

GTE-Pro misfortune for Porsche and second in the GTE-Am class in Portimão

13/06/2021 The Porsche GT Team finished round two of this year's FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) third and fourth in the GTE-Pro class.

The race

At the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve, works drivers Kévin Estre from France and Neel Jani from Switzerland as well as Denmark's Michael Christensen drove from pole position to the podium. At the flag, the No. 92 Porsche 911 RSR was only 20 seconds off clinching second place. Works drivers Richard Lietz from Austria, Gianmaria Bruni from Italy and Frédéric Makowiecki from France secured fourth place after 278 laps on the 4.684-kilometre Grand Prix circuit on the Algarve coast in Portugal. In the GTE-Am class, the customer squad Project 1 scored second place with drivers Egidio Perfetti (Norway), Riccardo Pera and Matteo Cairoli (both Italy).

At the start, Kévin Estre immediately swept into the lead. At the wheel of the number 92 car, the Frenchman promptly pulled away from his pursuers and eked out an eight-second lead during the first hour. After the first full-service stop, Neel Jani rejoined the race in second place with four fresh tyres. Prior to this, Gianmaria Bruni had fended off the second factory-run Ferrari in his No. 91 Porsche but had to relinquish his third place after a light nudge. A puncture caused by car debris on the track shortly before the two-hour mark forced him to pit earlier than planned, and Frédéric Makowiecki took over the wheel.

With the air and asphalt temperatures rising, both 911 RSR were unable to maintain the ideal performance window of the selected Michelin specification and lost ground. At the halfway mark, they were running a number of laps behind in third and fourth. A safety car phase after five hours and 15 minutes of racing and an adjusted tyre strategy turned the tables again for Porsche. Meanwhile, Estre had replaced Michael Christensen in the No. 92 cockpit, Richard Lietz later handed the No. 91 sister car back to Bruni. Both 911 RSR caught the top two in their category and a spirited final phase unfolded. At the start of the final hour, the four GTE-Pro rivals were running in the same lap. Estre even managed to work his way up to second place only to relinquish it at his final pit stop – which came at an inopportune moment, as it turned out: with about 30 minutes of racing left, a caution phase played into the hands of the competition, enabling them to defend their second place to the flag. Bruni crossed the finish line fourth in class.

Alexander Stehlig, Head of Operations FIA WEC: “Third and fourth place is not the results we’d hoped for. We set pole position again yesterday and we thought we could build on what we’d achieved at Spa-Francorchamps. During the first half of the race, we were simply too slow and couldn’t match the pace of our competitors, because our tyres deteriorated more. From about the halfway mark, we opted for the second tyre spec and that allowed us to catch up. Our number 92 car was on a sure course to second place until the final 30 minutes of the race. The full course yellow came at an unfortunate time: We had already completed our last pit stop. A rival pitted under yellow and therefore passed us. Things ran a little better for us in the GTE-Am class. Team Project 1 finished the race second in its class.”

In the GTE-Am category, Norway’s Egidio Perfetti (Team Project 1) and Christian Ried from Germany (Dempsey-Proton Racing) took up the race with their 911 RSR from the first grid row but lost their advantage early on in the eight-hour race. After an hour of racing, Perfetti was in fourth place. After a short intermezzo from Riccardo Pera (Italy), the Norwegian handed the 911 RSR off to Matteo Cairoli, who launched a spirited charge through the field. At times, the Porsche fielded by Project 1 was leading its class. However, a ten-second pit-stop penalty scuppered their chance of a win. Ultimately, the team finished in second place.

Christian Ried had to retire early with his 911, which he shared with New Zealander Jaxon Evans and Porsche’s works driver from Australia Matt Campbell. The sister car driven by Dominique Bastien (USA), Marco Seefried (Germany) and Porsche Young Professional Julien Andlauer from France lost some ground due to a low battery charge and ultimately finished tenth in their class. GR Racing concluded the eight-hour race in Portugal ninth in the GTE-Am class with the all-British driver trio Michael Wainwright, Benjamin Barker and Tom Gamble.

Round three of the World Endurance Championship WEC will be contested on 18 July at the Autodromo Nazionale di Monza in Italy and runs over six hours.

Drivers' comments on the race

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "Victory would definitely have been possible today but we took a gamble with the tyres. We should've changed our strategy earlier but it's always easier to say that afterwards. Second place was definitely within reach. It's a shame because there were a lot of points up for grabs this weekend. We learned a lot, but now we have to see why our tyre strategy didn't work out. We're a team and we'll grow from this."

Neel Jani (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "That was a very, very difficult race for us. We had big problems with the tyres, especially when it got hotter from noon to around three in the afternoon. Ferrari was able to pull away from us during this phase. After that, we could forget about a win, but second place was still within reach. Actually, things looked pretty good, but towards the end of the race, the full course yellow threw us back to third as our opponent managed to pit during that time. That put an end to our hopes for second place – what a pity."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "We had a good start to the race, but as it got warmer and the track temperatures rose, we struggled with the grip. At the end of the race, when it cooled off a bit, the situation got a little better, but at that point we'd already lost too much. Also, at the end, we were very unlucky with the full course yellow and it cost us second place. That's how it goes in racing sometimes."

Result GTE-Pro class

1. Pier Guidi/Calado (I/GB), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 279 laps
2. Serra/Molina (BR/E), Ferrari 488 GTE #52, 279 laps
3. Estre/Jani/Christensen (F/CH/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 279 laps
4. Bruni/Lietz/Makowiecki (I/A/F), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 278 laps

Result GTE-Am class

1. Lacorte/Sernagiotto/Fuoco (I/I/I), Ferrari 488 GTE EVO #47, 274 laps
2. Perfetti/Cairoli/Pera (N/I/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 274 laps
3. Flohr/Castellacci/Fisichella (CH/I/I), Ferrari 488 GTE EVO #54, 274 laps
9. Wainwright/Barker/Gamble (GB/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 271 laps
10. Bastien/Seefried/Andlauer (USA/D/F), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 269 laps

The qualifying

Porsche tackles round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC in Portugal from the front row of the GTE-Pro-class grid. At the debut of the WEC on the 4.684-kilometre Autódromo Internacional do Algarve, works driver Kévin Estre turned the fastest lap with the Porsche 911 RSR in 1:37.986 minutes. With this, the Frenchman repeated his qualifying success from Spa-Francorchamps. His Italian teammate Gianmaria Bruni set the third quickest time on the undulating circuit in the backcountry of the Algarve in 1:38.389 minutes and takes up the race from the second grid row. Like at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the highlight of the WEC season, each of the two factory-run 911 fielded by Manthey will be manned by three drivers for the eight-hour race. The championship leaders Estre and Neel Jani (Switzerland) receive support from Denmark's Michael Christensen. Bruni and the Austrian Richard Lietz join forces in the cockpit with French factory driver Frédéric Makowiecki.

Estre used his second flying lap in the short ten-minute qualifying session to set his top time. Unlike the competition, he kept his 911 RSR within the track boundaries of the Grand Prix circuit. Bruni posted his fastest time in his first hot lap. Ultimately, the native of Rome was a mere three-hundredths of a second off a front-row spot.

"Positions one and three, just like at Spa-Francorchamps: the second qualifying success for us this year," said a delighted Alex Stehlig, Head of Operations FIA WEC. "Still, the challenges here in Portugal are big – from the demanding circuit to the warm temperatures. But the team did a great job and worked perfectly to plan, which resulted in pole position for our number 92 car. Now we have a great starting position for this very important eight-hour race – there are a lot of points up for grabs at this event. Tomorrow we'll try to continue our form from today."

In the GTE-Am class, two Porsche customer teams share the first grid row. Egidio Perfetti drove the fastest time with the Project 1 squad's No. 56 911 RSR in 1:40.191 minutes. The Norwegian was 0.045 seconds faster than the Dempsey-Proton Racing team owner Christian Ried from Germany in the No. 77 Porsche. Britain's Michael Wainwright turned the tenth quickest lap in the GTE-Am category at the wheel of GR Racing's No. 86 car, with the American Dominique Bastien planting the second Dempsey-Proton 911 (#88) on P13.

Round two of the World Endurance Championship WEC, which runs over eight hours, takes off on Sunday, 13 June at midday (CEST).

Drivers' quotes on the qualifying

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "My lap wasn't great. We're still searching for the last fractions of seconds. We changed two things on the car prior to the qualifying but that didn't quite pay off. Now let's see what we can do in tomorrow's race."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): “That was a tough qualifying, to be honest. The conditions were different compared to the third free practice session, where we'd prepared for the qualifying. But I reckon no one managed a really perfect lap here. Everyone made a minor mistake, for example, with the track limits. It was all about having a good car and turning a clean lap. I managed that. I'm thrilled because we've made a mega start to the season. Still, the big day won't come until tomorrow."

Egidio Perfetti (Porsche 911 RSR #56): “I'm extremely pleased with pole position, of course. After the accident at Spa-Francorchamps, the team put in a huge effort to repair the car in time for Portimão. Matteo Cairoli also did a fantastic job of setting up our car. We've been extremely strong so far this weekend. I'm looking forward to the race. Let's see what happens."

Result GTE-Pro class

1. Estre/Jani/Christensen (F/CH/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 1:37.968 minutes
2. Pier Guidi/Calado (I/GB), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 1:38.359 minutes
3. Bruni/Lietz/Makowiecki (I/A/F), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 1:38.389 minutes

Result GTE-Am class

1. Perfetti/Cairoli/Pera (N/I/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 1:40.191 minutes
2. Ried/Evans/Campbell (D/NZ/AUS), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 1:40.236 minutes
3. Lacorte/Sernagiotto/Fuoco (I/I/I), Ferrari 488 GTE EVO #47, 1:40.885 minutes
10. Wainwright/Barker/Gamble (GB/GB/GB), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 1:41.604 minutes
13. Bastien/Seefried/Andlauer (USA/D/F), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 1:43.374 minutes

The preview

The Porsche GT Team has prepared intensively for the upcoming task in Portugal's Algarve with test drives and simulator sessions. The Manthey factory squad fields two Porsche 911 RSR cars in the GTE-Pro class. The drivers in each of the cars are the same crews that will tackle the 24 Hours of Le Mans in August. In the GTE-Am category, the customer squads Dempsey-Proton Racing, Project 1 and GR Racing campaign a total of four 911 cars at the endurance race.

“After the big success at Spa-Francorchamps, we're heading to the second round of the season as the championship leaders. Our goal is very clear: when the chequered flag comes out after the eight-hour race in Portugal, we want to still be in first place in all GTE-Pro categories," says Pascal Zurlinden, Director Factory Motorsport. “Our team has worked hard to prepare for the first WEC event in Portimao. We're ready to tackle the race. What's more, this eight-hour event complements our preparations for this year's Le Mans 24-hour race perfectly. It helps our driver crews, engineers and mechanics work even better together and streamline the procedures."

The Autodromo Internacional do Algarve is nestled in the hilly hinterland close to the coastal resorts of Portimao and Lagos. The 4.684-kilometre circuit, on which Formula One has raced twice, features 16 corners and many uphill and downhill passages. The steepest downhill section of the track has an incline of more than 12 per cent. Drivers are also faced with blind corners and deep gravel beds. The start-finish straight stretches over 969 metres, on which the GTE-Pro vehicles can reach top speeds of about 270 km/h.

“The upcoming race in Portugal offers a number of special features. Since it's an eight- hour event, more points are awarded compared to the normal WEC races, which gen- erally run over six hours. So we can harvest a bigger haul. That gives us extra motiva- tion,” explains Alexander Stehlig, Head of Operations FIA WEC. “The racetrack in Portimao is physically demanding for the drivers, so it makes sense to compete with the same three-man crews that will contest the Le Mans event. We regard the WEC debut in Portugal as an early trial run for the endurance classic in France and we're heading to the race weekend feeling very well prepared.”

Round two of the World Endurance Championship in Portugal is ideal for three drivers per vehicle. Given that the race runs over eight hours, all drivers get plenty of track time at the wheel of the Porsche 911 RSR. The race on 13 June – the original date for the 24 Hours of Le Mans – marks the first time that the FIA WEC will be contested on the Algarve track. Meanwhile the 89th edition of the French endurance classic will take place on 21/22 August, at the fourth round of the WEC season.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

In the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR, the works team relies on regular drivers Gianmaria Bruni and Richard Lietz from Austria. They will be joined by Frenchman Frederic Makowiecki for the eight-hour race in Portugal. The works driver from Montpellier will also compete at Le Mans. His compatriot Kevin Estre and Neel Jani from Switzerland share driving duties in the No. 92 sister car with Denmark's Michael Christensen. Estre and Jani won the GTE-Pro class at the opening round at Spa-Francorchamps and currently lead the world championship.

The customer teams

Dempsey-Proton Racing fields two Porsche 911 RSR cars at round two of the WEC season. Works driver Matt Campbell from Australia joins forces in the No. 77 car with the team owner Christian Ried (Germany) and the former Porsche Junior Jaxon Evans, from New Zealand. Porsche Young Professional Julien Andlauer from France, as well as Dominique Bastien from America and Germany's Marco Seefried, have been announced as the crew in the No. 88 sister car. The German customer team Project 1 campaigns the No. 56 Porsche 911 RSR with drivers Egidio Perfetti from Norway as well as the two Italians Matteo Cairoli and Riccardo Pera. The all-British driver crew of Michael Wainwright, Ben Barker and Tom Gamble compete for GR Racing in the No. 86 car.

Drivers' comments before the race

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "After achieving a mediocre result with our number 91 car at the season-opener in Spa-Francorchamps, we're now determined to earn maximum points. The track promises a lot of action and poses special challenges to teams and drivers. The durability of the tyres over two stints will be particularly tricky, but I think we're well prepared."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "The anticipation for the first WEC race in Portimao is huge. I really like taking on the new challenge of a new circuit. Finding an ideal setup that offers maximum grip even in the dips and on the crests will be our top priority in Portugal. Our team is very experienced and we also know the racetrack from our tests there, among other things. After our sister car won the opening round of the season in Belgium, we'd now like to finish at the front with our number 91 car."

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "It's great that the WEC has included an eight-hour race on its calendar in the lead-up to the Le Mans highlight. This allows me to familiarise myself again with the Porsche 911 RSR and take in the team pro- cesses. The same applies to Michael in the sister car. I think that our car should be well suited to the special features of this racetrack. I'm heading to the race weekend feeling very excited and I'm thrilled that I can finally drive the fast GTE racer for Porsche again."

The schedule (all times CEST)

Friday, 11 June
15:15 to 16:45 – Free practice 1

Saturday 12. June
09:35 to 11:05 – Free practice 2
14:00 to 15:00 – Free practice 3
18:00 to 18:10 – Qualifying GTE-Pro and GTE-Am

Sunday 13. June
11:00 to 19:00 – Race

Internet coverage of the race

For a fee, the official FIA WEC app offers live streaming and live timing.

2021 WEC calendar

26/27 April – Prologue in Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium)
1 May – 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium)
13 June – 8 Hours of Portimão (Portugal)
18 July – 6 Hours of Monza (Italy)
21/22 August – 24 Hours of Le Mans (France)
26 September – 6 Hours of Fuji (Japan)
20 November – 8 Hours of Bahrain (Bahrain)

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Video

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