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Motorsport

Audi R8 faces new challenge

- **Competition from Germany at ALMS finale**
- **Audi R8 unbeaten at Laguna Seca**
- **Single point separates Audi from Manufacturers' Title**

Although Audi drivers Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro wrapped up the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) drivers' championship with a race to spare after winning at Road Atlanta, and only a small miracle can prevent Audi from winning its sixth consecutive manufacturers' championship, the final of the US sportscar series in Laguna Seca (California) promises to be a real thriller: For the first time ever the Audi R8, the most successful Le Mans Prototype ever, comes face to face with the new Porsche RS Spyder.

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The factory Porsche is the first car to be purpose built and developed by an automobile manufacturer to suit the new Sports Prototype regulations. Because it competes in the LM P2 class it is allowed to weigh 150 kilograms less than the multiple winning Audi R8 (class: LM P1), which has won 61 of its 74 races to date. In return, the Turbo FSI engine propelling the R8 has approximately 70 hp more power – and is still the only racing engine with direct fuel injection.

The two Audi R8 prototypes racing for the American Audi customer team ADT Champion Racing must not only overcome the very real threat from the new Porsche, but the Dyson team's two Lolas and the British Zytek prototype are regarded as possible winners at the demanding circuit close to Monterey. The Audi R8 remains unbeaten at Laguna Seca since its first race there in the 2000 season. In spite of the strong competition Frank Biela/Emanuele Pirro and JJ Lehto/Marco Werner will do everything in their powers to ensure that it remains just so.

Lehto/Werner are three points behind Lola driver Chris Dyson going into the finale and have a great chance of taking the runner-up spot in the championship. Audi only needs a single point to take the manufacturers' crown. The race starts at Laguna Seca on Saturday, 15 October at 3:15 p.m. local time.

Quotes before the ALMS finale at Laguna Seca

JJ Lehto (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #1): “Last year we lost a near certain victory at Laguna Seca when there was some confusion in the closing stages because of a full course yellow. As we’ve had such a long run of bad luck this year, it would be fantastic to finish the season with a win. I love this circuit and look forward to four exciting hours.”

Marco Werner (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #1): “The new Porsche is a complete unknown. There were a few lap times on the grape vine after it broke cover at Road Atlanta, but nobody really knows just where it will end up. It’ll be really interesting to see just how fast a well prepared LM P2 car is and whether it can be a danger to us. However, I assume that our trusty old Audi R8 will at least have an advantage over the four hour distance. JJ and I will definitely be gunning for victory. It’s about time that our run of bad luck finally came to an end.”

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Frank Biela (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2): “It will be a great race for Emanuele and I, as we already have the championship in the bank. That means the pressure is off and we can race with no holds barred. It should be big fun, especially since Laguna Seca is such a fantastic circuit on which I’ve always loved to drive. Just how strong the new Porsche is will be revealed. It is definitely a big plus for the American Le Mans Series and the whole sportscar scene.”

Emanuele Pirro (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2): “I’m absolutely delighted that we were able to secure the ALMS title at the penultimate round of the season. In 2000, I won the Audi R8 prototype’s very first race together with Frank (Biela) and Tom (Kristensen) at Sebring – and now, quite probably, the R8 prototype’s last championship title. It would be fantastic if we could crown our championship victory with another race win at the finale.”

Dave Maraj (Team Owner Team ADT Champion Racing): “I’m delighted that Frank and Emanuele wrapped up the Drivers’ Championship at Petit Le Mans. At Laguna Seca we want to reach our two remaining goals: To win the ALMS Teams’ Championship and to give Audi its sixth consecutive manufacturers’ title.”

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): “Although the championship has already been settled, we obviously want to score a good result at the finale. Laguna Seca has always been a special race, which will be even more interesting thanks to the debut of the new Porsche. We are really very intrigued to see just how good this new Sports Prototype is, which has been purpose built for the new regulations.”

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