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Motorsport

Le Mans, 13 June 2002

Audi reserves front row of the grid at Le Mans

After the opening qualifying sessions for the 2002 Le Mans 24 Hour race, Audi has its hands on the front row of the starting grid. On Wednesday evening, Rinaldo Capello and Tom Kristensen both improved on last year's pole-position time with their Infineon Audi R8 sportscars despite the lengthening of the track by 275 metres (300.74 yards). Michael Krumm qualified the no. 3 Infineon Audi R8 in provisional fourth place on the grid.

Midway through the first qualifying session, the Dome-Judd of Dutchman Jan Lammers surprisingly topped the 50-car field. All three "works" Audis were on soft tyres when the session was red flagged due to a stranded car. Because of that, Capello, Kristensen and Krumm had to set their times after 10 p.m. in the darkness – and they succeeded: Capello almost matched his pre-test fastest time with a 3m 30.347s missing out by just 5/100 of a second, with Kristensen just four tenths of a second behind the Italian.

Start positions for the 70th running of the French endurance classic will be determined on Thursday during final qualifying from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. to 12 p.m. This will allow Audi Sport Japan Team Goh another chance to secure a position in the front of the grid. The Audi customer team from Japan is 11th after the first qualifying after an incident shortly before the end of the session.

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Quotes after first qualifying

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): „I had just gone onto qualifiers when the session was red flagged. We made some suspension and damper changes, stiffening the car slightly, and put on the qualifiers immediately after the break. Everything worked well on my fastest lap.“

Johnny Herbert (Infineon Audi R8 #2): „I went out first in our car when the track was still very dirty. I was sliding around a lot. The car was also bottoming on the track in places. After that we stiffened the suspension.“

Christian Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8 #2): „The car was fast but difficult to drive – it was easy to make a mistake. Near the end of the session I stopped early with a clutch failure. Tomorrow I believe will be better for me and I am looking forward to getting more miles in the car.“

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): „The grip level was quite poor today, but this was the same for everyone. We were able to achieve what we wanted: It was up to Tom to do a fast qualifying lap. This worked very well. But mainly we worked for the race. We tried many things, even high down-force for wet conditions.“

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Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #1): „I had bad luck with the red flag, but I had a good opportunity at the start of the second part of the session. I ran together with Dindo and we had an almost clear lap. I don't know who lost more in traffic at Arnage. Of course I would have preferred to be faster, but we have another chance tomorrow.”

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): „It has been a good day, but the circuit was quite different from the pre-practice. It is more slippery, more dirty. After the pre-practice we were happy with the set-up. Now we have to do some more adjustments. I think we can still improve the car a little.”

Michael Krumm (Infineon Audi R8 #3): “That was good fun: The car had a great balance and the track got better and better. Unfortunately I had a lot of traffic when I was out on qualifiers. Tomorrow we will go for it again and try to get a perfect lap – perhaps we can make it and get the Dome.”

Philipp Peter (Infineon Audi R8 #3): “My times were okay – there's no doubt that we are with the front runners. It's amazing out there – you must be concentrating for every single second. It was good that I could do twelve laps in a row in the second part of the session to get used to the special conditions. “

Marco Werner (Infineon Audi R8 #3): “There was a lot of trouble out on the track during the second part of the session. Unfortunately I was also a little part of it when I spun at the chicane. With all the yellow flags I didn't take any risks afterwards but concentrated on constant lap times, so I had some time to get used to the darkness and the many cars on the circuit.”

Seiji Ara (Audi R8 #5): „The car was not perfect tonight. We were using settings made from our test at Paul Ricard but they did not work here so we reverted back to our pre-test settings.”

Yannick Dalmas (Audi R8 #5): „I was quite happy with the car until I spun near the end of the qualifying session which surprised me. I'm confident we can improve tomorrow and make sure of a good position on the starting grid for the race.”

Hiroki Katoh (Audi R8 #5): „I set the fastest time despite a high fuel level in the car. It was a tough session for us but we will make changes and improve for the race I am certain.”

Reinhold Joest (Team Director Audi Sport Team Joest): “So far we have experienced a dream start here at Le Mans. Our competitors are very strong, which promises an exciting race. But as usual we are very well prepared and left nothing to chance - now we only need the famous little piece of luck.”

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Sport): „We were able to run through the scheduled programme we had with all three cars. Car number three had a minor off without consequences, and twenty minutes from the end, the clutch broke on car number two, which however does not preoccupy us. Generally, we can be content with the result.”

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Results 1st qualifying

1. Capello/Herbert/Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8)	3m 30.347s
2. Biela/Kristensen/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	3m 30.701s
3. Lammers/Hillebrand/Coronel (Dome-Judd)	3m 31.057s
4. Krumm/Peter/Werner (Infineon Audi R8)	3m 32.531s
5. Blundell/Bailey/McGarrrity (MG Lola)	3m 33.254s
6. Montagny/Sarrazin/Minassian (Oreca-Judd)	3m 34.053s
7. Beretta/Lamy/Comas (Oreca-Judd)	3m 34.244s
8. Angelelli/Taylor/Tinseau (Cadillac)	3m 35.042s
9. Cottaz/Derichebourg/Bjork (Courage-Judd)	3m 36.942s
10. Wallace/Leitzinger/van de Poele (Bentley)	3m 38.036s
11. Ara/Dalmas/Katoh (Audi R8)	3m 38.129s

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

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