the final round of the season."

Patrick Pilet (Porsche 911 RSR #911): "This simply wasn't our race. We already noticed in practice that it'd be difficult for us in terms of tyre durability. Still, we tried our best in the race. But even with an immaculate performance from us drivers and a flawless job from the pit crew, we simply couldn't do more. Now we're looking ahead. It'll undoubtedly be better for us at the final round at Road Atlanta."

Nick Tandy (Porsche 911 RSR #911): "At Laguna Seca we experienced the exact opposite of the previous race in Virginia, where we brought home a convincingly one-two result. But that's how it goes sometimes in the fiercely contested GTLM class. When one small thing doesn't work, you're very quickly thrown back. That's what happened to us today. I'm not surprised really because Laguna Seca has not been particularly kind to us in the past."

Earl Bamber (Porsche 911 RSR #912): "That was a tough race for us. To be honest, judging from the practice sessions, we'd expected this. Laguna Seca is simply not our favourite racetrack. Despite these disappointing results, we've taken another step towards winning the title. That means much more to us. Laurens and I have even managed to extend our lead. Now I'm very much looking forward to the grand finale at Petit Le Mans."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 RSR #912): "We still hold a clear lead in the championship. That's the most important thing after such a difficult race. We had no real chance today because there was too much wear on the tyres. I don't know if we could have achieved more with a different strategy. It doesn't matter now. We're looking forward to the ten-hour race on the outskirts of Atlanta, which is where Porsche North America is based. We are keen to secure the championship title at our home race."

Zacharie Robichon (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "After a really tough race, here I am with my first title – that's sensational. Our first Sprint Cup race at Mid-Ohio didn't go at all well, but since then we've made huge progress. Our Laguna Seca race is proof of that. We weren't at all familiar with the racetrack, so it was a journey into the unknown. The meticulous work of the team ensured that we could maintain a steady pace and achieve fourth place. That was the most we could do today, and it was enough to win the title for Porsche and for me personally. A dream has come true for me today."

Race result

GTLM class
1. Müller/Hand (D/USA), Ford GT, 114 laps
2. Krohn/Edwards (FIN/USA), BMW M8 GTE, 114 laps
3. Magnussen/Garcia (DK/E), Corvette C7.R, 114 laps

7. Bamber/Vanthoor (NZ/B), Porsche 911 RSR, 113 laps

8. Pilet/Tandy (F/GB), Porsche 911 RSR, 113 laps

GTD class
1. Sellers/Lewis (USA/USA), Lamborghini Huracan GT3, 110 laps
2. MacNeil/Vilander (USA/FIN), Ferrari 488 GT3, 110 laps
3. Potter/Lally (USA/USA), Lamborghini Huracan GT3, 109 laps
4. Robichon/Hargrove (CDN/CDN), Porsche 911 GT3 R, 109 laps

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

Qualifying

The Porsche GT Team has secured a strong starting position in the qualifying session for the penultimate round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. In the hunt for top times at Laguna Seca (USA), Laurens Vanthoor clocked the fourth fastest time at the wheel of the No. 912 Porsche 911 RSR. The Belgian currently leads the drivers' classification with his works driver teammate Earl Bamber (New Zealand). Nick Tandy was plagued by bad luck in the qualifying. The British racer spun in the famous Corkscrew corner, which prevented him from achieving a better result than eighth place.

Tandy, who won last year's race at the Virginia International Raceway with Patrick Pilet (France), wanted to attack in his second lap. While turning into the right-hander at the crest of the Corkscrew, he lost the rear of the No. 911 Porsche 911 RSR. Tandy avoided hitting the barriers, but after the spin, the tyres no longer offered sufficient grip to post fast lap times. Vanthoor gradually got his tyres up to temperature and made his best attempt only in the sixth lap. Putting in a flawless drive in the 911 RSR, which is based on the high-performance Porsche 911 GT3 RS, the Belgian claimed the fourth grid spot.

The GTD class qualifying was red-flagged after an accident involving Patrick Lindsey in the No. 73 Porsche 911 GT3 R. The American, who shares the vehicle fielded by Park Place Motorsports with works driver Patrick Long, was uninjured in the accident. Due to the severity of the damage, the team will not be able to contest the race. Zacharie Robichon (Canada) posted the third quickest lap time in the identical GT3 vehicle. Pilet, as the current leader of the IMSA Sprint Cup, shares the cockpit of the

No. 9 car run by Pfaff Motorsports with his compatriot Scott Hargrove.

Qualifying quotes

Pascal Zurlinden (Director Factory Motorsport): “At first glance, the result doesn't look particularly good, but we're actually okay with it. Our number 912 Porsche got the most out of it. The championship-leading car will head into the race in front of the Corvette and Ford, and that's enormously important on a racetrack where overtaking is very difficult. We'll go all-out right from the start because we should be strong over the distance."

Steffen Höllwarth (Head of Operations IMSA Championship): “It's not the best result, but it's one we can easily live with. Laurens managed to position himself ahead of his toughest rivals in the championship. Unfortunately, Nick was unlucky in the sister car. Everyone is driving at the limit, and at some point all the cars veered off the track. Nick's vehicle spun unfortunately. As a result, it wasn't possible to do better. Still, anything can happen in the race. The durability of the tyres will be the deciding factor. By now, we've always managed this discipline well."

Nick Tandy (Porsche 911 RSR #911): “I attacked in my second flying lap and unfortunately I went too far over the kerbs at the Corkscrew exit. I couldn't prevent the spin. Afterwards I did my very best in renewed attempt but the tyres couldn't manage another fast lap. Our grid position is obviously anything but ideal."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 RSR #912): “We never had the best speed during the individual laps of the session. Our strength, however, is our consistency in the race. With this in mind, fourth place in qualifying is a pretty decent result. We line up on the grid in front of our main rivals in the championship, so we should be pretty pleased about that."

Preview

Championship leader Porsche is eager to continue its impressive streak in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship at the penultimate round of the season. At the upcoming race on the Laguna Seca Raceway, the factory squad face a special challenge with its two Porsche 911 RSR. The tradition-steeped circuit in California is the only racetrack on the calendar where victory has so far evaded Porsche since the factory returned to the North American sports car series in 2014. In the GTD class, Pfaff Motorsports and Park Place Motorsports will each field a Porsche 911 GT3 R.

The Laguna Seca Raceway in the dunes inland from the Monterey coast is 3.601 kilometres long and features eleven corners. The most famous passage is the Corkscrew. This tight, spectacular and almost blind combination of curves after a crest has often been the scene of thrilling overtaking manoeuvres. Per lap, drivers have to cope with a 55-metre elevation change. Tyre wear and strategies were the key factors in the races on this track, which was built in 1957. In 2018, Earl Bamber (New Zealand) and

Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) finished second at Laguna Seca.

The Porsche drivers

Patrick Pilet (France) and Nick Tandy (Great Britain) share the No. 911 Porsche 911 RSR. So far this season, the pair has won the races in Sebring, Watkins Glen and most recently at the Virginia International Raceway. Pilet und Tandy currently rank second in the drivers' classification. Their works driver colleagues in the No. 912 sister car, Earl Bamber (New Zealand) and Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium), lead the class with an eleven-point advantage after victories at Long Beach, Mid-Ohio and Bowmanville, Canada.

In the GTD class, a championship decision will be made at Laguna Seca. The upcoming race marks the final round of the Sprint Cup category. Heading to the decider round in California, Porsche ranks first in the manufacturers' classification, with the Canadian Zacharie Robichon leading the drivers' category. Driving for Pfaff Motorsports, Robichon shares the No. 9 Porsche 911 GT3 R with his compatriot Scott Hargrove. The cockpit of the identical 500+hp GT3 racer from Weissach campaigned by Park Place Motorsports (No. 73) is shared by works driver Patrick Long (USA) with the American Patrick Lindsey.

The Porsche vehicles

The Porsche 911 RSR, which is based on the high-performance 911 GT3 RS* road-going sports car, has undergone further optimisation primarily in the suspension setup for its third racing season in North America. Depending on the size of the restrictor, the engine, which is positioned in front of the rear axle, puts out around 375 kW (510 hp). The large rear diffuser combined with a top-mounted rear wing provides aerodynamic efficiency and significant downforce.

The 911 GT3 R fielded by Porsche customer teams was newly developed for the 2019 season and is also based on the road-legal 911 GT3 RS*. Improvements in the areas of aerodynamics and kinematics were systematically implemented from the insights garnered from the many race outings of its predecessor. The six-cylinder engine in the rear of the GT3 racing vehicle produces over 368 kW (500 hp).

Comments before the race

Pascal Zurlinden (Director Factory Motorsport): "We're heading to Laguna Seca with an extra dose of motivation. The Californian racetrack is the only one on the calendar where we haven't yet won with the Porsche 911 RSR. That should change next weekend. Our job will be anything but easy, but we're more than happy to take on this challenge."

Steffen Höllwarth (Head of Operations IMSA Championship): "There are a number of factors that are

decisive for a successful outing at Laguna Seca: the track has several long, semi-fast turns. The setup for these passages has to be perfect, because even a slight understeer can lead to a significant loss of time. The track surface is really rough and it's often covered with sand from the surrounding dunes. This puts the tyres under enormous stress. It's important to drive a consistently fast pace over the entire stint. And last but not least, tactics play a critical role. There's a lot of leeway for different strategies in this race. It's important to correctly anticipate the safety car phases and respond astutely."

Patrick Pilet (Porsche 911 RSR #911): "Laguna Seca is one of my all-time favourite racetracks in the USA. Set against the picturesque landscape of the Pacific, the racetrack has its challenges. Tyre wear is a determining factor in the race. We've often been strong on the Californian racetrack but we've never won there. We'd like to change that next weekend. If our car wins, the situation in the drivers' championship will get really exciting."

Nick Tandy (Porsche 911 RSR #911): "We're heading onto the finish straight of the championship. Laguna Seca is the penultimate race on the calendar. As far as the rankings are concerned, our goal is to score as many points as possible and not risk too much. If we can achieve solid results at the two remaining races or even bring home more victories, then Porsche will be virtually unbeatable in the championship."

Earl Bamber (Porsche 911 RSR #912): "I'm really looking forward to racing on this fantastic circuit in California. We were strong there last year and scored second. It would be wonderful if we could secure another podium place this year. It would help Porsche to take another important step towards the championship. Plus, it would put Laurens and me in an even better position in the fight for the drivers' title."

This is the IMSA SportsCar Championship

The IMSA SportsCar Championship is a sports car race series that has been contested in the USA and Canada since 2014. The series originated from the merger of the American Le Mans Series and the Grand-Am Series. Sports prototypes and sports cars start in four different classes: GTLM (GT Le Mans), GTD (GT Daytona), Dpi (Daytona Prototype international) and LMP2 (Le Mans Prototype 2). The Porsche 911 RSR runs in the GTLM class, and the Porsche 911 GT3 R contests the GTD class.

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart