

IMAGOLIVE

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FIA GT Championship - Round 11 - Bahrain :

The 2005 season of the FIA GT Championship started as it finished : with a thrilling race and a varied podium. After so closely missing the win in Dubai, Russian Age Racing, running under the colours of Middle East Aston Martin, claimed their first-ever win. The Aston Martin DBR9, driven by Christophe Bouchut and his new team-mate Antonio Garcia, put in a dominant performance, leading for most of the three-hour race and finishing ahead of the nr 16 JMB Maserati, and the GLPK Carsport Corvette. But today's main story involved the GT1 Driver's title. This was initially claimed by Gabriele Gardel in the Larbre Competition Ferrari 550, after he finished fourth in the race, ahead of his Vitaphone Racing Team rivals, Timo Scheider and Michael Bartels. However, the Ferrari was later excluded for failing to have the regulation three litres of fuel in the car. The award of the GT1 Drivers' title is pending the appeal lodged by Larbre Competition.

FIRST WIN FOR RUSSIAN AGE RACING AND ITS ASTON MARTIN DBR9

After three pole positions for the nr 17 Russian Age Racing Aston Martin DBR9, running under the colours of Middle-East Aston Martin, Christophe Bouchut finally put bad luck aside and converted the pole into a win, helped admirably by his new team-mate, Antonio Garcia. The duo put in a faultless performance, taking the lead at the start, pulling away and only briefly dropping back during the pit stops. Despite his limited time in the car, Garcia pulled away from Philipp Peter during his time on the track, and was frequently the fastest man on the track. He was therefore able to hand over to Bouchut with a healthy lead, which the Frenchman held until the end.

"It's a wonderful day for sure," Bouchut said. "Today, I would like to congratulate all my team, all the mechanics, who did a very good job, and also Antonio. Of course, thanks to Aston Martin Middle East, without whom it would have been impossible to be here. And a special thanks for Rob [Schirle, Russian Age Racing's team manager]. This result is unbelievable." Garcia was also delighted with his win, his first in the FIA GT Championship since the 2001 Proximus 24 Hours of Spa, in the N-GT category. "It was nice to back in a GT car. I missed this kind of racing, as they are really good cars and good races. It was a perfect weekend, it couldn't have been better, and I'd like to thank everyone involved."

"After our sad loss, just eight laps from the end of last week's MotorCity GT500 in Dubai, the Middle East Aston Martin team is naturally delighted to end the FIA GT Championship on a great high note, that sets an exciting platform from which we can look to race next season," said Thomas Kastgen, CEO, Middle East Aston Martin, adding that "the new dynamic duo of Christophe Bouchut and Antonio Garcia meant a winning formula in the Aston Martin DBR9."

JMB RACING AND GLPK CARSPORT COMPLETE BAHRAIN PODIUM

Philipp Peter and Jamie Davies took a fine second place in the nr 16 JMB Racing Maserati MC 12, after chasing the Russian Age Racing Aston Martin for much of the three-hour eleventh round of the Championship. Without penalty weight, and with a strong line-up, the car finished 26 seconds behind the leading Aston Martin, and over a minute ahead of the third-placed GLPK Carsport Corvette. This equalled the Austrian driver's best result of the season, having also finished second in the Proximus 24 Hours of Spa, with Karl Wendlinger and Andrea Bertolini.

Third place on the track was the GLPK Carsport Corvette C5R, despite the team having struggled with the car in qualifying. They inherited their podium position in the closing stages, after first the nr 10 Vitaphone Maserati stopped with transmission problems, and then the nr 11 Larbre Competition Ferrari 550 Maranello slowed due to running low on fuel. Bartels and Scheider crossed the line in fifth place, followed by the nr 3 GPC Ferrari 575 M Maranello of Cioci and Montermini. Robert Lechner and Paolo Ruberti were seventh across the line, after a consistent race, followed by the nr



12 Larbre car of Zacchia, Narac and Bervillé.

LIEB AND ROCKENFELLER CLAIM SIXTH WIN OF 2005

Already crowned as 2005 Drivers Champions after Zhuhai, the young German duo of Marc Lieb and Mike Rockenfeller claimed their sixth win of the season, finishing the race in 10th position overall. "Overall, we had a great season with both cars generally finishing on the podium unless there were technical problems," Rockenfeller said. "Thanks to the team, our engineer, the crew of the nr 88 car and Marc. We were pretty good together and very consistent. We were so close - sometimes too close - with Manu and Tim. We had good fights and good fun. I feel really good to go in the winter as the Champion".

They were followed by the nr 86 GPC Sport Ferrari 360 Modena of Luca Drudi and Luca Pirri, with the nr 74 Ebimotors Porsche of Luigi Moccia and Paolo Rapetti in third. The six points meant that Moccia finished third overall in the GT2 Drivers Classification, behind the two GruppeM pairings of Lieb/Rockenfeller and Collard/Sugden.

The nr 97 Lammertink Porsche of Kaufmann and Moro finished fourth in the GT2 category, earning the drivers five points. However, they were far from satisfied, feeling a podium had narrowly slipped through their fingers. Collard and Sugden, in the nr 88 GruppeM Porsche, were competitive early on, but a problem with the radiator gave them a long pit stop, and although the car recovered well to finish fifth, it prevented the British team claiming yet another one-two. Dick Waaijbergen and Peter Kutemann, in the nr 89 JMB Ferrari, finished in sixth position, ahead of the nr 57 ARC Bratislava Slovakia Porsche of Konopka and Rosina. The Proton Competition Porsche, driven by Gerold Ried and Bahraini driver, Shaikh Jaber Ali Al Khalifa, finished in eighth position to take the final point.

GOOD FINISH TO THE SEASON FOR BELGIAN RACING IN G2 CATEGORY

The nr 105 Belgian Racing Vertigo Streiff made up for its disappointing DNF in Dubai with a fine finish in Bahrain, crossing the line in 20th position. The small team, which has done the last three races of the FIA GT Championship, as well as Imola and Spa, has put in a lot of effort to take part on an international level. "I am very happy that we made it to the end today," Bas Leinders said. "Especially because we had a lot of problems on the car in Dubai. I have to thank the mechanics who worked until 3 o'clock in the morning to get the car sorted. I would also like to thank the sponsors and Dunlop for providing us with such a good service. Hopefully, we can all be back next year".

THE RACE STORY

The final round of the 2005 season started in bright sunshine, with the nr 17 Aston Martin pulling away into the lead, Bouchut at the wheel. The nr 15 JMB Maserati was second, although Jamie Davies, in the nr 16 JMB, was at that point the fastest man on the track. Although Collard, in the nr 88 Porsche, took an early GT2 lead, Rockenfeller regained the upper hand on lap two, while the Spyker pitted with engine problems, retiring. Babini set the best lap of the race on lap three, and his Vitaphone Maserati was catching the nr 16 Maserati fast. On lap 9, the nr 15 Maserati of Championship leaders Wendlinger and Bertolini slowed and pitted, retiring later with gearbox problems.

The nr 88 Porsche, lying second in GT2, pitted on lap 20 after losing liquid, having a long pit stop.

This brought the nr 16 JMB Maserati up to second, and Davies began to close on Bouchut in the leading nr 17 Aston Martin. He closed to within half a second, but Bouchut then began to pull away again. While the three Maserati cars made an early first pit stop, Lamy, in the nr 11 Ferrari, rose up to second. Bouchut pitted on lap 29 to hand over to Garcia, while the Larbre Ferrari also pitted, the Corvette staying out on the track.

Garcia quickly settled into a good rhythm, pulling away from Philipp Peter in the nr 16 Maserati, while Biagi was in third place in the nr 10 Maserati. Gardel, having taken over the nr 11 Ferrari, was involved in a close fight for fifth place with Bartels in the nr 9 Maserati, a fight which was effectively for the 2005 GT1 title. Gardel held on to a slender lead, eventually pulling away just past the half-race point. As for Garcia, for his first time in the car, the young Spaniard gradually pulled out a good lead, setting the fastest time for the car so far on lap 47. The second round of pit stops started from lap 53, with once again the Larbre Ferrari staying out a long time, having been in the lead but losing it shortly before pitting at the two-hour point. Lamy, taking the car back over, rejoined behind title rival Scheider, who was at this point in the lead in the Championship battle. Lamy fought past Kumpen in the nr 6 Corvette, then began to pull away. But Scheider, in the nr 9 Maserati, and Lamy in the nr 11 Ferrari were setting similar lap times, although it was expected that an extra pit stop would definitely be necessary for the nr 9 car. The nr 9 did a splash-and-dash on lap 72, while Lamy moved up to third ahead of Babini in the nr 10 Maserati. Gardel was now back in the Championship-winning position. Bouchut, back in the Aston Martin, had improved on the car's best time as the sun went down, and had a lead of around 30 seconds over the nr 16 JMB Maserati, which had followed the Aston Martin throughout. On lap 88, the nr 10 Maserati slowed and stopped, with a transmission problem. Lamy was up to third, and Gardel was back in the Championship-winning position. On lap 90, Bouchut took the chequered flag for the nr 17 Russian Age Racing Aston Martin, followed by the nr 16 JMB, but the next car across the line was the nr 6 GLPK Carsport Corvette, the nr 11 Larbre Ferrari coming across in fourth, apparently having slowed, short on fuel.

The nr 11 was later excluded, but has appealed, meaning the results are provisional, both on this appeal, which is

suspensive, and on the fuel analysis from the Zhuhai round, on cars 6, 10, 11 and 66.

Full results, reports and quotes from the drivers can be found on www.fiagt.com

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