

Communiqué n° 2

13/06/2005 24:00hrs

Second practice and qualifying session 22 :00 – 24 :00 hrs

22:20

The No. 2 Audi, driven by three-time Le Mans winner Frank Biela made its presence felt when Frank Biela turned in a lap of 4:14.352.

There was a flurry of activity in the Pescarolo Sport garage as the No.16 Pescarolo encountered clutch failure.

As the sky darkened over the Circuit de la Sarthe, it was all LMP1 entries in the top nine cars.

Tenth fastest was the No. 61 GT1 Ferrari driven by Russian pilot Nicolas Fromenko.

The Paul Belmondo-driven LMP2 No.37 Courage sat in eleventh with a lap of 4:24.832, the fastest of its class. Fastest in GT2 was Romain Dumas in the No. 76 Porsche, in 4:34.844.

At 22:32, the No.16 Collard-driven Pescarolo Judd was still undergoing a clutch change.

Meanwhile, the No. 78 Panoz reported fuel supply problems.

The No. 5 Dome continued to thrill the fans as Katsumoto Kaneishi took over and set the evening's quickest time to 4:13.181. Not to be outdone, at 22:39, the Champion Audi really went for it. Six-time Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen bested the Dome Judd's best time by 2.375 seconds. Clearly, the Audi is not intimidated by the speed of the No 16 Pescarolo Judds or the No. 5 Dome Mugen.

22:40

The No. 59 Aston Martin was down on straightline speed. While the cause was unknown, the team indicated that they thought it was not due to a hardware issue. They believe it may be a software problem.

At 22:50, 2004 Le Mans-winning co-driver, Seiji Ara, climbed into the No. 5 Dome Mugen for his first stint of the evening. Five minutes later, he had grabbed provisional pole with a lap in 4:10.213, over a half-second ahead of the Tom Kristensen-driven Audi R8.

Moments later, the No. 52 Ferrari pulled into the pits for a rear bodywork change.

Just before the hour ended and under night skies, the No.2 Audi, driven by Alan McNish, and the No. 7 DBA Judd, driven by Andy Wallace, moved into third and fourth positions on the speed chart.

23:00

At 23:00 The No. 5 Jim Gainer International Dome-Mugen was still fastest, just 1.232 seconds ahead of No. 3 Champion Racing Audi. The Audis were speeding up with the No. 2 Champion Racing Audi, with McNish driving, has put in a quick lap.

The remarkable performance of No.61 Cirtex Motorsport - Ferrari 550 Maranello continued. It was 10th overall and remarkably, more than 7 seconds faster than the No.59 Aston Martin DBR9. Six seconds after the hour, there was a flash fire when the No. 18 Rollcentre Racing Dallara Judd arrived in the pits to refuel. The fire was extinguished quickly, but not before one of the mechanics was slightly burned. The cause - fuel dripping from a faulty seal on the refuelling rig onto a hot engine component.

At 23:12, the No. 59 Aston Martin DBR9 suddenly came alive with a time 0.10 seconds faster than the No. 61 Cirtex Ferrari 550 Maranello. With the cooler air, lap times began coming down, the first being the No. 5 Dome-Mugen, once more at the top of the charts.

23:20

At just short of 20 minutes after the hour, Montagny put the No.4 Audi ahead of the No.5 Dome-Mugen by 1.481 secs.

In GT2, the No.71 Alex Job Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR led the #90 White Lightning Racing - Porsche 911 GT3 RSR. At that point, the #77 Panoz Elan lay 3rd in Class.

By now the circuit had nearly dried out completely – and Audis were on the march, first, third and fourth, with the No. 5 Dome-Judd still second. Sébastien Loeb's Pescarolo lay 5th, an impressive performance considering that it was only the second time he has driven this car in the dark here.

The Audis got faster and faster as the track cooled, At 23:38, Franck Montagny, in the No.4 Playstation Team Oreca Audi, put in its fastest lap so far, at 4:02.705. The dark obviously also suited Andrew Kirkaldy in the No.93 Scuderia Ecosse - Ferrari 360 Modena, as he suddenly shot up to 19th overall and led the GT2 class by almost 4 secs.

A comment from the Corvette pits, re their decision not to participate on this first night of Qualifying, "We have nothing that we can learn tonight, it is not going to rain over the weekend."

23:30 hrs

Ara, Kristensen and McNish battled first place about between themselves, taking turns to rearrange their names in the top three places. The result was a series of laps that got closer and closer to the four-minute mark and kept the crowd on its toes. The battle gave the lie to those that had said the handicap of extra weight and restricted air-intakes would slow the Audis; they were right up there with the 'hybrid' Dome that is built to the latest regulations.

The other Hybrids were not having such a good time. The fancied Playstation Pescarolo-Judd team had a problem with the car that rally champion Sébastien Loeb was due to take out. It was diagnosed as being in the clutch, but it was quickly remedied, allowing Loeb to go out and continue to turn in creditable times while learning the track and the car.

24 :00

The minutes leading up to the flag saw a flurry of activity that culminated in an effort by 35 year-old French driver Soheil Ayari that lifted the No 17 Pescarolo-Judd he shares with Eric Hélary and Sébastien Loeb to the top place with a lap just 1.197 seconds over the 4-minute barrier. His was not the only flyer during the last quarter of an hour. Emmanuel Pirro put the No 2 Champion Racing Audi R8 second, 0.03 seconds slower than the Pescarolo, and Nicolas Minassian moved the Creation Autosportif DBA 03S – Judd No. 7 into third. Franck Montagny struck a blow for France by taking fourth for the Oreca team's Playstation-sponsored Audi R8, while JJ Lehto slipped the No2 Champion Racing Audi R8 into the fifth spot. Seiji Ara, who had spent much of the last hour in and around first place, finished sixth.

Top LM2 car was the No 32 Intersport Racing Lola B160 in the hands of Sam Hancock, while in the GT categories, GT1 was headed by the Larbre Competition Ferrari No 51 Ferrari 550 Maranello driven by Vincent Voss. GT2 was led by No 76, the Raymond Narac-entered Porsche 911 GT3 driven by Romain Dumas.