

Porsche 919 Hybrids finish third and fourth in Spa

06/05/2017 WEC: In the last race before the Le Mans 24-Hours, the Porsche 919 Hybrids has finished third and fourth. The race concluded with positions five and six in the GTE-Pro class for the Porsche GT Team.

At the six-hour race in Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium, both prototypes endured a troubled contest. The trio of Earl Bamber (NZ), Timo Bernhard (DE) and Brendon Hartley (NZ) lost time due to a slow puncture coming home third. The sister car of reigning world champion Neel Jani (CH), André Lotterer (DE) and Nick Tandy (GB) started from pole position but was unfortunate with the timing of two "Full Course Yellow" periods that neutralized the race. They finished just behind their team mates. Hartley had the consolation of setting the overall fastest race lap to underline the 919 Hybrid's potential. But in Spa, over the race distance, it was a pair of Toyotas that took the laurels.

Just like at the season's opening race in Silverstone, Porsche competed again in the Le Mans aerodynamic configuration. However, the lower downforce causes higher tyre wear. Toyota raced in two different aero specifications. The car in Le Mans configuration finished behind the Porsches.

Despite sunshine at the start, rain was predicted for the closing stages of the race but ultimately it stayed almost dry throughout. The organizers announced 61,000 spectators for the three-day event. After the second of nine rounds in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), Porsche ranks second in the constructors' standings. In the drivers' world championship, the Porsche crews are currently second and third.

How the race went for car number 1:

Lotterer starts from pole in warm sunshine (20C). The #7 Toyota takes the lead under braking around the outside into Bus Stop chicane at the end of lap 10. Two laps later #1 drops to third as the #8 Toyota goes ahead entering La Source. The #2 sister Porsche goes past on lap 21. After 22 laps Lotterer hands over the car to Tandy who resumes in P5. On lap 29 Tandy sweeps ahead of the #9 Toyota into P4. On lap 40 he passes the sister car that is on older tyres. After 46 laps Tandy stops for fuel only, leapfrogging the #8 Toyota in to P2 during the pit-stop phase when #8 made a driver change. On lap 64 the #8 Toyota overtakes Tandy who slips to P3. After 70 laps #1 is due for fuel again; Tandy hands over to Jani. The next stop for fuel only after 94 laps comes just before a "Full Course Yellow" period. Jani continues in P3 but is overtaken by the #2 Porsche on lap 116 before he pits at the end of the next lap. Lotterer jumps back into the car – equipped with four fresh tyres in P4. He refuels on laps 142 and 165 in the 173-lap race.

How the race went for car number 2:

Hartley moves up one place from his fifth place start when second-row starting #9 Toyota locks up at La Source hairpin after the green light. Hartley overtakes the sister #1 Porsche for P3 on lap 21 and pits from lead for fuel only on lap 24 after the leading Toyotas had pitted earlier. Hartley continues in P3, aborts the final corner 19 on lap 39 and lets closely following #1 ahead. Hartley pits after 48 laps for full service to Bamber who resumes in P4 but is forced to pit early after 54 laps, when less than a second from P3, with a slow rear left puncture. The team replaces only that tyre while adding a splash of fuel. Bamber remains in P4 with two hours on the clock. After 78 laps Bamber gets out and Bernhard continues in P4 with more than half of the race distance to go. During a "Full Course Yellow" period the team calls both 919 Hybrids to the pits for fuel only after 94 laps. Bernhard continues in P4 until he overtakes the #1 Porsche on lap 116 to improve to P3. After 119 laps Bernhard hands over to Hartley again, who gets four fresh tyres. He sets the fastest lap of the race on lap 122 and manages to overtake the number 7 Toyota on lap 127. On his last lap before the next scheduled pit stop, Hartley has a collision with a LMP2. After 143 laps the car is refuelled and gets a new nose section. Hartley rejoins the race immediately behind the number 7 Toyota in P3 with one hour to go. After 167 laps he comes for a final splash and dash before finishing third.

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