

24 HEURES DU MANS

15-16 JUIN 2002



Press release #4

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Third consecutive pole for the Audis in qualifying

Nothing changes for Audi in qualifying over the years. For the third year in a row, Audi holds the top three places on the starting grid for the start of the race on Saturday. Like last year, the pole was earned by the Italian Rinaldo Capello at the wheel of the #2 Audi R8. And as in 2001, the #2 leads the #1 and #3 cars, with the only difference being that the #3 Audi is a works car this year. The time posted by Capello at the end of the 1st qualifying session of the day was unchallenged during the night session, between 10:00pm and midnight. The time of 3:29.905 (average speed of 234.106 km/h) is the quickest pole since 1993, despite the track being slightly longer this year. The Audi driver was 2.5 seconds quicker than last year, yet he doesn't believe the car is at its full potential. Rinaldo Capello is the 4th driver in history to win two consecutive pole positions in Le Mans. But since the win in 1997 by the TWR Porsche, no car on pole has gone on to win the race.

For the 2nd session of the day, the drivers of the #2 Audi decided, despite their qualifying position, that they would not look to improve their times, so as to allow Herbert to complete some stress-free laps during the night.

This tactic could certainly have benefited the #1 Audi. Only 7 minutes into the last session, Tom Kristensen improved his time to come even closer to the #2 Audi. But he would not further improve on his time of 3:30.219. Following Kristensen's lead, three other drivers also improved their times: Lammers, Beretta and Sarrazin. Jan Lammers put his #16 Dome back into 5th place (3:32.734) as he worked on the race setup, then handed the car over to Tom Coronel to complete his first laps in the car. Olivier Beretta put his #15 Oreca 7th on the grid (3:33.403), while Stéphane Sarrazin was the top «non-Audi», with a time of 3:31.828, good enough for 4th overall. Sarrazin is only 1 second behind the 3rd place #3 Audi with Michael Krumm behind the wheel.

A surprising performance by Cadillac, who gained 6 seconds since the preliminary tests. The #7 is 8th (3:33.569), and the #6 rounds out the top 10.

After the first 15 minutes of the session, most teams were concentrating fully on their race setups. Among the prototypes, only the Bentley would improve its time. Eric Van de Poelle posted his quickest time during the last minute of qualifying (3:35.056). While quicker than last year, the Bentley qualified further back on the grid than before (11th overall).

Life is still difficult for the Pescarolo Sport team. The Courage-Peugeot is 4 seconds slower than the Courage Judd (13th). The green cars are thus 18th (#18) and 19th (#17) on the grid, with times in the 3:41's. The result is a far cry from what they had hoped for this year, and is even 2 seconds slower than in the preliminary test session.

There were also a number of incidents, most involving flat tires, which added a lot of action to the last session. The most disastrous was undoubtedly the blown engine in the #11 Panoz driven by Bryan Herta (9th overall). The oil covered the track in the Dunlop chicane, prompting a stop to the session which lasted 12 minutes.

The #27 MG also had an engine problem which prevented it from starting the final night session. Nonetheless, it retained its 1st place in the LMP-675 class, 6th place overall. With a time of 3:33.254, the MG has not progressed much since May, but has still gained an impressive 7 seconds in comparison to the 2001 event.

Halfway through the session, the #22 Leader remained stranded in the pits because of a clutch problem, which set back the night-time sequence for the " Michel Vaillant " film. Nonetheless, the Leader is qualified in 20th position. The Vaillante is 23rd.

In the LM-GTS class, the #58 Ferrari Maranello is in a class of its own with a time of 3:54.091, 28th in the overall standings.

The #81 Racers Group Porsche led the LM-GT class with a time of 4:10.803, good enough for 39th on the grid. The quickest Ferrari Modena (#70) is 44th. A great performance for the Morgan (46th). The Spyker is 49th, and the #71 Ferrari is at the back of the pack. Friday is a day of relaxation for the mechanics, while the drivers will be participating in a parade, starting at 6:00pm.

La course en direct sur le 0892 3500 24 *



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