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Motorsport

Miami, 4 October 2002

Frank Biela wins qualifying thriller in Miami

During qualifying for the inaugural "Grand Prix of the Americas" in Miami, round nine of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS), Frank Biela and Rinaldo Capello gave the spectators a foretaste of Saturday's race: The two Audi works drivers battled fiercely for pole position with their Infineon Audi R8 sportscars. More than once Biela and Capello swapped places at the front before the German was able to win the duel by just 0.009 seconds.

The three time winner of Le Mans continued his outstanding series in the ALMS: On the five occasions that Biela contested qualifying in the 2002 American Le Mans Series, he always set fastest time with the no. 1 Infineon Audi R8.

Johnny Herbert was third fastest in the 2001-spec R8 of Audi customer team Champion Racing. This means that all three Audi sportscars will start from the front of the grid – a perfect starting position for a particularly difficult race. The teams suffer not only from Florida's humid and extremely warm weather with temperatures reaching about 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The new street circuit at Miami is narrower than any other ALMS track, bumpy and partly very slippery. Overtaking is extremely difficult and the smallest mistake can end the race due to the concrete walls surrounding the narrow track.

When the race starts at 4 p.m. local time Frank Biela and Rinaldo Capello will be at the wheel of the two Infineon Audi R8 sportscars which they share as usual with Emanuele Pirro and Tom Kristensen. Team Audi Sport North America can not only collect their seventh win of the season: Finishing 11th or better will give Audi the ALMS manufacturers title with one race to go.

Quotes after qualifying

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Before qualifying I had quite a lot of pressure, on one hand because I needed the point for the championship, and on the other hand because I had to defend a series. I could manage both, five pole positions out of five qualifying sessions I drove. The race tomorrow will be difficult, but the most important thing is to finish the race because we still have a chance in the championship. Although especially on this race track something can happen on every lap and at each corner."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Congratulations to Frank and to Dindo. Their times are almost the same. It really was an incredible qualifying session on a very difficult racetrack and under difficult conditions. This is a different race weekend for us - we share the event with the ChampCar Series. So far we compare very well with them. We proved that our speed is not much slower than the speed of the ChampCars."

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Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "In the second last lap I was four tenths faster than on my fastest lap. Unfortunately there was a slower car in front of me in the final corner. This year I simply had no luck in qualifying winning not even one pole position. Especially here I needed the extra point for the pole position because it was my last chance to close up to Tom in the championship."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Miami is a great city with a lot of love for life. It's fantastic to have a race here despite the track not being quite perfect yet. It is very narrow and slippery. But the people did a great job in a very short time. Because of the big heat the race will be very hard for the car, especially for the brakes and the engine. It will be also tough for the drivers and you may not make any mistakes."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "I am happy with the qualifying result. I did not really expect to beat the 'works' cars. We pushed them and to be seven tenths behind them is not bad. For the race, the positions in qualifying are totally irrelevant. The traffic will be a big nightmare. It's going to be a very, very hard race."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "This is the most difficult track I have ever experienced. Because of the low speed you get stuck behind other cars for a much longer. In practice I did not have a single clear lap. The track is too narrow to pass in many places. Because of that, the race will be very exciting and hectic and there will be many incidents."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "Qualifying was a foretaste for tomorrow's race. Frank and Dindo had an exciting fight which was decided by just nine thousandths of a second. This track is extremely difficult. The tarmac is changing all the time, one section is especially slippery. Despite that, our cars worked well here from the very beginning."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "This was an exciting qualifying with a great result. We are almost as fast as the ChampCars which shows that the R8 is working very well here and that our drivers do a good job. However, Dindo and Frank slightly touched the wall damaging their cars. This may not happen in the race. It will be decisive to do 2:45 hrs without mistakes and without big risks. But if you are too careful, you can lose five, six seconds in one single lap."

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Starting grid at Miami

1. Biela/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 03.873s
2. Capello/Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 03.882s
3. Herbert/Johansson (Audi R8)	1m 04.632s
4. Goossens/Ave (Riley&Scott-Elan)	1m 05.722s
5. Bernard/Collard (Cadillac)	1m 07.021s
6. Herta/Auberlen (Panoz)	1m 07.603s
7. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz)	1m 07.651s
8. Knight/Hürtgen/Block (MG Lola)	1m 08.559s

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9. Duno/Vann (Dome-Judd)	1m 09.287s
10. Field/Neuhaus (Lola-Judd)	1m 09.987s

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

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