



There hardly is any driver in the paddock that isn't welcoming the return to Portugal, and everyone is excited about the prospect of racing once again on the 4.652-kilometre Autódromo Internacional do Algarve.

Everything came together for Nicolas Lapierre when the flag dropped for the 20-minute qualifying. His last, and quickest lap, with a time of 1:30.681, was enough to secure the French driver his second pole in the 2010 series.

Because the race starts later in the afternoon, the morning schedule of the qualifying session was unusual, but Nicolas Lapierre was fully awake as he was able to repeat last year's pole for team ORECA Matmut.

NO MAJOR SURPRISE IN THE LMP1 AND LMP2 CLASSES...

The qualifying session did not hold any big surprises in the LMP1 class, as #4 Team ORECA Matmut snatched pole by less than three tenths of a second from the second #12 Rebellion Racing Lola below blue skies in Portugal. However, it also begs the question: who might challenge them as they still expect the first victory ever with the Peugeot 908 HDi FAP? "It is good to be on pole and score one point," said Nicolas. The gap is small, and we have to keep a close look at our rivals who have caught up since yesterday. But the most important thing is that the Peugeot works very well."

Rebellion Racing desperately needs a good result to get back into the game after the first two rounds and Neel Jani secured yet a front row start for the Swiss team, clocking up the second fastest time around at the Portuguese track. The podium at Le Castellet boded well for the team, but they endured a weekend blighted by bad luck at Spa, as well as at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, and both cars were struck by technical gremlins. The situation is about the same for Team Signature, and third spot on the grid means that the team is determined to bounce back.

Many people think the Strakka Racing HPD is the fastest car on the grid over a single lap and at Portimao on Saturday morning Danny Watts hammered the point home, once more locking out the front row. It seems the rest of the pack will have their work cut out to stay in touch on the evening even if the team has not been head and shoulders their rivals as they used to. While the rest of the paddock expects the British team to dominate again this weekend, the team themselves believe that the racing might be closer than it was in Le Castellet or in Le Mans last June as the British driver confirmed: "I'm really pleased, but that was hard work. Yesterday we struggled to find the perfect set-up, but that made it much closer. You have to compromise here to find the perfect set-up, and there are four or five teams now that are close on times. It will be closer still in the race."

The first round winner might expect a stronger challenge from Quifel-ASM Team and RML, as well as OAK Racing, in Portimao as they demonstrated in the free practice sessions that the LMP2 leader can be beaten. Many fans will want to see the two Quifel-ASM drivers fight it out for home victory at Portimao.

In the Formula Le Mans class, Mathias Beche prevented the reigning champion Nico Verdonck from clinching his second pole in the 2010 season for 130 thousands of a second. Team Applewood Seven will start from pole, but Hope Polevision Racing, second and third, stays in ambush as both teams expect their second victory.

...THE SURPRISE SPRANG FROM THE LMGT1 AND LMGT2 CLASSES

Carlo Van Dam and Atlas FX-Team FS sprang a big surprise and snatched the pole, while Gabriele Gardel secured the front row in the LMGT1 class in the morning qualifying session. Thanks to another front row grid slot, Larbre Compétition remains in a promising position to build on the LMGT1 championship lead.

1-2-3 Ferrari! Setting the fastest time in two free practice sessions and taking a one-two in qualifying made this so far a weekend to remember for AF Corse. Gimmi Bruni finally won the internal battle against Toni Vilander while Tim Mullen and CRS Racing were able to secure second row. But, is the battle really over? Ferrari may have won the first battle, but their rivals, and especially Team Felbermayr-Proton, haven't given up yet as the whole GT2 pack or almost was within two seconds of the pole-winning time.

