



ASTON MARTIN RACING

ASTON MARTIN EXCEEDS ALL EXPECTATIONS AT LE MANS

Le Mans, 14 June, 2009. Fifty years on from Aston Martin's victory in the 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours, the team has exceeded all expectations by finishing an excellent fourth overall in this year's race, having been quickest of the petrol runners from start to finish.

As expected, the diesel-powered cars enjoyed a margin of superiority, but Aston Martin Racing fulfilled its mission of being the first petrol car home, having also been the quickest of the petrol cars during qualifying on Thursday night.

Despite the Aston Martin LMP1 car being new for this year, with the Le Mans programme only confirmed six months ago, the fourth-placed 007 car – crewed by Jan Charouz (CZ), Tomas Enge (CZ) and Stefan Mücke (DE) – exhibited perfect mechanical reliability, with only a puncture and a minor issue with the headlights getting in the way of its serene progress to the chequered flag.

Mücke qualified the 007 car in eighth place for the start of the 77th Le Mans 24 Hours, which took place at 3pm on Saturday. This was in spite of extremely limited dry running before qualifying, as the six-hour long free practice session on Wednesday was hit by heavy rain. When it came to the race, ambient temperatures were extremely warm, taking their toll on cars and drivers.

The 007 car ran in close formation with its sister 008 car – crewed by Anthony Davidson (GB), Darren Turner (GB) and Jos Verstappen (NL) – for the first half of the race. Davidson, a former Grand Prix driver, qualified the 008 car ninth and at one point on Saturday evening climbed as high as third in the overall race standings.

Unfortunately the 008 car lost time at around 10pm when it was in collision with a GT1 car during an overtaking manoeuvre at Terre Rouge. The effect of this was to damage the suspension and floor, which necessitated several visits to the pits to repair. Furthermore, the crew was handed a five-minute stop-and-go penalty in relation to the incident, which was taken in the early hours of Sunday morning. Afterwards, 008 was amongst the quickest petrol-powered cars in the race, but it subsequently lost time with mechanical problems relating to the gearbox and brakes. It was eventually classified 13th, having followed the 007 car across the line on Sunday in a spectacular formation finish.

The 009 car, crewed by Stuart Hall (GB), Peter Kox (NL), and Harold Primat (CH) did not make the end of the race as Primat had an accident in the 18th hour that brought out the safety car but left him uninjured. Kox had qualified the car in 17th place on Thursday night, setting his fastest lap on his final timed run.

Tomas Enge took the finish for the 007 crew after 373 laps and 5084 kilometres, watched by an estimated crowd of over 250,000 people. The Czech driver commented: "I have to say how impressed I have been with the reliability of the car. We had no real problems at all from start to finish, which is an amazing achievement for such a tough race. I'd like to thank the entire team for making this result possible, which certainly exceeds our expectations. This is always going to be one of the best memories of my career."

His compatriot Jan Charouz bounced back from an accident in qualifying on Thursday night that damaged the 007 car heavily. Thanks to some excellent work from the Aston Martin Racing mechanics, the car went on to finish just off a podium place in the race. Charouz said: "The accident in qualifying certainly wasn't the best way for me to start the Le Mans 24 Hours but that is all forgotten now. Conditions during the race were extremely tough, with several incidents and safety car periods, but we managed to get through it thanks to some excellent team work. We may not have won ourselves on this occasion, but I hope that we paid a good tribute to the drivers who won for Aston Martin back in 1959."

Mücke took the start of the race for the 007 crew and turned in a fault-free performance throughout the 24 Hours, despite feeling unwell on Sunday. The German driver's renowned blend of speed and consistency resulted in the car making rapid progress back up the order after a puncture on Saturday evening dropped it down to seventh.

"I'm absolutely delighted by this result," he said. "The performance gap shows that there are still effectively two classes in the LMP1 category – diesel and petrol – but we said from the very beginning that our objective was to be quickest in the petrol class and so I am very pleased that we have managed to achieve this. Compared to last year our performance gap to the diesels is a bit smaller but the rules still do not allow us to compete on equal terms."

The 008 crew completed 342 laps, with all the drivers delighted to get to the finish of this epic race. Anthony Davidson set the car's qualifying time on Thursday and impressed the team with his abilities and feedback throughout the weekend. "It's been an absolutely great experience," said the Englishman. "I've been really impressed with the performance we've shown here and I hope we've surprised a few people with our speed. It's been fantastic to be part of the Aston Martin team and I think between us all we've put on a great show. We ran as high as third overall and I think had we experienced no problems, then we could have challenged for the podium."

Darren Turner finished the race for the 008 crew, having proved instrumental in hauling the car back up the leaderboard after it lost time overnight. Turner, a two-time Le Mans winner in GT1 with Aston Martin, said: "We're really pleased to get to the finish, although at the same time we're disappointed that we had a few problems. The important thing though is that this has been a tremendous result for the team after all the hard work everyone has put in, particularly the 007 crew who did such a great job."

Former Grand Prix driver Jos Verstappen, who spent 10 years in Formula 1, did not put a foot wrong on what was his LMP1 debut and only his second Le Mans, following his win in the LMP2 class last year. "I've had a fantastic time," said the Dutchman. "Before this race I had very little experience of the car, and during my first stints alone I practically doubled my seat time in it. As the race went on I got to know it better and our pace improved. I felt comfortable in the car straight away: given the small amount of preparation we all had I think everyone has done an amazing job."

The 009 crew was reduced to two drivers after Stuart Hall was disqualified on Saturday evening for his part in a collision with an LMP2 car at the Ford chicane. Beforehand, the young Englishman had impressed on his debut with Aston Martin Racing.

Hall commented: "I'm very sorry for the incident that led to my disqualification, but I'm very grateful for the opportunity to drive for Aston Martin Racing. The professionalism of the team has been second to none, and the end result for the 007 car is well-deserved."

Peter Kox was drafted into this year's squad at the last minute, but is nonetheless a familiar face at Aston Martin, having driven for the team on several occasions in the past. "It was great to be back," he said. "We obviously had a tough race with our car, but when things go well there is plenty of potential as the result for 007 shows."

Harold Primat luckily emerged with no injuries after his accident on Sunday, having shouldered the burden of all the driving with Kox since Saturday night.

"It was a shame for Peter and I as we were moving up the field after our earlier problems and we were both frustrated not to finish," concluded Primat. "At Le Mans you sometimes have bad luck, and this was just one of those occasions. However, the team result with the 007 car is the most important thing."

David Richards, Chairman of Aston Martin, commented: "I'm absolutely delighted. We came to Le Mans with modest expectations and we've exceeded all of them. Once again, Aston Martin has punched well above its weight and it's a fantastic achievement from everyone involved. Now we have to ask ourselves some serious questions about where we go from here."

Dr Ulrich Bez, Chief Executive Officer of Aston Martin, added: "In the same month that we launch the new V12 Vantage and DBS Volante, it is fitting that the same 6.0 litre V12 heart powers our LMP1 cars to such an outstanding Le Mans debut. I am thrilled for the whole team."

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