

1 000 KM OF SPA

Johnny Herbert and Jamie Davies took their second win of the year and claimed the inaugural LMP1 title in their Audi after a spectacular Spa 1000kms filled with incident. The race was the best attended of the year, and the spectators endured sunshine and rain throughout the six-hour race but were kept enthralled. Five safety car periods punctuated the race, the first time that they had been deployed all season, but 28 of the 41 starters made it through tough conditions to take the chequered flag.

LMP1

Jamie Davies and Johnny Herbert took the title with a victory that looked unlikely in the first hour of the race. Soheil Ayari made a mistake in the Judd-powered Pescarolo and went off circuit at high speed, the Frenchman lucky to walk away from the car which hit the tyre wall at Pouhon after he put a wheel on a wet kerb.

The safety car emerged for the first time all season, splitting the three Audis. Under new regulations, the safety car is not required to pick up the leader, leaving Herbert frustrated in third position as both Rinaldo Capello and Pierre Kaffer pulled out nearly a lap.

Kaffer was victim of an unfortunate accident when he came to lap a GT car which hadn't seen his Audi. As it pulled over to take its line into the Bus Stop chicane, the Ferrari and the Audi made contact, Kaffer sliding onto the wet grass. He then hit the TVR driven by Warren Hughes, an innocent bystander in the incident, destroying the rear end of the R8 and causing it to catch fire. With one wheel hanging off, and the rear of the car ablaze, Kaffer drove down the pit lane to his pit, where the team rapidly extinguished the fire.

Capello lost all the time gained over Herbert under the second safety car, and the Englishman soon passed the Team Goh car for the lead. At mid-distance, Davies managed to go a lap ahead, and the Audi UK car went on to take eventual victory.

Nicolas Minassian had started the race from pole position in the Creation Sport Zytek, but contact with Kaffer at the first corner punctured a rear tyre. From 40th position, the Frenchman bravely fought back into the top ten before Jamie Campbell-Walter continued the fine work. They finished third overall after a wonderful recovery drive.

John Stack, driving with a broken rib, Sam Hignett and Gianni Collini were fourth in the LMP1 category in their Team Jota Zytek, delayed when Collini suffered a broken track rod and spun into a wall. They finished eight laps down on the overall winners, and ahead of the RML MG Lola which had its best showing of the year. Miguel Ramos pitted early during his stint, and the team changed tyres putting them outside their fuel window. They never got back onto their fuel schedule and lost places with an extra pit stop for fuel in the final hour.

The Team Nasamax DM139 retired in the fourth hour when Romain Dumas suffered an unusual problem. Team-mate Werner Lupberger had a crash in the morning warm-up, and new bolts in the footwell were suspected to have caused some stitching to have come loose on Dumas' boot. As he braked for Pouhon for the 69th time, his boot held the throttle open 20 per cent causing him to crash.

LMP2

Alexander Frei and Sam Hancock claimed the LMP2 title, sharing with the impressive Jonathan Cochet, who drove the Courage to third place overall at one stage of the race. The three eventually finished fourth overall after a near perfect race in the Courage. "The LMP2 category is growing all the time and it would be a pleasure to stay and defend the title," said Hancock. "To do what Jonathan did was incredible, but I want to thank Jean-Marc Gounon who shared with us for the rest of the season. You win titles due to consistency, and this is what these two drivers have given us."

Paul Belmondo Racing was second in their Courage, delayed when a pipe came off the turbo which caused them to lose a lot of time. Any chance to fight for the class win finished when they also had a starter motor problem caused by a lack of cooling to the unit.

Jean-Rene de Fournoux, Jean-Bernard Bouvay and Sylvain Boulay were third in their WR, eight laps down on the winners. The Lucchini of Pierguiseppe Peroni, Mirko Savoldi and Filippo Francioni, making its debut in the series, had three one minute penalties for two drivers overtaking behind safety cars. They took all three penalties together, and then lost four further laps with an electrical problem.

GTS

One of the most closely-fought classes of the field, it was a deserving Larbre Competition 1-2 in the class, with Pedro Lamy, Christophe Bouchut and Steve Zacchia taking the GTS title for the first time in their Ferrari 550 Maranello having won all four rounds of the LMES. Their Ferrari ran faultlessly to take victory ahead of the French team's second car, driven by Tomas Enge, Robert Pergl and Patrice Goueslard.

The two Ferraris once again faced tough opposition from the Konrad Motorsport Saleen S7R which lost time with a loose floor late in the second hour. Uwe Alzen, Michael Bartels and Franz Konrad drove a great race until Bartels spun mightily at the daunting Eau Rouge corner. "He was flat out in fifth gear!" said Konrad. The German hit a wall and damaged the chassis, unable to get the car back to the pits.

The Barron Connor team had its best showing of the year, when Mike Hezemans and Jean-Denis Deletraz finished third in the category. The team had worked until 7am following a large crash by Hezemans during first qualifying on Saturday morning that had caused extensive damage to the front of the car. "It is lovely to get a result for the team having worked so hard," said a spokesperson. Their car was severely delayed when Hezemans had a pit lane infraction which incurred a five-minute penalty. "I have never seen a penalty like that in my life," said Deletraz.

John Bosch, Danny Sullivan and Thomas Biagi were fourth in the sister Barron Connor car, delayed in the latter stages by a broken front splitter. Fifth was the Graham Nash Motorsport Saleen S7R of Paul Whight, Phil Bennett and David Leslie having been delayed by a broken wheel.

GT

Stephane Ortelli and Emmanuel Collard won the GT category, their second victory of the year, but the teams' title went to the British Sebah Automotive team. Xavier Pompidou and Marc Lieb finished third in class to claim the title and were delighted to do so having lost time early on in the race when Pompidou suffered a fire extinguisher problem. "I had to get out of the car, find the problem, and then fix it before I could bring the car back," he said.

For Ortelli and Collard it was a bitter sweet win for the Freisinger Motorsport team. They won the opening round at Monza, but a misunderstanding with the team at the Nurburgring caused them to lose points when they finished in the pitlane and were not classified. They drove a fantastic race at Spa, making brave tyre decisions to take a decisive victory.

Second was the Cirtek Motorsport Porsche of Adam Jones and Sascha Maassen. They lost time on Friday with a misfire and a gearbox problem, but were able to set pole position time on Saturday. A handling issue, discovered during the warm-up, caused them to give up hope of victory, and they came away delighted with their third position.

Thorkild Thyrring, Lars Nielsen and Patrick Long were fourth in the Farnbacher Racing Porsche, the latter putting on a stunning drive in the latter stages of the race to secure the position.