

Audi Achieves Second Place at Spa

Written by Jason (Neutral)
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Round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) at Spa marked the first event this year in which the relative strengths at the front of the field began to show, as this time the LMP1 hybrid sports cars of all three manufacturers finished the race. Audi, in front of 46,000 spectators, achieved second place with a gap of 1m 13.926s.

After Audi was unfortunate in the WEC season opener two weeks ago with two retirements, round two produced a clearer picture of the effects of the new efficiency regulations and its ratings. Lucas di Grassi (BR) and the two World Champions Loïc Duval (F) and Tom Kristensen (DK) battled and finished the Spa 6 Hours as the runners-up. As the R18 e-tron quattro diesel hybrid sports car did not quite achieve the lap times of the best race cars with gasoline engines, which have a different rating than the efficient TDI power-plant, Audi opted for a different strategy. To save time, Audi Sport Team Joest changed the tyres of car #1 only at every second refueling stop.

Di Grassi/Duval/Kristensen advanced to third place at the race's midpoint, fighting a varied battle with the #7 Toyota for second place. The last pit stop produced a preliminary decision: 21 minutes before the end of the race, Loïc Duval had to refuel for the seventh time and went back out with a four-second advantage. He successfully defended second place to the finish, with a 6.935-second advantage over the third-placed car.

Car #2, which only achieved fifth place, experienced a race with setbacks. An electric receiver for the lap trigger had separated at an early stage of the race. As a result, the R18 e-tron quattro of Marcel Fässler/André Lotterer/Benoît Tréluyer (CH/D/F) was no longer receiving the organizer's lap signal at the beginning of the race. As this pulser serves various systems André Lotterer was not able to use the full hybrid power of his race car either until the repair. A pressure loss in a tire on lap 101 cost car #2 additional time.

By contrast, Filipe Albuquerque (P) and Marco Bonanomi (I) achieved a good rhythm. Their #3 R18 e-tron quattro tested the aerodynamics variant for the Le Mans 24 Hours. At the same time, sports car rookie Albuquerque on his WEC debut familiarized himself with his new race car while Bonanomi, following a year as a test and reserve driver, contested his first race again.

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Further into the race, both Audi drivers kept improving their lap times and ultimately finished in sixth place.

After the round at Spa, the WEC teams will meet again at Le Mans for the test day on June 1. Two weeks later, the season's pinnacle event is on the agenda – the Le Mans 24 Hours on June 14 and 15 in which Audi has celebrated twelve victories to date.

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