



Team RLR Takes Positives from Imola Outing

Despite having their bid for a third consecutive top five class finish derailed in the searing heat of the 6 Hours of Imola today, both Team RLR management & drivers were upbeat about the progress the squad has made heading into the second half of the 2011 Le Mans Series season

The weekend had begun full of promise for the British outfit, with a productive test programme prior to the race giving the team confidence it could once again challenge the established names in the championship in front of the enthusiastic Italian motorsport 'tifosi'.

However, unusually the team suffered from a series of mechanical issues that ultimately meant it failed to maintain its 100% finish record in 2011.

After making an excellent start to the race in the MG Lola EX265, on the second lap Rob Garofall suddenly felt the steering lock up while driving well in excess of 100mph. While it came back on line quickly enough to allow him to avoid an accident and nurse the car back to the pits, the problem required the full steering rack to be changed and cost the team almost a full hour in the pit box.

With the early setback having left Team RLR with an insurmountable deficit to make up and the prospect of racing for position out of the question, the focus turned to providing productive seat time for the drivers.

Having solved the steering problem Team RLR's well drilled pit crew sent the car back onto the track with Simon Phillips behind the wheel. The London based driver quickly settled in and consistently posted some of his best times around the 4.9km Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari.

The stormy weather that drenched the circuit on Friday was by now a distant memory, and when Barry Gates climbed into the MG Lola EX265 just before the halfway point of the race the track temperature was nudging 34 degrees Celsius.

Gates ran a clean and quick double stint before pitting to hand over to Phillips once again. During the stop it became apparent there was an issue with the alternator that had to be remedied, costing the team a further 20 minutes while the job was carried out.

After Phillips had clocked up more valuable mileage Gates was set to take over and close the race out, but another niggling problem reared its head with the gearbox and the decision was taken to retire with around 25 minutes of the six hour event remaining.

Despite enduring a frustrating day at the office all three drivers reported the car to be excellent to drive when on circuit, and felt the progress the team had seen in testing had been successfully translated into the race setup.

Team RLR will now analyse the data from Imola before devising a strategy to bounce back strongly to competitive action at the next round and 'home' event for the team at Silverstone on September 9-11.

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Nick Reynolds, Team RLR team principal, said:

"I felt we had a great chance to secure a big result here coming into the weekend, but unfortunately that was put beyond our reach very early in the race. On the plus side the guys did feel the benefit of the improvements we have made to the car recently. Simon and Barry both took a lot from their time on track today so it's certainly not been a wasted journey. The more miles we do the more we all learn, and I'm very confident we can successfully work through the issues we had here today."

Barry Gates, Team RLR driver, said:

"Obviously it was frustrating to not be able to race for position after what happened in the opening stages, especially as the car was great today and really enjoyable to drive. It was perfectly balanced, and while other cars still have much more power than us in a straight line we were able to make up some time through the corners. It's actually a very demanding track Imola as you're always working hard, there's nowhere you can afford to stop concentrating. It didn't help that the steering wheel was not quite straight after the incident, but it didn't affect the performance of the car at all."

Rob Garofall, Team RLR driver, said:

"Well there's not a lot you can say when something like that happens after two laps. I got a good start and went to change direction going into the chicane and the steering just locked, which was a bit worrying as I was carrying a fair bit of speed. Thankfully it started working again and I caught it, but it felt all wrong. We decided to bring it in and fix it rather than risk damaging the car even more if it went again at the wrong place. We had four or five hours of clean running in practice and qualifying this weekend with no problems, so it's not easy when you then get an issue on lap two of the race."

Simon Phillips, Team RLR driver, said:

"It was very hot out there which made it really hard work today, but I enjoyed every minute of it. It was a shame what happened to the car early on but these things happen sometimes in racing. After that it was just a question of having the right mindset and go as quickly as possible without compromising anyone else's race. The car felt really alive and it's fantastic track to drive, so I just worked hard on my lap times and ensured I brought the car back in good shape."

ENDS

Notes for editors:

To find out more about Team RLR and its Le Mans Series campaign log on to: www.rlrmotorsport.com

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