

Le Mans, 14 October 2006

Motorsport

Audi driver Kristensen keeps DTM in suspense

- **Qualifying thriller in DTM début at Le Mans**
- **Le Mans record winner starts from the front row**
- **Tom Kristensen wants to postpone title decision**

The penultimate DTM round promises to be another race full of suspense: in the first event of the most popular international touring car series staged at Le Mans (France) this Sunday two of the three candidates for the title, Audi factory driver Tom Kristensen and Bruno Spengler, will be starting the race from the front row of the grid. Front runner and favourite for the title Bernd Schneider on the other hand merely took grid position nine in the qualifying. If the race were to produce the same result, the decision in the fight for the title would not come about until the finale at Hockenheim.

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Thousands of spectators lining the Circuit Bugatti on Saturday witnessed a true qualifying thriller in which Le Mans record winner Tom Kristensen in the Siemens Audi A4 DTM of Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline was running in front almost up to the end of the session. Only at the very last moment the Dane was bumped from the pole position by Bruno Spengler – by a mere 32 thousandths of a second.

A strong performance was also shown by Audi Sport Team Phoenix making it into the top eight for the first time with both cars. Christian Abt in the Playboy A4 as the best driver of a car from last year claimed fifth place. Team-mate Pierre Kaffer in the Castrol Audi A4 DTM will start from position seven. Martin Tomczyk was another Audi driver to qualify for the final section of the three-part “shoot-out” qualifying for the top positions on the grid.

Mattias Ekström – exact to one thousandths of a second – set the same time as Bernd Schneider and will be starting from tenth position alongside the favourite for the title. Altogether, five Audi A4 DTM cars will be starting the race from the first five rows.

The quickest driver of a 2004-spec car was the Swede Thed Björk who will be starting from 16th place in his DTM début.

The race is scheduled to start at 2:00 p.m. local time on Sunday. ARD will start to broadcast live coverage from Le Mans on "Das Erste" from 1:45 p.m.

Quotes after qualifying

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): "Today we witnessed an incredibly exciting qualifying. In the end, 32 thousandths of a second were lacking – but that's the thrill of the DTM. Tom (Kristensen) has established a good base to start from for himself. Perhaps we'll be able to keep the suspense in the Championship. Our 2005-spec cars, as well, showed a strong performance, particularly Christian (Abt), who was running at the front of the field throughout the weekend."

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Tom Kristensen

Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline, Siemens Audi A4 DTM #7

2nd place, 1m 31.348s / 1m 30.632s / 1m 30.518s

"No doubt: I'm very happy to have exploited the car's potential to the max and to be starting from the front row. Of course it was a shame that Bruno Spengler bumped me from the pole position at the very last moment. Overall, it's great being back at Le Mans even though it's 'only' the Bugatti Circuit and – compared with June – I'm missing 25,000 Danes keeping their fingers crossed for me..."

Christian Abt

Audi Sport Team Phoenix, Playboy Audi A4 DTM #12

5th place, 1m 31.385s / 1m 31.038s / 1m 31.089s

"Yesterday we were out in the middle of nowhere, spent a long time discussing things and hardly knew what to do. Then, we sat down, worked everything out meticulously and now it was perfect. I think our set-up for the race is even much better than for the qualifying."

Pierre Kaffer**Audi Sport Team Phoenix, Castrol Audi A4 DTM #14****7th place, 1m 31.456s / 1m 31.180s / 1m 31.376s**

“A superb qualifying! I’m very pleased about the result for the team, which has managed to get both cars into the top eight. In free practice I still had a few damper problems. Bernd Schneider did not make it into the top eight. That makes me happy for Tom (Kristensen). Maybe we can even help him a bit more.”

Martin Tomczyk**Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline, Red Bull Audi A4 DTM #4****8th place, 1m 31.482s / 1m 30.990s / 1m 31.483s**

“Technical difficulties yesterday almost prevented me from using the entire test day. Fortunately, this morning we sorted everything and quickly found a good set-up. Under these circumstances I’m satisfied with my position and I’m already looking forward to the race tomorrow.”

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Mattias Ekström**Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline, Red Bull Audi A4 DTM #5****10th place, 1m 30.668s / 1m 31.209s**

“In the first session I was doing well. But then the balance wasn’t all that good anymore. When things get tight you can’t afford not to be perfect. And we weren’t perfect today – but tomorrow everything will be alright...”

Timo Scheider**Audi Sport Team Rosberg, Gebrauchtwagen plus Audi A4 DTM #16****11th place, 1m 31.385s / 1m 31.221s**

“Basically, I was satisfied with my car because we continuously improved it. The laps seemed to be good, only on one of them I hit a bit of dirt, but that wasn’t a dramatic mistake. The result, though, does not reflect the position we’d been hoping for.”

Frank Stippler**Audi Sport Team Rosberg, S line Audi A4 DTM #15****12th place, 1m 31.380s / 1m 31.221s**

“I’m not completely satisfied. In the first session we were pretty good. In the second the grip wasn’t the same anymore. The tyres just didn’t have the same grip as in the first session and I didn’t adapt to this very quickly.”

Heinz-Harald Frentzen**Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline, Audi A4 DTM #6****14th place, 1m 31.500s / 1m 32.043s**

“As early as in the first qualifying session I noticed the engine was misfiring. The crew changed everything. But when I went out again the problem was still there – and even worse than before. Suddenly third gear didn’t work anymore either. A weird qualifying, but such things happen.”

Thed Björk**Futurecom TME, Futurecom Audi A4 DTM #19****16th place, 1m 32.006s**

“This was my first qualifying in a DTM car. Considering this, I think I managed a pretty good showing. We need to try and improve grip on the rear wheels and adjust the car a bit more to my style of driving. But I’m sure it’ll be an interesting race.”

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Vanina Ickx**Futurecom TME, Original Zubehör Audi A4 DTM #20****20th place, 1m 32.812s**

“My lap times are getting better from one day to the other, even though I’m not quick enough. Every time I improve, the others make more strides as well. At least we’re heading in the right direction.”

Hans-Jürgen Abt (Team Director Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline): “That was really a nail-biting qualifying. Congratulations to Tom. Coming second with a 32-thousandths-of-a-second gap is nothing to be ashamed of. We’re looking forward to the race.”

Ernst Moser (Team Director Audi Sport Team Phoenix): “Finally, things were going the way I like it today: Christian (Abt) and Pierre (Kaffer) were in great shape, we sent them out at exactly the right moment and now both of our cars are in the top eight. I wouldn’t mind if things always went this way.”

Arno Zensen (Team Director Audi Sport Team Rosberg): “I’m disappointed because I thought we’d be able to put both cars into the top eight. Unfortunately, none of our drivers made it into the group of the front runners. Now we need to find out why this was the case.”

The starting grid at Le Mans

- 1 Bruno Spengler (Mercedes), 1m 30.486s
- 2 Tom Kristensen (Siemens Audi A4 DTM), 1m 30.518s
- 3 Mika Häkkinen (Mercedes), 1m 30.853s
- 4 Jamie Green (Mercedes), 1m 31.062s
- 5 Christian Abt (Playboy Audi A4 DTM), 1m 31.089s
- 6 Alexandros Margaritis (Mercedes), 1m 31.324s
- 7 Pierre Kaffer (Audi A4 DTM), 1m 31.376s
- 8 Martin Tomczyk (Red Bull Audi A4 DTM), 1m 31.483s
- 9 Bernd Schneider (Mercedes), 1m 31.209s
- 10 Mattias Ekström (Red Bull Audi A4 DTM), 1m 31.209s
- 11 Timo Scheider (Gebrauchtwagen:plus Audi A4 DTM), 1m 31.221s
- 12 Frank Stippler (S line Audi A4 DTM), 1m 31.357s
- 13 Daniel la Rosa (Mercedes), 1m 31.497s
- 14 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Audi A4 DTM), 1m 32.043s
- 15 Stefan Mücke (Mercedes) 1m 31.569s
- 16 Thed Björk (Futurecom Audi A4 DTM), 1m 32.006s
- 17 Jean Alesi (Mercedes), 1m 32.046s
- 18 Susie Stoddart (Mercedes), 1m 32.311s
- 19 Mathias Lauda (Mercedes), 1m 32.436s
- 20 Vanina Ickx (Original Zubehör Audi A4 DTM), 1m 32.812s

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