

Porsche celebrates one-two victory at endurance classic in Belgium

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28/07/2019 With a strong effort from its teams, Porsche won the 24 Hours of Spa. The GPX Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R crewed by the current FIA WEC Sportscar World Champions Kévin Estre, Michael Christensen, and Richard Lietz finished first at the Belgian long distance classic after 363 laps, securing Porsche the seventh overall success from the world's most important GT3 event.

The race

The Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by Rowe Racing (#998) rounded off the one-two victory of the Porsche teams at the marathon in the Ardennes. Five of the six Pro-cars from Porsche finished the 71st running of the 24 Hours of Spa in the top ten.

Right from the start, the rain played the leading role at the 24-hour classic in Belgium. In the early hours of Sunday morning, the race had to be stopped for almost six hours due to heavy downpours. But even this interruption couldn't end the victorious drive of the number 20 Porsche 911 GT3 R. The crew with Estre, Christensen, and Lietz, which had been relegated down the field by a drive-through penalty in the evening, put in an impressive charge through the field. When the race was halted, the driver trio had made it back to eighth place with a series of flawless and constantly fast stints and made up more positions after the race was restarted. With two hours to go, the GT3 R driven by Kévin Estre took the lead, which the Frenchman held driving the slick-shod car on a damp track surface. After nine years, it was time to celebrate again for Porsche at the prestigious endurance classic in the Ardennes.

During the closing stages of the race, Tandy conquered second place

The Rowe Racing number 998 Porsche 911 GT3 R also had a race of mixed fortunes on the 7.004 kilometre storied circuit. Patrick Pilet (France), Frédéric Makowiecki (France) und Nick Tandy (Great Britain) also lost many places due to a drive-through penalty and caught up to the frontrunners in the night with a strong performance in the rain. During the closing stages of the race, rain specialist Tandy conquered second place with several skilful overtaking manoeuvres to secure the one-two win for Porsche.

Scoring three more top ten placings, the Porsche customer teams crowned their strong and unified showing at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. The Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by Rowe Racing with the starting numbers 98 and 99 finished fifth and seventh. KÜS Team75 Bernhard brought its identical number 117 nine-eleven home in ninth place.

Galerie

Comments on the race

Fritz Enzinger, Vice President Porsche Motorsport: "Congratulations to our customer teams at Spa. The effort of the engineers, strategists, the pit crews, and the drivers impressed me deeply. They all co-operated with our support crew from Weissach in the best possible way. We've scored this victory together. And the Porsche 911 again proved to be the car to beat at sportscar races."

Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R: "I'm speechless. For 24 hours one challenge came after the other at Spa. We put in a strong performance under all conditions – from the qualifying to the last race lap. Our teams worked perfectly together over the entire weekend. This makes this one-two victory a common success for all. The start was great, afterwards the best running cars were unfortunately thrown back by penalties but charged back to the front in the night. The drivers and teams didn't make any more mistakes, dictated the pace and pushed right through to the end. The 911 GT3 R put in a strong performance at Spa. Our rear engined car displayed fantastic traction, and all drivers praised the driveability of the new GT3 R. Under all track conditions the nine-eleven was the

best car. Moreover, our vehicles didn't have the slightest technical problems."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 GT3 R #20): "This was another typically crazy race at Spa. We had to master various weather conditions and aquaplaning. With tough wheel-to-wheel racing we conquered one position after the other, we were on slicks in the rain and on wets on the drying track. During the last 30 minutes of the race there were yellow and safety car phases – the way to our victory was truly a tough piece of work. But after the race was halted in the morning we were confident to have the right strategy to make it to the top. I am proud of our team that only started the co-operation with Porsche this year. And I am proud to be a member of this squad."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #20): "An unbelievable race. Tackling Spa is always something special with the unpredictable weather. And the fights on track are extremely tough from start to finish. As a team we have mastered all those feats well and did a great job right to the end."

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 GT3 R #20): "This marks a special victory because our team ran a Pro car for the first time. We were welcomed well and now we are the happy ones who won. Everything was prepared immaculately, and the team have surely deserved this win."

Result

1. Estre/Christensen/Lietz (F/DK/A), Porsche 911 GT3 R, 363 laps
2. Pilet/Makowiecki/Tandy (F/F/GB), Porsche 911 GT3 R, 363 laps
3. Engel/Buurman/Stolz (D/NL/D), Mercedes-AMG GT3, 363 laps
5. Müller/Dumas/Jaminet (D/F/F), Porsche 911 GT3 R, 362 laps
7. Olsen/Campbell/Werner (N/AUS/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R, 362 laps
9. Bernhard/Vanthoor/Bamber (D/B/NZ), Porsche 911 GT3 R, 362 laps

248 drivers took up the 24 hour classic at Spa-Francorchamps in 72 cars. Eleven marques were represented at the 71st running of the Ardennes marathon which is regarded the world's most important GT3 event.

Newsflash

On Sunday, Porsche won the 71st running of the 24-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps. The Porsche 911 GT3 R with the starting number 20 from GPX Racing driven by Michael Christensen, Kévin Estre and Richard Lietz finished first in a race that was held in wild weather conditions, securing the seventh overall win for Porsche at the long distance classic in the Ardennes. In the early morning hours, the race was halted for almost six hours due to heavy rain.

"The last success dates back nine years. To return to the top of the podium now is a great achievement," says Sebastian Golz, project manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. "Congratulations to the GPX

Racing team and the three successful drivers who made this success possible with their outstanding performance in the rain. The entire team were enormously focused and the Porsche 911 GT3 R ran like proverbial clockwork."

Interim report 2

With strong performances from the drivers and good strategies, Porsche's customer teams shone during the night at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. Because of heavy rainfall, the charge of the Porsche 911 GT3 R was thwarted when the Stewards of the Meeting stopped the race in the early morning hours. At 5.55am, the Belgian endurance classic was temporarily red-flagged.

Prior to this, the No. 20 Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by GPX-Racing had put in a particularly impressive pursuit. Kévin Estre (France), Michael Christensen (Denmark) and Richard Lietz (Austria), who had at times led the pack, were handed a drive-through penalty in the evening, which threw them far down the field. In the night and in pouring rain, the driver trio implemented a good strategy and drove flawless stints to fight their way back up the order. Despite multiple accidents which resulted in long caution phases, and the red-flagging of the event hampering the No. 20 nine-eleven, it heads into the final third of the race still with good chances.

A drive-through penalty also lost the No. 998 vehicle campaigned by Rowe Racing a lot of ground. Patrick Pilet (France), Frédéric Makowiecki (France) and Nick Tandy (Great Britain) gave a world-class performance in adverse conditions at the wheel of their Porsche 911 GT3 R and fought their way through the field one position after the other.

Dinamic Motorsport's crew has also survived the long night at Spa. Putting in fast and steady stints, the team's three drivers Klaus Bachler (Austria), Andrea Rizzoli (Italy) and Zaid Ashkanani (Kuwait) gave convincing drives in the nine-eleven (#54), and, before racing stopped, were within reach of the front pack. Rowe Racing's second Porsche 911 GT3 R with the starting number 99 is also on course for a spot at the front after a flawless drive through the night.

Comments after the start

Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R: "The race was quite rightly red-flagged due to heavy rain. It simply became too dangerous to continue in these conditions. Until this point, though, our teams went through a rollercoaster of experiences. The Porsche 911 GT3 R performed really well in the wet conditions at the start of the race and were the pacesetters. Then, unfortunately, a number of mistakes followed. Rowe Racing and KÜS Team75 Bernhard drove too fast under yellow, and GPX Racing had one mechanic too many at the car during the pit stop. The resulting drive-through penalties threw the vehicles back. However, thanks to clever strategies they have made up ground to the front. Now our teams are back within striking distance to the top and we're feeling positive about the rest of the race."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #20): "We made it through the night unscathed and have fought our way back into the race. Since we've already completed our compulsory technical pit stop, our chances of claiming a front spot have improved. Our car is running like clockwork, so we'll just keep doing what we've been doing."

Interim report 1

In adverse weather conditions, the 911 GT3 R racing cars mounted with a rear-engine made the most of the traction advantage and snatched one position after the other. Driving for GPX Racing, Kévin Estre made up the most ground in his No. 20 Porsche GT3 R. Taking up the race from position eleven, the Frenchman has now moved within striking distance of the leaders after 90 minutes of racing.

The No. 117 customer vehicle fielded by KÜS Team75 Bernhard has also closed in on the frontrunners after an hour and a half. Right behind him is Rowe Racing's best Porsche 911 GT3 R (#998), thus rounding off the Porsche trio in the top ten at the world's most important GT3 event.

Comments after the start

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 GT3 R #20): "I started from eleventh on the grid in rain and on a wet track and managed to make up a lot of positions. It was fun overtaking strong rivals under these conditions. Our strategy is good, the team is working well together and that's important at a tough race like Spa."

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 911 GT3 R #998): "The start was pretty tricky in these conditions and it was the right decision to start behind the safety car. Luckily, the track then dried, but we have to expect more rain over the course of the race."

The Super Pole

The best-placed Porsche 911 GT3 R takes up the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps from the first grid row. In the gripping and hotly-contested Super Pole, in which only the top twenty qualifiers were eligible, just one driver per car was permitted to take part. In the hunt for the best time, Laurens Vanthoor turned an impeccable lap for the KÜS Team75 Bernhard squad.

At the wheel of the No. 117 Porsche 911 GT3 R, the Belgian lapped the tradition-steeped 7.004-kilometre racetrack in a time of 2:18.605 minutes on his second flying lap. For a long period, he topped the Super Pole time sheets, before the final contender trumped his time by a mere 17-thousandth of a second. Thus, the local hero will take up the 71st running of the Ardennes marathon on Saturday with his teammates Timo Bernhard (Germany) and Earl Bamber (New Zealand) from the second grid spot.

Posting a time of 2:18.822 minutes, Nick Tandy planted his Porsche fielded by Rowe Racing on P4. The British racing driver shares the No. 998 Porsche 911 GT3 R with the two Frenchmen Patrick Pilet and Frédéric Makowiecki.

Team colleague Mathieu Jaminet (France) concluded the Super Pole in tenth with the No. 98 nine-eleven. Lining up behind him on eleventh is Kévin Estre (France) from GPX Racing (No. 20) with the Norwegian Dennis Olsen on twelfth in Rowe Racing's third Porsche GT3 R (No. 99). In the No. 54 Porsche 911 GTR 3 campaigned by Dinamic Motorsport, Klaus Bachler (Austria) starts from 16th and rounds off the strong Porsche performance in the Super Pole of the Ardennes classic.

Super Pole result

1. Engel/Buurman/Stolz (D/NL/D), Mercedes-AMG GT3, 2:18.588 minutes
2. Bernhard/Vanthoor/Bamber (D/B/NZ), Porsche 911 GT3 R, + 0.017 seconds
3. Molina/Aleshin/Rigon (E/R/I), Ferrari 488 GT3, + 0.218 seconds
4. Pilet/Makowiecki/Tandy (F/F/GB), Porsche 911 GT3 R, + 0.234 seconds
10. Müller/Dumas/Jaminet (D/F/F), Porsche 911 GT3 R, + 0.439 seconds
11. Estre/Christensen/Lietz (F/DK/A), Porsche 911 GT3 R, + 0.479 seconds
12. Olsen/Campbell/Werner (N/AUS/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R, + 0.671 seconds
16. Bachler/Rizzoli/Ashkanani (A/I/KWT), Porsche 911 GT3 R, + 1.293 seconds

Super Pole quotes

Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R: "That was a gripping qualifying. The times of all the cars were very close. Laurens drove a fantastic lap and was only a few thousandths of a second behind the fastest. The Super Pole has underlined that we're spot on. Everything came together when it mattered and we can now be in the running for victory. Now we need to prepare the vehicles for the race. The weather will be unpredictable and we're expecting changing conditions. To get the best performance, we have to respond with the right tyres at the right air pressure at the right time."

Timo Bernhard, team owner KÜS Team75 Bernhard and driver (Porsche 911 GT3 R #117): "The first grid row is a dream and the perfect position to start the race. Laurens put in a flawless drive, and it gives us a lot of confidence. It's still new for me to cheer from the outside, but as a driver and team owner I now get to experience things from both sides. We'll now switch over racing trim and then we're ready for the 24 Hours of Spa."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #117): "That was fantastic – we're on the first grid row. Obviously, for me personally, it's bitter to have led the Super Pole for a long time only to lose it by just 17-thousandths of a second. Still, it's a good starting position for the race and that's what counts."

Nick Tandy (Porsche 911 GT3 R #998): "That was fun. It's always great to take part in a qualifying

session in which only the best and fastest cars go head-to-head. This is a fantastic result for Porsche, with two GT3 R vehicles in the top five. That was a tremendous team effort from my Rowe Racing squad. We've put all three cars in the top twelve."

More quotes in the press release (downloads).

The qualifying

Porsche's customer teams have delivered a strong performance at the first qualifying session of the 24-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps: All six vehicles in the pro-category have qualified for Friday's Super Pole, in which the fastest 20 cars fight for the top grid spots for the 24-hour marathon in the Ardennes.

Per vehicle, each driver had 15 minutes in the qualifying to attempt a flying lap. At the end of the session, the average was calculated from the best time of each driver in a team. The best Porsche 911 GT3 R was the No. 998 vehicle fielded by Rowe Racing, with Frédéric Makowiecki (France) and his works driver teammates Patrick Pilet (France) and Nick Tandy (Great Britain) posting fifth. Driving for KÜS Team75 Bernhard, Earl Bamber (New Zealand), Timo Bernhard (Germany) and Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) planted the identical No. 117 racing car on ninth.

Klaus Bachler (Austria), Andrea Rizzoli (Italy) and Zaid Ashkanani (Kuwait) qualified their No. 54 nine-eleven on eleventh for Dinamic Motorsport. Rowe Racing's two other Porsche 911 GT3 R with the starting numbers 99 and 98 also qualified for the Super Pole on Friday with positions 16 and 18. Achieving 20th, the GT3 R vehicle campaigned by GPX Racing made the solid team performance perfect for Porsche.

A total of 248 drivers tackle the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 72 vehicles. Eleven manufacturers are represented at the Ardennes marathon, which is considered the largest and most important GT3 event in the world.

Qualifying quotes

Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R: "We've achieved a very good result with six cars in the top 20 in a very strong field. This means our vehicles make up almost 30 percent of the Super Pole grid. If we want to succeed in this session, everything has to come together perfectly. You have just one lap where the tyres have to work at their peak."

Klaus Bachler (Porsche 911 GT3 R #54): "We encountered a lot of traffic out there, but the car ran really well and the balance is great. Qualifying on eleventh for the Super Pole is a good result. Anything is possible now and I'm excited for tomorrow."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #20): "It was tricky to turn a decent lap with so many cars on

the track. But we're all in the same boat. You also need a bit of luck and we had that today as the 20th."

Dennis Olsen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #99): "All of the pro-class Porsches including the three Rowe Racing cars are in the Super Pole, and that's an outstanding result. In this qualifying, where the best lap of each driver counts, teamwork is the key factor. And that worked perfectly with all Porsche squads."

More quotes in the press release (downloads).

The schedule

Saturday, 27 July
15:35 – 16:15 hrs: Start ceremony
16:30 hrs: Start Total 24 Hours of Spa

The 24-hour race can be viewed via live stream on the internet website of the Blancpain GT Series as well as on the homepage of the Intercontinental GT Challenge.

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Image Sublines

Path: media/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: 911 GT3 R, race, 24 Hours of Spa, 2019, Porsche AG
Subline: After a drive-through penalty in the evening, the GPX-Racing team put in an impressive pursuit

Path: media/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Kévin Estre, GPX Racing, race, 24 Hours of Spa, 2019, Porsche AG
Subline: Kévin Estre has made up a lot of ground for the team GPX Racing

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