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ALMS At Laguna Seca – 10/18/08

Source: Team Race Reports

Photos Courtesy AUDI and ALMS



Acura Motorsports Race Report

Source: Tom Blattler, ACURA ALMS MEDIA RELATIONS

KANAAN, PAGENAUD PUT ON A GREAT SHOW DURING ACURA 1-2 FINISH

Acura's Take Pole, Fastest Lap And 1-2 Finish in LMP2 Division

In one of the most dramatic wheel-to-wheel battles in this year's American Le Mans Series, Tony Kanaan and Simon Pagenaud scored an Acura 1-2 LMP2 finish Saturday in the Monterey Sports Car Championships at the legendary Laguna Seca Raceway.

Kanaan, the 2004 IndyCar Series champion who won the 12 Hours of Sebring last year, held off the young French star in the last hour of the four-hour sports car extravaganza, winning by just .054 seconds in one of the closest finishes in ALMS history. The popular Brazilian, who teamed with Detroit winner Franck Montagny in the No. 26 XM Satellite Radio AGR Acura ARX-01b, took the overall lead on Lap 112, and swapped positions with Pagenaud several times before taking the checkered flag on Lap 145.

Kanaan's charge to the lead included several encounters with the more-powerful LMP1 Audi of Emanuele Pirro. Pirro forced his way past Kanaan late in the race to win the overall title.

Pagenaud, driving the No. 66 Panasonic ELS de Ferran Motorsports Acura ARX-01b prototype, took over the driving chores from team owner Gil de Ferran after the former Indy 500 champion led overall for more than 20 laps in the early portion of the four-hour contest. Pagenaud drove the last 92 laps and established himself as one of the world's promising sports-car stars with his stellar performance against the veteran Kanaan.

The LMP2 win was the sixth of the 2008 campaign for Acura, season high in the class. Porsche best Acura by one point in the final LMP2 manufacturers' engine and chassis standings.

The pole-winning No. 9 Patrón Highcroft Acura ARX-01b of Scott Sharp and David Brabham led early in the race before a power-steering problem forced the car to the pits on several occasions. Late in the race, Brabham set one of the fastest race laps, but the mechanical troubles held the team six laps back from the leader.

The fastest race lap went to Adrian Fernandez in the No. 15 Lowe's Fernandez Acura ARX-01b, as the Mexican driving star challenged for his team's first ALMS victory. Fernandez, who co-drove with Luis Diaz, fought with Kanaan and Pagenaud for the lead with an hour remaining, but an electrical problem on the team's final pit stop forced the Lowe's squad to seventh place at the finish.

Acura's second season in the American Le Mans Series proved to be very successful with six class victories including two overall wins [Lime Rock and Detroit] and four overall pole positions.

In 2009, Acura moves to the LMP1 division, with de Ferran Motorsports and Patrón Highcroft Racing set to campaign the new Acura ARX-02a. Lowe's Fernandez Racing will continue in the LMP2 class for Acura.

ACURA QUOTES:

FRANCK MONTAGNY (#26 XM Satellite Radio Acura ARX-01b): "This is a great way to finish the season. Without the late problem at Petit, we could have won the last three races. Driving in the American Le Mans Series has been great fun for me. The series is so competitive and the cars are great. It was fun to drive with Tony, too. He is a professional and he did a great job today at the end of the race. This is exciting for me."

TONY KANAAN (#26 XM Satellite Radio Acura ARX-01b): "This place is special for me. I won my first U.S. race here in Indy Lights in 1996. And today's race was one of my favorites. The battle with Simon [Pagenaud] was as good as anything I have done in Indy Car racing. He raced clean and we swapped positions several times. I love driving these prototype cars. Winning today was a thrill for me. Franck and I seemed to have a real bond in driving together. We got along tremendously. To win here was great."

DAVID BRABHAM (#9 Patrón Highcroft Racing Acura ARX-01b): "The Patrón Highcroft Acura felt really good at the start. Gil [de Ferran] made a good move in Turn Two, but I was able to hold him off. The tire pressures were a little too low and we were sliding around quite a bit. Gil got by me going up the hill in Turn Six. Our car just didn't feel proper with the low tire pressure. I think some of the cars had a similar problem in the early portion of the race. We had a tough day with the steering problem for Scott. At the end, our Acura was very fast. Overall, it was good season for us."

SCOTT SHARP (#9 Patrón Highcroft Racing Acura ARX-01b): "I jumped in the car after David ran so well. But something was wrong with the steering in the Patrón Highcroft Acura. The power steering went away and the car felt like I was driving a truck. It was very hard to drive it. I brought the car in several times and the team saw that the connection to the power steering box came loose. It was too bad, because I think our car was fast enough to run with the other Acura's and Porsches. We wanted to help Acura win the Manufacturers' Championship."

SIMON PAGENAUD (#66 Panasonic ELS Surround Acura ARX-01b): "Wow, Tony and I had a quite a race today. I think we passed each other twice. I know we were wheel-to-wheel lap after lap. And we raced cleanly. No dirty driving at all. We had a car to win today and it took a great drive by Tony to beat us. I feel good about our race and I hope the fans enjoyed the battle too."

GIL de FERRAN (#66 Panasonic ELS Surround Acura ARX-01b): "I'm very proud our team today. How about that race at the end? I thought we had a good race car coming into the race. And I had a great time driving here. Of course, I love this track. We made a good call on our tire selection. My stint was excellent and it was fun for me to lead again. But the story for team was Simon's performance. He and Tony put on a driving demonstration today. This was a good performance for our team. An excellent way to finish up our first season."

ADRIAN FERNANDEZ (#15 Lowe's Fernandez Acura ARX-01b): "Today was typical of the season we have had. It doesn't matter if we did the fastest lap and were fast in the race. At the end of the day, you win races by not having any or fewer problems than the others. We have already started our work for 2009 and testing begins in January. Next year will be our year."

LUIS DIAZ (#15 Lowe's Fernandez Acura ARX-01b): "It was a tough race for us. For me, my stint was complicated. We did the right thing with our tires [compound] for qualifying but it cost me a little bit on my first stint with the handling of the car. We got things right for Adrian and he was fast. Our tough luck continued today. I truly believe we had a car to win. I know we'll be ready to go for 2009."

Porsche Motorsports Report

Source: Andy Schupack, Porsche Motorsports

PORSCHE SECURES LMP2 AND GT2 MANUFACTURERS TITLES WITH KEY PERFORMANCES BY PENSKE RACING, FLYING LIZARD MOTORSPORTS AT LAGUNA SECA FINALE ATLANTA

Porsche entered today's Monterey Sports Car Challenge, the final round of the 2008 American Le Mans Series, with the LMP2 prototype drivers championship and the GT2 production-based drivers championship already clinched, but the manufacturers titles in both classes were still up for grabs. But, when the checked flag fell on the four-hour sports car classic early Saturday evening, a Porsche race team in each class scored a third point finish – good enough for the marquee to win both manufacturers championships.

In a race which featured 13 yellow flags and a racing surface which lost its grip due to excessive gravel on the track from the many racing incidents, the 2007 and 2008 LMP2 drivers champions, Romain Dumas (France) and Timo Bernhard (Germany), overcame an off-track incident of their own to guide their Penske Porsche RS Spyder to a third-place finish – just high enough to edge Acura by a single point in the final standings. Porsche ended up with 214 points, and Acura, with its one-two finish at Laguna, finished second with 213.

Penske Racing had previously clinched their third straight LMP2 team title. In the production-based GT2 class, Porsche had a more comfortable lead of 15 points going into the last event, but a strong contingent of Ferraris threatened to overcome those points with a sweep of the top position in the four-hour finale. But the Flying Lizard Motorsports Porsche 911 GT3 RSR of Patrick Pilet (France)/Johannes van Overbeek (USA) finished fourth in class to seal the manufacturer's championship, 220 – 215. Originally, Dirk Werner (Germany)/Bryce Miller (USA) in the Farnbacher Loles Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR had finished third, but the car was excluded at post-race tech for a ride height violation due to a broken right front spring.

Previously, Joerg Bergmeister and Wolf Henzler (both Germany) had clinched the driver's championship in their Flying Lizard Porsche, and Flying Lizard Motorsports had sealed the team title – their first. Hartmut Kristen, head of Porsche Motorsport, couldn't have planned the season any better for this final result. "To win all six championships – team, driver, and manufacturers titles in both LMP2 and GT2 – is so much satisfying than any individual race that we could win. This team effort included all our teams, their drivers and crews, our engineers – both at the track and in Germany – and all the Porsche AG, Porsche Motorsport, and Porsche Cars North America employees that helped make this happen. A special thanks must go to Penske Racing and Flying Lizard Motorsports, the teams that produced the driver's championships and contributed heavily to the manufacturers titles," said Kristen.

Paul Ritchie, president of Porsche Motorsport North America, was particularly gratified with the success of the 2008 Porsche 911 GT3 RSR after 2007, when Ferrari got the best of Porsche for the championship. "Over the winter, the engineers at Weissach, led by Roland Kussmaul, completely revamped the race car, including a new aerodynamic package and a four-liter engine, and provided us with a great package – and our teams did the rest. A special thanks must go to my staff at Porsche Motorsports North America, who provided critical parts and service support to keep everyone on the track," said Ritchie, whose organization is based in Santa Ana, Calif.

Other LMP2 Porsche finishers included Helio Castroneves/Ryan Briscoe in the Penske Porsche RS Spyder (fourth); Guy Smith/Chris Dyson in the Dyson Racing Porsche RS Spyder (fifth); and Marino Franchitti/Butch Leitzinger in the other Dyson Racing Porsche RS Spyder. Other GT2 Porsche finishers the Darren Law/Seth Neiman Flying Lizard Porsche (fifth); the Joerg Bergmeister/Wolf Henzler Flying Lizard Porsche (ninth after an early-race accident resulting in a long pit stop for suspension replacement). The Francesco Pastorelli/Nicky Pastorelli/Mark Basseng VICI Racing Porsche did not finish due to an early-race accident.

Dyson Racing Team Report

Source: Brian Wagner, Dyson Racing

At times, it seemed like the Mobil Economy Run had been resurrected. Almost half of the ALMS season-ending four-hour Monterey Sports Car Championship was run under yellow, with green periods often few and far between. Avoiding the sand traps that claimed so many, Dyson Racing put in a solid run in a most fragmented race. Chris Dyson and Guy Smith were fifth in LMP2 and Marino Franchitti and Butch Leitzinger finished sixth.

The team started the eight-month, eleven-race series with a second and third at the Twelve Hours of Sebring. The team finished the year third in the P2 team championship and Franchitti and Leitzinger were fifth in the drivers' points followed by Dyson and Smith in sixth. Porsche won both the engine and chassis manufacturer championships, the later by one point. Dyson Racing's points made both those championships possible.

The # 20 Porsche RS Spyder of Franchitti and Leitzinger finished in the points in every race of the season and the #16 Thetford/Norcold entry missed the points in only one race, at Lime Rock in May. The Lime Rock race marked the 25th anniversary of Dyson racing in professional motorsports. Of the thirty-seven cars that raced at the Connecticut track 25 years ago, only Dyson Racing is still competing today. They have garnered 17 championships, 61 wins, 56 poles and 156 podiums during their run at the top of sportscar racing.

This year also marks the tenth anniversary of the American Le Mans Series. "The competition, the depth of the field, and the quality of the driving is as good as we have ever seen at any time in sportscar racing," commented Rob Dyson. "The 2008 season was a notable year," added Chris Dyson. "For us, it was a mixed season with some great highs and some lows. The arc of this season may not have been what we hoped for, but we gave it our best shot every weekend.

The team conducted itself with a high degree of diligence and integrity all year. We certainly ran a good campaign and when you have a group that is always putting forth this level of effort, it reinforces your motivation as a driver. If we had to sum up the season in one word, it would be very simple: pride."



AUDI Motorsports Race Report

Source: Audi Motorsports Communications

Audi was able to complete their successful 2008 sportscar season with another 1-2 victory. In the finale of the American Le Mans Series at Laguna Seca (U.S. state of California), the two Germans Lucas Luhr and Marco Werner celebrated a narrow victory in front of their team mates Christijan Albers and Emanuele Pirro.

The Audi R10 TDI thus remained undefeated on the track at Laguna Seca that has traditionally favored the lighter LM P2 sportscars in the corresponding race for the past three years. In 2006 and 2007, Dindo Capello and Allan McNish had won there.

This year's race was one of the most unusual ones of the season. The Safety Car was deployed no less than twelve times – the most occasions all season. During 46 of the 145 laps overtaking was thus not allowed.

Team Audi Sport North America dealt well with the difficult circumstances. Starting from row five of the grid, the Audi drivers were able to take advantage from the enormous torque of their TDI engine mainly at the restarts improving position by position.

Lucas Luhr needed only 37 laps to fight his way from 10th on the grid to first place. Because he had to pit for fuel under green, Lucas Luhr and Marco Werner lost a lap and dropped temporarily to 12th position.

This seemed to play the race into the hands of sportscar rookie Christijan Albers and Emanuele Pirro. Pirro took the lead on lap 89 with a spectacular move and defended it until the final caution period.

At the decisive restart, however, he was passed by his team mate Marco Werner who in the meantime had fought his way back to the front thus taking the lead just 20 minutes from the end of the race. Werner crossed the finish line the eventual winner 1.941 seconds ahead of Emanuele Pirro who had tears in eyes following his last race in the Audi R10 TDI.

It was the seventh outright victory for Audi in the eleven-round American Le Mans Series. Acura/Honda and Porsche each scored two victories. Lucas Luhr and Marco Werner celebrated their eighth win of the season in the LM P1 class. The two Germans had already secured the title in the LM P1 Drivers Championship.

Emanuele Pirro finished third in the Championship. Christijan Albers finished his first sportscar race on the podium.

Quotes after the race at Laguna Seca:

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): "This was a great finale with a superb victory for Audi at the end of a very good season. This season we certainly have not always been the fastest ones in qualifying. But with hard work, a very good strategy, a great squad and a really good race pace we've always been able to turn things around to us. The races in this year's American Le Mans Series have been very exciting until the very end. We've seen motorsport at its best in all the races."

Lucas Luhr (Audi R10 TDI #2): "This was a great race! At the beginning my only chance were at the restarts. And I used each of them to my advantage. Marco (Werner) did the same as me in the end. The last restart, when he was able to pass Emanuele (Pirro), was really something special. I am more than happy. Thanks to all in the team!"

Marco Werner (Audi R10 TDI #2): "This was a great day for us. Lucas (Luhr) did a superb job in the beginning. He worked his way from tenth to first position. We lost a lap but came back on the lead-lap thanks to Audi and the Champion team. In the end it was up to me. I really pushed and tried to keep the tires clean during the caution periods."

Christijan Albers (Audi R10 TDI #1): "It was really good. I was a little bit on the safe side which in the end paid off. It was my first race with the R10 TDI and I did not want to do anything wrong. Pirro did a very good job at the end. I'm very happy for the team. It is a great result."

Emanuele Pirro (Audi R10 TDI #1): "I really enjoyed the race. From ninth and tenth on the grid we finished 1-2. Unfortunately I was in second gear at the last restart instead of first. After so many good restarts in my career I was sleeping this time. But all in all it has been a positive race. I want to thank Christijan (Albers) who did a very good job in his first sportscar race. And I really want to thank all the people who said a lot of very nice things about me here."

Dave Maraj (Team Director Audi Sport North America): "This was a great way to end the season and a great way for Emanuele (Pirro) to end his season. It was great team work again by both teams with a great

strategy. Coming from ninth to tenth on the grid and taking a 1-2 victory is something special. It was a great year, one of the best I ever experienced. I want to thank everybody on our team for this."

The results at Laguna Seca

- 1 Luhr/Werner (Audi R10 TDI) 145 laps in 4h 01m 05.315s (1st in LM P1)
- 2 Albers/Pirro (Audi R10 TDI) + 1.941s (2nd in LM P1)
- 3 Montagny/Kanaan (Acura/Honda) + 3.536s
- 4 de Ferran/Pagenaud (Acura/Honda) + 3.590s
- 5 Dumas/Bernhard (Porsche) + 9.481s
- 6 Castroneves/Briscoe (Porsche) + 26.178s
- 7 Smith/Dyson (Porsche) + 45.278s
- 8 Franchitti/Leitzinger (Porsche) + 1m 18.045s
- 9 Fernandez/Diaz (Acura/Honda) - 1 lap
- 10 Maassen/Long (Porsche) - 1 lap

Farnbacher-Loles Race Report

Source: Sylvia Proudfoot, SPUR Communications

Farnbacher Loles Racing capped its rookie American Le Mans Series season with a GT2 podium finish – following a record class pole position – at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif. As in previous years, the season finale on the 2.238-mile road course was slowed by numerous caution periods, especially during the opening stint, with more than half of the four-hour race run under caution. Despite the slow pace, the Farnbacher Loles crew overcame bad luck on the caution timing to score the class podium. But a loose spring put the team's No. 87 Porsche 911 GT3 RSR outside the required technical specification and the car was excluded from race results.

Dirk Werner of Kissenbrück, Germany, started from the GT2 pole. He was passed at the start of the race, but regained the class lead during his first driving stint. Bryce Miller of Summit, N.J., took over at the one-hour mark, returning to the track fifth in class. He pitted for a driver change just past the halfway point, but the car's distance from the fuel rig caused the hose coupling to lock and the team incurred a penalty for fueling while working on the car. Werner fought back from fifth in class, two laps behind the class leader, to finish just one lap down, in third place.

However, the post-race technical inspection found the car to be lower than the required ride height and it was excluded from race results. The car's right-front spring perch had loosened during the first hour of the race, collapsing the spring and dropping the right front of the car below the required ride height.

[quotes obtained before post-race inspection]

Bryce Miller: "It's a good result, a podium result, but there is a little bit of disappointment that I reserve because I know we had the winning car today and the best car on the track. Dirk drove great in his last stint, but we fell out of sequence early with the timing of the yellow flags and it put us down a lap with the rest of the field behind us. But I think the team is here to stay, to run at the top and compete for championships. It's certainly been exciting to have been a part of it."

Dirk Werner: "A podium for the last race of the season is good for the team. Although we had the fastest car today, we got a little bit unlucky with a few caution situations that put us a lap down. But I think we can be really happy because we were the best Porsche today and we showed good speed and good teamwork. I'm very happy that we could help Porsche to win the manufacturers' championship. That makes us proud and Porsche happy."

