

Sebring, 17 March 2005

Motorsport

Audi takes sixth Sebring Pole Position in a row

- **Qualifying cancelled due to rain**
- **JJ Lehto fastest in practice**
- **Both Audi R8 sports cars start from the front row**

The farewell tour of the Audi R8 could hardly start better: Team ADT Champion Racing's two Audi R8 sports cars will start Saturday's Sebring 12-hour race from the front row of the grid (10:45 a.m. local time). Thus, the most successful Le Mans prototype ever captured pole position also in its sixth and presumably last Sebring entry.

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Just as last year, Finland's JJ Lehto took the best place on the grid – this time however not during qualifying, which was cancelled due to extreme rain. The starting grid was made up by the times of the free practice sessions. JJ Lehto set the fastest time in 1m 49.723s Wednesday morning – just 0.332 seconds ahead of Emanuele Pirro in the other Audi R8.

JJ Lehto contests the Sebring 12-hour race together with Tom Kristensen and Marco Werner. Emanuele Pirro will be partnered by Frank Biela and Allan McNish. Dry weather is expected for Friday's final practice session which will mainly see Allan McNish and Tom Kristensen in action. Both arrived in Florida only Wednesday evening.

Quotes after practice

Tom Kristensen (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #1): "Obviously I am very happy we are on pole. I know Sebring well. We've tested here earlier this year and I had so many miles in the R8 that I don't see it as a problem I won't have too many laps before the race. I know that Marco, JJ and Team Champion have prepared a good car."

JJ Lehto (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #1): “I got pole at Sebring for two years in a row now. We were a bit lucky this time, but we would have been able to achieve this also in qualifying. Conditions have been very difficult so far. The track has been bad as never before in the previous years and we don’t know yet how the rain will affect the track. But I am pretty confident. The car is good and I am happy I have such a good team around me.”

Marco Werner (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #1): “Today we’ve seen again how important it is to give 100 percent anytime you are in the car – even in a free practice session. This gave us pole position. The first place on the grid is not so important in a 12-hour race. But two Audi R8 cars on the front row make up a nice picture when the race starts.”

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Frank Biela (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2): “Things are looking good for Audi and for the Champion team. But it is difficult to judge where we are really standing because track conditions kept changing all the time. Once, there was more grip, the next time less – and on top of that the rain on Thursday. I think, the situation has never been so open before the start of the race.”

Allan McNish (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2): “I know the Audi R8 very well and I know Sebring very well. Losing track time because of the weather doesn’t affect me as much as it would other drivers. When I did the installation lap this morning it was too wet to go full throttle. From that point of view it was the right decision to cancel qualifying.”

Emanuele Pirro (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2): “Normally at Sebring there is every day more rubber on the track and you get more and more grip. This time this was not the case due to the changing weather conditions. We had to modify the set-up a little bit and I am very happy with the work we did. Both our cars very equally fast in all the sessions. We have a very good setup for the race, so I’m looking forward to it.”

Dave Maraj (Team Director Team ADT Champion Racing): “It is a very good feeling to have both cars on the front row of the grid, especially as all the AUDI AG board members are coming to see the race. We are well prepared, the cars are running well, we are in a good position and hope to have a nice clean race.”

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): “2005 is most likely the last season for the Audi R8. Seeing two of our R8 sports cars start from the front row of the grid at Sebring at the beginning of this season, makes me especially happy as the R8 started its winning streak at Sebring exactly five years ago.”

The starting grid at Sebring

- 1 Lehto/Kristensen/Werner (Audi R8) 1m 49.723s
- 2 Biela/McNish/Pirro (Audi R8) 1m 50.055s
- 3 Dyson/Smith (MG Lola) 1m 50.249s
- 4 Leitzinger/Wallace/Weaver (MG Lola) 1m 51.351s
- 5 Field/Dayton/Fisken (Lola-AER) 1m 51.752s
- 6 Bucknum/McMurry/James (Courage-AER) 1m 54.669s
- 7 Mitchell/Bennett/Primat (Courage-Judd) 1m 55.986s
- 8 Gavin/Beretta/Magnussen (Chevrolet) 1m 57.347s
- 9 Fellows/O’Connell/Papis (Chevrolet) 1m 57.686s
- 10 Lewis/Drissi/Willman (Riley & Scott) 1m 57.841s

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