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Motorsport

Laguna Seca, 21 September 2002

Audi starts from pole position in hot ALMS phase

For the hot phase of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS), Audi has created itself a perfect starting position: In Laguna Seca (California), both Infineon Audi R8 sportscars will start from the first row of the grid into the eighth of a total of ten races this season. Italian Emanuele Pirro captured pole position with a tight margin of eleven hundredths of a second in front of his Danish team mate Tom Kristensen.

In the 20 minutes of qualifying on the fascinating circuit, the traffic on the track played an important role. As overtaking on many parts is very difficult, slower cars often meant the end of a fast lap. Pole sitter Pirro who shares his Infineon Audi R8 with Frank Biela, therefore chose his own strategy: At the exit of the pitlane he waited for a gap in the traffic and then used the first chance he got for the fastest lap of the day.

The Champion team who was second in last year's race at Laguna Seca with the customer R8, struggled to find a perfect setup for the demanding circuit the entire weekend. In qualifying, Stefan Johansson, who partners Johnny Herbert, had to be satisfied with fifth place behind both Cadillac.

For the race on Sunday (12:00 p.m. local time) Pirro is scheduled as start driver for the no. 1 Infineon Audi R8, Tom Kristensen starts in the sister car no. 2 and then hands over to his team mate Rinaldo Capello.

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Quotes after qualifying

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "The qualifying was perfect for us. This weekend every practice session was very tight. Emanuele took his chance today. Although it was quite hot, he drove an excellent time. Hopefully we will take our opportunity of the pole position in the race and bring home a victory again."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "I'm very happy about this pole position. I didn't expect it this morning as I have influenza and a temperature and didn't feel absolutely in shape. Originally I wanted to start at the very beginning of the practice, but the officials didn't let me out. So I had to wait for another opportunity and obviously found the right moment."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Emanuele and Tom, both did a great job. It is difficult to say whether Tom could have taken pole when he would not have had to overtake a car on his fast lap. The time gap between our two cars is very small, the gap to our competitors quite big. Therefore I am confident for the race."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Unfortunately I always had some other cars in front of me during my fastest laps and not everyone let me past at once. But the front row is still a very good starting position and our car is perfectly prepared for the race tomorrow."

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Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "Hopefully we'll have a good race after what has been a disappointing time so far here at Laguna. We didn't have a lot of confidence going into qualifying, since we've been slowed with a handling imbalance and whatever we try in a bid to improve it has failed."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "The story of the weekend is understeer for us. We have a few ideas for the warm up, but we hope the race will turn out well for us. In the circumstances therefore to start from fifth place on the grid is not disastrous but nevertheless we expected a lot better."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "That was a very tight qualifying with different strategies. To be honest, I haven't seen Emanuele's way to wait at the exit of pitlane so far. But it worked out fine. Tomorrow it will be important to find a quick way through all the traffic. There are some places at Laguna Seca, for example the corner combination "Cork Screw", where you can lose a lot of time when you are behind a slower car."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "A satisfying result: Both of our cars are in front of the grid. Behind us Cadillac, in front of the Panoz, which were our toughest competitors during the past two years. The qualifying of Champion was a little bit disappointing, but the team fights with a good setup because of heavy understeer."

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Starting grid at Laguna Seca

1. Biela/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 15.765s
2. Capello/Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 15.876s
3. Lehto/Angelelli (Cadillac)	1m 16.672s
4. Bernard/Collard (Cadillac)	1m 17.054s
5. Herbert/ Johansson (Audi R8)	1m 17.629s
6. Herta/Auberlen (Panoz)	1m 17.749s
7. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz)	1m 17.812s
8. Weaver/Leitzinger (MG Lola)	1m 18.432s
9. Knight/Block/Hürtgen (MG Lola)	1m 18.589s
10. Field/Sutherland (MG Lola)	1m 18.630s

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

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