

Audi aims for ALMS hat-trick

After three consecutive victories at the Le Mans 24 Hour race, Audi now bids for another hat-trick: Before the final two races of the season in Miami (Florida) and Road Atlanta (Georgia) on October 5 and 12 respectively, the Team Audi Sport North America aims to successfully defend its American Le Mans Series (ALMS) title with the two Infineon Audi R8 sports cars. After 2000 and 2001, this would mark the third triumph for Audi in one of the most important automobile markets.

In the Miami street race, an eleventh place would be enough for Audi to win the Manufacturer's title. Whereas it seems that the outcome in the Drivers' category will have to wait until the finale in Road Atlanta: Prior to the final two rounds, nine drivers can still theoretically win the title. With points leader Tom Kristensen, Rinaldo Capello, Johnny Herbert, Frank Biela and last year's champion Emanuele Pirro, five Audi drivers occupy the first five places in the overall standings.

In Miami and Road Atlanta, the Team Audi Sport North America and the customer Champion Racing team face two extremely different tasks within one week: The new, near 1.5 mile (2.5 kilometre) long Miami street circuit is one of the shortest and slowest tracks of the season. As a contrast, the final race in Road Atlanta takes place on one of the fastest tracks of the ALMS. And whilst the race in Miami lasts only 2:45 hours, the "Petit Le Mans" in Road Atlanta, with a distance of 1,000 miles or maximum ten hours, is a real long-distance race.

Logistically as well, the "double-header" at the end of the season also provides the Audi team with a challenge: On Wednesday after the race in Miami, practice begins for the "Petit Le Mans" race over 600 miles (1,000 kilometres) away in Road Atlanta.

Quotes before the races in Miami and Road Atlanta

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Miami and Road Atlanta are two real highlights at the end of the season. Miami will offer a unique atmosphere. The Road Atlanta circuit is like a small Nürburgring Nordschleife. Ten hours with two drivers – that'll be pretty tough. We hope for two victories of course, and with a little luck we could even take the title."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Like in Washington, at Miami we have the chance to drive in the heart of a major city. We share the stage with the ChampCar Series and will do our best to offer the spectators a great show. Frank and I haven't given up our hopes to win the title. We'll do everything to postpone the title decision until Road Atlanta where we won last year."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Miami will be a tough race. The track is so narrow that it's easy to make a mistake and lose important points. Tom and I don't necessarily have to win in Miami. To finish and bring home points would be important so that we can travel to the season final with a healthy advantage in the championship."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "I'm very much looking forward to Miami and another street race in front of a huge crowd. The race has a great tradition. It's fantastic to see sportscars return to Miami. Of course my hope is that Dindo and I are still in front of the championship at the end of both races."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "The race in Miami will be very interesting. The track is new to us all, and apart from that the championship could be decided here. I think that Miami is realistically the last chance for me to win my first race with Champion Audi. In Road Atlanta the 'works' Audis are likely to be too strong for us."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "I drove in Miami in the mid-nineties with the CART series. But driving a much wider sportscar, the new, narrow and bumpy street circuit will offer a totally different challenge. I'm expecting a difficult weekend. Road Atlanta is a fantastic way to end the season: It's a great track, very demanding."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "This is the first time we have an event together with the ChampCar Series. I'm convinced that the ALMS will make a big contribution to the success of the event. Once more the track is new for us, but by now we have not found one circuit that has not suited our R8. We've proved that the R8 performs excellently on twisty circuits, even though it has been developed for fast tracks. For this reason we are particularly looking forward to the finale in Road Atlanta which is one of the fastest circuits of the ALMS."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "Miami has a lot of tradition and is a race that enjoys a huge public interest in America. For this reason it is important that we perform well there. But apart from that the race is also decisive for the championship. The smallest mistake from our drivers could mean a big change in the championship positions. That also applies of course to the endurance race in Road Atlanta: For two to race over ten hours is a great challenge for a driver."

Schedule in Miami

Friday, 4 October	
08:00 – 09:00 hrs	Free practice
12:00 – 13:00 hrs	Free practice
16:05 – 16:25 hrs	Qualifying (Prototypes)

Saturday, 5 October	
08:55 – 09:20 hrs	Warm-up
16:00 – 18:45 hrs	Race (2:45 hours)

Schedule in Road Atlanta

Wednesday, 9 October	
12:25 – 14:25 hrs	Free practice

Thursday, 10 October	
09:30 – 10:30 hrs	Free practice
14:15 – 15:15 hrs	Free practice
19:00 – 21:00 hrs	Night practice

Friday, 11 October	
08:00 – 09:00 hrs	Free practice
13:35 – 14:00 hrs	Qualifying (Prototypes)

Saturday, 12 October	
08:00 – 08:30 hrs	Warm-up
11:30 – 21:30 hrs	Race (1000 miles or ten hours)

Drivers' Championship

1. Tom Kristensen (Audi)	182 points
2. Rinaldo Capello (Audi)	180 points
3. Johnny Herbert (Audi)	164 points
4. Frank Biela (Audi)	162 points
5. Emanuele Pirro (Audi)	161 points
6. David Brabham (Panoz)	141 points
7. Jan Magnussen (Panoz)	135 points
8. Stefan Johansson (Audi)	133 points
9. Bill Auberlen (Panoz)	129 points
10. Bryan Herta (Panoz)	119 points

Manufacturers' Championship

1. Audi	197 points
2. Panoz	151 points
3. Lola	96 points
4. Riley & Scott	83 points
5. Cadillac	71 points
6. Ascari	19 points
7. Dome	12 points

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