

ACURA SCORES 1-2 IN ACURA SPORTS CAR CHALLENGE WITH PATRÓN HIGHCROFT RACING SECURING 1st LMP2 CLASS WIN

Tough Street Race In St. Petersburg Produces Wins For Patrón, Lowe's Teams

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — David Brabham and Scott Sharp led an Acura 1-2 sweep Saturday in the Acura Sports Car Challenge, the second race of the 2009 American Le Mans Series, through the streets of St. Petersburg.

The veteran driving pair drove the No. 9 Patrón Highcroft Racing Acura ARX-02a prototype sports car to the lead on Lap 43 and recorded a 32-second victory over the Mexican duo of Adrian Fernandez and Luis Diaz in the No. 15 Lowe's Fernandez Racing Acura ARX-01b in the 93-lap feature. The 1-2 Acura finish marked Acura's first ALMS sweep since last August in the streets of Detroit, when the automaker placed 1-2-3 overall.

Saturday's Acura sweep also made American Le Mans Series history with Acura taking wins in both the LMP1 and LMP2 class in the same event. No auto manufacturer had accomplished that feat in ALMS' ten years.

Brabham and Sharp's win was the first for Acura in the LMP1 class.

The pole-winning car of Simon Pagenaud and former Indy 500 winner Gil de Ferran led the first 42 laps of the Acura Sports Car Challenge in the No. 66 XM Radio de Ferran Acura ARX-02a before pitting for a fuel, tires and a driver change. De Ferran started the race and pushed to a 28-second lead, but Sharp cut into de Ferran's advantage at Lap 38. Sharp trailed by just four seconds and handed the bright green, black and blue Acura over to Brabham, one of the world's best sports-car drivers.

Pagenaud, who won the overall pole Friday, jumped into the No. 66 Acura in an effort to catch Brabham and Fernandez. However, electrical problems in the No. 66 car kept the French driver from finishing the race.

Fernandez and Diaz recorded their second consecutive 2009 LMP2 triumph after a dominating performance in the tough 12 Hours of Sebring two weeks ago. Fernandez actually led Brabham and Pagenaud overall in the middle of the event after a superb pit stop by the Lowe's Fernandez Racing team. But the new Acura LMP1 proved to have too much horsepower for the LMP2 machine of Fernandez, who settled for the class win and second overall.

Acuras of Patrón Highcroft Racing and de Ferran Motorsports debuted the new ARX-02a LMP1 prototype machine in the season opener at Sebring. But after de Ferran's car won the Sebring pole with Indy 500 champion Scott Dixon at the wheel, the two new mounts failed to finish the grueling, 12-hour event.

The American Le Mans Series moves to another exciting street race, at legendary Long Beach, California, when the Tequila Patrón Grand Prix takes place on Saturday, April 18.

Acura Sports Car Challenge Overall Results

1. **PATRÓN HIGHCROFT ACURA ARX-02a No. 9**
Drivers: David Brabham, Scott Sharp (1st in LMP1)
2. **LOWE'S FERNANDEZ ACURA ARX-01b No. 15**
Drivers: Adrian Fernandez, Luis Diaz (1st in LMP2)
3. **No. 16 Dyson Racing Mazda**
Drivers: Chris Dyson, Guy Smith
13. **XM RADIO de FERRAN ACURA ARX-02a No. 66**
Drivers: Gil de Ferran, Simon Pagenaud



ACURA QUOTES:

DAVID BRABHAM (#9 Patrón Highcroft Racing Acura ARX-02a): "The track was extremely tricky today. We had a nice lead later in the race, but I couldn't relax because of the slippery surface. One mistake and the car would be in the wall. This a big win for Acura, since it was their first LMP1 class victory. Scott drove well in the early stages to set up my stint. It always feels good to win."

SCOTT SHARP (#9 Patrón Highcroft Racing Acura ARX-02a): "Tire selection was a key for us today. The team made the call to have a harder compound on the left-rear tire. Early on, though, it made the car a handful due to the slick track conditions. But later in the race, the Michelin tires held up and I was able to close in on Gil [de Ferran]. David did his usual great job bringing the car home for the win. It is great to capture Acura's first LMP1 victory. I know the Patrón folks are happy too."

ADRIAN FERNANDEZ (#15 Lowe's Fernandez Acura ARX-01b): "Track conditions were very difficult today. The surface seemed quite slippery. But the Lowe's team made some great setup decisions. This was a big win for us with all of our Lowe's executives and associates here at St. Petersburg. Now, it's on to Long Beach, looking for another win."

LUIS DIAZ (#15 Lowe's Fernandez Acura ARX-01b): "I had to push hard early in the race, because we wanted to get a margin over the Mazdas in LMP2. But the car felt great and we actually raced with the LMP1 Acuras. That was fun. The Lowe's crew was fantastic today with a very quick pit stop and Adrian led overall in the race. That is a good achievement for an LMP2 car."

SIMON PAGENAUD (#66 XM Radio de Ferran Acura ARX-02a): "I don't know what happened to the car. The engine kept cutting out and I never got the chance to race today. It is frustrating after winning the pole position on Friday. That was a thrill, but today's race just never got started for me. Gil led the race impressively and I was very anxious to jump in for the second half of the event. But something kept us out again. I know I am ready to go for the win at Long Beach."

UPCOMING ALMS RACE:

Event: Tequila Patrón Grand Prix
Track: Long Beach Grand Prix
Long Beach, Calif.

(1.968 miles, 11 turns)

Date: Saturday, April 18, 2009
1:30 p.m. (EDT)

Distance: 1 hour, 40 minutes

TV: ABC-TV, April 19
12:30 p.m. EDT

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(Photos) Luis Diaz [upper left] drove the Lowe's Fernandez Acura to LMP2 class honors for the second straight ALMS race. Scott Sharp [lower right] teamed with David Brabham for Acura's first LMP1 class title Saturday. Simon Pagenaud [lower left] won the pole on Friday but the No. 66 de Ferran Acura had electrical problems in the race.



GIL de FERRAN (#66 XM Radio de Ferran Acura ARX-02a): "I thought we had a car to win today. I was able to run very consistent laps early on. And the track surface wasn't ideal. In fact, it was very difficult to negotiate some of the turns due to the slick conditions. I am disappointed that we had some trouble when Simon got in the car. I never had any problems throughout my run. Then Simon jumped in, and the car wouldn't run properly. It's tough, because we have been on the pole for the first two races this season, and we haven't finished either race. However, we have a strong team and they will bounce for Long Beach. Back there is a place I would like to win. I have been so close to winning at Long Beach in Indy cars. It would be great to finally win there."

