



ROUNDS 1 & 2 RACE REPORT

Weather: sunny and warm, with a dry track.

Attendance: 45,000

YVAN MULLER TAKES CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD

The 2006 FIA World Touring Car Championship started on a sunny Italian day, before a huge crowd of 45,000 who invaded the track after the second race.

It was a spectacular start to the season with two breathtaking races, full of action, overtaking, surprises and a new record field of 35 starters that overshadowed the 33 of Magny-Cours in 2005.

Reigning World Champion Andy Priaulx of BMW Team UK emerged as the winner in the first race, giving the new BMW 320si a victory on its very first race.

The second race went to N.technology's Augusto Farfus, who proved that the Super 2000 Alfa Romeo 156 is still a winning car on its fifth racing season.

However, newcomer Yvan Muller is the first championship leader of the season, thanks to the two second places he collected today. The Frenchman is also the first SEAT driver to be on top of the points since the Spanish Manufacturer joined the FIA Touring Car Championship back in 2003.

SEAT is also leading the Manufacturers Championship.

The second race turned into a nightmare for the BMW drivers. Dirk Müller, Andy Priaulx, Jörg Müller and Marcel Costa were all involved in collisions, while Alessandro Zanardi came out the worst in his fight with Farfus for the lead in the second race.

Opposite situation at Chevrolet, where the team celebrated their first podium result after Alain Menu came home a close third behind Farfus and Yvan Muller. A success that was completed by two more points scored by Nicola Larini.

A special mention goes to Alessandro Balzan, who not only managed to score a double victory in the Independents Trophy, but also fought for the podium in Race 2 against a bunch of works drivers.

WARM-UP – FARFUS FASTEST, ZANARDI CRASHES

What should have been a normal warm-up session actually brought high drama this morning. Alessandro Zanardi had just posted the fourth fastest lap overall before going wide at Lesmo 2 and narrowly avoiding a high speed collision with Dirk Müller. *"I made a mistake, I went wide and I lost the car. It was unfortunate that I hit the barriers that are placed just after the tyre wall so the impact was heavier than it would have been if I'd crashed into tyres,"* he said.

Alfa Romeo's Brazilian, Augusto Farfus set the fastest lap at 2:01.567.



RACE 1 – PRIAULX WINS THE OPENING ROUND

Reigning world champion, Andy Priaulx in car number 1 started from pole and led the entire race to cross the line first in the first race of the season.

From the very start the Team BMW UK man created a gap and was never seriously challenged by the battling field behind him. Yvan Muller had a spectacular race in his WTCC debut to finish second. He was joined by team-mate James Thompson on the podium.

After a bad start, Farfus was caught in an incident with Alfa Romeo team-mate Tavano incurring damage to the rear of his car. He dropped down to 5th leaving Dirk Müller and Yvan Muller fighting for second. This resulted in some breathtaking moments but persistence paid dividends as Yvan overtook on the eighth lap. The fight was not over there for Dirk however as Thompson was now on his tail. On the final lap the SEAT and BMW were side by side down the straight but Thompson edged through the first corner to finish on the podium.

There was a spell of two laps under safety car conditions, after Colciago crashed at the Biassono bend and his car caught fire on the track following a clash with Edman's Peugeot. After the re-start Zanardi, Tarquini and Rydell were competing for 6th position. After various overtaking moves Tarquini passed the chequered flag 5th with Rydell and Zanardi 6th and 7th. Augusto Farfus finished 8th and claimed pole for the second race.

Huff was the leading Chevrolet in 11th position until lap 8 when he spun and dropped to the back of the field. This left Menu to chase and overtake Costa of BMW Team Italy Spain for 10th position.

In the Independent category, Balzan was victorious and finished 9th overall.

FARFUS WINS BREATHTAKING RACE 2

Before the crowd could catch its breath after the first race, the second was underway and even more spectacular.

The young Brazilian driver, Augusto Farfus began from pole in his N.technology Alfa Romeo 156 and unlike Race 1, he got a great start. In the opening stages there was a five man fight for third; Tarquini, Thompson, Dirk Müller, Priaulx and Rydell were in a close pack throughout the opening three laps. Priaulx, Dirk and Thompson all entered a corner together and while Thompson escaped relatively unscathed, Dirk and Priaulx ended the race with their BMW cars in barriers.

The leading pack continued and by now independent driver Alessandro Balzan had come from 9th through to 6th. This soon improved to 5th after Tarquini had a failed attempt at overtaking Zanardi and fell back to 10th. On lap 5 Balzan continued to storm through, overtaking Yvan Muller for 4th and then Rydell for 3rd. However, a place on the overall podium was not to be as Yvan redeemed 3rd place on lap 7.

Zanardi and Farfus were having their own contest for victory. Contact was made several times but on the penultimate lap the BMW car's steering obtained damage and Zanardi was out of contention. More action ensued as Balzan dropped down to 6th coming into the final lap and Rydell and Huff collided. The result of these incidents meant Alain Menu achieved a fantastic podium for Chevrolet. And their success did not end there because Larini finished in the points, 7th overall. Balzan obtained an outstanding 4th position overall and encored his victory in the Independents' category.