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Motorsport

Sebring, 14 March 2002

All Audi front row at Sebring

Audi have given a clear indication they still have the car to beat in the 2002 sports car season: Thursday afternoon, Frank Biela easily qualified his Infineon Audi R8 on pole position for the 12 Hours of Sebring (Florida). Rinaldo Capello qualified Team Audi Sport North America's other Infineon Audi R8 for the second place on the grid, making it an all Audi front row on Saturday for the classic American endurance race.

Despite strong heat, Biela recorded a new track record. With his time of 1m 48.029s, the double Le Mans winner improved his own 2000 record by almost a full second.

Audi customer team Champion qualified fifth in the strong field of 56 cars behind the two 'works' R8 sportscars, the surprisingly competitive MG Lola and the fastest Panoz beating both of the new Cadillacs.

The 12 Hours of Sebring, run for the 50th time this year, will start at 10:30 a.m. local time on Saturday. Tom Kristensen (#1) and Rinaldo Capello (#2) are scheduled to start the race with the two Infineon Audi R8 sportscars.

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Quotes after qualifying

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "We had a good car from the very start. Then we tried some little things and quickly found the perfect setup for this circuit. Of course I'm very happy that inspite of the high temperatures I broke the track record."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Since we arrived here at Sebring, we split the testing programme and worked on a lot of details to have a perfect car for qualifying. Then Frank simply did a fantastic job: He set two consistent fast laps – and that's it."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "That's how I wanted the new season to start: Frank put our R8 on pole easily and gave us a good starting position for Saturday. During the race we have to totally concentrate for twelve hours. With so many cars on the track, the smallest mistake can get you into big trouble."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "The first part of my lap was good. Then there was some oil, but the others had the same problem. Because of that the gap to Frank is a little mysterious to me. I will have a close look on the data recording."

Johnny Herbert (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "I am not absolutely happy, because the gap is too big. But the race on Saturday is really the main thing. The aim is not to win qualifying but to be in front after 12 hours."

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Christian Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "I am happy with the second place on the grid, because the important thing is to be on the front row. We worked a lot for the race during practice, so we should have a very good car for Saturday."

Stefan Johansson (Audi R8 #38): "We've failed getting enough outright speed from the car which is a bit of a mystery but the team is working hard towards finding a solution for the race."

Jan Lammers (Audi R8 #38): "I haven't had much time in the R8 but enough to know it's an incredibly good car. I feel very comfortable behind the wheel. I have a great chance of claiming my first Sebring 12 Hours victory."

Andy Wallace (Audi R8 #38): "We 'lost' time compared to the 'factory' cars as the week progressed. Qualifying was okay after we adopted a very similar set-up as them. Our aim remains the same, to go out and win. I believe our Audi will be very good in race trim."

Reinhold Joest, Team Director Audi Sport North America: "We've already shown we have worked hard during the winter. The drivers managed to adapt all the experiences they got during our tests in Italy to the Sebring circuit. And we are very happy that all drivers feel absolutely comfortable in the R8. Now we are looking forward to an exciting race."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "It is a little bit surprising that the gap to our competitors is that big. Of course it proves that we have done a very good job over the winter. But it seems also that we found the best setup for this track. Now we must bring this good qualifying result through the race. However, because of the traffic there are many risks you can't calculate in advance."

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Starting grid at Sebring

1. Biela/Kristensen/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 48.029s
2. Capello/Herbert/Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 48.744s
3. Knight/Hawkins/Kane (MG Lola)	1m 50.543s
4. Magnussen/Brabham/van de Poele (Panoz)	1m 50.617s
5. Wallace/Lammers/Johansson (Audi R8)	1m 50.797s
6. Herta/Donohue/Auberlen (Panoz)	1m 51.076s
7. Bernard/Collard/Lehto (Cadillac)	1m 51.160s
8. Taylor/Angelelli/Tinseau (Cadillac)	1m 51.434s
9. Mathews/Smith/Goossens (R&S-Elan)	1m 51.834s
10. Lienhard/Theys/Baldi (Dallara-Judd)	1m 52.186s

Photos and further information are available on the internet:
www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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