

Le Mans, 14 June 2007

Motorsport

Audi on provisional front row at Le Mans

- **Thrilling battle for pole position in first qualifying**
- **Allan McNish fastest Audi driver on Wednesday**
- **Successful comeback of Tom Kristensen**

The first qualifying session for the 2007 Le Mans 24 Hours has given a hint what spectators can expect weekend in the 75th running of the French endurance classic: a thrilling battle between the diesel-powered sportscars from Audi and Peugeot.

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Two red-flags and a rain shower caused a quite unusual Le Mans qualifying on Wednesday evening. On a track which dried only slowly, the fastest times were set just before the end of the practice at midnight. When at exactly 12 p.m. the chequered flag was waved, Allan McNish in the number 2 Audi R10 TDI was topping the time list. However, the Scotsman was narrowly relegated to provisional second spot on the grid by the best Peugeot in the dying seconds.

With a 3m 26.916s, McNish recorded the fastest ever Le Mans lap of an Audi R10 TDI on soft race tyres despite the difficult conditions and the darkness. A few minutes later, the Scotsman had missed the provisional pole time set by Stéphane Serrazin by just 0.572 seconds. Audi Sport Team Joest's other two R10 TDI sports cars hold positions four and five after the first qualifying session.

On Wednesday, Audi Sport Team Joest concentrated primarily on qualifying all nine drivers for the race – including the mandatory laps in darkness. The Audi squad used the few dry laps and also the wet track to test different tyre compounds, suspension set-ups and aerodynamic configurations for the race. All three Audi R10 TDI prototypes ran without any technical problems.

More than satisfied was Tom Kristensen at the end of the first qualifying session: The Le Mans record winner immediately felt comfortable at the wheel of the 650-hp sports car in his much noticed comeback.

The final starting grid will be decided in the second qualifying session on Thursday evening from 7 to 9 p.m. and 10 to 12 p.m. Similar changeable weather conditions are forecast as on Wednesday.

Quotes after the first qualifying

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): “It was a very unusual qualifying today because I think it never happened before that the fastest lap times were set during the last minutes. But that was only due to the fact that during the usual time-window for fast lap times there was either a red flag out or the track was wet. We have done some good work and qualified all our drivers in the night. I am satisfied with the times we have achieved today.”

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Dindo Capello (Audi R10 TDI #2): “Overall it was a good day for us. We did a lot of work looking towards the race. The weather conditions changed for the better right at the end of the session and it was a good battle between Peugeot and Audi in the final minutes – exactly what we expected. Allan put in a big effort – I honestly did not expect him to produce such a time in these conditions. Perhaps tomorrow we can make even further steps forward.”

Tom Kristensen (Audi R10 TDI #2): “It is great to be back at Le Mans and to be here with my Audi team members and co-drivers. It has been a long wait for me and I’m really excited to be back behind the wheel of the R10 TDI. I think it is the best healing for my symptoms. I did a number of laps in the dry during the first part of the session and then again in the wet conditions early in the second half. It was important for me to get back in the car and I think my lap times proved okay.”

Allan McNish (Audi R10 TDI #2): “Qualifying was difficult because of the red flag stoppages and weather, so it all came down to the last 10 minutes or so when times began to fall after track conditions allowed us to

bolt on 'slicks'. I had two reasonable laps but encountered some traffic in the last chicane on my second 'hot' lap which is frustrating having worked hard for over eight miles only to see time slipping away in the last tenth of a mile. However, I don't believe it cost me over half a second which is how much faster the Peugeot went right at the end."

Frank Biela (Audi R10 TDI #1): "We have worked on the set-up of the car and we tested tyres with regard to the race. Hence we rather did long distances and not really a qualifying. Initially, the times were very good given these circumstances. But then it all went a bit chaotic owing to the damp weather. It took long for the track to dry out. At the end, our opponents were using their chances and tried a little bit more whereas we stuck to our plan. Hence the result is okay. Our car is well sorted for the race. If the second qualifying is dry, we can certainly raise our game."

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Emanuele Pirro (Audi R10 TDI #1): "The rain turned our plan upside down. We had a long plan for tyre tests that we couldn't complete. In the end, the track surface became dry again and our opponents went quicker whereas we didn't react to their times any more. Nonetheless, it was a positive day that saw us at the sharp end of the classification for quite a while. I'm quite happy."

Marco Werner (Audi R10 TDI #1): "Today the weather messed up our plans because we were neither able to work on our setup nor could we do a proper qualifying. Frank's time was at the top of the list for a long time but then dropped at the end. Of course we would have preferred to be on the front row, but once again it is a fact that the pole position is not at all important in a 24-Hour race."

Lucas Luhr (Audi R10 TDI #3): "Everything is okay, the car is fine. At the end I tried to go out to improve our time again, but I didn't get a free lap. There are so many guys out there, who have no idea where they are going in the dark. You have to be really careful."

Alexandre Prémat (Audi R10 TDI #3): "I think Rocky and Lucas did a very good time. I had only two laps in the dark and in the wet. I feel okay, no problems."

Mike Rockenfeller (Audi R10 TDI #3): “I think it went quite okay. I did most of the first qualifying. In the first session we focused on finding a good set-up. In the second session I only did the three laps which I needed in the dark to be qualified. Tomorrow is another day, maybe we can do a little bit better.”

Ralf Jüttner (Technical Director Audi Sport Team Joest): “With the changing track conditions and the many red flags we experienced some kind of strange qualifying today. The circumstances did not allow us to stick to our programme, because we always had to react to the conditions. At the end it was a question of being out on slicks at the very right time. Tomorrow is another day. If it will be dry then of course we will strike back. And if not we still know that we have a very good race car to rely on.”

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The results of Qualifying 1

- 1 Lamy/Sarrazin/Bourdais (Peugeot) 3m 26.344s
- 2 Capello/Kristensen/McNish (Audi R10 TDI) 3m 26.916s
- 3 Gene/Minassian/Villeneuve (Peugeot) 3m 27.724s
- 4 Biela/Pirro/Werner (Audi R10 TDI) 3m 28.301s
- 5 Luhr/Prémat/Rockenfeller (Audi R10 TDI) 3m 29.736s
- 6 Collard/Boullion/Dumas (Pescarolo-Judd) 3m 33.590s
- 7 Gounon/Moreau/Johansson (Courage-AER) 3m 35.171s
- 8 Barbosa/Hall/Short (Pescarolo-Judd) 3m 35.559s
- 9 Lammers/Hart/Bleekemolen (Dome-Judd) 3m 35.660s
- 10 Campbell-Walter/Ortiz/Nakano (Creation-Judd) 3m 36.279s

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**Photographs, sound bites and additional information available on the Internet:
www.audi-motorsport.info (accreditation necessary)**