

So near yet so far for Team RLR

A top ten class finish was cruelly snatched from Team RLR in the final round of the 2010 Le Mans Series at Silverstone today (September 12), as a mechanical failure just 15 minutes from the end of the 1000km race denied the Lancashire-based squad a confidence-boosting end to the season.

Having elected to contest the final two rounds of the championship at the Hungaroring and Silverstone the newcomers were looking to gather as much experience in the MG Lola EX265 as possible before taking on a full campaign in 2011.

With one box ticked after finishing eighth in class in Hungary, Team RLR sought a similar result at the home of British motorsport to help push forward the development of the squad.

However, after 141 drama-filled laps the LMP2 challengers were brought to a shuddering halt - with a suspected drive shaft problem putting paid to their hopes while sitting ninth in class and 21st overall of 45 starters.

The weekend had started well for the new kids on the block, showing good pace in free practice and Rob Garofall then placing the MG Lola 9th in class & 20th overall on the grid after qualifying despite changeable conditions that made the track swing between dry and wet.

Sunny weather arrived in time for the start of the five hour race though, and Barry Gates made a great start for Team RLR in the opening laps. He picked off two class rivals, and was rapidly closing on those ahead of him, before an off resulted in a pit stop to tidy up the car and dropped the MG Lola back to 36th overall.

Once Gates returned to the fray he had made steady progress though, and by the time he handed over debutant Simon Phillips almost two hours in, Team RLR was on the comeback trail. Phillips settled quickly to the task in hand and drove a very clean stint to recover some of the ground lost earlier in the day. With no major dramas and his lap times consistently improving throughout, the London-based driver had moved up to 33rd overall before handing over to team-mate Rob Garofall.

The Leighton Buzzard man used all of his seven years experience as an instructor at Silverstone to quickly make inroads into the field ahead of him, and four hours into the race Team RLR was up to ninth in class and 24th overall. As the speed of rival cars began to wane going into the final hour of the race Garofall was on a mission, recording Team RLR's quickest times so far and consistently upping the ante.

Even a quick pit stop to fit a new nose to the MG Lola, as a result of some minor damage to the front end bodywork earlier in the race, didn't halt Team RLR's momentum much. However, shortly after a much bigger problem did. Garofall was powering out of a corner when a suspected driveshaft failure brought him to a stop and the fight was over for Team RLR only minutes from the end of the race.

Despite the bitter blow so close to the finishing line the Team RLR lineup was buoyed by the fact it had once again shown its intention to compete at the very top level and build towards becoming a strong presence in the Le Mans Series in seasons to come.

Barry Gates, Team RLR driver, said:

"Despite a slightly frustrating start to the weekend on Friday, mainly due to the weather, we had a very good day on Saturday and started to show the kind of pace we knew we could produce. When it was fully wet it helped us, as the difference in power between us and some of our rivals was cancelled out a bit, and we had a good qualifying session. When it came to the race I think all three drivers showed they had good pace, but we ended up in the pits too often and that cost us. I felt I showed some speed out there when I got a clear run, but had a few issues with certain corners. However, it has all been good experience for next season. All of our pit stops went very smoothly and the team have worked so well together, both here at Silverstone and in the previous round in Hungary. We think from where we are now once we get a competitive engine in the car we can show what we are truly capable of in 2011."

Rob Garofall, Team RLR driver, said:

"I'm gutted to have got so close to the finish and not made it. Not sure what happened but everything had been going well until I came out of a corner and there was a big bang and I lost all drive. The car had been absolutely mega until then. It would've been nice to get to the finish but there's not much you can do when these things happen, it's just bad luck. I felt I drove well and the car handled superbly throughout. We know it's lacking a little bit of outright pace but everything else is in place to make it a competitive package. We can solve the power issue and it's been great to get out there and test ourselves against some very strong competition over the last two rounds. I've loved every minute."

Simon Phillips, Team RLR driver, said:

"As a team we didn't get the result we wanted, but it was another steep learning curve coming here and competing against a field like this. I'm pretty happy with my debut in the Le Mans Series overall. I didn't have any traction control during my stint which made it pretty hard work, but it also made the car feel a bit like the CN prototypes I've raced before so it didn't throw me too much. I got my lap times down to a good level and had no dramas at all, so I hit the targets I set myself before this weekend. Now I have that experience, especially of the type of decisive overtaking that is required out there in traffic, I will be able to push harder next time."

Nick Reynolds, Team RLR team principal, said:

"What can I say? I'm so disappointed to have got that close to the end and not got to the finish. There were a bit too many dramas early in the race and that's something we'll need to cut out to be successful going forward, but the drivers all did themselves proud by clawing their way back from the position we were in. Simon Phillips did an outstanding job considering he was a race behind the rest of us having missed Hungary, he progressed really well throughout the weekend. We're all frustrated but we've also taken a lot from it. The boys in the garage have not missed a beat and worked ever so hard. We'll look at our engine choice for next year during the close season and continue to push as hard as we can to develop the team in every area."

ENDS

Notes for editors:

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

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