



Difficult end to '09 at Silverstone for Ajlani

Karim Ajlani endured a difficult end to his 2009 Le Mans Series campaign at Silverstone today after a small fire put pay to his chances in the 1000km event.

The Syrian had harboured high hopes of a strong season finale in Britain after qualifying his OAK Racing Pescarolo-Mazda fifth during Saturday's qualifying session, despite having never driven a prototype sportscar at the venue before Friday's opening free practice.

Come Sunday and it was team mate Matthieu Lahaye who took the 11.35 start. The Frenchman made good progress during his opening stint, climbing up to third in what was a fierce battle at the head of LMP2.

Karim then took over at #35's first scheduled stop before returning to the action in fifth having lost out slightly once the round of pit stops had shaken out. There he remained for the next 30 minutes before a minor error resulted in a harmless spin exiting the second Luffield right hander. Pointing the wrong way, he returned to the fray via the gravel trap, resulting in a lengthy stop to clean out the sidepods.

20 minutes were lost before he was able to rejoin, dropping the duo out of contention. Despite the difficult situation, Karim drove a trouble-free stint before handing the car over with three hours remaining.

Progress then continued to be made under the guidance of Lahaye with Ajlani back at the wheel for the final hour and a half. Unfortunately, he would be forced to retire in the pits following a fire at the rear of the car.

"It's the first race we've started this season without incurring a penalty," **said Karim.** "Matthieu made a good start and quickly settled into a good rhythm without any problems. We were third when he made his first stop but lost some time changing the tyres as we couldn't double stint them.

"Everything was working fine during my first stint before someone touched me on the right rear going into Copse. By Stowe I was experiencing a strange sensation through the car before spinning at the final corner. I ran out of track trying to point it back in the right direction and went through the gravel, which cost us some more time. It was a difficult race from there but we didn't give up. Matthieu put in a decent double stint before I took over for the final time. That's when I had a lot of smoke in the cockpit which forced me back in for good."

Despite a difficult final race, Ajlani's debut season in prototypes has been a strong one with two podium finishes to his name, while his exploits also earned a much sought-after Hilton Racing ambassadorship.

ENDS.