Wright Motorsports' Porsche 911 GT3 R finishes fourth at Daytona

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31/01/2021 The Porsche customer team Wright Motorsports has secured fourth place in the GTD class at the 24 Hours of Daytona.

The race

Factory driver Patrick Long from the USA shared driving duties in the No. 16 Porsche 911 GT3 R with his compatriot Trent Hindman, Jan Heylen from Belgium and Klaus Bachler from Austria. Over long stretches, the GT3 vehicle fielded by the team from the U.S. state of Ohio was on course for a podium result, however, a collision cost the squad considerable time. The Hardpoint EBM team's first outing fielding a Porsche 911 GT3 R concluded with tenth place.

Under blue skies and in temperatures exceeding 20 degrees Celsius, the 59th edition of the endurance classic began on Saturday afternoon with multiple incidents and yellow flags. "There were fierce battles like in a sprint race," says Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. "The collisions in this intense long-distance event resulted in a lot of repair work, and one of our cars even had to retire. We held our position in the top five over the distance, but unfortunately this year, we missed out on claiming a podium step by ten seconds. Congratulations to Wright Motorsports on finished a strong fourth. The points are very important for the championship. Next up is Sebring."

Keeping a cool head, Jan Heylen brought the No. 16 car through the heavy traffic of the GTD class unscathed and, in the process, even made up positions. After five and a half hours, the Porsche 911 GT3 R took the lead for the first time. Over the following laps, the team maintained the pace of the front-running pack. However, a collision during the night threw a spanner in the works. The vehicle was able to continue but with significant damages on the left of the car. Despite the challenging circumstances, Heylen, Long, Bachler and Hindman fought valiantly but were unable to launch a final attack for the podium. Hardpoint EBM with drivers Earl Bamber from New Zealand, Rob Ferriol from the USA, Denmark's Christina Nielsen and Katherine Legge from Great Britain were seriously hampered by a faulty front splitter and ultimately took the flag in tenth place after a solid performance.

For the WeatherTech Racing team, which fields a Porsche 911 RSR in the GTLM class with the support of Proton Competition for the 2021 season, the race was over before it had even started. Works driver Kévin Estre had lined up in third place for the start. Shortly before the green flag came out on Saturday at 3:40 pm, a BMW crashed into the rear of his car. The Frenchman was unable to avoid a spin and

collided with another vehicle. Repairs to the damage at the front and rear of the car threw the squad 14 laps behind. Making the most of the 13 caution phases, among other things, Estre and his works driver teammates Richard Lietz from Austria and Gianmaria Bruni from Italy, as well as the American Cooper MacNeil, slashed the gap by four laps, however they were not able to catch up to the GTLM field. The No. 79 car concluded the race in sixth place.

Bad luck also plagued the Pfaff Motorsports squad in the GTD class for vehicles complying with GT3 regulations. For almost 20 hours, the No. 9 red and black racer ran among the frontrunners. The car driven by the two works drivers Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium and Australian Matt Campbell as well as the Canadian Zacharie Robichon and Porsche's development driver Lars Kern (Germany) sustained considerable damage in a collision and came to a standstill on the track. The repairs, including fitting a new half-shaft, took around 80 minutes. The vehicle still managed to cross the finish line in twelfth place after 24 hours and collected some points towards the championship. The Porsche 911 GT3 R campaigned by the TGM squad with American amateur drivers Ted Giovanis, Matt Plumb, Hugh Plumb and Owen Trinkler had to retire early after 515 laps with a power transmission fault.

Round two of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, the tradition-steeped 12 Hours of Sebring, is contested on 20 March.

Drivers' comments on the race

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "The start was beyond adventurous. Kévin was driving and got shunted from behind. The car was badly damaged in the accident. Our team did a terrific job and fixed everything, but the gap was simply too big. Our strategy was perfect and we were able to make up five laps, but unfortunately, we couldn't catch the frontrunners. We would've needed many more safety car phases to achieve that. So, we finished sixth."

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "We were going really well and had our eye on the podium over long stretches. At times we even had a faint hope of a class win. A nudge with the No. 9 Porsche left our car in bad shape. The damages to the body hampered us on the straights. It's a shame. Still, fourth place gives us a lot of championship points. I prefer to focus on this positive aspect. I'm now looking forward to Sebring."

Katherine Legge (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "It was a great experience to drive at Daytona with the Hardpoint EBM team. The Porsche 911 GT3 R was huge fun to drive. Unfortunately, a faulty splitter hampered us significantly. Under these conditions, we couldn't do better than tenth. It's definitely not the result we'd anticipated at the start."

Matt Campbell (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9):"It's a pity. We were looking really strong during the night, and our hopes were high. Unfortunately, an incident resulted in considerable damage. Still, the team put in a massive effort and managed to get our No. 9 car back in the race. At least we earned important points for Pfaff Motorsport and for the regular drivers Laurens and Zach."

Ted Giovanis (Porsche 911 GT3 R #64): "All in all, my first race at Daytona was a great experience. Our team worked perfectly, and my teammates did a flawless job. Obviously, we're disappointed that we didn't finish, but I gained a lot of amazing impressions. I learned a lot, especially about physical exertion. Next time I'll make sure I'm fitter when I compete. I'm exhausted. It's like my first marathon. I was totally exhausted, but I still took part in a second one."

Results

Result GTLM class
1. Garcia/Taylor/Catsburg (E/USA/NL), Corvette C8.R #3, 770 laps
2. Milner/Tandy/Sims (USA/GB/GB), Corvette C8.R #4, 770 laps
3. Edwards/Krohn/Farfus/Wittmann (USA/FIN/BR/D), BMW M8 GTE #24, 769 laps
6. MacNeil/Estre/Lietz/Bruni (USA/F/A/I), Porsche 911 RSR #79, 760 laps

Result GTD class
1. Ward/Ellis/Dontje/Engel (USA/CH/NL/D), Mercedes-AMG GT3 #57, 745 laps
2. Habul/Marciello/Grenier/Stolz (AUS/CH/CDN/D), Mercedes-AMG GT3 #75, 745 laps
3. Sellers/Snow/Lewis/Caldarelli (USA/USA/USA/I), Lamborghini Huracan GT3 #1, 745 laps
4. Long/Hindman/Bachler/Heylen (USA/USA/A/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 745 laps
10. Ferriol/Bamber/Nielsen/Legge (USA/NZ/DK/GB), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88, 737 laps
12. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern/Campbell (CDN/B/D/AUS), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, 702 laps
17. Giovanis/Plumb/Plumb/Trinkler (USA/USA/USA/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #64, 515 laps

Full results and championship standings at imsa.alkamelsystems.com.

The race: Interim report

The Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by the Wright Motorsports customer team lies in a promising position after three hours of racing at the Daytona 24 Hours. The vehicle run by the experienced squad from the US state of Ohio currently ranks fourth in the GTD class after a turbulent start to the season-opening round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. Meanwhile, in the hotly contested GTLM category, bad luck has plagued the WeatherTech Racing team. The No. 79 Porsche 911 RSR got caught up in an accident at the start and is now running at the back of the field.

In bright sunshine and temperatures of over 20 degrees Celsius, works driver Kévin Estre took up the race from the third grid spot at the wheel of the Porsche 911 RSR. When the 59th edition of the American endurance classic took off, misfortune hit. The Frenchman's vehicle was hit from behind and forced into a spin. This action caused his car to shunt a competitor in front. The team, which receives support for the IMSA campaigns from the seasoned Proton Competition squad, repaired the car from Weissach but lost 14 laps. Thanks to a clever strategy during numerous caution phases, that gap was

reduced by two laps.

The first stints went considerably better for the four customer teams contesting the GTD category for vehicles complying with the GT3 regulations. In the early phase, Belgium's Jan Heylen was at times running in second place at the wheel of the No. 16 Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by Wright Motorsports. Maintaining fourth place after three hours of racing, the chance to fight for class victory looks good for the squad. In twelfth position, the identical vehicle campaigned by Pfaff Motorsports also has good prospects. The two Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by Hardpoint EBM and TGM head into the Florida night ranking 13th and 19th.

Comments after the start

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "We were all bunched up and waiting to get the go-ahead to start. Suddenly, a BMW crashed into my rear, and the green flag hadn't even come out. I couldn't do a thing. It took ages to repair the damage, so our race was ruined at the start. We're back in the race, but the vehicle is now out of balance. It's such a shame. The GTLM class is almost exclusively made up of professionals. An accident like this just shouldn't happen."

Sebastian Golz (Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R): "Our hearts almost stopped at the start when the 911 RSR was shunted out of the blue. But that says a lot about the situation we're facing. Everyone is driving as if it was a one-hour race – it's brutal out there. Our four Porsche 911 GT3 R are looking good. Everything is running to plan. Pfaff Motorsports tweaked the setup during a pit stop and that cost them some ground, but it'll pay off further down the line. The rhythm of our teams is good. It's important to avoid any skirmishes and drive a clean race."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "My stints went well. It's tough out there, but I managed to keep out of any trouble and gained some positions at the same time. Our Porsche 911 GT3 R is running beautifully. Our goal is to get through the night with little risk and stay in touch with the frontrunners. If we can turn our laps without any incidents or penalties, then we have the best chances over the distance."

Jan Heylen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "I simply did my job: take care in the traffic, keep an eye on the brakes and tyres, and use as little fuel as possible. That worked perfectly. On top of that, I even managed to overtake a lot of rivals. After my stint, I handed the car off in second place. If we can continue like this, we should have every chance in the final sprint."

The preview

Porsche customer teams will field one 911 RSR in the GTLM class and four 911 GT3 R in the GTD category at the season-opening round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Daytona on 30/31 January.

After the successful performance at the first-ever qualifying race last Sunday, expectations are high for the 59th edition of the famous 24-hour endurance classic in the USA. At the three-day “Roar before the 24” test event on the 5.73-kilometre circuit, the teams prepared for the upcoming challenge with total concentration and meticulousness.

“During the test sessions and the qualifying race, we made considerable progress with our Porsche 911 RSR campaigned by the WeatherTech Racing customer squad,” says Steffen Höllwarth, Head of GTLM Operations. “Although we’ve gained and implemented a lot of those findings, we still have some homework to do before the start of the race. I’m feeling really positive about the season-opener at Daytona.” The WeatherTech Racing customer squad will be supported by the experienced German team Proton Competition during the 2021 season. At the qualifying race, works driver Kévin Estre from France and the American Cooper MacNeil secured the third grid spot in the hotly-contested GTLM class.

“During the drives with our four 911 GT3 R, we noticed that we’re very strong in both wet and dry conditions. This gives our teams, the drivers and the whole Porsche crew a real boost as we head to the 24-hour race,” concludes Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. During the “Roar before the 24”, the four GT3 vehicles fielded by Pfaff Motorsport, TGM, Hardpoint EBM and Wright Motorsports covered a total distance of 3,472 kilometres. “All of that data is now being analysed,” explains Golz. “Using this information, we’ll work with the teams to further improve the vehicle setup to optimally prepare for the race.”

The Daytona International Raceway in Florida, which opened in 1959, distinguishes itself from other tracks most notably by its steeply banked turns. The slope incline reaches up to 31 degrees in the oval passage of the track. This requires a special vehicle set-up. Porsche is by far the most successful manufacturer at Daytona. The Stuttgart automobile manufacturer has achieved 18 overall wins as a constructor and four as an engine partner, with a further 78 class wins rounding off this success record.

The Porsche customer teams

The WeatherTech Racing team tackles the GTLM category with a Porsche 911 RSR. The cockpit of the No. 79 vehicle is shared by Kévin Estre from France, his factory driver teammates Richard Lietz from Austria and Gianmaria Bruni from Italy as well as the American amateur driver Cooper MacNeil. In the GTD class, the Pfaff Motorsports customer team takes up the first North American long-distance race of the year from a promising position. The Belgian works driver Laurens Vanthoor and Canadian Zacharie Robichon finished the qualifying race in second place at the wheel of the No. 9 car. For the 24-hour race, the pair shares the Porsche 911 GT3 R run by the Canadian customer squad with works driver Matt Campbell from Australia and Porsche development driver Lars Kern (Germany).

Unchanged from last season, Wright Motorsports’ No. 16 car is manned by the American works driver Patrick Long and his compatriot Ryan Hardwick. The two receive support from Belgium’s Jan Heylen and the Austrian Klaus Bachler. The team takes up the race from ninth on the grid. Sharing driving

duties in the identical (No. 88) 911 GT3 R fielded by Hardpoint EBM are New Zealander Earl Bamber, American Rob Ferriol, Christina Nielsen from Denmark and Katherine Legge from Great Britain. The team achieved 14th place in the qualifying race. The TGM squad did not take part in the qualifying and thus the vehicle driven by the all-American driver lineup of Ted Giovanis, Hugh Plumb, Matt Plumb and Owen Trinkler starts the race from the last grid spot.

Drivers' comments before the race

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #79):"Like my works driver colleagues Gimmi and Richard, I'm returning to Daytona after a long break. I'm really looking forward to it. The race is one of the biggest and most spectacular in the world. We've worked systematically with our new team to prepare for the season-opener and we scored a great result with third place in the qualifying race. I expect we'll make some progress with our 911 RSR during the race week. I'm feeling very confident."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "Our good result in the qualifying race has given us extra motivation. The 100-minute event was the perfect way to prepare for the huge task ahead of us. The processes are very tight and well-thought-out. I firmly believe that everything will come together even better in the lead-up to the 24-hour race. We have a great car, a strong team and a formidable driver crew."

Earl Bamber (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "We have a few things to sort out before the start of the big race. During the test drives, we managed to make good progress with the setup of the Porsche 911 GT3 R. More improvements will follow. Our team is new, as is our driver squad. If we can continue to make progress in the practice sessions, I think our chances look good."

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "Our preparation during the test days was going really well – until we had an accident during the night practice. We had to change the chassis. The team did a perfect job in a very short time, but we're still not back to the same setup level as we were before the incident. So we'll have to work extremely hard in the first sessions of the race week. We're up against a top-class field. A result in the top five would be a big success for us."

Live streaming of the race

The first race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship season at Daytona gets underway on Saturday, 30 January, at 15:40 pm local time (21:40 pm CET). The race over 24 hours can be viewed outside the USA and Canada on www.imsa.com. Live timing of all sessions is available at scoring.imsa.com.

The schedule (local time, CET -6 hours)

Thursday, 28 January
11:05 am – 12:05 pm: Free practice
15:20 – 16:35 pm: Free practice
19:15 – 21:00 pm: Free practice

Friday, 29 January
11:20 am – 12:20 pm: Free practice

Saturday, 30January
15:40 pm: Start 24 Hours of Daytona

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