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Sears Point, 18 May 2002

All Audi front row at Sears Point

The second round of the American Le Mans Series 2002 (ALMS) sees another all Audi front row – a familiar but on this occasion, somewhat unexpected picture: At Sears Point (US state of California), Audi is not racing the latest generation Infineon Audi R8 sportscars which stayed in Europe after the Le Mans pre-practice so as not to disturb the team's preparation for the highlight of the season on June 15/16.

During qualifying at Sears Point, however, Audi was still able to make the pace. Audi works driver Tom Kristensen, driving for Champion Racing this weekend, was fastest in the 2001-spec R8 giving Dave Maraj's team its first ALMS pole position. Emanuele Pirro was just three tenths of a second slower with the R8 of Team Audi Sport North America which is even two years old relegating the fastest Panoz to the second row of the grid.

The "Grand Prix of Sonoma" starts at 1 p.m. local time on Sunday running over the "classic" ALMS distance of 2:45 hours. Tom Kristensen (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38) and Rinaldo Capello (Audi R8 #1) are scheduled as start drivers. Johnny Herbert's Whit Sunday will be especially strenuous: The Sebring winner will attempt to qualify for the Indianapolis 500 on Sunday morning. He will then fly back to Sears Point taking over the ADT Champion Audi R8 from Andy Wallace and Tom Kristensen in the final stages of the race.

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Quotes after qualifying

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "It is fantastic Tom has earned Champion its first ALMS pole. My scenario is not ideal with having to be at Indianapolis but we have made plans that I can get from Indy to Sears Point during the race. I would love to score another maximum points here."

Tom Kristensen (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "We have worked a lot with the car since yesterday. Normally I don't change too much for qualifying. I did it this time and it seems like it worked. Because of traffic I had to do my time on the third flying lap. When I saw the lap time I was very pleased."

Andy Wallace (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "I am very happy for Champion Racing. The team was working hard for the last couple of years. To get the pole is great. But tomorrow will be difficult as the two Audis are very close together. It will be a very close race."

Frank Biela (Audi R8 #1): "We are a little bit surprised that we are so competitive with the old R8. But on the other hand, we were hoping for it because the 2000-spec car has always been very good on tight tracks. The car works well. The top of the field is very close together, I believe we have a good chance in the race."

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Rinaldo Capello (Audi R8 #1): "During my first laps on Friday I immediately noticed how much the R8 has improved during the last two years. The difference is bigger than I expected. Being able to fight for the pole position we proved that the 2000-spec car is still fast. I am convinced that we would have been far ahead of the competitors with this year's car."

Emanuele Pirro (Audi R8 #1): "The second starting place is a really good performance even if I hoped to get pole position after the times we did in free practice. But we are driving an old car which we are not used to any more. The whole team did a very good job, and considering we are fighting against very strong opposition, we must be very happy."

Reinhold Joest, Team Director Audi Sport North America: "Congratulations to Champion Racing for taking pole position and many thanks for giving us the car. It seems to be still very good for this track. Our drivers and our crew did a great job. I am sure we will see an exciting race."

Starting grid at Sears Point

1. Herbert/Kristensen/Wallace (Audi R8)	1m 22.615s
2. Biela/Capello/Pirro (Audi R8)	1m 22.967s
3. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz)	1m 23.352s
4. Field/Sutherland (MG Lola)	1m 25.319s
5. Jeannette/Donohue (Panoz)	1m 27.310s
6. Knight/Hawkins/Block (MG Lola)	1m 27.830s
7. Graham/de Radigues (Panoz-Mugen)	1m 27.958s
8. Neuhaus/Field (Lola-Judd)	1m 29.224s
9. Duno/Maxwell (Panoz-Mugen)	1m 29.244s
10. Weaver/Dyson (R&S-Lincoln)	1m 30.130s

Photos and further information can be found on the internet:
www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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