



4th April 2011

6 Hours of Le Castellet A frustrating first race for Olivier Pla !

This weekend saw Quifel-ASM Team's first race of the season at the Paul Ricard HTTT. Olivier Pla returned to the top category in sportscar racing for the first time since Petit Le Mans 2009. Partnered with Miguel Amaral at the wheel of the Zytek 09SC, the Toulouse native was hoping to be a successful underdog. The potential was there until a chaotic starting procedure reduced his hopes to nil.



During the free practice sessions, Olivier Pla quickly showed the car's potential. After signing the quickest time in the second session, he ended up in second place in the final run. At the end of qualifying the Toulouse native finished in third place after being bothered during his quick lap. *"We were thinking of the race, rather than going for a fast lap. We were running hard tyres. I still think that second place was possible, but we were confident for the rest of the*

weekend." The Quifel-ASM would take the start from the front row after the No. 16 Pescarolo was disallowed after technical inspections.

Olivier Pla was to take the start next to the No. 12 Lola-Toyota. Unfortunately, the starting procedure didn't go as the competitors expected. *"My engineer warned me that the safety car would stay out for one more lap,"* explains Olivier. *"However, the lights went to green anyway, and several drivers started to accelerate, two of which hit me from behind and damaged the rear of the car."* Once the restart was given, the No. 20 Zytek followed the leader's rhythm until the eighth lap when he fell victim to a puncture. *"The start had bad consequences for us. The damage to the rear caused the puncture and I was forced to pit so that the team could change the rear cover and wheel well. We lost ten laps. It's very frustrating to see your chances ruined because of such a reason. The writing was on the wall, so our only hope was to score points."*

As he rejoined in 28th, Olivier Pla continued to progress up the running order. After a solid double stint from Miguel Amaral, he took the controls to finish in 8th place, 4th in LMP1. *"We can't be happy with how the race unfolded: we had the potential to have a great race, as the second fastest race lap proves. Miguel, who is a gentleman driver, followed a very good rhythm against the pros. It's encouraging for the future. At Spa (Quifel-ASM Team's next race), the comparison between us and the Intercontinental Le Mans Cup competitors such as OAK Racing and Rebellion Racing will be interesting."*

After the Le Mans Series season opener, Olivier Pla will begin his campaign in GT Tour (French GT championship) starting this weekend at the Lédenon circuit. Partnered with Gabriel Balthazard, he will be driving a Ferrari F458 GT3 entered by Team Sofrev-ASP.

