

IMSA: Second podium for the new Porsche 911 RSR

09/04/2017 At the Grand Prix of Long Beach, the new Porsche 911 RSR has claimed its second podium result at its third race in IMSA SportsCar Championship.

On the spectacular city course in the port district, where the pits are just a stone's throw away from where the docked ocean-liner giant "Queen Mary" lies anchored, Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) and Kévin Estre (France) secured third place on Saturday with the #912 car. In the sister 911 RSR fielded by the Porsche GT Team, last year's winner Patrick Pilet (France) and Dirk Werner (Germany) finished sixth. At the season-opening round at the 24 Hours of Daytona, they came second.

The race set against a postcard-perfect backdrop of sun, sea and palms is regarded as the American equivalent to the Monaco Grand Prix for good reason. Despite the short race duration of just 100 minutes, the completely walled and fenced 3.167-kilometre street circuit demands everything from the drivers, and on the grandstands and balconies of high-rise apartments, keen sports car fans mingle with famous stars. The simple reason for the high number of prominent celebrities is that Hollywood is virtually just around the corner.

Kévin Estre kept his cool just before the finish line

The race was as spectacular as the backdrop. After just one lap, the leading trio in the particularly competitive GTLM class clashed – which opened the door for Laurens Vanthoor. Taking up the race from the fourth grid spot, the Belgian, who as the winner of the 2016 Macau Grand Prix is no stranger to narrow city circuits, moved into the lead. Vanthoor held onto the top spot for almost 45 minutes until the first pit stop – no other GTLM vehicle stayed out on the track as long without a tyre change.

It was only while handing the 911 RSR off to Kévin Estre that the position was lost. Running in fifth place, the Frenchman then took up the chase again. In the final laps of a race that had seen no less than five safety car phases, events turned truly dramatic: Kévin Estre advanced to fourth place and kept his cool in the hairpin just before the finish line: In stop-and-go traffic he overtook another competitor in the last seconds to secure the second podium result for Porsche in North America's premier racing series.

A spirited drive and a drive-through penalty

In the second 911 RSR with the starting number 911, two former Long Beach winners had to line up at the back of the field: Patrick Pilet (2016) and Dirk Werner (2015) were unable to take part in the qualifying session due to an accident during practice and were therefore relegated to the very back of the 35-strong field. Putting in a spirited drive, Patrick Pilet ploughed his way through the pack and as he came into the pits he was running in eighth position. Dirk Werner gained another four places during his stint and was even looking good for a podium spot. However, a drive-through penalty imposed by the stewards of the meeting for making contact with another competitor put a sudden halt to his charge.

In the GTD class, Park Place Motorsports with Jörg Bergmeister (Germany) in the 911 GT3 R finished on fourth place as the best Porsche customer team. His works driver colleague Wolf Henzler (Germany) took the flag in the 911 GT3 R of the TRG squad in fifth. Fielded by Alegra Motorsports, the customer sport racer, which Porsche had designed for worldwide GT3 series based on the 911 GT3 RS production sports car, secured a class win at round one at the Daytona 24-hour race.

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