

IMAGOLIVE

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Oggetto: FIA GT CHAMPIONSHIP - ROUND 10 - DUBAI - RACE REPORT

2005 FIA GT CHAMPIONSHIP - Round 10 - Dubai (United Arab Emirates)

A stunning drive from Pedro Lamy and Gabriele Gardel in the nr 11 Larbre Competition Ferrari 550 Maranello, starting from the back of the grid, further closed up the GT1 Drivers classification, and left everything to play for in the final race at Bahrain. The Dubai Autodrome witnessed a magnificent GT race, with all the ingredients necessary to make it an event to remember : heroic drives, close overtaking, heart-breaking mechanical failures - including that of the Russian Age Racing Aston Martin DBR9, which was leading until eight laps from the end - and plenty of excitement, keeping the spectators guessing until the very end. With the top four cars finishing within ten seconds after three hours of racing, the Ferrari crossed the line just ahead of the nr 9 Maserati MC 12 of Bartels and Scheider, who helped to claim the 2005 FIA GT1 Teams Championship for the Vitaphone Racing Team. The GLPK Carsport Corvette finished third for a varied podium. Furthermore, for the first time this season, three different manufacturers finished on the GT2 podium, where the GruppeM Porsche of Sudgen and Collard were victorious ahead of the Spyker Squadron C8 Spyder and the JMB Racing Ferrari 360 Modena.

The Championship now faces a quick sea-trip to the Kingdom of Bahrain, which will host the season finale. The leading five drivers are separated by just one point, while any of the top seven could win the FIA GT1 Drivers title. The answer will be known in a week...

THIRD WIN FOR LARBRE : LAMY AND GARDEL VICTORIOUS FROM THE BACK OF THE GRID

Larbre Competition claimed its third win of the season to keep Gabriele Gardel in the fight for the GT1 Drivers title, one point behind the leaders Andrea Bertolini and Karl Wendlinger. The star of the race was undoubtedly Pedro Lamy, who started from the back of the grid and put in two storming stints, climbing from 25th to 3rd place in the space of 25 laps, before putting in a series of fastest race laps in the closing stages, and overtaking the Corvette and Timo Scheider in the nr 9 Vitaphone Maserati to take the lead in the penultimate lap. The team benefited from the mechanical failure which befell the Russian Age Racing Aston Martin DBR9 in the closing stages, but also had to recover from nearly running out of fuel at the first pit stop. "I have to thank Pedro for his wonderful race at the end, as well as the team which did not make any mistakes," Gardel said. "You have to be proud of being in this team. It is the second year in a row that I have won on this circuit. We came here competing for the title and I am just one point behind the leading drivers in the classification. Everything is still open until the last race of the Championship. I would like to share this moment with Pedro."

With Scheider and Bartels finishing second, third place on the podium went to the Zhuhai winners, the GLPK Carsport Corvette C5R of Hezemans, Kumpen and Longin. After a slower start, Hezemans caught the Russian Age Aston Martin, which led for the whole first stint, appearing unbeatable. Running constantly in the top group, the Corvette claimed its fourth podium of the season. Fourth place went to the nr 15 JMB Racing Maserati MC 12 of Wendlinger and Bertolini, after a consistent race, to retain their Championship lead - although by just one point. The second Vitaphone Maserati, of Biagi and Babini, was fifth, after losing out during a brief safety car period at the two-thirds distance. The other losers during that safety car period, the nr 2 GPC Ferrari 575 M Maranello, was sixth, ahead of the Lister Storm and the Russian Age Racing Ferrari 550, scoring the last point on their first solo excursion in the car without Christophe Bouchut.

VITAPHONE CLAIM 2005 GT1 TEAMS CHAMPIONSHIP

The Vitaphone Racing Team placed its two Maserati MC12 cars in second and fifth places in today's MotorCity GT 500 Dubai race, scoring twelve points and putting them out of reach of their sole remaining rivals, JMB Racing. With Timo Scheider heading straight off to Malaysia to compete in the A1GP race this weekend, Michael Bartels spoke of his pleasure at winning the title : "It was one of the most exciting races we saw in the FIA GT Championship. Considering that we are carrying 150kg of handicap and FIA weight, I think that the car is still performing. I did not expect to finish in second position. I have to thank Pirelli and Maserati for delivering very performing material. I also have to thank the young structure of Vitaphone Racing Team which achieved a great goal to win the GT1 Teams Championship in its first season. We will have an incredible finale with a very close point standing in the Drivers Championship and we should all look forward to the race in Bahrain". All four Vitaphone drivers, Bartels, Scheider, Biagi and Babini, are still in with a



chance of winning the Drivers title.

COLLARD AND SUGDEN VICTORIOUS IN GT2

The score is now five all for the GruppeM team, with Emmanuel Collard and Tim Sugden inheriting the lead of the tenth round of the Championship after the nr 66 car developed a water leak. "We were so far in the lead that it was just the case of being careful with the car and not making any mistakes," Tim explained. "It was easy really. We will take any win anywhere we can get it. With Mike and Marc having won the Championship, and with 5 races won each, the only thing we can hold onto is that we want to win one more race than them".

Beforehand, the two Porsche 996 GT3-RSR cars had given the Dubai crowds a thrilling example of close racing, as they fought nose-to-tail for over thirty laps, rarely separated by more than half a second.

Second place went to the Spyker Squadron C8 Spyder, on just its second race in the FIA GT Championship. With Jeroen Bleekemolen also heading for Malaysia, his team-mate Donny Crevels said : "We had an excellent race today. The team is working very hard for next year, trying to have another engine in order to be more competitive. We did a good race, we controlled it. We were lucky that the nr 66 Porsche retired. The second place was the best we could reach for this race".

In third place, the nr 89 JMB Racing Ferrari 360 Modena made it three different manufacturers on the GT2 podium, as well as on the GT1 podium - the first time this has happened this year. Chris Buncombe, on his first time in the car, was delighted with the result, as were his team-mates Albert von Thurn und Taxis and Mauro Casadei .

G2 AND G3 BRING VARIETY TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Although the Vertigo Streiff entered by Belgian Racing failed to finish the race, Kuppens, Leinders and Ickx were classified 17th thanks to the 69 laps it completed, having run strongly until that point. "The differential broke, which was quite sad, as we were running quite well and our speed in the race compared to qualifying was quite good, but unfortunately we didn't finish," Leinder said. " But we'll be in Bahrain. The car did really well in the GT Festival but the competition is rather different this year. If we can finish around the 12th position, that would be outstanding, and I think it is also realistic. But you never know, it's the last race of the season, and strange things can happen, which we might be able to take advantage of."

The sole G3 car, the Ferrari 360 Modena running in Ferrari Challenge configuration, achieved its goal of finishing the race, crossing the line 18th and last of the 26 cars which started the 500-km race. Jonathan and Carine Sicart, and Ange Bard, were pleased with their achievement. "I would like to thank my team for preparing a good car. I was pleased to race here in Dubai for the first time. At the start of the weekend, we were not sure to go until the end of the race, but we did and we are really happy !" Ange said. Carine added : " I would like to thank all our team who helped us win this race but also all FIA GT drivers who were very kind with us. I hope that we did not get in anybody's way".

RUSSIAN AGE RACING MISS OUT ON FIRST WIN

The Russian Age Racing Aston Martin, running in the colours of Middle East Aston Martin, came very close to a first win in Dubai. The car was undoubtedly quickest throughout the event : Christophe Bouchut set pole position, Stephane Ortelli was fastest in free practice, and the car built up a commanding lead in the race. However, just as victory seemed inevitable, the car pulled to the side of the track with a mechanical failure, with eight laps to go. "It is a pity, as we are still chasing the first win of the season, and now there is only one race left. We had a good lead - it's true that we had a good car and we are two good drivers in the car so that was an advantage, but something broke - we don't know what exactly yet. But it's disappointing, although it's true that we are not fighting for the Championship. Still, after our problems in Zhuhai, and now this with only eight laps to go, you begin to wonder. We have everything in place to win, so we'll have to wait for Bahrain. I have a slight advantage of having raced there in the GT Festival, and I am looking forward to going back."

STORY OF THE RACE

The nr 17 Aston Martin took the lead at the start, followed by the Corvette. The track was rather sandy after a storm had blown through in the morning. The nr 17 Aston Martin driven by Christophe Bouchut pulled away from the field, while at the back, Lamy in the nr 11 Ferrari began to climb up from the back, reaching 12th place by lap 8. By lap 12, the nr 6 Covette was beginning to catch the leading Aston Martin, pulling away from the third-placed JMB Maserati. Throughout this time, the two GruppeM Porsches were fighting for the GT2 lead : the nr 88 car had made an early break, but Lieb retained the advantage after overtaking Collard on the first lap. By lap 13, the nr 11 Ferrari was up to seventh place, and it continued to move up the field, taking third place on lap 25 by overtaking Bertolini's JMB Maserati. With the Aston Martin making its first pit stop, the Corvette took the lead, but was soon overhauled by the Ferrari. However, nearly out of fuel, Lamy slowed and pitted. The Corvette pitted a few laps later, retaining the lead ahead of the Aston Martin and the nr 15 Maserati. The Ferrari rejoined in seventh. However, by lap 38, Ortelli, in the Aston Martin, retook the lead from Bert Longin. The next lap saw a major change in GT2, as the leading nr 66 GruppeM Porsche came in to the pits with a water leak and was pushed into the garage, retiring later. This placed the nr 88 in the lead, ahead of the Spyker and the JMB Ferrari, a situation which was to remain the same until the chequered flag.

By lap 47, Ortelli in the Aston Martin had pulled out a lead of 19 seconds over the Corvette, which was closely followed by a group of Maserati MC12s, while Gardel, in the Larbre Ferrari, was climbed back up to sixth.

On lap 55, the safety car came out, after two Porsches had stopped on the track : the ARC Bratislava Slovakia Porsche of Konopka and Rosina, and the nr 56 Vonka Racing Porsche, which suffered a broken driveshaft and lost a wheel, Manfred Jurasz driving the car at the time. During the six laps it was out, the field closed up, and after the pit stops, barely 0.5 seconds separated Bouchut and Kumpfen at the front, with the top seven on the lead lap. Lamy put in a series of fastest race laps, overtaking Bertolini in the nr 15 Maserati on lap 75, while Scheider overtook Kumpfen for second on the next lap. On lap 79, the Aston Martin stopped out at turn 9. The nr 9 Vitaphone, driven by Timo Scheider, took the lead. Lamy was in third, behind Kumpfen, whom he overtook on lap 81. By lap

83 he had closed to within 3.6 seconds of the leader, overtaking for the lead on the penultimate lap and crossing the line 0.7 seconds ahead after 89 laps of the 5.394 km circuit.

NEXT ROUND

The next round of the Championship takes place at the Bahrain International Circuit in just seven days time. It will be the first visit for the FIA GT Championship to the beautiful track with its exceptional facilities, which hosted SRO's GT Festival in last December. There is much still to play for, as the GT1 Drivers Classification has never been quite so close coming into the final race of the season. The provisional entry list, as well as a map of the circuit, have been attached.

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

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