

Le Mans Series – Spa 1000kms – Race

## Raymond Narac and Patrick Pilet take battling fifth amid Spa carnage

The week didn't begin well however with drivers Patrick Pilet and Raymond Narac encountering a problem around the differential during free practice which hampered the important set-up work normally completed on Friday. With the issue solved, the IMSA pair began the second day of practice with a much better platform, which allowed them to set a very encouraging third fastest time on Saturday morning's final session. In qualifying, Patrick was hoping for a place on the first or second row at least, but that was without factoring in Jaime Melo, who refused to move from the racing line on his slowing down lap. The blockage cost at least half a second and pushed the #76 Porsche down to eighth place on the GT2 grid.



As Sunday dawned, so the Ardennes' conditions closed in, although the light rain which fell prior to the start did not warrant drivers opting for wet weather tyres. Nevertheless, as the cars set off on their formation lap, it was clear that grip was at a premium with several drivers being caught out, including those of Peugeot and Audi at the front! Pilet was another to misjudge the conditions as he spun at the first corner of the opening lap.

*"Surprisingly, the car spun through 90 degrees but on the opposite side to where it should have gone, which made me think it wasn't the conditions that were to blame. It looked more like a slight push from another competitor, but after checking the car, we did not notice anything suspicious at the rear and I did not feel anything when it happened,"* pondered the Frenchman. Nevertheless, the chaotic start saw the driver from Gers drop towards the back of the pack, before the race was neutralised following another accident at the top of Eau Rouge.



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Once racing resumed, Patrick embarked on a great comeback drive despite four flat-spotted tyres which caused the car to vibrate. *"There was no way I was going to lose time by going back into the pits. I preferred driving like that as it was not going to have an impact on the car's performance,"* he confirmed.

Utterly committed, the factory Porsche driver continued to climb the order lap after lap and reached as high as second place before handing over to his team mate. With the race's half way point approaching no one could have predicted what happened next; a power cut forced the race director to suspend racing. As the red flags flew, so the race for victory was effectively over for the IMSA Performance Matmut team. *"They blocked the main pack from certain cars. Those in front were able to do one more lap which is why we lost a lap to the leaders! There was a lot of confusion. Certain teams even used the opportunity to repair their car, which surprised a few people,"* explains Narac, who was then installed in the car. From then on, with three hours of racing remaining, it would be difficult to recover the handicap without luck playing its part.



After half-an-hour, the race resumed. Raymond and then Patrick, both fired up, completed an excellent second half thanks to an aggressive race strategy, especially concerning tyre changes, before light rain returned during the last fifteen minutes of the race.

*"We knew that Spa would be one of the hardest meetings of the year for us. We have come out of it quite well despite what happened when the race was stopped. We finished in the top five, which allowed us to score some important points and move up to fourth in the championship. The overall result is good. It is a shame that it did not rain for longer as on a wet track I was able to gain three or four seconds a lap. When you consider that we finished ten seconds behind the second placed car, it is a bit frustrating. That's life. The Porsche has again showed how competitive it is throughout the weekend and this is a positive note ahead of the Le Mans 24 Hours. The big meeting of the year is only one month away and it is reassuring to know that the car is working well before this very important race,"* explained Pilet.



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*"Of course we will never be satisfied but when you see the level of competition this year, fifth place is not a bad result at all," said Narac. "I do not know if the sudden performance of the BMWs will be confirmed but the battle is so close that to score a podium has become very, very hard. The team has done an excellent job this weekend and when you consider what has already happened to me at this track twice before, and when you see the carnage which unfolded during the race, I believe that we can be satisfied."*



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