

## FIA GT 2008 / round 1 - Silverstone

The 2008 season of the FIA GT Championship got off to the best possible way, with a truly thrilling Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy in Silverstone. Despite the extremely poor weather, with heavy fog and rain, which improved later, 25,000 spectators turned up to watch the exciting programme, which included the FIA GT3 European Championship, the GT4 European Cup and the Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli. Jetalliance started off the 2008 season as they finished the 2007 one – with a victory for their Aston Martin DBR9, and the right to inscribe the names of Karl Wendlinger and Ryan Sharp on the historic trophy, alongside many Motorsport greats of the past. Vitaphone's Maserati and Gigawave Motorsport's Aston Martin completed the podium. Reigning GT2 Champions AF Corse started off the season with a victory for Gianmaria Bruni and Toni Vilander, ahead of new team CR Scuderia and BMS Scuderia Italia, completing a Ferrari 430 GT2 one-two-three.

**GT1 : KEEPING THE SUSPENSE TO THE END**At the start of the race, the conditions were quite bad, and with visibility low and the track slippery, tyre choice became the real gamble. Most cars started on rain tyres, except for Gigawave Motorsport, which chose intermediates. Wendlinger led early on, until a spin relegated him down the field. Fässler, in the Phoenix Corvette, took over the commands of the race, chased by Bouchut in the SRT Corvette. However, by the time the cars first pitted, Simonsen took control in the Gigawave Aston Martin. Handing over to Peter, the car went out on slicks. Gigawave pulled out a handsome lead, and, were it not for a safety car period, looked like taking a fine debut win. But the safety car closed up the field, and when racing went green with just 12 minutes remaining, a frantic and fascinating fight for the finish developed. The top eight cars were within eight seconds of each other. Ryan Sharp, in the nr 33 Jetalliance Aston Martin, overtook Peter through Luffield; Bartels, in the Maserati, who had made a fine recovery from a poor qualifying, also came through, leaving the Gigawave Aston third. Xavier Maassen, taking over from Christophe Bouchut in the SRT Corvette, put in a fine debut performance to finish fourth, ahead of the Phoenix Corvette of Hezemans and Gollin. The top five cars crossed the finish line within eight seconds of each other – a truly classic race. The second Jetalliance car was sixth, to give the Austrian team a fine lead in the Teams classification, while Vitaphone's second car finished seventh. Fässler and Deletraz took the final point for eighth in the Phoenix Corvette.

**ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB TOURIST TROPHY : SUCCESS FOR WENDLINGER AND SHARP**The Jetalliance drivers were delighted to start their season with a win – and also to be presented with the history trophy, first awarded in 1905. “It's a fantastic win. We were here last year but unfortunately didn't make it onto the podium. As we're starting the championship off here this year, it was important to get some points. It was just really important to cross the line first. It's great to be on the Tourist Trophy, to know that your name will be on there forever, next to some other great names. It's fantastic! I can't wait until next week to go down and have a look at it,” Ryan Sharp said.

**GT2 : FIRST ROUND TO FERRARI**Despite the wet conditions, which have often seen the Porsche cars come to the fore in GT2, Ferrari dominated the first round of 2008, with AF Corse claiming a fine win for Bruni and 2007 Champion Vilander. With a good tyre choice, Vilander pulled away early on, and was running as high as eighth overall. “It hasn't been an easy weekend to start the championship,” Toni said. “Mainly because of the weather which kept changing all the time. We've got different tyres than our rivals and I think that helped at the beginning and helped us to win the race. Even though I usually get on well in the wet, if you don't have a good car, you can't do anything. You need the right tyres and the right car to win a race.” Their car finished a lap ahead of second-placed CR Scuderia, the new team nevertheless putting in a fine performance for their FIA GT debut, with experienced drivers Bell and Kirkaldy. BMS Scuderia Italia finished third, ahead of the second AF Corse car of former GT1 drivers Montanari and reigning GT1 Champion Biagi, on their GT2 debut. The second CR Scuderia Ferrari was fifth, promising much for the Teams battle in the category this year. The leading Porsche had originally been the nr 61 Prospeed Competition Porsche of Collard and Westbrook, but the car was later excluded for failing the ride height test. Their team-mates Palttala

and Forsten inherited the position, with the second BMS Scuderia Italia car seventh. Kessel Racing claimed the final point on their debut in the GT2 category. G2 : VICTORY TO GTO CHAROUZIt had been a difficult weekend for GTO Charouz, which had to miss practice and free qualifying with their Mosler MT900R for administrative reasons. However, the team made up for it with victory in G2 in the race. The nr 111 ARC Bratislava Saleen, which had qualified 3rd overall, lost a wheel, while the nr 101 Gillet Vertigo retired after damaging the undertray during a spin. The nr 104 Mosler took the class win, for Kenneth Heyer and Stepah Vojtech : “Our team was made really quite late and we have a problem because we can’t buy time. Even though we’re only four cars in the class, it’s still good to come first, it’s much better than I expected, because my first lap was a time practice lap and I only did one. We have to sort out a lot of things with the car. We’re at the beginning of the season, and we have a lot of work to do.” CITATION VICTORY TO AT RACINGThe first win in the 2008 Citation Cup, for non-professional drivers in the GT1 category, went to new Austrian team AT Racing, with their Corvette C5R. Driver Alaiksandr Talkanitsa commented : “This has been a lot of firsts for me: first with the team, first race for me personally, first time in the series and first time at Silverstone. I want to thank Wolfgang Kaufmann, it’s really his win.” More information, quotes, photos and race facts are available on the web site, [www.fiagt.com](http://www.fiagt.com) The next round is in Monza on April 18th