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Thursday 15th june 2006

FIRST QUALIFYING SESSION



24 HEURES DU MANS®
17-18 JUIN 2006

Partenaires "Privilège" des **24 HEURES DU MANS** 2006





PESCAROLO AND AUDI DOMINATE WET QUALIFYING SESSION

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 23h59

Rain which varied from fairly light to torrential dogged the second two-hour stint on Wednesday; despite this, the top LMP1 cars managed to improve their times.



After the first two-hour session was brought to a premature end, the second got under way on time at 10pm. The cloud cover made the circuit prematurely dark; the track was still very wet, the rooster-tails of spray showing up in the headlights of following cars. The rain had lessened and was much lighter than earlier. Franck Montagny took advantage of the minor improvement in conditions to do some quick laps in the No.17 Pescarolo Judd, first splitting the Audis and then going even quicker to claim provisional pole with a lap of 4:19.143; the degree of difficulty caused by the conditions can be judged by the fact that this time is almost 45 seconds slower than last year's pole time, set in the dry. But then, 20 minutes after the green flag, the rain started to come down more heavily and

times got even slower. The teams switched their focus onto getting all of their drivers night-qualified – the requirement is that a driver completes at least three laps during the two 2-hour sessions between 10pm and midnight on Wednesday and Thursday. Not that the rain bothered Montagny; at 10:37pm he put in a remarkable lap, his 4:17.295 almost two seconds faster than his previous best. It took Audi only two minutes to fight back, McNish putting in a 4:17.189 in the No.7 Audi. On the very next lap Montagny outdid him with a 4:14.447, an astonishing improvement of almost three seconds on his previous best. By the end of the session the No.8 Audi had improved to 4:17.676 but had dropped back to fourth, just under half a second slower than the sister No.7 car. At almost the same time Rinaldo Capello spun the No.7 car into the barriers at the Tertre Rouge esses and was forced to abandon the R 10. With half an hour remaining, despite the rain continuing to fall, Emmanuel Collard put in a series of flying laps in the No.16 Pescarolo; first he leap-frogged the two Audis to claim second with a 4:15.565, then went fastest of all with a 4:13.832. As the LMP1 started to bring their times down the leading GT1 cars, the two Aston Martin DBR9 entries, were pushed out of the top ten. The No.007 car of Enge/Piccini/Turner staying ahead of the No.009 of Lamy/Ortelli/Sarrazin. The two works Corvettes went out, but made no real attempt to turn in fast laps, so third in class went to the No.67 Convers Menx Ferrari 550 Maranello. The 4:25.398 lap set by the No.20 Pierre Bruneau Pilbeam Judd in the first ten minutes of the evening proved to be the quickest time in LMP2. Their nearest challenger was the No.32 Barazi Epsilon Courage AER, just under 2s slower. The final two hours of the evening saw no changes in the GT2 positions, so the No.90 White Lightning Porsche 911 is on the overnight class pole improving their time to 4:39.912, ahead of the No.76 IMSA Performance Matmut Porsche 911, with third held by the No.86 Spyker Squadron C8 Spyder. If Thursday's practice session is dry, as is forecast, all of tonight's times will count for nothing, despite the heroics involved in going as fast as possible in extremely tricky conditions. The sheer length of the 13.65km circuit makes it even more difficult - there can be torrential rain in some parts, no more than a light shower in others.

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h08

> FIRST QAULIFYING BEGINS

First qualifying began at 19:00hrs. The weather today could well play a major role today. It is still warm but it is very murky , there is moisture in the air and there is a possibility of rain.

This could make things harder for the incredibly 'torquey' diesel Audis. They are tricky to drive in the dry so a wet track will be very challenging.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h13

> IT IS RAINING!

19:12 hrs It's raining !

Just minutes into practice it has started to drizzle and it is getting increasingly wet out on the circuit. The pit lane is looking very slippery. Teams have started bringing the cars in to change over to 'wet' tyres.



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h22

> IT IS GETTING SLIPPERY.

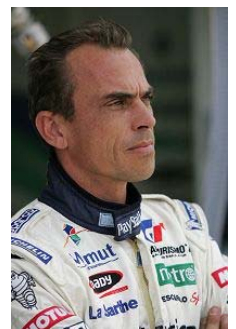


19:16 hrs. As if to prove that it is getting very slippery out on the track the Miracle Motorsport No.27 Courage AER driven by Andy Lally spins at Tertre Rouge. Luckily the driver missed the gravel traps and rejoined without damage. Most teams seem to be opting for full wet tyres rather than 'intermediate' compounds. After weeks of very dry weather this will be the first time the teams have encountered rain so it may have to become a test session as well.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h34

> CONDITIONS GETTING HARDER BY THE MINUTE..

Proving that even the most experienced drivers are finding the conditions difficult Eric Helary in the No17 Pescarolo has just executed a 360 degree spin, missed everything and carried on.



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h45

> ERIC HELARY QUOTE

Back in the pits after his spin in the No.17 Pescarolo Eric Helary tells us "We were trying out a special sort of tyre to see if it was OK in the rain and it was not the right choice..." The team is running on Michelin tyres.

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h52

> PATRICK LONG, THE MOST EUROPEAN OF AMERICANS

Patrick Long knows Le Mans well. In fact, the driver for the n°80 Porsche (Flying Lizard Motorsport), is a former driver for ELF and has since become the driver for FFSA and has spent almost 6 years moving around Europe.



The least we can say is that Patrick Long is not an American like the others. In fact, the official Porsche driver has spent almost more time in Europe than in his own country. He lived for a year in France, a year and a half in Germany, 3 years in Britain and a year in Italy. After his tour of Europe, he returned to the US for a hectic program which includes 38 races for this season alone. He is forced to continue living the life of a nomad.

Since debuting in the Bugatti in 1999, Patrick still has a particular twinge of sorrow when he returns to Le Mans. He explains: "When I was younger I heard about the '24 Heures du Mans', but I never really realised just how big the event is. It was only when I came here for the first time as a spectator that I understood that this event is truly mythical". The Le Mans magic has never left him since, because the driver of the n° 80 Porsche has already entered his name twice into the '24 Heures' history books in the GT category in 2004 and 2005 with the White Lightning Racing team.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 19h55

> AUDI FINALLY VENTURE OUT ONTO THE WET TRACK...

19:52 hrs. At last one the Audis is out on the circuit; it is the No.7 Audi Team Joest R10, driven by Allan McNish. The team appears to have been waiting until the circuit dried out but this would have left them with no experience of wet running - and no wet set-up.

This seemed a brave move, particularly if the weather remains changeable throughout the weekend. It has already been mentioned that the Audis have so much torque from their massive V12 5.5 litre diesel engines that they are tricky to handle even in the dry. The team clearly believes that the weather is going to improve.



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h12

> QUOTES FROM DAVID BRABHAM AND NELSON PIQUET JR.

Quotes on the first hour of qualifying from David Brabham and Nelson Piquet Jr, who are sharing the No.62 Russian Age Aston Martin DBR9 with Antonio Garcia.



David Brabham

"It is not dangerously wet out there, but there is not much rubber on the track so traction at Arnage is not good. A number of cars have spun there - including me! We are mainly doing system checks, and checking brake bias; there is a lot for this team to learn."

Nelson Piquet

"I don't know the circuit and it is raining and this is not really the best way to learn! The car is still very new to me, and it will take a while to get used to it."

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h19

> LAMBORGHINI SUFFERING MISTING PROBLEMS ...

The No.53 JLOC Isao Noritake Lamborghini Murcielago is having a difficult time at the moment. It is very tough out there on the wet track for everybody, and to make things even more difficult the Lamborghini has a serious problem with condensation on the inside of wind-screen.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h24

> JAMIE CAMBELL-WALTER QUOTES

Comments by Jamie Campbell-Walter, driver of the No.9 Creation Judd.

Jamie Campbell-Walter:

"The car is very good. We are doing our best to it ready for Saturday.

Everything is perfect, apart from the rain!

"I didn't do the test day, so it's a bit a baptism of fire for me here with the rain falling."



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h24

> AUDI STEP UP THE PACE



20:23 hrs. It has taken some time but despite the conditions, the Audis are beginning to up the pace. The No.8 Audi Team Joest R10 heads the times with a 4:23.070 lap by Allan McNish, with no.7 its sister car running second ahead of the Pescarolos.

A few minutes later the weather appeared to be improving, but the track remained wet and conditions were very difficult. As if to prove this, Alex Frei spun into the barriers at the Tertre Rouge esses in the Courage Mugen, damaging the front of the car and coming to rest against the barriers facing the wrong way. The marshals pushed the car out of danger and Frei climbed out, forced to wait for the end of the two-hour session before the Courage could be brought back to the pits.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h38

> ASTON MARTIN 007 IN THE GRAVEL...

20:33 hrs. The LM GT1 class-leading No 007 Aston Martin DBR9, driven by Piccini, went off with 25 minutes remaining in the first two-hour session. Piccini left the track just after the Dunlop Chicane, and was pushed away by the marshals. A few minutes later he made it back to the pits, where the car was wheeled straight into the garage to be checked.



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h43

> QUOTE FROM LUC ALPHAND ..

20:40 hrs Luc Alphand, driving the No.72 Luc Alphand Corvette C5-R, tells us:

"Arnage corner is very, very wet. We are all very cautious, because we don't want to destroy the car! There's a little water dripping inside the car. The Americans obviously don't do a lot of driving in the rain! No one

wants to slide off into a wall tonight, and that could be so easily done. We

are taking no risks, especially as we think the rain will stop for tomorrow"

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h52

> DAVID BRABHAM: THE GAME OF MUSICAL CARS

When David Brabham comes to Le Mans, you never know which car he is going to jump into. In 13 Le Mans participations, the Australian driver has driven 7 different cars.



Toyota, Jaguar, McLaren, Panoz, Bentley, Zytek and Aston Martin are among the beautiful collection of cars that have passed through the hands of David Brabham since his Le Mans debut in 1992.

For the second year in a row he will line up at the wheel of an Aston Martin DBR9.

Even though the car remains the same as last he, he will, however, be behind the wheel of the privately run Modena team DGR9 entered under the banner of Russian Age Racing.

He will spearhead this young team with Nelson Piquet Jr. and Antonio Garcia completing the line up. The youth of his team mates has made David smile: "I feel like their dad, Nelson is only 2 years older than my son! But I am not old, I am just very experienced".

As for his chance of finishing once again on the Le Mans podium, he seems very confident: "Although beating the Corvettes and the official Aston Martins will not be easy, I think we have a good chance".

Significant words if we take into consideration the fact that David has driven a Ferrari 550, a Saab S7R and a works Aston Martin.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 20h59

> 20:51 HRS SESSION STOPPED - RED FLAG

The No.39 Chamberlain-Synergy Lola AER driven by Miguel Paes de Amaral, has gone off at the Tertre Rouge esses, sliding backwards into the barriers and sustaining rear-end damage. The session was red-flagged to allow the marshals time to haul the car to a safe position. The accident was very close to the spot where the car was badly damaged in testing ten days earlier - an incident which also brought out the red flag. The car had to be completely rebuilt after the testing accident; the damage this time does not look as serious.



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 21h07

> QUOTE FROM HENRI PESCAROLO



Comments from Henri Pescarolo, manager of Team Pescarolo Sport.

"We didn't want to change any settings so we have stayed with the dry settings on our two cars. We wanted all six drivers to drive in the rain, especially Sebastien Loeb, who hasn't driven the car in the wet.

"If the rain doesn't stop, we may consider using rain settings. The forecast is 'better for tomorrow', so we'll see - right now, the track is very slippery. The car can't be all that bad in the rain, because we have already won two races this season in difficult conditions."

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 21h13

> FIRST QUALIFYING - RAIN HITS THE OPENING SESSION

The opening session of qualifying for the 2006 24 Hours of Le Mans provided a topsy-turvy timesheet, with rain sweeping across the circuit, and many teams opting not to go for a competitive time.

The first qualifying session for the 2006 edition of the 24 Hours of Le Mans began exactly on time at 7pm, with most of the 50 cars heading out on track. However, before a single flying lap had been completed rain started to fall, with most cars choosing to pull straight back into the pits.

The rain quickly intensified, to the point where intermediates and wet tyres became the right choice; some teams decided not to risk the car in the difficult conditions, wheeling the cars into the pit garages. As if to prove this was the right decision, Andy Lally spun the No.27 Miracle Motorsports Courage AER in the Tertre Rouge esses; coming to a halt without hitting anything, he needed a push from the marshals to get going again.

All this meant that the No.20 Pierre Bruneau Pilbeam Judd of Rostan/Macallister/Pullan had the honour of topping the timesheets with a 4:25.398 lap – quite a feat for an LMP2 car. Indeed, the leading LMP1 car was the No.13 Courage Mugen of Gounon/Kurosawa/Nakano, in sixth on 4:43.686.

Just as the first half-hour came to an end Eric Hellary spun the No.17 Pescarolo Judd at the Tertre Rouge esses; making a rather neater job of it than Lally had earlier, Hellary didn't even come to a stop after doing a complete 360-degree pirouette.

Romain Dumas, one of the drivers of the No.76 IMSA Performance Matmut Porsche 911, summed up the attitude of many of the teams: "The weather is forecast to be better tomorrow, so we are not taking any risks tonight". Some teams had the decision made for them: the No.72 Luc Alphand Corvette was forced to remain in the pits with broken wipers.

Provisional pole position finally changed hands after 43 minutes, when Jamie Campbell-Walter tiptoed round in 4:25.234 in the No.9 Creation Judd; the car retained the lead for just over 15 minutes, when the two Pescarolo Judd cars jumped to the top of the timesheets. First Erik Comas, in the No.16 car, lapped in 4:24.135 – then, less than two minutes later, Sebastien Loeb lowered the mark to 4:23.443 in the sister No.17 entry. Twenty minutes later, and the diesel-powered Audi appeared at the head of the list for the first time, Emanuele Pirro going round in 4:23.070 in the No.8 Audi Team Joest R10 – but just over a minute later, Allan McNish leapfrogged him in the No.7 Audi, lapping in 4:19.863.

In GT1, the works Corvette team opted to rely on their vast experience of this race, leaving their cars sitting in the pit lane as they already have wet set-up knowledge from previous years. That meant that the works Aston Martins dominated the category, the No.007 and No.009 DBR9 cars spending much of the session in the top ten overall.

The difficult conditions caught out many drivers, with a number of spins – the Tertre Rouge esses saw several cars spinning out, most without damage. One exception to this as the No.12 Courage Mugen, Alex Frei hitting the barriers hard enough to bring his session to an end. Traction out of Arnage corner was also at a premium, causing several spins, including David Brabham, in the No.62 Russian Age Aston Martin DBR9. With less than ten minutes remaining, the Tertre Rouge esses claimed another victim – and this time it led to the session being red-flagged. Miguel Paes de Amaral, in th No.39 Chamberlain-Synergy Lola AER, lost the car over the kerbs and slid backwards into the barriers, coming to a halt some way down with rear-end damage. After the session was stopped the marshals attached a towrope to the front and hauled it to safety. Ironically this is the same car which spun, at virtually the same place, on the practice day, also causing a red flag.

The red flag effectively brought the first two-hour qualifying stint to an end, with the two Audi R10 entries topping the timesheets ahead of the No.17 Pescarolo Judd. Courtesy of its lap very early in the session the No.20 Pierre Bruneau Pilbeam Judd retained the LMP2 lead in sixth overall, well clear of the No.33 Intersport Lola AER.

The two works Aston Martin cars kept the GT1 lead, ending the session in eighth (No.007) and ninth (No.009) overall, with the No.67 Convers Menx Ferrari 550 Maranello in twelfth. The leading GT2 car was the No.90 White Lightning Porsche 911, over four seconds clear of the No. 76 IMSA Performance Matmut Porsche, with third being held by the No.85 Spyker Squadron Spyker.

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 21h51

> QUOTES FROM ALLAN MCNISH, NO.7 AUDI TEAM JOEST R10

"I'm very happy with the car. With the diesel, it's easier to get some traction. This session was very important to get some data - but it would be much better for everybody if the weather clears up. The visibility was really bad and as always in Le Mans the grip was very different from one side of the track to the other. The conditions were worse for Tom [Kristensen], there were some big puddles and it would have been very easy to aquaplane off the track."

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 21h53

> ITS A LEARNING CURVE FOR NELSON PIQUET JUNIOR

With only 6 laps to familiarise himself with the Le Mans track and to learn to manage overtaking the prototypes, the young Brazilian driver can't wait to take the wheel of the n°62 Aston Martin DBR9.

More used to driving a single-seater, Nelson Piquet seems a little unhappy at having to drive with his eyes on his rear-view mirrors. He explains: After my first laps of the circuit, I had no idea of the line to take. I was going so slowly that even the LM GT2s were overtaking me. I have never used my mirrors so much. It's very difficult for me".



Even if he has not really asked for driving advice from his dad, he does rely on David Brabham to give him a little helping hand in bringing him up to scratch. "David has so much experience here that he can feel the other cars approaching. I hope to be able to do the same very soon". From Wednesday evening, Nelson Piquet will have more time to get to grips with the Le Mans circuit.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 22h04

> GREEN FLAG ON PART TWO OF WEDNESDAY SESSION

The second part of Wednesday's qualifying session commenced at 10pm; Cars out on wet tires as the rain resumes.



Frank Biela is feeling his way around the very wet course in the No.8 Audi Sport Team Joest, leading the field in what could be the best opportunity to qualify well if Thursday's sessions are also wet. Frank Montagny in the No.17 Pescarolo Judd is also on track, quickly setting the quickest time of 4:19.143, ahead of Kristensen in the No.7 Audi by 0.720 seconds.

As rain begins to fall more heavily on the circuit the No.50 Larbre Ferrari 550 Maranello is having its fuel pump changed, likely to take about 30 mins. Unconfirmed reports indicate the Corvette Racing team will cycle its drivers through some laps to get them night qualified, and then depart the session. The No.6 Lister Storm makes a brief off-track excursion as the first quarter hour of Part Two closes.

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 22h10

> COMMENTS FROM ANDY WALLACE, NO.25 RML LOLA AER

"It was very, very wet when I drove; I completed six laps. During my last lap, I spotted some standing water at Indianapolis and I decided to come back to the pit - right after that, the No.39 crashed.

"These conditions are a little bit harder for us, because it can get very tricky with a small turbo engine".

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 22h23

> QUOTES FROM SCOTT MAXWELL, NO.77 MULTIMATIC PANOZ ESPERANTE

"We worked a lot on rain set-up. The car was very hard to handle to start with, but it got better by the end. The back of the car lacks grip and overall we need to make the car softer to be more comfortable to drive.

"For the night running tonight, the three of us are going to complete our three mandatory laps, and then Gunnar Jeannette and Tom Milner are going to spend a little bit of time in the car".



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 22h33

> BOULLION IS SUPPORTING PESCAROLO



After falling from a ladder some 10 days ago, Jean-Christophe Boullion, one of the drivers of the n°16 Pescarolo-Judd, had to withdraw from taking part in his 9th '24 Heures du Mans'. However, his broken wrist hasn't stopped his coming along to support his replacement, Nicolas Minassian, as well as his team-mates Emmanuel Collard and Erik Comas in the team garage. The team's decision to leave his name written on the car, visible behind the drivers' helmet, is a gesture that Boullion will most certainly appreciate.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 23h08

> COMMENTS FROM LIZ HALLIDAY, NO.33 INTERSPORT LOLA AER

"I've done my three mandatory laps in the dark. The car is usually very good in the rain, but tonight the track is really wet. The water accumulates on the tarmac, and it's very tricky to drive. I think that the track is wetter than during the first session".

"We've come into the pits because we've got a problem with the dashboard - it keeps saying the car is on the pit-lane speed limiter. We tried changing the steering wheel, but that hasn't fixed it; it's best to get on top of problems like that now."



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 23h08

> STÉPHANE SARRAZIN, ASTON MARTIN DBR9 N°009

"The car was quite well balanced in the rain. At the end of the session there was a lot of water on the track, it reminded me a bit of 2001. We had no problems with over-steer when exiting the corners. We tried different tyres for the rain, and now we know which we will use if it rains during the race".

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mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 23h14

> COMMENTS FROM HUGH CHAMBERLAIN, TEAM MANAGER OF CHAMBERLAIN-SYNERGY RACING

On the LMP2 car, No.39 Lola AER: "We damaged the rear suspension in the accident in the first session, and we'll have to pass through technical inspection again before we can return to the track. The driver failed to back off the throttle enough when he entered the turn, and there was a huge sea of water on the track"

On the LMP1 car, No.19 Lola AER: "Last year the Wednesday test session was run under the same weather conditions, and we had a big accident. This year I decided to play it safe and to keep the car in the pits. We'll just have each driver do their three mandatory laps and that's it."



mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 23h37

> COLLARD SETS FAST TIME ON DRYING TRACK.

Capello has an 'off' in the No.7 Audi R10 while Collard flies in No.16 Pescarolo Judd.



Entering its last half hour, Wednesday's session has been eventful. "Dindo" Capello spun off in the No.7 Audi Sport Team Joest R10 at the Tertre Rouge Esses as the rain began to lessen. Hitting the Armco and knocking its rear wing askew, the Audi came to rest at 90 degrees to the track. It was soon pushed to safety by marshals and Capello got out of the car.

Minutes later, the No.8 Audi Sport Team Joest R10 pulled into its garage for what appeared to be some adjustments. Pit lane had a variety of cars being tweaked, including the No.009 Aston Martin DBR9.

The No. 73 Ice Pol Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR was trapped in the gravel at Playstation Chicane.

Fifteen minutes from the session's end, Emmanuel Collard, who had been consistently reducing his times for a number of laps, set fastest time in the No.16 Pescarolo Judd with a 4:13.832, 0.615s quicker than Frank Montagny in the No.17 sister car. Collard went even quicker in the first sector of his next lap, but then headed for the pits.

Fifteen minutes from the session's end, Emmanuel Collard, who had been consistently reducing his times for a number of laps, set fastest time in the No.16 Pescarolo Judd with a 4:13.832, 0.615s quicker than Frank Montagny in the No.17 sister car. Collard went even quicker in the first sector of his next lap, but then headed for the pits.

mercredi 14 juin 2006 - 23h50

> WEDNESDAY SESSION ENDS WITH PESCAROLO-JUDDS ATOP TIMESHEETS Pescarolos lead Audis in the wet.

Wednesday's session at Le Mans ended in rain even heavier than that which had shaped the evening's activities on track.

The team of French racing legend Henri Pescarolo ended the session atop the timesheets. Its Pescarolo Judd C60s were almost three seconds clear of the new Audi R10s, after masterful driving by Frank Montagny in No.17 and Emmanuel Collard in No.16, both of whom showed consistent speed in foul conditions.

Audi Sport Team Joest, its No.7 R10 left on trackside at Tertre Rouge, shrouded the No.8 R10 as its suspension was re-set based on the information obtained in the drenched session.

Wet or dry, the stage is set for some great excitement on Thursday.



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