

STRAKKA RACING



Strakka Reflecting on Spa

The Spa Francorchamps circuit is one of the drivers' favourites. It has long, fast straights, bracing high-G corners, and complex chicanes and hairpins. It's a challenging, technical track that sweeps through the forests of the Ardennes, climbing to the heights at Les Combes, and dipping to the seat-hugging lows of Eau Rouge. Much the same could be said of Strakka Racing's experiences at last weekend's Spa 1000 Kilometres. From the highs of another dominant qualifying run from Danny Watts, to the disappointment of a race cut short, it had it all, but the team emerged stronger, wiser, and more determined than ever.



The weekend began with the Michelin Green X Challenge award ceremony. Nick Leventis, Danny Watts, Jonny Kane and Team Manager Piers Phillips were each presented with trophies for Strakka Racing's success in securing the best score

in the opening round of the Le Mans Series at Paul Ricard. Using a formula that analyses over thirty different factors, the Challenge rewards those competitors that succeed in delivering the best overall performance, fuel efficiency, and least environmental impact throughout the race. The ultimate prize, offered to the season's overall Green X victor, is a guaranteed place in the following year's Le Mans 24 Hours.

"We were delighted to pick up this award, which came as a great bonus on top of our class win at Ricard," said Nick Leventis. "It is doubly important to us, as we feel we already owe so much to Michelin. I can't over-emphasise the role that Michelin has played in our performances already this year. Being the only Michelin runner in LMP2 has worked to our advantage, and their technical support has been excellent. They've pulled out all the stops to ensure we have the best tyre for the job, and I believe the evidence for that can be seen in the win we took at Paul Ricard, and the two successive pole positions that Danny has secured for us. To be awarded the Michelin Green X Challenge trophy for our first race of the year, from our own tyre supplier, is such an honour."



Clinching pole on Saturday afternoon was another high point. "Those were probably two of the most exciting qualifying laps of my career," admitted Danny Watts. His first had ended abruptly when the Strakka Racing HPD ARX-01c

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was clipped into a spin by an equally determined Tom Kristensen. “I won’t hold it against him,” grinned Danny. “He’s won Le Mans seven times, so if I can aspire to be half as good as him, I’ll be extremely happy.” Knowing he only had fuel for three flying laps, Danny gathered himself together and posted a time of 2:03.135 next time round; nearly five seconds quicker than the 2009 pole.

“That lap was fantastic,” suggested Nick. “Not just because it was quick, but because of where it came from. His composure and the way Danny was able to re-focus so quickly after being hit, and immediately set a terrific lap, really showed how good a driver he is.”

If those were the highs, then Sunday morning plumbed the depths. Heading into the Les Combes complex during morning warm-up, Nick lost control of the Strakka Racing HPD ARX-01c, and thumped backwards into the tyre wall, sustaining an 11g impact. “The reality is, I made a mistake. The track was cold, there was a bit of damp, and I hold my hand up; driver error,” he said. The car was delayed in its return to the pits, and the Strakka engineers had little more than ninety minutes to effect a repair before the race was due to start. To their enormous credit, they did so, losing just two laps to the leaders.

Jonny Kane took the race start. “We went from stone cold last to fifth in class,” said Piers Phillips. “The volume of accidents illustrated just how difficult the track conditions were, yet Jonny drove a fantastic couple of stints, totally faultless. Then Nick went out, and to be honest, my jaw dropped. Considering what he’d been through that morning, his driving was extraordinary. His pace was fantastic, even through the thickest traffic.”

Then, 3½ hours into the race came a second accident for Nick. “Ultimately there was damage to the transmission that none of us knew about, and least of all Nick,” explained Piers. “It was most likely a legacy of the morning’s incident, and it could have happened at any time, but it was unfortunate that Nick was in the car when that manifested itself.”

“The championship is wide open now,” admitted Nick Leventis, “but our focus now has to be on Le Mans. Every team faces set-backs; it’s very character building, but we have to put the disappointment behind us and concentrate on the 24 Hours.”

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