

Le Mans, 5 June 2005

Motorsport

Audi Teams all set to start at Le Mans

- **Audi finishes pre-practice fourth, seventh and eighth**
- **JJ Lehto quickest Audi driver**
- **Final preparation for the endurance classic**

For the Audi importer teams, ADT Champion Racing (USA) and Audi PlayStation Team ORECA (France), the pre-practice for the 24-Hour Race at Le Mans went as expected. During the only opportunity for testing on the 13.650-kilometre non-permanent circuit, the three Audi R8 cars entered by the two teams finished in fourth, seventh and eighth places respectively. At the end of the nine-hour pre-practice session, the “American” Audi R8 driven by JJ Lehto and Marco Werner led the Audi trio with a lap time of 3m 38.719s.

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Only three tenths of a second slower was the all-French Audi PlayStation Team ORECA with Jean-Marc Gounon, Franck Montagny and Stéphane Ortelli, who finished seventh. Following right behind them in eighth place was the Audi R8 entered by Team ADT Champion Racing with Emanuele Pirro and Frank Biela. In the first half of the pre-practice, the German-Italian pairing had lost some time in the pits due to some minor problems.

For the Audi R8 – with its track record of four victories the most successful Le Mans prototype of all times - 2005 marks the sixth and final season because new regulations will come into effect in 2006. In the 24 Hours of Le Mans the three Audi R8 cars have to start with 50 kilograms of additional ballast and a smaller air-flow limiter than in 2004. This has reduced the power of the Audi Turbo FSI engine to roughly 520 hp. Consequently – as Audi engineers had expected - the gap to the best time set in the pre-practice amounted to more than six seconds.

The 73rd edition of the 24 Hours of Le Mans is scheduled to start at 4 p.m. (local time) on 18 June. Qualifying practice will be on Wednesday (15 June) and Thursday (16 June) from 7 to 9 p.m. and from 10 p.m. to midnight.

Quotes after pre-practice

JJ Lehto (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi #3): "Today wasn't about setting a fast lap, it was about being well prepared for the race. We were able to complete our programme very well, fully testing various tyres and set-ups. The result is what we expected. We knew before that we wouldn't be any quicker. A six-second disadvantage seems to be a lot at first glance. But the race lasts for 24 hours – and that means that the R8's reliability is a key factor for success."

Marco Werner (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi #3): "A few minor things cost us a bit of testing time today. In the beginning, for example, the brake pedal had too much travel. JJ Lehto and I both had a brief 'off' into the gravel. Before the start of the race, we can probably make another step forward, because we still have some practice sessions coming up next week. We are satisfied with the places we achieved today, they're what we expected."

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Jean-Marc Gounon (Audi PlayStation Team ORECA Audi #4): "It's been a good day. All three drivers completed their scheduled programme like clockwork. At the end of the day, our R8 felt a lot better, we have made a big step forward."

Franck Montagny (Audi PlayStation Team ORECA Audi #4): "I'm happy about the time I was able to spend at the wheel of the Audi R8 today because my Formula 1 programme has taken up a lot of my time, and so I was able to familiarise myself with the car only in two tests. The R8 is very easy to drive, I'm thrilled about it. I believe that we can fight for a podium position in the race."

Stéphane Ortelli (Audi PlayStation Team ORECA Audi #4): "It's great to be back with Audi. The current R8 is the best Audi I've ever driven. And in this race it'll be the best car that wins – not necessarily the fastest."

Frank Biela (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi #2): "In the first half of the pre-practice, we had a few minor problems. But I'd rather see them happening now than in the race. The balance of our R8 was very good, there are only a few small things left to improve. We're not far from reaching the maximum potential. This time, it will be particularly important to be perfectly sorted in the race. That it's a very reliable car, the Audi R8 has proved often enough. What's more, with Champion Racing, we have a team with lots of experience."

Emanuele Pirro (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi #2): “I’m satisfied with my personal performance, I was very quick and feel comfortable in the R8. Still, it was a bit frustrating to see where we stand compared to our competitors, who are subject to a different set of rules.”

Dave Maraj (Team Director Team ADT Champion Racing): “We’ve had a very busy day. The team and the drivers did a super job. Fourth place is okay – especially considering how close the times are between the third and tenth places. Only the gap between the third and the two first-placed contenders was a bit bigger. And the R8 is a fully developed car.”

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Hugues de Chaunac (Team Director Audi PlayStation Team ORECA): “Today, we concentrated on working out a set-up for the race allowing the drivers to drive as comfortably as possible. For us, it’s not so important to set a fast lap, but to be perfectly prepared for the race. After the pre-practice, I’m convinced we’ve got a car that’s as good as it could possibly be. All drivers were satisfied with the R8. What makes me particularly happy is the good team spirit among the three drivers.”

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): “Even prior to the pre-practice we knew that things would be difficult for our customer teams at Le Mans this year. The result confirms our projections. We’re not assuming that any of the three R8 cars will start the race from the front rows. That’s why the teams fully focussed on the set-up for the race today. Over the whole distance, due to the well-known strengths of the R8, they will have a good chance for victory – yet the performance of the teams and the drivers will be even more critical than in previous years.”

Pre-practice results

1. Collard/Boullion/Comas (Pescarolo-Judd) 3m32.468s
2. Loeb/Hélary/Ayari (Pescarolo-Judd) 3m35.893s
3. Cochet/Nakano/Jouanny (Courage-Judd) 3m37.674s
4. Lehto/Werner (Audi R8) 3m38.719s
5. Michigami/Ara/Kaneishi (Dome-Mugen) 3m38.875s
6. Short/Barbosa/Ickx (Dallara-Judd) 3m38.976s
7. Gounon/Montagny/Ortelli (Audi R8) 3m39.060s
8. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) 3m39.418s
9. Minassien/Campbell/Wallace (DBA-Judd) 3m39.568s
10. Schwager/Frei/Vann (Courage-Judd) 3m39.633s

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