Porsche achieves solid grid positions for the finale in Bahrain

01/11/2024 The best Porsche 963 will take on the 8-hour race of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC from fourth place. In the Hyperpole session on the Bahrain International Circuit, Neel Jani planted the hybrid prototype fielded by the Proton Competition customer team on the second row of the grid. Porsche Penske Motorsport's two identical works cars will start the season finale from positions six and seven. In the LMGT3 class, the new Manthey PureRxcing champions claimed fifth place on the grid with the Porsche 911 GT3 R.

The qualifying and the subsequent Hyperpole sessions for the ten fastest vehicles were contested at sunset in Bahrain. After the sweltering heat on Friday, temperatures dropped to a pleasant 28 degrees Celsius. In the first twelve-minute session on the Formula 1 circuit near the capital Manama, Matt Campbell (No. 5) and Kévin Estre in the No. 6 car spent the first three laps getting their Michelin tyres into the ideal operating temperature before heading out to hunt for top times. The two works drivers from Australia and France wrapped up the qualifying session in seventh and ninth place – good enough to advance into the decisive Hyperpole.

However, in the following shootout of the ten fastest cars, the two works vehicles were slightly off the lap-time pace of the fastest. Estre qualified the car of the world championship leader in position six, with Campbell lining up directly behind in the sister car.

“Our grid positions aren’t ideal but it’s no big deal when it comes to the race,” says Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. “We’ll be driving from daytime into the night in the long eight-hour race and we’re certain that the cooler conditions towards the end will work in our favour. Sure, some of our rivals feel the same way but I'm confident we’ll have an advantage in that regard. It’ll all become clear on Saturday. Congratulations to Proton Competition on their strong performance. We need to see what they did better than the works team in qualifying and the Hyperpole.”

“The gaps to the leaders were a little bigger than expected. We now need to find out why,” explains Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. “Matt and Kévin did a good job, but the car balance wasn’t ideal. Tyre wear will be the most critical factor in the race. We’re well prepared and have ticked off all our tasks during practice.”

The Proton Competition customer team enjoyed a successful qualifying day: Neel Jani planted the German team’s No. 99 car on the fourth grid spot. With this result, the Swiss racer, overall winner of Le Mans in 2016 at the wheel of the Porsche 919 Hybrid, was the fastest Porsche 963 driver on Friday. The two cars fielded by Hertz Team Jota will tackle the season finale from positions eight and eleven.

Manthey’s Porsche 911 GT3 R start from positions five and 14

In the LMGT3 class, the best Porsche 911 GT3 R starts from fifth place. After clinching the championship crown at the last race in Fuji (Japan) with Austrian Klaus Bachler and German Joel Sturm, UK driver Alex Malykhin turned an impressive lap at the wheel of Manthey’s ca. 416 kW (565 PS) car. In the identical sister car, Yasser Shahin from Australia missed out on advancing into the Hyperpole. The Le Mans class winners in the No. 91 car will head into the final race of the year from P14 in the LMGT3.

The FIA WEC 8-hour race on the Formula 1 circuit track in Bahrain gets underway on Saturday, 1 November at 2 pm local time (12:00 pm CET). In the eight-hour race, the normal points are multiplied by a factor of 1.5. A win in Bahrain is worth 38 points instead of the usual 25.

TV / Stream

The Eurosport Group's channels will broadcast almost all of the FIA WEC season finale live. The German free-TV channel Sport1 will televise the race from 3 pm to 5 pm (CET). The German sports channel will air the entire race on its website until the flag at 20:00 hrs CET. The fee-based FIA WEC app offers live timing and a live stream. The Sport1 channel and the pay-TV provider Sport1+ offer an hour of highlights from Bahrain over the following week.

Drivers quotes from qualifying

Matt Campbell (Porsche 963 #5): "We made it into the Hyperpole with both cars. Our pace was OK – but that was about it. We couldn't quite match the pace of the frontrunners. Conditions were tough. It felt completely different to the previous day. We've now secured solid starting positions and a long race ahead of us."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): "The battle for a spot in the Hyperpole was extremely close. We ultimately made it with ninth place. In the final shootout, I changed the car slightly to better suit the track conditions using the adjustment options on the steering wheel. That worked quite well, and we qualified sixth. Our starting position for the race is okay, although we were quite far off pole position. For an eight-hour race, the pace over a single lap isn't so critical."

Neel Jani (Porsche 963 #99): "This was my first time qualifying this year. I was completely unfamiliar with attempting a flying lap on fresh tyres and low fuel. You never practice such things in a test. Based on these conditions, I am extremely happy. Good shot: direct hit. The team did a great job in terms of preparation and setup. Bahrain is always special: the grip on a set of tyres develops very quickly and disappears just as quickly. Everything has to come together perfectly. To be so far up the grid as a private team is a strong statement."

Norman Nato (Porsche 963 #12): "Overall we had a good qualifying session. We were right in the mix and it's always good to get through to Hyperpole - that's been really tough this season and I think we were the fastest Porsche. We finished Hyperpole P8 but to be honest I thought we could have done more and finished higher - we've been struggling a little this season to really maximise on our performance in Hyperpole. That said, we're in a good position to fight for the race so it's all to play for tomorrow."

Oliver Rasmussen (Porsche 963 #38): "That was a really exciting qualifying session - it's cool to qualify at night at this track. The car felt good and I gave it everything I could, it's just a shame I wasn't able to put it all together and get into Hyperpole. I really enjoyed the experience though."

Alex Malykhin (Porsche 911 GT3 R #92):"I had such great fun. When I landed in fifth place with my flying lap, my engineer told me over the radio that maybe a little more was possible. So I pulled out all the stops again, but in the end, the lap time was the same. I'm happy, the position is good. I expect we'll have a fast and consistent race."

Yasser Shahin (Porsche 911 GT3 R #91): "I reckon that was a fantastic qualifying. We made significant progress between practice and qualifying – both in terms of setting up the car and my performance. That was a nice surprise. I was just unlucky on my fastest lap because I veered too far to the outside in the penultimate corner and my time was voided for exceeding the track limits. Had that not happened, we would definitely have made it into the Hyperpole. I'm now feeling optimistic and looking forward to the race."

Qualifying result

Hypercar class:
1. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZL/J), Toyota #8, 1:46.714 minutes
2. Conway/Kobayashi/de Vries (UK/J/NL), Toyota #7, 1:47.037 minutes
3. Pier Guidi/Calado/Giovinazzi /I/UK/I), Ferrari #51, 1:47.080 minutes
4. Andlauer/Jani/Tincknell (F/CH/UK), Porsche 963 #99, 1:47.234 minutes
6. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 1:47.542 minutes
7. Campbell/Christensen/Makowiecki (AUS/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 1:47.630 minutes
8. Ilott/Stevens/Nato (UK/UK/F), Porsche 963 #12, 1:47.950 minutes
11. Hanson/Button/Rasmussen (UK/UK/DK), Porsche 963 #38, 1:48.263 minutes

LMGT3 class:
1. Caygill/Puno/Sato (UK/CHL/J), McLaren #95, 2:02.201 minutes
2. Cottingham/Costa/Saucy (UK/BR/CH), McLaren #59, 2:02.203 minutes
3. Heriau/Mann/Rovera (F/USA/I), Ferrari #55, 2:02.367 minutes
5. Bachler/Malykhin/Sturm (A/UK/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #92, 2:03.642 minutes
14. Lietz/Shahin/Schuring (A/AUS/NL), Porsche 911 GT3 R #91, 2:03.975 minutes

Full results fiawec.alkamelsystems.com

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