

Communiqué n° 8

19/06/2005 00h00

22h - 24h

- Just as the race completed its sixth hour, Alex Frei in the No. 12 Courage Judd spun off at the Dunlop Chicane. The car, in ninth overall at that point, stalled, and he had to be hauled out of the gravel by the waiting tractor. At the same time Vanina Ickx brought the No. 18 Rollcentre Dallara Judd in at the end of her double stint and handed over to Joao Barbosa; the car is still handicapped by a power-steering leak. Barbosa quickly got up to speed, putting in the car's fastest lap at 22:12 hrs with a 3:41.314.
- As night descends the temperature is coming down from its earlier peak, dropping from 35 to 27 Celsius by 20:00 hrs. The overnight low is expected to be in the low 20s.
- Just on 22:05 hrs both Aston Martins came in for routine pit-stops, Darren Turner bringing the No. 59 Aston Martin DBR9 in ahead of Peter Kox in the sister No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9. The two were running in fourth and second in class respectively, doing their best to close on the Corvette C6-R cars in first and third.
- Seven minutes later those two Corvettes came in almost together, mirroring the Aston pair. Ron Fellows pitted the No. 63 Corvette C6-R first for a fuel-only stop, with Oliver Gavin doing the same in the No. 64 Corvette C6-R less than a minute later.
- The No. 32 Intersport Lola AER continued to lead the LMP2 category, as it has for much of the race. The team stretched out a three-lap lead over the No. 36 Belmondo Courage Ford, with Sam Hancock taking his turn at the driving duties.
- With the retirement of the No. 77 Panoz Elan, the No. 71 Alex Job Porsche 911 GT3 RSR pulled out a slender lead over the No. 90 White Lightning Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR. With Mike Rockenfeller bringing the 71 car in for a routine pit-stop at 22:16 that allowed Timo Bernhard to close the gap down to around half a lap.
- The LM GT1 battle raged, with Peter Kox in the No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9 wresting the class lead from Ron Fellows in the No. 63 Corvette C6-R, managing to slipstream past down the Mulsanne straight.
- At 22:21 hrs the No. 51 BMS Scuderia Italia Ferrari 550 Maranello officially retired from the race, with the car stuck out on the course as a result of accident damage. A car enjoying rather better fortunes, the No. 5 Jim Gainer International Dome-Mugen, came into the pit-lane a couple of minutes later for

fuel and tyres; at the same time Michigami handed over to Seiji Ara. They kept fourth position as before they left their pit, Jean-Marc Gounon brought the fourth-placed No. 4 Audi Playstation Team Oreca Audi in for their next stop.

- Team owner Hugh Chamberlain explained why the No. 39 Chamberlain-Synergy Motorsport Lola AER was forced into retirement: "We don't yet know exactly what, but something broke in the gearbox. A shaft got punched through the side of the box, all the oil fell out, and that was that."
- With the sun having set, the race settled down into the kind of rhythm required to keep going for 24 hours. Up at the front the No. 3 Champion Audi and No. 4 Audi Playstation Team Oreca Audi continued to put in consistent laps around the 3'45 mark; Tom Kristensen, going for a record-breaking seventh win in the Champion car, had the luxury of being a lap clear of the Oreca Audi and three laps ahead of the No. 5 Jim Gainer International Dome-Mugen in third.
- The lead in LM GT2 continued to shrink, with Timo Bernhard in the No. 90 White Lightning Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR closing to within a minute of Mike Rockenfeller in the No. 71 Alex Job Porsche 911 GT3 RSR.. By contrast Liz Halliday, having taken over the No. 32 Intersport Lola AER, enjoyed a handy 3-lap advantage over Didier Andre in the No. 37 Belmondo Courage Ford; the Intersport car was fifteenth overall.
- Prior to the race, one of the talking points was the pace of the new Aston Martin DBR9 LM GT1 car. In fact, the top four cars in the LM GT1 category proved themselves able to stay ahead of the quickest LMP2 prototype. The dogfight between Aston Martin and Chevrolet saw the top three running in close company, Peter Kox in the No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9 narrowly ahead of the No. 63 Corvette C6-R, being driven by Ron Fellows, with Oliver Gavin in the No. 64 Corvette C6-R close behind. The No. 59 Aston Martin DBR9 was over a lap further back having been hit by a couple of stop-and-go penalties and punctures earlier in the race.
- The previous power-steering difficulties suffered by the No. 18 Rollcentre Dallara Judd worsened at 22:40, with Joao Barbosa bringing the car in for an unscheduled pit-stop to try to resolve the problem. Having been as high as second overall, the problem dropped the car to seventh when Barbosa pitted. The Portuguese driver is earning plenty of praise for his performance in the car.
- Only three minutes later the other Rollcentre car, the No. 8 Rollcentre Dallara Nissan, was wheeled into the garage. This car has consistently been near the bottom of the timesheets, having barely turned a wheel in the first 90 minutes due to a crank sensor problem.
- At 22:48 Emmanuel Collard brought the No. 16 Pescarolo Judd in for fuel and tyres; the stop was extended a little as the team replaced the small flyscreen at the front of the cockpit. Recovering from earlier problems, the car is in eighth overall.

- The White Lightning squad, running second in the LM GT2 category, have been struggling with a car which hasn't been handling perfectly. Patrick Long, one of the three drivers, explained: "It's a bit of a challenge – engine and transmission are fine, but balance under braking is not perfect." He went on to suggest that it may be a legacy of the car's crash during the qualifying sessions earlier in the week.
- Just on 22:51 there was more drama for the Spyker team. Donny Crevels, having been in the car for 30 minutes, lost control at high speed on the updown to Indianapolis. Thankfully the gravel trap did its job perfectly and the car came to a halt; however, the car was on fire; it appeared that the fire had already started as the car spun. The marshals rapidly got the fire put out, but the incident led to the safety car being deployed at 22:57 as the car had deposited oil on the circuit; the oil leak probably got onto the rear tyre, causing the spin, and the hot brake disc, leading to the fire..
- At the end of the 7th hour, the standings are as follows:
- LMP1
 - No. 3 Champion Audi – Kristensen
 - No. 2 Champion Audi – Biela
 - No. 5 Jim Gainer International Dome-Mugen - Ara
- LMP2
 - No. 32 Intersport Lola AER – Halliday
 - No. 37 Belmondo Courage Ford – Andre
 - No. 36 Belmondo Courage Ford - Gosselin
- GT1
 - No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9
 - No. 63 Corvette C6-R – Fellows
 - No. 64 Corvette C6-R – Gavin
- GT2
 - No. 71 Alex Job Porsche 911 GT3 RSR – Rockenfeller
 - No. 90 White Lightning Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR – Bernhard
 - No. 76 Raymond Narac Porsche 911 GT3 RSR - Dumas
- The safety car came out at 22:57 hrs to allow the track marshals the chance to clear up the track after the No. 85 Spyker C8 Spyder incident. The driver, Donny Crevels, was unhurt. During the safety car period Kox brought the class leading LM GT1 No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9 into the pits , this allowed the two Corvettes to move into the lead.
- The Circuit here at Le Mans is so long that the organisers have to deploy three safety cars at various points around the circuit. This has always tended to make strategic planning for the teams during a safety car spell very tricky indeed.
- The next drama during the safety car session was when the left rear wheel flew off the No. 34 Miracle Motorsports Courage AER just before the Dunlop

Chicane; the car had just left the pit-lane.

- When the safety car came in at 23:18 hrs and racing resumed several hundred yards of track at Indianapolis were covered in fine cement dust, making visibility very tricky.
- When the racing resumed the No. 59 Aston Martin DBR9 was given yet another 'Stop-Go' penalty – another three minutes wasted. This one was for speeding in the pit-lane.
- Possibly one of the luckiest teams was the No. 34 Miracle Motorsports Courage
- AER ; they had been able to trickle down the hill backwards into the pits and have another wheel fitted, replacing the one that fell off. It rejoined the race at 23:23 hrs with all four wheels firmly attached.
- When racing action resumed it became clear that the safety car had helped the No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9 and Tomas Enge into the Class lead of LM GT1. In LM GT2, an intriguing development; the Panoz squad commenced a clutch replacement on the No. 78 Panoz Elan – and started to strip down the No. 77 Panoz Elan, which had earlier retired. The team were considering using the clutch out of the 77 car to replace the one that had failed in the 78 car.
- Our reporter in the pits told us that the Aston Martin team mechanics looked relaxed, sitting in comfortable chairs, sipping tea and eating biscuits.
- At 23:40 hrs the Audis looked to be in control, they occupied the first three places with No. 3 Champion Audi (Lehto) leading, No. 2 Champion Audi (Biela) second and No. 4 Audi Playstation Team Oreca Audi (Gounon) third. In LM GT2 the Porsches began to take control when the Panoz and Ferrari challenges faded away; Porsche occupied the first seven places at 23:45 hrs.
- The No. 61 Cirtek Ferrari 550 Maranello was running smoothly, sixth in class despite Vasiliev crossing the gravel traps at the Playstation Chicane just before he came into the pits.
- Martin Short and the No. 18 Rollcentre Dallara Judd were back running smoothly after their long pit stop resolving power steering problems.
- Tom Kristensen was interviewed by French radio and he said: "We were surprised to lead the race so early on - but helped by the misfortune of others, yes we are there. We are just trying to hang on, trying to do our best. It's very difficult, there are a lot of accidents and a lot of oil on the track - we just have to stay out of trouble - but the race is young - we'll see."
- In LMP2 Liz Halliday was leading the class in the No. 32 Intersport Lola AER. This is her first visit to Le Mans, and so far it's been a rather rewarding experience for the young American.
- At the end of the eighth hour, the standings were as follows:
- LMP1
No. 3 Champion Audi, Lehto
No. 2 Champion Audi, Biela

- No. 4 Audi Playstation Team Oreca Audi, Gounon
- LMP2
 - No. 32 Intersport Lola AER, Halliday
 - No. 37 Belmondo Courage Ford, Sutherland
 - No. 36 Belmondo Courage Ford, Gosselin
- GT1
 - No. 58 Aston Martin DBR9, Enge
 - No. 64 Corvette C6-R, Beretta
 - No. 63 Corvette C6-R, O'Connell
- GT2
 - No. 71 Alex Job Porsche 911 GT3 RSR, Leib
 - No. 90 White Lightning Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR, Bernhard
 - No. 76 Raymond Narac Porsche 911 GT3 RSR, Dumas