

WEC: Porsche 911 RSR finishes second in Austin

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24/02/2020 After a fiercely-contested race at the Sports Car World Endurance Championship WEC in the USA, Porsche celebrated its fourth podium result of the season. The reigning champions Kévin Estre and Michael Christensen concluded the six-hour race in Austin on second place in the GTE-Pro class.

The race

At the wheel of their Porsche 911 RSR, which is based on the high-performance 911 GT3 RS road-legal sports car, Kévin Estre (France) and Michael Christensen (Denmark) were just 4.210 seconds off claiming victory after 173 laps without a single yellow phase. Their teammates Gianmaria Bruni (Italy) and Richard Lietz (Austria), however, were unlucky. A technical problem threw the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR three places down the field, with the pair ultimately taking the flag in seventh place in the GTE-Pro

class. In the manufacturers' classification, Porsche retains second place. In the GTE-Am class, Matteo Cairoli (Italy), Egidio Perfetti (Norway) and Germany's Laurents Hörr clinched third place in the 2017-spec Porche 911 RSR fielded by the Project 1 squad.

Round five of the WEC in Austin was characterised by different tyre strategies and many duels. Under cloudy skies and in temperatures of around 20 degrees Celsius, spectators were treated to a six-hour sprint event without a single safety car phase on the Circuit of the Americas (COTA). Taking up the race from the second grid spot, Estre and Christensen put in a spirited and flawless drive and were rewarded with second place. However, the race for the Silverstone winners Bruni and Lietz proved disappointing. While running in fourth place, Bruni suddenly found he could not change gears and rolled to the edge of the track. After resetting the electrical system, the gear shifting worked again. Still, to be on the safe side, the team replaced the battery at the next pit stop. The lost time relegated the Porsche 911 RSR back to seventh place in the GTE-Pro class.

Comments on the race

Alexander Stehlig (Head of Operations FIA WEC): "I have mixed feelings about this round. The number 92 car had a very good race, which resulted in a commendable second place. Unfortunately we experienced an electrical problem with our number 91 Porsche 911 RSR. The car stood at the side of the track and we had to change the battery. That cost us several positions and consequently many championship points."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "In terms of tyre choice, we chose a different strategy than most of our competitors today. We raced on used slicks for most of the time while our rivals ran new tyres and vice versa. That's why we were sometimes ahead and sometimes behind. But we didn't let that faze us and we simply focussed on the job at hand. Unfortunately, it wasn't quite enough to win and we were only four seconds off, but second place yields us important points for the championship."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "We got the best out of the car. The team did a flawless job and we drove a steady race. I hope we'll be at the top of the podium again next time."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "Unfortunately, technology threw a spanner in the works today. It's a real shame, especially so close to the end of the race. Still, the new 911 RSR is in its maiden season. We had the speed and the strategy to reach the podium today. We'll do our utmost to be up the front again at the next race."

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "The car ran well right from the start. Our rivals were able to pull clear a little on the straights, but we caught up on the narrow, technically demanding passages. The balance of our 911 RSR was excellent. The tyres still looked great after a double stint, and our strategy was perfect. Unfortunately we were hampered by the electrics. But Kevin and Michael's good result demonstrate that the car has a lot of potential."

Egidio Perfetti (Porsche 911 RSR #56): "Basically the race went really well. We definitely could have implemented a different strategy to finish even further up the field, but third place with our new driver line-up is very good and I'm happy with it."

Race result

GTE-Pro class
1. Thiim/Sörensen (DK/DK), Aston Martin Vantage, 173 laps
2. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR, 172 laps
3. Calado/Pier Guidi (GB/I), Ferrari 488 GTE Evo, 172 laps
7. Lietz/Bruni (A/I), Porsche 911 RSR, 170 laps

GTE-Am class
1. Yoluc/Eastwood/Adam (TR/IRL/GB), Aston Martin Vantage, 170 laps
2. Turner/Dalla Lana/Gunn (GB/CDN/GB), Aston Martin Vantage, 170 laps
3. Perfetti/Hörr/Cairoli (N/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR, 170 laps
5. Campbell/Ried/Pera (AUS/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR, 169 laps
6. Wainwright/Barker/Watson (GB/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR, 169 laps
9. Preining/de Leener/Curtis (A/B/USA), Porsche 911 RSR, 168 laps
11. Keating/Fraga/Bleekemolen (USA/BRA/NL), Porsche 911 RSR, laps

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

The qualifying

The reigning world sports car champions Michael Christensen and Kévin Estre secured position two in qualifying for the fifth round of the Sports Car World Endurance Championship WEC on the Circuit of the Americas. The two were only 0.219 seconds shy of pole position in the new Porsche 911 RSR on the 5.513-kilometre Grand Prix circuit. In the No. 91 sister car, Gianmaria Bruni from Italy and the Austrian Richard Lietz concluded the qualifying on fifth place and take up Sunday's race from the third grid row. In the GTE-Am class, the driver trio Matteo Cairoli (Italy), Le Mans class winner Egidio Perfetti (Norway) and Germany's Laurents Hörr clinched pole position in the 2017-spec Porsche 911 RSR fielded by the Project 1 customer squad.

During the 20-minute qualifying session held in the early evening, the Porsche GT Team drivers were constantly hampered on their flying laps by heavy traffic and overtaking manoeuvres. Bruni and Christensen took up the hunt for top times under partly cloudy skies and in an outside temperature of 16 degrees Celsius. Halfway through the session, they handed the car to their teammates, Lietz and Estre, in positions two and five. The Frenchman managed to improve the average time, however heavy traffic prevented Lietz from clocking a better time in the final phase. Christensen and Estre take up the six-hour race at midday on Sunday from position two in the GTE-Pro class. Their colleagues Bruni and

Lietz head into round five from P5.

Qualifying quotes

Alexander Stehlig (Head of Operations FIA WEC): "We could have done better today, but nevertheless we're satisfied with positions two and five. We tackle the six-hour race feeling confident because the cars ran well during free practice, the long runs and in qualifying. Congratulations to our Project 1 customer team for posting pole position in the GTE-Am class."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "Neither Michael nor I managed to turn a perfect lap, so we're satisfied with second place. It's important to start from the front grid row. We have to try to stay at the front and go for the lead. The car performed really well during both the free practice and the long runs."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "We couldn't do any better today. As expected, Aston Martin was very strong in qualifying. Our cars ran very well and we were very close to the polesitter. For this reason I'm feeling really optimistic for the race."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "The new Porsche 911 RSR ran beautifully and a front row spot would have been possible. Unfortunately, Richard encountered a lot of traffic and had to overtake twice, which cost him time unfortunately. Still, it's great that he still managed to claim fifth place for us."

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "It was a long day today with two practice sessions and the evening qualifying. We managed to improve our car from session to session. Unfortunately I had a lot traffic, but that's what happens when you're out on the track with different classes. We're taking up the race from the second grid row. A lot can happen over six hours."

Matteo Cairoli (Porsche 911 RSR #56): "It's fantastic to be on pole here. However, my lap wasn't totally perfect. I made a mistake in the last corner and lost some time. Luckily, Egidio Perfetti made up for it. The setup and the balance of our Porsche 911 RSR was basically very good today."

Qualifying result

GTE-Pro class

1. Thiim/Sörensen (DK/DK), Aston Martin Vantage, 2:00.733 minutes
2. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:00.952 minutes
3. Martin/Lynn (B/GB), Aston Martin Vantage, 2:01.029 minutes
5. Lietz/Bruni (A/I), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:01.049 minutes

GTE-Am class

1. Perfetti/Hörr/Cairoli (N/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:02.784 minutes

2. Turner/Dalla Lana/Gunn (GB/CDN/GB), Aston Martin Vantage, 2:02.830 minutes
3. Yoluc/Eastwood/Adam (TR/IRL/GB), Aston Martin Vantage, 2:02.909 minutes
4. Campbell/Ried/Pera (AUS/D/I), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:03.110 minutes
6. Keating/Fraga/Bleekemolen (USA/BRA/NL), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:03.450 minutes
8. Preining/de Leener/Curtis (A/B/USA), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:03.682 minutes
11. Wainwright/Barker/Watson (GB/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR, 2:04.296 minutes

The preview

At round five of the Sports Car World Endurance Championship WEC at the Circuit of the Americas (COTA) in Austin on 23 February, Porsche aims to clinch its first U.S. victory with the new 911 RSR.

After a successful start to the 2019/2020 season with a one-two at Silverstone (Great Britain) as well as podium spots in Fuji (Japan) and Shanghai (China), fifth and sixth places followed at the Sakhir (Bahrain) race in December prior to the winter break.

Moreover, the Porsche GT Team had posted pole position three times. After four rounds, the works team currently ranks second in the manufacturers' classification with the two latest-generation Porsche 911 RSR racers. In the drivers' category, the two GT racers sit third and fifth. Three customer teams field another five 2017-spec Porsche 911 RSR in the GTE-Am class at the six-hour race in Austin, Texas.

After the cancellation of the race in São Paulo (Brazil), the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC returns to Austin this season. The Circuit of the Americas already hosted the World Sports Car Championship between 2013 and 2017. The 5.513-kilometre Grand Prix circuit with its 20 turns and at times significant changes in elevation is considered a very demanding racetrack. Since its completion in 2012, the Circuit of the Americas to the south of Austin is a regular venue for Formula 1 races in the USA. On account of the many bumpy sections, parts of the track surface were removed and replaced at the beginning of 2020.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

Gianmaria Bruni from Italy and Austria's Richard Lietz helm the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR. The duo returns to Austin with fond memories. Lietz won the GTE-Pro class in 2015. In the past, his teammate Bruni has claimed three podium spots at the WEC race in Texas. The current WEC champions Michael Christensen and Kévin Estre also have good memories: Christensen won in 2015 and finished second with Estre at the final WEC round at Austin in 2017. The Danish-French pair shares the cockpit of the No. 92 car.

The customer teams

Dempsey-Proton Racing tackles the race in the USA with two 2017-spec Porsche 911 RSR. Sharing driving duties in the racer (No. 77) is the newly-signed Porsche works driver Matt Campbell (Australia), team owner Christian Ried (Germany) and the Italian Riccardo Pera. Manning the No. 88 sister car is Porsche Young Professional Thomas Preining from Austria, Belgium's Adrien de Leener and Bret Curtis from the USA.

The Project 1 customer team also campaigns two 2017-generation Porsche 911 RSR. At the wheel of the No. 56 car are Matteo Cairoli (Italy), Le Mans class winner Egidio Perfetti (Norway) and the Dane David Heinemeier Hansson. Ben Keating from America joins forces with Jeroen Bleekemolen from the Netherlands and Felipe Fraga from Brazil to tackle the race. Gulf Racing's No. 86 vehicle is shared by the all-British line-up Michael Wainwright, Ben Barker and Andrew Watson.

Comments before the race

Fritz Enzinger (Vice President Motorsport): "After the winter break, we're looking forward to the second half of the WEC season. I hope we can continue our great performance from the first three races."

Pascal Zurlinden (Director Factory Motorsport): "The new Porsche 911 RSR has already underlined its huge potential in this season's WEC. We had a great start with a one-two and other podium results from the first three races. Unfortunately, things didn't go so well for us in Bahrain, but we've done our homework and we're heading to the USA full of optimism."

Alexander Stehlig (Head of Operations FIA WEC):"Unfortunately, we lost our point advantage at the previous race in Bahrain and we've now turned from the hunted to the hunter. We're happy to assume this role. We've had a good look at what happened in Bahrain and drawn our conclusions. We've implemented the lessons from the last race and will now tackle the rest of the season stronger. Austin has always been good turf for us so we're looking forward to the upcoming race."

You can find more comments in the press release.

The Porsche 911 RSR

The new Porsche 911 RSR (2019 model year) celebrates its maiden WEC season. The vehicle from Weissach is based on the high-performance 911 GT3 RS road-going sports car. Compared to its extremely successful predecessor model, the car fielded in the GTE-Pro class of the FIA WEC, received improvements, most notably to areas such as driveability, efficiency, ergonomics and serviceability. About 95 percent of all components are new. The 911 RSR is powered by a 4.2-litre, six-cylinder boxer engine.

The Sports Car World Endurance Championship WEC

In the Sports Car World Endurance Championship (WEC), which was first contested in 2012, sports prototypes and GT vehicles compete in four classes: LMP1, LMP2, GTE-Pro and GTE-Am. They all compete together in one race but are classified separately. The Porsche factory squad contests the GTE-Pro class as the reigning world manufacturers' champions, while the customer teams Dempsey Proton Racing, Project 1 and Gulf Racing fight for honours in the GTE-Am class.

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