



Press Information

Le Mans, 15 June 2001, 02:00 hours

Audi in pole position again at Le Mans

For the second time in succession, last year's race winner Audi starts the Le Mans 24 Hour race from pole position. In the final qualifying on Thursday evening, Rinaldo Capello, from Italy, in his Infineon Audi R8 with starting number two topped the best time that his team-mate Tom Kristensen achieved the previous day. Separated by a mere 0.029 seconds, both Infineon Audi R8 cars will start Le Mans from the first row.

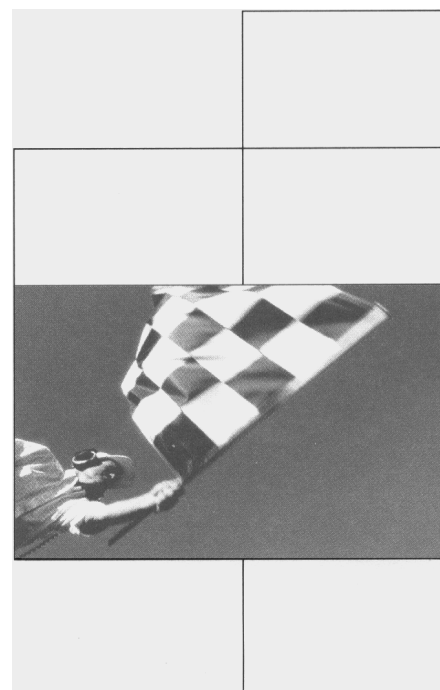
While last year's winners Frank Biela, Tom Kristensen and Emanuele Pirro focused on the race set-up of their Infineon Audi R8 during qualifying, Capello again started attacking for pole shortly before dusk. Having abandoned his first attempt when drizzle set in, he was successful on his second bid: At 3m32.429s, he achieved the new best time.

Thus Laurent Aiello, Rinaldo Capello and Audi newcomer Christian Pescatori will start on Saturday at 16.00 hours from pole position ahead of their Audi team-mates Frank Biela, Tom Kristensen and Emanuele Pirro.

As last year after qualifying, three Audi sportscars head the 48-car grid: Johnny Herbert, Ralf Kelleners and Didier Theys defended the third place they had achieved on Wednesday in their R8 of American Champion Racing outfit.

Stefan Johansson's team made considerable progress in the final qualifying: The Swede was third quickest on the second day, improving from eighth to fifth place on the grid. On Thursday, only Capello and Jan Lammers in his Dome-Judd were quicker than Johansson who shares the Audi R8 with starting number four at Le Mans with Tom Coronel and Patrick Lemarie.

While Johansson mainly used the final qualifying to improve considerably on his starting position, the Audi works team primarily concentrated on race preparation. Both Infineon Audi R8 cars were already equipped with their engines for the race.



Quotes after 2nd qualifying

Frank Biela (#1): "It is a pity for us that we lost the pole position in the last qualifying session, but it does not mean anything for the race. Starting on pole does not necessarily mean that you also win the race. The car has to be comfortable to drive over 24 hours. We were working towards that."

Tom Kristensen (#1): "For us qualifying was yesterday. Today we concentrated on race preparation and changed quite a lot on the car. Dindo did a fantastic job, there is no doubt about it. It is tough to lose pole by just 0.029 seconds but the most important thing remains the race."

Emanuele Pirro (#1): "It was a long day and not so easy to find a good set-up. I cannot say I am disappointed for the pole position. It is always good to be on pole but the most important thing is to have a good car for the race. I hope we have got it."

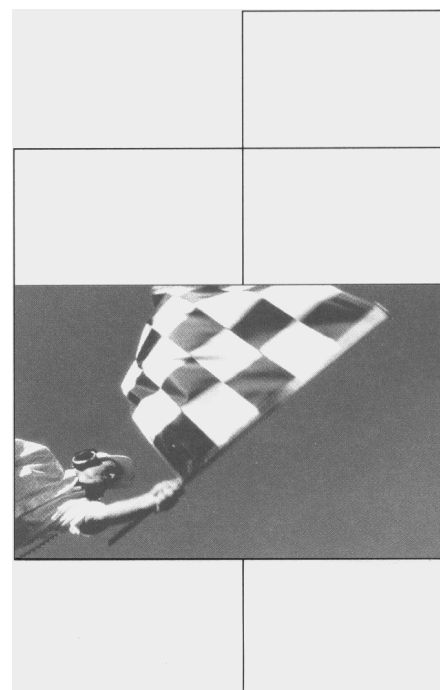
Laurent Aiello (#2): "I am happy that we are on pole. I think this is a very good position for the race, especially if it is raining. I do not hope for rain but in this situation it is good to be in front. I am very happy for Dindo who did the job and took pole. During the session we tried a lot of things with interesting results which will help us in the race."

Rinaldo Capello (#2): "On my qualifying lap I had to pass one slower car, the rest of the lap was almost clear. But still I did not know how fast I was going because I could not see the time on my display in the car. I just tried to push until the end and had the feeling that it was a good lap. When I saw the time on the pit board I was really happy. It is a great feeling to have pole at Le Mans, because I like this race very much. I am only 0.029s ahead of Tom which means I was not really faster than him, just more lucky."

Christian Pescatori (#2): "Everything went well. I did a stint with many laps. The car feels good and is very fast with a full amount of fuel. The only problem for me are the other cars. The straights are quite narrow and as we are very fast there, you have to be careful when you overtake."

Johnny Herbert (#3): "I'm very happy to be starting my first Le Mans for nine years from the second row. Third position is great and we've got ourselves an excellent racecar – it's a joy to drive. It would have been nice to get more time behind the wheel but I reckon I'll get that opportunity over the weekend!"

Ralf Kelleners (#3): "We are really happy. The third start position is exactly what we were aiming for. So, we go into the race in a very good mood. Technically everything worked very well, now it's time to think about the strategy for the race."





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Didier Theys (#3): "In my first stint, I had too much heat in the rear brakes and spun going into the first chicane. We took some tape off the rear brake cooling duct and the balance returned. We also practiced pit stops and driver changes."

Tom Coronel (#4): "I've not done as many laps as I would have liked but I've done enough to see why the Audi R8 finished 1-2-3 here last year. The car is amazing and I'm certain I'll get the opportunity to explore the R8 to its full potential in the race."

Stefan Johansson (#4): "I put on qualifiers just before 9pm and moved up to fifth but shaved off a few more tenths immediately at the start of the second part. We were only able to concentrate on our race set-up for the final 90 minutes but I'm confident we've got ourselves a good racecar."

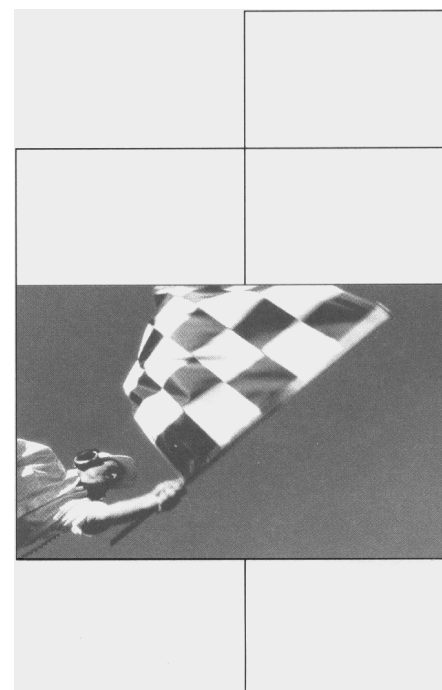
Patrick Lemarie (#4): "I completed a long stint on full tanks and found the car nicely balanced. I was especially careful with traffic because this is the character of the entire race. I improved on my personal time and managed a good rhythm."

Reinhold Joest (Team Director Audi Sport Team Joest): "It looks good. We have two Infineon Audi R8 cars which are able to win the race and experienced drivers. We are well prepared and have the chance to possibly repeat last year's victory. But as always, you need some luck. We have to cover a distance of over 5,000 kilometres. Everybody knows what that means."

Thierry Boutsen (Project Manager Champion Racing): "I am very pleased - we made a few changes and had no real dramas. The drivers have got themselves a well-balanced and very quick car. We must organise our pit stops a little more because the race will be won or lost in the pits. I have seen many people at Le Mans who have lost it with bad decisions."

Mike Earle (Team Director Johansson Motorsports): "We lost over an hour in the first part when the team replaced the steering rack. Then Stefan went out on qualifiers with only minutes remaining and did an incredible job and bettered his time immediately after the break. We've moved up to fifth - not high enough - but we'll be okay in the race I'm certain."

Dr. Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Sport): "After the first two hours, I did not expect any times to improve. It was very tight, but Dindo took the pole. Both cars are within a tenth of a second. This proves how close our cars are together. The customer teams did a good job as well. Now I hope that for all everything runs trouble free for 24 hours and that we will have reasonable weather."



The grid at Le Mans

1. Aiello/Capello/Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8) 3m 32.429s
2. Biela/Kristensen/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8) 3m 32.458s

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3. Herbert/Kelleners/Theys (Audi R8)	3m 34.349s
4. Lammers/Hillebrand/Crevels (Dome-Judd)	3m 34.838s
5. Coronel/Johansson/Lemarie (Audi R8)	3m 35.128s
6. Beretta/Wendlinger/Lamy (Chrysler)	3m 36.155s
7. Brundle/Ortelli/Smith (Bentley)	3m 36.535s
8. Collard/Goossens/Bernard (Cadillac)	3m 37.402s
9. Wallace/Leitzinger/van de Poele (Bentley)	3m 37.408s
10. Gache/Beltoise/Policand (Courage-Judd)	3m 38.746s

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