

JWA Seventh with Le Mans Series Aston Martin GT2 Debut

Silverstone, Northamptonshire (September 14, 2008) – James Watt Automotive (JWA) had a simple goal for the debut of its #93 Aston Martin Vantage GT2 in the season finale of the 2008 Le Mans Series, Sunday's *'Autosport 1000km of Silverstone'* – to finish the race! The Staffordshire-based team duly declared 'mission accomplished' as they claimed the chequered flag seventh in the GT2 class with two championship points a just reward for a solid maiden effort.

The stunning 4.5-litre, V8-powered Aston Martin Vantage GT2 made its European competition debut at Silverstone in the hands of JWA's driver trio of Tim Sugden (UK), Alan van der Merwe (SA) and Michael Outzen (DK). Van der Merwe started from 13th in class following a frustrating qualifying session the day before, the team still getting to grips with the car having had just one day of testing prior to the weekend's six-hour endurance race.

The former British F3 Champion pitted after 45-minutes with Michael Outzen next up behind the wheel. The Danish touring car regular enjoyed a trouble-free stint despite the first of the race's two full course cautions on his shift. He climbed into the top-ten with 39 laps recorded and was sitting ninth at the two-hour mark when he pitted for Tim Sugden to start what would be a double-stint.

Sugden was back in the pits just a lap later though with the team losing precious time and a potential fifth place finish as a flooring mount required repairing. Racing in front of an enthusiastic, and sizeable home crowd, the Brit held ninth in GT2 at the three hour mark and twenty minutes later climbed to eighth with 90 laps on the board.

Alan van der Merwe relieved Sugden for his second stint as the four hour mark approached. An event-free period saw the South African up to seventh by lap 123 before he returned to the pits for Michael Outzen to complete the run to the chequered. While the final laps of the race were interrupted briefly with the final safety car period, for crash debris, Outzen kept the JWA entry on-track for a debut finish, the Dane clocking 150 laps around Silverstone's Grand Prix circuit with five hours and twenty five minutes logged.

Nine laps later and JWA celebrated a points paying GT2 debut for the One York and TW Steel partnered #93 Aston Martin Vantage GT2, Outzen claiming the chequered in seventh. Britain's Allan McNish claimed the overall victory and LMP1 honours for Audi, alongside team-mate Rinaldo Capello, while the GT2 class was won by Virgo Motorsport's Robert Bell and Jamie Melo in a Ferrari F430 GT.

"Well we have to be pleased with a finish for the Aston," stated James Watt, JWA Team Principal. "It's what we set out to get and to claim two championship points against some of the best sports car team's in the world is pretty cool. Naturally we're a bit disappointed not to finish slightly higher up but I have to be pleased with what we accomplished.

"We lost around eight and a half minutes in the pits which equates to close to four laps fixing the mounts on the rear of the front floor shortly after Tim jumped in. Had we completed those laps we'd have likely ended up with a fifth place finish which would obviously have been a fantastic result so I'm a little disappointed we had that issue. Overall we've got a great baseline from this event and we can use it as a springboard for 2009."

Alan van der Merwe (28) commented; "Our objective was simply to finish with the new car so in that respect it's a case of mission accomplished. That said, we're competitive people and we had secret expectations of the car in terms of its pace so it was slightly disappointing we couldn't have had a better qualifying run yesterday. We went quicker in today's race obviously but the top-five we had hoped for didn't quite happen after the extended stay in the pits. The fact is that this car just needs some mileage and we got some on the board today. There's no doubt the Aston Martin's a great package and should be competitive next season."

"I really enjoyed my run," stated Tim Sugden (44). "I think the car performed as well as we expected it to given the limit track time we had heading into Silverstone. My best lap time, a 1m53.8s, was actually pretty respectable compared to the established GT2 cars. We finished the race which was the main thing. In a race as long as this, there's a ton of things that can go wrong but didn't. The team did a great job. Our floor issue was a silly little problem but it cost us some position. Overall though I think everyone should be pleased with how things turned out today given the circumstances."

Michael Outzen (26) enjoyed his first full taste of Le Mans Series competition; "It was a good experience getting to know the car and seeing how it performed over the course of a whole race. We have to look at all the positives from this run which includes getting to the finish and building up some data on the car as well. It gives the team information to work with which didn't exist prior to the weekend. There's no doubt this car has a lot of potential in GT2. I had a great time, I really like these long endurance races. The crowd here today was great and Silverstone's always fun to race on. I hope I get to come back again!"

For further information on the Le Mans Series, please log on to: www.lemans-series.com

ENDS – www.jwaracing.com

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Photo Credit – 'JWA's #93 Aston Martin Vantage GT2 debuted in Round 5 of the Le Mans Series' – Jakob Ebrey Photography

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