

IMAGOLIVE

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ADRIA DECIDES THE CHAMPIONS !



Bright sunshine, plenty of spectators and a compact, tight circuit made for an interesting event at the Adria Raceway. The penultimate round of the 2006 season was a race of attrition, mainly due to the nature of the circuit which wore heavily on the brakes and tyres. But a fine one-two for the Vitaphone Racing Team saw Thomas Biagi and Jamie Davies emerge victorious, while Michael Bartels and Andrea Bertolini, second today in their Maserati MC12, secured the GT1 Drivers Championship.

Scuderia Ecosse's duo of Mullen and Franchitti were victorious today, crossing the line ahead of AF Corse's Salo and Aguas. Third place went to newcomers Edil Cris Racing Team, making an impressive debut in the category. However, the nr 59 car was excluded as the car did not comply with ground clearance regulations. This means that AF Corse's Matteo Bobbi and Jaime Melo have secured the GT2 Drivers Championship. As for sole G2 competition Belgian Racing, Leinders and Kuppens claimed their best result of the season. Last but not least, Aston Martin has claimed the GT1 Manufacturers Cup.

SECOND WIN OF THE YEAR FOR VITAPHONE'S DAVIES AND BIAGI

Vitaphone claimed its fifth victory of the season in Adria today, with Davies and Biagi following up their Dijon win with victory in Italy. The duo, who started from 7th on the grid in their nr 2 Maserati MC12, made good progress through the field, and were closing in on the leading Zakspeed Saleen when Montermini pitted, flames emerging from the front left brake pads. Biagi continued to take the chequered flag, finishing ahead of their team-mates



Bertolini and Bartels. "I am very pleased because starting from 7th place in such a small circuit is not easy. This is one of our best races," Thomas Biagi explained.

Third place went to the GLPK Carsport Corvette C6, which had to make an extra pit stop due to a puncture in the second stint. Fourth and fifth went to the two Aston Martin Racing BMS DBR9 cars, closely missing out on a podium for their home race but securing second place in the Teams Championship as well as victory for Aston Martin in the GT1

Manufacturers Cup. Zakspeed made a rapid disc and pad change, and recovered to finish 12th and 6th in GT1.

Among the non-finishers, the nr 33 Race Alliance Aston Martin went out with technical failures after running second. The nr 38 All-Inkl.com Lamborghini Murciélago also put in an excellent start, and ran in the leading group of four cars, but retired during the second hour. The nr 5 Phoenix Aston Martin took a strong lead early on, overtaking the pole-setting Saleen, but a racing incident with the nr 23 Aston Martin Racing BMS saw it make a long pit stop, and finally retired.

BARTELS AND BERTOLINI ARE THE 2006 GT1 DRIVERS CHAMPIONS



For the past three years, the GT1 Drivers Champions have driven Ferrari 550 Maranello cars. But for 2006, the Champions will have driven a Maserati MC 12. A close season-long fight, between the nr 1 Vitaphone Maserati, the nr 5 Phoenix Racing Aston Martin DBR9 and the nr9 Zakspeed Saleen S7 finally came to an end today, when the nr 5 Phoenix car retired in the pits and the nr 9 Saleen, long-time race leader, fell back after a brake disc caught fire.

This left the crew of the nr 1 car, who already had a good lead of nine points, to come home second and claim the title with a lead of 14 points over nearest rival Sascha Bert. "We couldn't have finished in a better way," Michael Bartels explained. "It has been a very hard season. Everyone was going completely unto the limit today, to fight for success. In the end of the day, it is a great result for the whole the season, with our partners Pirelli and Maserati, with the driver line-up, with the still young Vitaphone team, of which I am very proud." As for Bertolini, who was with the Maserati project from the start, he was delighted to claim the title at home. "This is a very special event for me, I will always remember today. I would like to thank all the Vitaphone team and the drivers, and special thanks to Pirelli, who worked very, very hard all season." He also thanked his secret weapon and lucky charm, his wife, saying that she always brought him good luck.

MULLEN AND FRANCHITTI VICTORIOUS FOR SCUDERIA ECOSSE

Scuderia Ecosse claimed its second win in a row – but this time it was the nr 63 Ferrari 430 GT2 which took the chequered flag, confirming Mullen in third place behind the two AF Corse driver crews in the GT2 Drivers Classification. After a number of podium finishes, Tim Mullen took his first win of the season, while Marino Franchitti, who joined the team yesterday morning, managed his aim of adding a win to the second and third places he had already taken in the FIA GT this season. :“It’s a fantastic result,” Tim said. “I’ve had many seconds and thirds this year, but it’s my first win. It’s been great to have Marino on board this weekend. The car was very strong and we could push the whole stint. I’m really, really pleased. ” As for Marino, he dedicated his win to his uncle, who died recently.



Second across the line was AF Corse’s nr 59 car of Rui Aguas and Mika Salo. Their Ferrari 430 GT2 finished four places ahead of the team’s other car, Bobbi and Melo in the nr 58, which looked like keeping the title battle between the two crews going until the last race in Dubai. However, the nr 59 car was later excluded as the car did not comply with ground clearance regulations, giving Melo and Bobbi the title.

Third at the end, inheriting second, was the Edil Cris Racing Team Ferrari 430 GT2, the Italo-Luxembourg team making an impressive debut to claim a podium for Paolo Ruberti and Raffaele Giammaria. The team had been in the lead of the category shortly before the end, having aimed for a one-stop strategy, but a last-minute splash and dash saw them drop back, but still claim a fine podium. “We wanted to show what the team was capable of doing; unfortunately, the strategy didn’t quite work out, but we limited the damage and globally we are happy,” the team said afterwards.

Sugden and Alexander inherited third after finishing fourth in the nr 55 JMB GruppeM Ferrari 430 GT2, ahead of the sole finishing Porsche, the nr 74 Ebimotors car of Busnelli and Moccia.

BOBBI AND MELO CLAIM THE 2006 GT2 DRIVERS CHAMPIONSHIP



Sixth at the chequered flag, and the last classified car in GT2 was the nr 58 AF Corse Ferrari of Bobbi and Melo, after an early race collision with the Vertigo saw the car come in for a long stop to repair a puncture and the radiator. It looked as if the title fight would go on to Dubai, but when the nr 59 was excluded, the drivers of the nr 58 had an unreachable lead in the GT2 Drivers Championship. With two wins this season, in Silverstone and Dijon, as well as second-place finishes at Spa, Mugello and Hungary, Bobbi and Melo have scored

points in every round.

Although this is a first title for Jaime Melo of Brazil, it is Matteo Bobbi’s second victory, after he claimed the 2003 FIA GT1 Championship in 2003, with BMS Scuderia Italia. This feat was previously achieved by Christophe Bouchut, who won in N-GT in 2000, and then in GT in 2001. Olivier Beretta won in GT2 in 1998 and then overall in 1999, but with the same car and in effectively the same category. “It has been a very emotional day,” Bobbi said. “First of all Jaime had problems at the start of the race, and we lost a lot of points. I was very frustrated when I left the track. But then I had a phone call from Jaime who told me that the nr 59 had been excluded and we had won the title. It might not be the best way to conclude the battle, but the Championship is the Championship, and I am very glad to have another one in my pocket. Now we can go to Dubai with no pressure. I think the team, Jaime and I have done an unbelievable job this year.”

EXCELLENT RACE FOR BELGIAN RACING IN G2

Although the team had stated that this circuit did not suit the Gillet Vertigo, the nr 101 performed extremely well on the tight Adria circuit, with Leinders and Kuppens crossing the line in 11th position overall, moving up to tenth, their best result to date. “I had a very good start and passed four or five cars in the first lap,” Bas Leinders explained. “Then on lap two or three, there was a collision with the nr 58 car, which damaged the rear of the car. But I was able to continue, and at the end I pushed very hard to pass the Saleen and finish in 11th position overall. This is the best result of the season. We should be a bit more competitive in Dubai.”



ASTON MARTIN CLAIMS THE GT1 MANUFACTURERS CUP



Ferrari, claiming all but one win in the GT2 category to date, had already secured the GT2 Manufacturers Cup two races ago. In Adria, fourth and fifth places for the Aston Martin Racing BMS team, combined with all the good results of the year, especially Phoenix’s magnificent performance in the Proximus 24 Hours of Spa, and Race Alliance’s first Aston Martin win in Mugello, allowed the British manufacturer to claim the 2006 GT1 Manufacturers Cup. Maserati, the 2005 winners, will finish second, while Saleen and Corvette are currently

tied on third place.

The British manufacturer made its FIA GT debut in 2005, winning the Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy in Silverstone on its debut, although as a factory entry, it did not score points. The first points for the car came in Bahrain 2005, when Christophe Bouchut and Antonio Garcia were victorious in the Russian Age Racing car, bearing the livery of Aston Martin Middle East. This year, six DBR9 cars took part in the first round, with four competing all season.

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